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Sommario:

◆ **Press Conference for the presentation of the Final Report on the Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States of America**

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Opening remarks of Fr. Thomas Rosica, C.S.B.

Statement of Cardinal João Braz de Aviz

Statement of Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M.

Statement of Sr. M. Clare Millea, A.S.C.J.

Statement of Sr. Sharon Holland, I.H.M.

Statement of Sr. Agnes Mary Donovan, S.V.

Closing remarks of Fr. Thomas Rosica, C.S.B.

At 11.30 this morning in the *Aula Giovanni Paolo II* of the Holy See Press Office a press conference will take place to present the Final Report of the Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States of America.

The speakers in the press conference are: His Eminence Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life; Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M., secretary of the same Congregation; Sr. M. Clare Millea, A.S.C.J., director of the Apostolic Visitation in the United States; Sr. Sharon Holland, I.H.M., president of the “Leadership Conference of Women Religious” (LCWR); Sr. Agnes Mary Donovan, S.V., coordinator of the “Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious” (CMSWR); Fr. Thomas Rosica, C.S.B., assistant to the Visitation Committee.

The interventions are published below:

Opening remarks of Fr. Thomas Rosica, C.S.B.

Thank you, Fr. Lombardi.
Your Eminence, Cardinal João Braz de Aviz,
Your Excellency, Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo,
Reverend Mothers and Sisters,

Good morning to all of you here present in the Vatican Press Centre. Welcome to this very important and historic Press Conference at the Vatican dealing with the release of the Final Report of the Apostolic Visitation of Women Religious in the United States of America.

I especially greet the major superiors and representatives of Religious Congregations present in Rome as well as the many religious women who are joining us through the live streaming feed provided by Vatican Television and the Holy See Press Office. I also greet the many journalist colleagues here present- those permanently accredited to the Holy See as well as the many following us from afar. I remind you that for those who are unable to view the conference live due to different time zones, the entire conference is stored on the Vatican You Tube site: <https://www.youtube.com/user/vatican>.

Today I have the triple role of one who has accompanied this visitation from the beginning as one of the few male visitors; as moderator of this panel, and also assistant for English language to the Holy See Press Office. Before inviting our distinguished panel to begin their individual presentations, I simply wish to situate this conference in the wider context of the Year of Consecrated Life which the universal Church began on the First Sunday of Advent this year.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis, who is very aware of today's conference and report, chose as the aims of this year the same ones which Saint John Paul II proposed to the whole Church at the beginning of the third millennium, "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished!"

The Year of Consecrated Life and the Final report invite us to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion, and to examine our fidelity to the mission entrusted to us. The Year of Consecrated Life and the Final report invite us to embrace the future with hope.

In order to keep our focus on the Apostolic Visitation and do justice to this very important event in the life of the Church, our reflections today will only address this important theme that is the competency of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and no other themes or topics. During the ample time for questions from our audience, I would ask you to kindly refer only to the Apostolic Visitation of Women Religious of the United States.

I now invite **His Eminence Cardinal João Braz de Aviz**, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to address us.

He will be followed by **Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo**, O.F.M., Secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

They will be followed by the three sisters whom I will present individually.

Mother M. Clare Millea, A.S.C.J., Superior General of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Director of the Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Apostolic Life of Women Religious in the United States of America.

Sr. Sharon Holland, I.H.M., Vice President of Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and President of Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR).

Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, S.V., Superior General of the Sisters of Life and Chair of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR).

[02072-02.01] [Original text: English]

Statement of Card. João Braz de Aviz

I thank all of the journalists who have gathered here for this press conference to present our final report on the Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States of America. In December, 2008, Cardinal Franc Rodé, then Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life commissioned the Visitation “*to look into the quality of the life of women religious in the United States*”.

We initiated the Visitation because of our awareness that apostolic religious life in the United States is experiencing challenging times. Although we knew that any initiative of this magnitude would have its limits, we wished to gain deeper knowledge of the contributions of the women religious to the Church and society as well as those difficulties which threaten the quality of their religious life and, in some cases, the very existence of the institutes.

Our final report on the Apostolic Visitation is addressed to the women religious of the United States as well as to the Church’s Pastors and faithful. In addition to publishing this general report, our Dicastery will send individual reports to those institutes which hosted an onsite visitation and to those institutes whose individual reports indicated areas of concern. We will also send letters of thanks to those institutes which participated in the first two phases of the Visitation.

