



PRESS RELEASE

Final results of the 2015 annual conference of AMI

Theme: Gaudium et Spes and interreligious dialogue – the Apostolate Militaire International celebrates its 50th General Assembly in Santiago de Compostela, Spain!

Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 6-10 September 2015

With the help of lectures on the history of the Camino (Way) of Santiago, inter-religious dialogue, and the present condition of the world and the needs of military members in it, the Apostolate Military International gathered again in Santiago de Compostela 50 years after it was originally conceived here in 1965 to reexamine its mission and goals. From our beginning, AMI has been a group of Military pilgrims from different countries traveling through life in what Vatican II reminds us is only one world and one human community.

Like pilgrims on the Camino of Santiago, Catholic military exhibit faith when they choose to begin the pilgrimage, live in hope as they travel each day, and display charity in their encounters with each other as fellow pilgrims through life. Each day they express faith by their offering of that day back to God; each hour they live in hope as they go through intermediate goals (parallel to military milestones); and every moment they are called upon to treat others with true charity. This can be particularly difficult when Catholic military are asked to live honorably, following their consciences and still obeying orders about areas that are beyond traditional military tasks--such as processing large movements of peoples, or attacks from within one's allies or from virtual space.

With its newly acquired status both as a Vatican recognized lay organization and a NGO, AMI has a special ability to be a forum for exchange of "best practices" among member military organizations and be able to share those same experiences as a template or a stimulus for each nation's finding their own pilgrim way through life's challenges. This could include anything from promoting inter-religious dialogue within the military, to developing methods of encountering the media, or confronting terrorist challenges to living virtuously: ways of protecting one's population without degenerating into revenge.

With the new status AMI could also more easily be a resource to other Vatican organizations or other NGOs who only have the chance to observe the military from outside. With the change from conscripted military service in so many nations to voluntary service, fewer and fewer civilians

and social leaders will have had the chance to understand the military from within. AMI could help re-introduce military values to any civilian leaders making decisions that affect them intensely.

A parallel concern is fostering virtue in our youngest military members. These millennials live at a faster pace, and more digitally connected yet more personally disconnected and lonely today. They live with the surface relationships yet deep vulnerability of the virtual world, where trivial questions are constantly discussed and one wrong statement or picture can “go viral” and drastically affect one’s future. Yet in that same digital world real issues rarely have the chance to be examined with a compassionate friend who understands their military struggles.

Because our young military long for welcome and acceptance, especially as they change unit assignments, they need good example from other young Catholic military as well as their leaders to continue their own pilgrimage through life. To engage in the inevitable inter-religious dialogue in their units, especially when deployed, they need good instructions in their faith—but packaged in ways that are electronically attractive yet challenging in bite-sized pieces: much as each day’s journey along the Camino of Santiago is an achievable goal. As some nations have already developed such digital materials and adult catechetical methods to accompany their use, AMI can be a useful vehicle to exchange such materials and the most usable methods of employing them.

Young military also long for good worship experiences, whether or not they attend at every opportunity. Exchanges of techniques from AMI members can help these young military feel part of those worship services (mass and the various sacraments) in ways that are encouraging rather than intimidating: if they sing when marching or in taverns they can be encouraged to sing in church with challenges between army units there. Finally, young military need to express their charity in vivid ways that give them “bragging rights” as having fed the hungry, encouraged orphans or other youngsters, built shelter for the homeless, etc. Such actions not only help those in need but polish the image of God in each of our young military and let that goodness shine as thoroughly as the stars which showed a Galician hermit where to find the body of St. James. Again, AMI can be not only the vehicle for exchanging ideas for developing such opportunities but can also offer assistance by intervening with senior authorities to support these initiatives by our young military.

With the help of the grace of God and the intercession of St. James, the first apostle to lay down his life for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, may we all follow the pilgrimages we each are called to, together with our fellow military pilgrims, and arrive one day at the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

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