News
Religious Life



Religious celebrating the Conference of Religious in Brazil's 70th anniversary take to the streets in a pilgrimage to Caninde, Ceara. The Brazilian city is home to one of the largest Franciscan sanctuaries in the world. (Courtesy of CRB)

by Lise Alves

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More than 800 religious women and men from congregations throughout the country met at the end of May in Fortaleza, Brazil, to celebrate the end of the 70th jubilee

year of the Conference of Religious in Brazil.

With the theme "CRB 70 Years: Grateful Memory, Mysticism, Prophecy and Hope," the organization, which today has more than 24,915 perpetual religious and 1,757 temporary religious vows registered, celebrated its role in boosting consecrated religious life in Brazil.

The congress showed that "the mission of the Conference of Religious in Brazil is important for consecrated religious life itself and for our Church overall," Sr. Eliane Cordeiro, president of CRB, told Global Sisters at the end of the event. "I have a feeling of deep gratitude to God for everything that we were able to experience."

At the beginning of the four-day celebration, a blessing from Pope Francis, was read.

The pontiff expressed his gratitude for the tireless service and testimony of the lives of religious men and women in Brazil, highlighting the important role they play in evangelization, promoting social justice and caring for those most in need.

"I am grateful for the immense gift of the vocation to the consecrated life which, in its most diverse charisms, enriches ecclesial communion and greatly collaborates with the mission of the Church throughout the world," he said in the letter, adding, "In fact, in many places on the globe, the first proclamation of the Gospel is in the face of consecrated men and women who assume with great commitment and dedication of their lives the mandate of the Lord: 'Go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to every creature.' "

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> —Pope Francis
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Participants celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Conference of Religious in Brazil take a day to make a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary St. Francis of the Stigmata in Caninde, Ceara. (Courtesy of CRB)

The Holy Father also stated that the gift of vocation must be safeguarded and cultivated every day and hoped that the event would be "a moment to recall the past with gratitude, to live the present sustained by the mysticism of the specific charisms of each religious family and engaged in a prophetic way to the proclamation of the Gospel, and to look to the future with hope."

Since 1954, CRB has been a prophetic voice in defense of Brazil's marginalized, Cordeiro said. "The entity has stood out for its work in the fight against hunger, poverty, violence and discrimination. CRB has also been an important coordinator of actions in favor of peace, social justice and environmental protection," she said.

The congress began with a eucharistic celebration, presided over by Bishop Gregório Paixão, the archbishop of Fortaleza and president of the Episcopal Commission for Culture and Education of Brazil's National Bishops Conference, or CNBB. It was

concelebrated by 21 priests from Brazilian states.

"The great expectation is of a great renewal of joy, of enthusiasm for prophecy; we will leave here much stronger," Sr. Maria Neves Franco, superior general of the Capuchin Missionary Sisters, told reporters.

Participants from across Brazil attended the in-person event, and CRB's social media networks received more than 10,000 views, according to the organization.

"Intercongregationality was one of the themes we worked on, encouraging congregations to ensure that our religious life in Brazil follow the course of interconnections, so that we go beyond the boundaries of both the congregation and the province, and have a broader, more universal vision of the church's mission," Franco said.

> 'The entity has stood out for its work in the fight against hunger, poverty, violence and discrimination.'
> —Sr. Eliane Cordeiro
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Sr. Daniela Cannavina, secretary general of Confederation of Latin American Religious, attends Conference of Religious in Brazil jubilee. (Courtesy of CRB)

Participants also watched a documentary prepared by CRB which narrates its 70 years. They also received a commemorative magazine, highlighting the achievements and challenges religious men and women have faced since CRB began.

For Cordeiro, CRB continues to contribute to the church in Brazil "as an instrument to collaborate in the transformation of our world and in the transformation of the structures of Brazilian society."

The bishops at the jubilee agreed with Cordeiro that the communion between the CRB and CNBB strengthened during these four days.

"It is a true experience of the impulse of the Holy Spirit in the church of Brazil. The presence of religious men and women, with their charisms, with the diversity of their gifts, greatly enriches our church," said Bishop Ricardo Hoepers, CNBB secretary general, who was present throughout the event.