This press conference gives me the opportunity to express the gratitude of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life for the presence of women religious in the United States and for all that they contribute to the Church’s evangelizing mission. Since the early days of the Catholic Church in their country, women religious have courageously been in the forefront of her evangelizing mission, selflessly tending to the spiritual, moral, educational, physical and social needs of countless individuals, especially the poor and marginalized. Throughout the nation’s history, the educational apostolate of women religious in Catholic schools has fostered the personal development and nourished the faith of countless young people and helped the church community in the USA to flourish. In addition, a great majority of the Catholic healthcare systems in the United States, which serve millions of people each year, were established by congregations of women religious.

In response to the appeal of the Vatican Council’s Decree, *Perfectae Caritatis* to return to the Gospel, “the ultimate norm of religious life” and to “their founder’s spirit and special aim” (*PC, 2 a & b*) women religious sought to adapt their life style and mission in ways that might enable them to more effectively respond to contemporary needs. In a spirit of creative fidelity to their charisms, they branched out in new ministries to those most on the margins of the Church and society. Women religious in the United States also notably pursued ongoing theological and professional formation, seeking to further their ability to serve the Church’s evangelizing mission and to prepare others to collaborate in it as well. Women religious typically engage in volunteer ministry well beyond the normal retirement age and even in their later years sustain the life and ministry of their sisters through their prayerful support.

We are aware that the Apostolic Visitation was met with apprehension by some women religious as well as the decision, on the part of some institutes, not to collaborate fully in the process. While this was a painful disappointment for us, we use this present opportunity to

express our willingness to engage in respectful and fruitful dialogue with those institutes which were not fully compliant with the Visitation process.

As we prepare for the celebration of *The Year of Consecrated Life*, which Pope Francis offers not only for consecrated persons but for the entire Church, all of us—religious, clergy and laity – can work toward that full reconciliation which will offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion to all. We reaffirm the desire of our Dicastery to strengthen the spirit of ecclesial communion in our direct contact with conferences of major superiors of women religious, as well as with the superiors and members of the individual institutes. We express the hope that together we may welcome this present moment as an opportunity to transform uncertainty and hesitancy into collaborative trust, so that the Lord may lead us forward in the mission he has entrusted to us on behalf of the people we serve.

It will certainly be of interest to all that Pope Francis has asked our Dicastery, in close collaboration with the Congregation for Bishops, to update the curial document *Mutuae Relationes* regarding the collaboration among bishops and religious, in accord with the Church's resolve to foster the ecclesial communion which we all desire.

We joyfully welcome the many recent statements by Pope Francis about the indispensable and unique contributions of women to society and the Church. I assure you that this Congregation is committed to collaborate in the realization of Pope Francis' resolve that "the feminine genius" find expression in the various settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 103). We will continue to work to see that competent women religious will be actively involved in ecclesial dialogue regarding "the possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church's life" (*EG*, 104).

In the name of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and the women religious of the United States, I express heartfelt gratitude to Mother Mary Clare Millea for having accepted the challenge of such a huge undertaking and for having carried out this task in such a pastoral and professional manner. Sincere thanks are also offered to all who contributed to the success of the visitation process, in particular to the religious who served as her core team, those who conducted the on-site visits and all who cooperated in the Visitation to their congregation.

The Apostolic Visitation offered new opportunities for women religious to discover God's presence and salvific action in fruitful communication with other religious, with the Church's pastors and lay faithful. May the self-assessment and dialogue sparked by the Apostolic Visitation continue to bear abundant fruit for the revitalization and strengthening of religious institutes in fidelity to Christ, to the Church and to their founding charisms. Our times need the credible and attractive witness of consecrated religious who demonstrate the redemptive and transformative power of the Gospel. Convinced of the sublime dignity and beauty of consecrated life, may we all pray for and support our women religious and actively promote vocations to the religious life. Thank you.

[Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, Secretary of the Congregation, will now present an overview of our final report on the Apostolic Visitation.]

[02073-02.01] [Original text: English]

Italian translation (Statement of Card. João Braz de Aviz)

Ringrazio tutti i giornalisti, qui riuniti in questa conferenza stampa per la presentazione della nostra relazione finale sulla Visita Apostolica agli Istituti Religiosi Femminili negli Stati Uniti d'America. Nel dicembre del 2008, il Cardinale Franc Rodé, allora Prefetto della Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica, decise la Visita “*per esaminare la qualità della vita religiosa femminile negli Stati Uniti*”.

