

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0681

Martedì 03.11.2009

Pubblicazione: Immediata

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Since the Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious was first announced in January 2009, there has been great interest in the study that the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) has undertaken to look into the fundamental aspects of women religious in the United States. This Apostolic Visitation hopes to encourage vocations and assure a better future for women religious. Having read many news accounts and received various inquiries, I offer the following in response.

For many years this dicastery had been listening to concerns expressed by American Catholics – religious, laity, clergy and hierarchy – about the welfare of religious women and consecrated life in general, and had been considering an Apostolic Visitation as a means to assess and constructively address these concerns.

The multitude and complexity of these issues were made clear by speakers and participants at the Symposium on Religious Life at Stonehill College in September 2008. This helped me understand that such an evaluation of the challenges facing individual religious and their congregations could benefit the Church at-large as well as the sisters and institutes involved. My hope is that the Apostolic Visitation will not only provide the Holy See with a thorough analysis of the condition of religious life in the United States, but also be a realistic and graced opportunity for personal and community introspection, as major superiors and sisters cooperate with this study.

I am pleased with the voluntary response reported in Phase One of the Apostolic Visitation, during which more than three-fourths of the superiors general communicated their hopes and concerns directly to Mother Mary Clare Millea, A.S.C.J., the Apostolic Visitor. Shortly thereafter, the *Instrumentum Laboris* was sent to all major superiors requesting that it be given to each sister for her prayerful consideration, study and open discussion with other sisters.

Now, during Phase Two, the major superiors in the United States are responding to a questionnaire that will present a comprehensive profile of each institute's present reality and future outlook. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University is cooperating in the collection of information and will prepare a composite analytical report of the standard, objective data contained in Part A of the questionnaire. This report will be made public and should provide important information regarding likely future trends of religious life in the United States.

It is the practice of the Holy See that an Apostolic Visitation be conducted *ad inquirendum et referendum* (i.e., studied and referred). Therefore, this dicastery will formulate no conclusions or plan of action, if any, until the final report of the Visitor has been evaluated.

To date, I am encouraged by the efforts to identify the signs of hope, as well as concerns, within religious congregations in the United States, which are also likely to have implications elsewhere in the world. I ask all people of good will to unite in prayer for the fruitful outcome of this effort to promote the Catholic identity and vibrancy of life of women religious.

City of Vatican, 3rd of November 2009

[01599-02.01] [Original text: English]

AVVISO DI CONFERENZA STAMPA

Si informano i giornalisti accreditati che **giovedì 5 novembre 2009, alle ore 11.30, nell'Aula Giovanni Paolo II** della Sala Stampa della Santa Sede, avrà luogo la Conferenza Stampa di **presentazione dell'Incontro del Santo Padre Benedetto XVI con gli Artisti (21 novembre 2009) nel decennale della Lettera di Giovanni Paolo II agli Artisti (4 aprile 1999) e nel 45° anniversario dell'Incontro di Paolo VI con gli Artisti (7 maggio 1964).**

Interverranno:

S.E. Mons. Gianfranco Ravasi, Presidente del Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura e della Pontificia Commissione per i Beni Culturali della Chiesa;

Prof. Antonio Paolucci, Direttore dei Musei Vaticani;

Mons. Pasquale Iacobone, Incaricato del Dipartimento Arte e Fede del Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura.

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