"When we meet, we truly feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, guiding each step of each of these men and women who gave a generous 'yes' to their vocation and their charism and today contribute to the church of Brazil," Hoepers added.

Bishop Edmilson Tadeu Canavarros dos Santos, auxiliary of the Archdiocese of Manaus, also noted the importance of religious life in the Amazon region.

"The church is in the Amazon because of religious life. They were the first to arrive with the Carmelites, Jesuits and Capuchin Franciscans," he said. "There we have always counted on the presence of female religious. In the most distant and most challenging places, we always find religious life."

Santos also had a message to the religious of Brazil: "Don't stop being prophetic signs in our church. Religious life is a prophetic sign and always awakens us to a special look so that the kingdom of God may come about."

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> —Bishop Edmilson Tadeu Canavarros dos Santos

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Participants celebrating 70 years of the Confederation of Religious in Brazil, held May 30-June 2 in Fortaleza, Ceara. (Courtesy of CRB)

During its general assembly earlier this year, CNBB praised the CRB. "The history of the CRB began with the arrival of the Jesuits, together with the Portuguese, playing an important role of evangelization in the church of Brazil," Sao Paulo Bishop Angelo Ademir Mezzari said then.

Mezzari also pointed out the importance of celebrating 70 years to "make a memory of the history" of men and women who "profess the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, living the faith experience of a charisma and a mission, realized in life fraternal in community and spirituality."

Several representatives from religious orders outside Brazil also joined CRB in Fortaleza.

"Our continent is rich with a very large presence of religious people who think and dream of other ways of being the church and other ways of living religious life. We continue this legacy of that mysticism with open eyes, following in the footsteps of God in our time," Sr. Daniela Cannavina, an Argentinian Capuchin nun and secretary general of the Latin American Confederation of Religious, or CLAR, in a CRB interview.

The second day of the event was marked by the celebration of mysticism, with participants making a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of St. Francis of the Stigmata in Canindé, 110 km (68 miles) from Fortaleza. The city is considered a major pilgrimage center and home to one of the largest Franciscan sanctuaries in the world.

"Walking today with consecrated religious life to the sanctuary of St. Francis, let us renew our commitment to the caring for life, to the caring for our common home and allows Francis to continue to inspire us," said Sr. Rosane Lundin, general coordinator of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.

Prophecy was highlighted on the third day of the Jubilee, with a celebratory moment for those who gave their lives for the cause of the Gospel. Notre Dame de Namur Sr. Dorothy Stang, Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga and Bishop Tomás Balduíno were among those remembered.

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Sr. Eliane Cordeiro, president of the Congress of Religious of Brazil, speaks to participants in Fortaleza during the celebration of the conference's 70th anniversary. (Courtesy of CRB)

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Almost 800 religious men and women gathered in Fortaleza, Ceara to celebrate the Congress of Rreligious of Brazil's 70th anniversary. (Courtesy of CRB)

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Religious from all over Brazil gathered in Fortaleza, Ceara, to celebrate the Congress of Religious of Brazil's 70th anniversary. (Courtesy of CRB)

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'I think we needed this type of gathering to know that the life we lead is worthwhile and that we are not alone.'
—Sr. Eliane Cordeiro

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"It was possible to see today how many religious martyrs like Sr. Adelaide [Molinari] and Sr. Dorothy [Stang] gave their lives in the Amazon region. Religious life continues to follow this prophetic mission," said Theresan Missionary Sr. Kelly Simone da Silva Osório, coordinator of CRB's Belem region in the state of Para.

The jubilee ended with a Mass presided over by Hoepers, who said that the high point of the event was when "all consecrated religious men and women were able to join hands in this spirit of inter-congressionality, and return to their communities with their charisms strengthened for the good of the entire church, the mystical Body of Christ."

After the pandemic, Cordeiro said, "we went through very difficult times in which some of us confused separation and distancing with isolation.

"Recovering this joy of encounter, of fraternity, of coexistence, of brotherhood, was a challenge. But I think we needed this type of gathering to know that the life we lead is worthwhile and that we are not alone."

[This story was originally published in Spanish on June 17, 2024.]