Pur avendo la convinzione che un'iniziativa del genere avrebbe avuto i suoi limiti, sia per il numero dei destinatari che per il suo contenuto, si è andati avanti con il desiderio di acquisire una conoscenza più profonda del contributo delle religiose alla Chiesa e alla società, come pure delle difficoltà che minacciano la qualità della loro vita religiosa e, in alcuni casi, l'esistenza stessa degli Istituti.

A conclusione di questo lungo processo rivolgiamo ora la nostra relazione finale sulla Visita Apostolica non solo alle religiose degli Stati Uniti, ma anche ai Pastori della Chiesa e ai fedeli. Oltre alla pubblicazione di questa relazione generale, il nostro Dicastero invierà singole relazioni agli Istituti che hanno ricevuto una visita *in loco* e agli Istituti le cui singole relazioni hanno destato preoccupazioni. Invieremo anche lettere di ringraziamento agli Istituti che hanno partecipato alle prime due fasi della Visita.

Questa conferenza stampa mi offre innanzitutto la possibilità di esprimere la gratitudine della Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica alle religiose degli Stati Uniti per la loro presenza e per tutto ciò con cui contribuiscono alla missione di evangelizzazione della Chiesa. Fin dagli inizi della Chiesa cattolica nel loro Paese, le religiose sono state coraggiosamente in prima linea nella missione di evangelizzare, dedicandosi con abnegazione alle necessità spirituali, morali, educative, fisiche e sociali di innumerevoli persone, specialmente povere ed emarginate. Lungo tutta la storia della nazione, l'apostolato educativo delle religiose nelle scuole cattoliche ha promosso lo sviluppo personale ed alimentato la fede di tantissimi giovani ed ha aiutato la comunità ecclesiale a espandersi negli Stati Uniti. Inoltre, gran parte del sistema sanitario cattolico negli Stati Uniti, ogni anno a servizio di milioni di persone, è stato creato da congregazioni religiose femminili.

In risposta all'appello del Decreto *Perfectae Caritatis* del Concilio Vaticano II di ritornare al Vangelo, “regola suprema” della vita religiosa”, e “allo spirito e alle finalità proprie dei fondatori” (2 a e b) le religiose hanno cercato di adattare il loro stile di vita e di missione in modo tale da poter rispondere più efficacemente ai bisogni contemporanei. Con spirito di fedeltà creativa ai loro carismi, si sono dedicate a nuovi ministeri a favore di chi è maggiormente al margine della Chiesa e della società. Le religiose negli Stati Uniti hanno anche acquisito una formazione teologica e professionale, cercando di mettere sempre più le loro capacità al servizio della missione di evangelizzazione della Chiesa e di preparare altri a collaborarvi. Attualmente si impegnano in attività di volontariato ben oltre l'età normale della pensione, e anche in età molto avanzata continuano a sostenere la vita e l'apostolato delle altre suore mediante la loro preghiera.

Certo non possiamo ignorare che la Visita Apostolica è stata vissuta con apprensione da alcune suore, come pure della decisione, da parte di alcuni Istituti, di non collaborare del tutto nello svolgimento di essa. Anche se questo è stato per noi motivo di amarezza, cogliamo l'occasione per esprimere la nostra disponibilità a instaurare un dialogo rispettoso e fruttuoso con gli Istituti che non sono stati pienamente concordi con il corso della Visita.

Siamo convinti che la celebrazione dell'*Anno della Vita Consacrata*, che Papa Francesco offre non solo alle persone consacrate, ma alla Chiesa intera - tutti noi religiosi/e, clero e laici - ci offre una buona occasione per lavorare verso quella piena riconciliazione che offrirà a tutti

una testimonianza radiante e attraente di comunione fraterna. Riaffermiamo il desiderio del nostro Dicastero di rinvigorire lo spirito di comunione nel nostro contatto diretto con le Conferenze di Superiore Maggiori, come pure con le superiori e i membri dei singoli Istituti. Esprimiamo la speranza di poter accogliere insieme il momento presente come occasione per trasformare ogni incertezza ed esitazione in fiduciosa collaborazione, in modo che il Signore possa condurci nel portare avanti la missione che egli ci ha affidato al servizio del suo popolo.

Certamente è interesse di tutti sapere che Papa Francesco ha chiesto al nostro Dicastero, in stretta collaborazione con la Congregazione per i Vescovi, di attualizzare il documento *Mutuae Relationes* sulla collaborazione tra vescovi e religiosi/e, in accordo con il proposito della Chiesa di promuovere la comunione ecclesiale che tutti desideriamo.

