



APOSTOLAT MILITAIRE INTERNATIONAL
the PRESIDENT

STRENGTHENING CHRISTIAN VALUES WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES WORLDWIDE

General Assembly of the AMI 2012

Report of the AMI President

Excellencies, Generals, Ladies and Gentlemen – dear friends of our AMI family!

Starting my speech, I want to address to you a very warm welcome here in Retie. At the beginning I want to thank our Belgian friends for their excellent preparations, their hospitality and cooperation. Especially, I want to express my gratitude to Vicar General Monsignore Johan van den Eeckhout, for enabling the conference, Annie Walscharts and her husband Paul, Mia Devriese, Chaplain Erwin Villain, Jos Schils and Rick Tavernier. Thank you all for organizing this conference.

First, let me look back to the Philippines. Your Excellency Bishop Tumalak, thank you again for inviting AMI to your country and for organizing the last conference in Manila. We all were grateful. We learned a lot about the history, culture and society of the Philippines and maybe all participants coming from outside remember the national hero Jose Rizal, killed by the Spanish. For me as an Austrian it was new that Jose Rizal had an Austrian friend and scientific colleague named Ferdinand Blumentritt.

Last year I was elected as the new President of AMI for the following three years. This is a great honour for me and I look forward to tackling the future challenges with my “Presidency Team” from Austria and with the team of my Secretary General Nelleke Swinkels van de Vorst. First of all please allow me to introduce myself and my two deputies: Col. Michael Michael Jedlicka, accompanied by his daughter Josi and WO II Markus Stromberger. I am accompanied by my wife Ida.

I am proud to carry out my duty in explicit support of the Austrian Military Bishop, His Excellency Christian Werner. Unfortunately, he is not able to join this conference, but he told me to present his best compliments to all of you. The presidency will be supported by my Netherlands Secretariate General, headed by Nelleke Swinkels van de Vorst as my Secretary General, her deputy the former Chief Chaplain for the Royal Netherlands Army Jan van Lieverloo and the treasurer Herman Vriesema. Herman is accompanied by his spouse Ans.

As you know already, AMI strives to promote the establishment of the Christian view of military life and its values; to foster international understanding and cooperation as

a means of building up world peace; in the light of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church to address spiritual, ethical, moral and social issues of specific relevance to military life. This is the principle of our community and with this in mind I feel obliged to invest my energy and my engagement during my AMI-presidency.

I am delighted to welcome so many delegates and representatives from all over the world. I appreciate very much that delegations from 12 countries attend this conference.

A warm welcome to: Austria, Belgium, Gambia, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Kenya, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the Philippines, Slovakia and the United States of America. Especially, we are happy that our friends from Kenya, where we held our conference in 2006, are „back on board“ again and that for the first time in the history our community we are able to welcome delegates from Gambia!

It is a great honour for us that Bishop Alfred Rotich from Kenya, Bishop Richard Moth from Great Britain and Bishop František Rábek from Slovakia are with us. Thank you very much for coming, participating, working and praying with us.

Let me now talk about the aims of this year's conference. The AMI Conference and General Assembly will discuss under the overall topic of AMI 2012 – 2014: “The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace - To live authentically according to the Word of God and to spread the gospel” and the subtopics - Commemoration: “Powerful past, powerful present, challenging future”,

- Commemoration of the war dead, past, present, future
- How to overcome fear and death on the battlefield by trusting in God our Hope
- Military ceremonies of the war dead.

Our ecclesiastical assistant Monsignore Werner Freistetter will hold the introducing lecture.

Let me mention that the main title announced before is at the same time the leitmotiv of my Austrian Association of Catholic soldiers. I am glad, too, that father Dolan from the United States is with us and that he will take responsibility for a working group.

At the end of the conference we will vote on a joint AMI position regarding the conference topics, if possible, and publish it subsequently. I would like to wish all of us an interesting and constructive summit.

Honoured ladies and gentlemen!

The Association of Catholic Soldiers in Austria, on the occasion of the 2012 AMI Conference, has developed comments, i.e. “Commemoration of the Fallen” and “Overcoming the Fear of Death with the Strength of Belief”, and has the pleasure of

submitting them to the Conference under the working concept Christian and Military Mortuary Culture; Questions and Food for Thought. I will distribute this paper of the Association of Catholic Soldiers in Austria to all of you.

The reason why we decided to discuss the announced subjects is the fact that once our soldiers leave their camps, garrisons or positions for military action, the question of life and death, moral, ethics and bravery becomes imminent and we should be able to answer the question what aid our faith could be in such situations.

The question of commemoration of our war dead becomes more and more important, due to the changes of our societies and new influences like other growing religions or the question of non-believers. Younger generations especially in Europe do not know anything about First or Second World War anymore. The following conflicts became more and more a private affair.

What happened since the conference on the Philippines? In autumn the newly elected Presidency and Secretary General met in Vienna for discussing the planned conference and to meet a crowd of military bishops and military chaplains. We were assisting an enquete of the Austrian Military Bishop and the Institute for Religion and Peace as well.

In January, I assisted the holy mass at Cologne together with my vice presidents, His Eminency, the German Cardinal Meissner, the German Minister of Defence and numerous German soldiers.

At the same time the finances of AMI were checked. In the aftermath we assisted the farewell of Chief Chaplain (Roman Catholic) for the Royal Netherlands Army Jan van Lieverloo, who left the army end of March in order to serve his country as Chief of Chaplains of the Ministry of Security and Justice. Besides, I visited the place of this year's conference, Retie, together with our Belgian friends for the first time.

In March, the old and new president of AMI travelled to Rome for a meeting with Monsignore Walsh and Dottoressa Alvarez in the Secretariate of State of the Vatican. We continued our talks with Monsignore Delgado at the Pontifical Council for Laity.

In spring, I met the Commandants of the Slovenian and the Portuguese Military Academy and discussed questions of Christian faith and possibilities of assisting our conferences or contribute to them.

In May during the soldier's pilgrimage to Lourdes, I had the opportunity to talk in an assembly of heads of delegations about the goals of AMI and invited them to send participants or observers to our conference.

As I mentioned already, I am still president of the Association of Catholic Soldiers of the Austrian Armed Forces. I intend to hand over the responsibility after a ten year's period to a younger candidate in order to concentrate on the tasks of the presidency of AMI.

At the end of my report I want to inform you that we plan to organize the annual General Assenbly 2013 in Slovenia and 2014 in Slovakia.

Finishing my report, I wish all of you an interesting and fulfilling conference, many fruitful talks and discussions. May God help us to find the right answers to the posed questions.

Thank you again for coming. God bless us all!

Thank you for your attention!