Accogliamo con gioia le molte recenti dichiarazioni di Papa Francesco sul contributo indispensabili e insostituibile delle donne alla società e alla Chiesa. Posso assicurare che questa Congregazione è impegnata a collaborare per rispondere alla risoluzione di Papa Francesco che “il genio femminile” trovi espressione “nei diversi luoghi in cui vengono prese le decisioni importanti, tanto nella Chiesa come nelle strutture sociali” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 103). Continueremo a lavorare per fare sì che religiose competenti siano attivamente coinvolte nel dialogo religioso “rispetto al possibile ruolo della donna lì dove si prendono decisioni importanti, nei diversi ambiti della Chiesa” (*Ibid.*, 104).

A nome della Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica e delle religiose degli Stati Uniti desidero esprimere la mia più sentita gratitudine a Madre Mary Clare Millea per aver accettato la sfida di questo gravoso impegno e per aver svolto questo compito in modo pastorale e professionale. Un grazie sincero anche a tutti coloro che hanno contribuito allo sviluppo della Visita, in particolare ai religiosi e alle religiose che hanno costituito il gruppo di appoggio, a coloro che hanno svolto le visite *in loco* e a quanti hanno collaborato nella Visita alla loro Congregazione.

La Visita Apostolica ha offerto alle religiose nuove opportunità per scoprire la presenza e l'azione salvifica di Dio in una fruttuosa comunicazione con le altre religiose, con i pastori della Chiesa e con i fedeli laici. Auspico che l'auto-valutazione e il dialogo suscitato dalla Visita Apostolica continui a dare frutti abbondanti per rivitalizzare e rafforzare gli Istituti religiosi nella fedeltà a Cristo, alla Chiesa e alla loro ispirazione fondante. Il nostro tempo ha bisogno della testimonianza credibile e attraente di persone consacrate che mostrino la potenza del Vangelo che redime e trasforma. Convinti della sublime dignità e della bellezza della vita consacrata, preghiamo tutti per le religiose e sosteniamole, promovendo attivamente le vocazioni alla vita religiosa. Grazie.

[Ora l'Arcivescovo José Rodríguez Carballo, Segretario della Congregazione, presenterà una visione d'insieme della nostra relazione finale sulla Visita Apostolica.]

[02073-01.01] [Testo originale: Inglese]

Statement of Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M.

The Dicastries of the Apostolic See regularly authorize Apostolic Visitations, which involve sending a Visitor or Visitors to evaluate an ecclesiastical entity in order to assist the group in question to improve the way in which it carries out its mission in the life of the Church. In some ways, however, this Apostolic Visitation was unprecedented. It involved 341 religious institutes of women religious which engage in apostolic ministry and which have a generalate,

provincialate and/or initial formation program in the United States. Both diocesan and pontifical right institutes, to which approximately 50,000 women religious throughout the United States belong, were part of the Visitation. Each province of institutes which had more than one province in the United States was considered a separate unit, for a total of 405 entities involved in the Visitation. Our Dicastery appointed a woman religious from the United States, Mother Mary Clare Millea, ASCJ, as Apostolic Visitor, granting her the faculties to design and carry out the Visitation. She, in turn, chose a core team of American religious who assisted her throughout the process.

Not only was the Apostolic Visitation vast in its proportions but it also examined widely diversified expressions of apostolic religious life throughout the country. From the outset, it sought to convey the caring support of the Church in respectful, “sister-to-sister” dialogue, as modeled in the Gospel account of the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. It sought to listen to the lived reality of the religious, understand their rich heritage, current challenges and future hopes, within the context of the ecclesial community.

The Visitation took place between 2009 and 2012 and was divided into four phases. In the first phase, 266 superiors general (78% of their total number) voluntarily engaged in personal dialogue with the Visitor. Subsequently, all major superiors were asked to complete a Questionnaire requesting empirical data and qualitative information regarding the spiritual, community and ministerial life of the individual institutes. On-site visits were then conducted in a representative sample of 90 religious institutes, representing about half of the apostolic women religious in the United States.

In the final phase of the Visitation, the Visitor submitted to our Dicastery a final General Report on the major issues and trends in women’s religious life in the United States. While these trends cannot be presumed to apply to each of the institutes, they were significant enough to warrant mention in her report.

The Visitor also provided the Dicastery with a brief overview of each of the participating institutes, using the data submitted by major superiors as well as impressions gleaned from personal interviews and written documentation submitted to her by major superiors and their councils, members of the religious institutes and any other persons who wished to contribute their personal input to the process. As the Cardinal Prefect stated earlier, our Congregation will respond to the major superiors of the individual institutes in a manner consonant with their participation in the Visitation process. Respecting the confidential nature of the content of the individual reports, we will make no public statement regarding them.

The document we are presenting today is our Congregation’s response to the Visitor’s General Report. Following a brief introduction, it describes the rationale and offers an overview of the Visitation process. It then briefly treats the principal issues evaluated during the Visitation process: empirical data, charism and identity, vocations and religious formation, Christ-centered prayer, community life and ministry, governance and financial stewardship, collaboration in the evangelizing mission of the Church and ecclesial communion. On each of these topics, a point of reference is given in the form of a brief statement of current Church teaching on the issue being reviewed. This is followed by a summary of the Visitor’s overall evaluation of the reality. The third part of each section contains the Congregation’s recommendations to all religious institutes regarding that issue.

Any oral summary of the Apostolic Visitation during this press conference would risk impoverishing its content. The full text of the Report will be available on the some major Catholic websites (www.vatican.va, www.uisg.org, www.vidimusdominum.org, www.lcwr.org,

www.cmswr.org, www.usccb.org) at the conclusion of this meeting, and will be sent to all the participating religious institutes as well.

We hope that women religious will recognize their lived reality in this report and will find it to be a helpful tool in their ongoing self-evaluation and in the articulation of their strategic plans for the future. We also hope and pray that reflection on its content will promote even greater collaborative efforts among religious institutes, with the Church's Pastors and lay faithful and with our Dicastery, in a deepening spirit of ecclesial communion, leading to an effective revitalization of their life and mission and new vocational interest in religious life.

We have prepared this final report with the compassionate support and encouragement of Pope Francis. His insistence that "none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 201) certainly resonates deeply with women religious in the United States. Nearly all their foundresses/founders were very active in areas of social justice. Recent chapters of many institutes have studied their own history to discover creative and purposeful ways of responding to current societal issues as their foundress/founder would have addressed them today.

We gratefully acknowledge this apostolic fervor among women religious and support them in their resolve to continue to respond courageously to the Holy Father's urgent plea for spiritual conversion, intense love of God and neighbor, zeal for justice and peace, and the Gospel meaning of the poor and of poverty (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 201T). As Pope Francis further insists, only by working together to create a new mind-set of solidarity will we make those concrete decisions which will lead to the elimination of the structural causes of poverty and "would allow all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny" (Ibid, 190).

The Church in the United States is greatly enriched by the myriad experiences and gifts of its current fifty thousand women religious and the multitude of dedicated women who have preceded them. We pray that the Holy Spirit continue to guide them on the journey of internal renewal as vital partners in the Church's mission of bringing the Good News of salvation to all.

Thank you for your attention.

[02074-02.01] [Original text: English]

Italian translation (Statement of Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M.)

I Dicasteri della Sede Apostolica autorizzano regolarmente Visite Apostoliche, che implicano l'invio di uno o più Visitatori per valutare una entità ecclesiastica e poter così aiutare il gruppo in questione a migliorare il modo in cui svolge la sua missione nella vita della Chiesa. In un certo senso, comunque, questa Visita Apostolica, non ha precedenti. Ha coinvolto 341 Istituti religiosi femminili che sono impegnati in ministeri apostolici e che hanno un Generalato, un Provincialato e/o un programma di formazione negli Stati Uniti. Sia Istituti di diritto diocesano che di diritto pontificio, a cui appartengono circa 50.000 religiose negli Stati Uniti, sono stati coinvolti nella Visita. Ogni provincia di Istituti che avessero più provincie negli Stati Uniti è stata considerata una unità indipendente, per cui nella Visita sono state coinvolte 405 entità. Il nostro Dicastero ha nominato una religiosa degli Stati Uniti, Madre Mary Clare Millea, ASCJ, quale Visitatrice Apostolica, concedendole le facoltà di progettare e condurre la Visita. A sua volta, Madre Mary Claire ha scelto un'equipe di religiosi/e nordamericani che l'hanno coadiuvata.

La Visita Apostolica non è stata solo vasta nelle sue proporzioni, ma ha anche esaminato ampiamente le diverse espressioni della vita religiosa apostolica nel Paese. Fin dall'inizio, si è voluto trasmettere il sostegno premuroso della Chiesa, in un rispettoso dialogo "da sorella a sorella", il cui modello si trova nel passo evangelico della visita di Maria alla cugina Elisabetta. Si è cercato di ascoltare la realtà vissuta dalle religiose, di capire la loro ricca eredità, le sfide attuali e le speranze future, nell'ambito della comunità ecclesiale.

La Visita si è svolta tra il 2009 e il 2012, in quattro fasi. Nella prima fase, 266 superiori generali (il 78% del totale) si sono impegnate volontariamente in un dialogo personale con il Visitatore o Visitatrice. In seguito, a tutte le superiori maggiori è stato chiesto di compilare un questionario con dati concreti e informazioni sulla qualità della vita spirituale, comunitaria e apostolica dei singoli Istituti. Le visite *in loco* sono state condotte su un campione rappresentativo di 90 istituti religiosi, corrispondenti a circa metà degli istituti religiosi femminili di vita attiva negli Stati Uniti.

Nella fase finale della Visita, la Visitatrice ha presentato al nostro Dicastero una Relazione generale conclusiva sulle questioni principali e sulle tendenze della vita religiosa femminile negli Stati Uniti. Pur senza presumere di applicare tali tendenze a ogni Istituto, queste sono state sufficientemente significative per essere menzionate nella sua relazione.

La Visitatrice ha inoltre fornito al Dicastero una breve panoramica di ciascuno degli istituti partecipanti, servendosi dei dati presentati dalle superiori maggiori, come pure delle impressioni raccolte da interviste personali e documentazione scritta che le è stata presentata dalle superiori maggiori e dai loro consigli, da membri degli istituti e da altre persone che hanno voluto dare il proprio contributo allo svolgimento della Visita. Come già indicato dal Cardinale Prefetto, la nostra Congregazione risponderà alle superiori maggiori dei singoli istituti in modo consona alla loro partecipazione alla Visita. Nel rispetto della riservatezza del contenuto delle singole relazioni, non faremo nessuna dichiarazione pubblica riguardo ad esse.

Il documento che oggi vi presentiamo è la risposta della nostra Congregazione alla Relazione finale della Visitatrice. Dopo una breve introduzione, esso descrive la logica e offre una visione d'insieme del processo della Visita. Affronta poi brevemente i temi principali che sono stati considerati nel corso della Visita: dati rilevati, carisma e identità, vocazioni e formazione religiosa, preghiera cristocentrica, vita di comunità e apostolato, governo e gestione finanziaria, collaborazione alla missione evangelizzatrice della Chiesa e comunione ecclesiale. Per ciascuno di questi temi si offre un punto di riferimento nella forma di una breve esposizione attuale dell'insegnamento della Chiesa sui temi esaminati. Segue un riassunto della valutazione della Visitatrice sulla realtà. La terza parte di ogni sezione contiene le raccomandazioni della Congregazione a tutti gli istituti religiosi riguardo al tema in questione.

Qualsiasi riassunto orale della Visita Apostolica durante questa conferenza stampa rischierebbe di impoverirne il contenuto. Il testo completo sarà a disposizione su alcuni dei principali siti web cattolici (per esempio: www.vatican.va, www.uisg.org, www.vidimusdominum.org, www.lcwr.org, www.cmswr.org, www.usccb.org) e sarà anche inviato a tutti gli istituti religiosi a cui si è rivolta la Visita.

Abbiamo speranza che le religiose riconoscano in questa relazione il loro vissuto, e la trovino utile a una loro continua autovalutazione e all'articolazione dei loro piani programmatici per il futuro. Speriamo inoltre e preghiamo affinché la riflessione sul suo contenuto promuova una sempre maggiore collaborazione tra gli istituti religiosi, con i pastori della Chiesa e i fedeli laici e con il nostro Dicastero, e aiuti ad approfondire lo spirito di comunione ecclesiale,

conducendo così a un'effettiva rivitalizzazione della loro vita e missione e ad un nuovo interesse vocazionale per la vita religiosa.

Abbiamo preparato questa relazione finale in sintonia e con l'incoraggiamento di Papa Francesco. La sua insistenza sul fatto che "nessuno dovrebbe dire che si mantiene lontano dai poveri e dalla giustizia sociale" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 201) trova profonda risonanza nelle religiose degli Stati Uniti. Quasi tutte le loro fondatrici/fondatori si sono attivamente impegnate/i nell'ambito della giustizia sociale. I recenti capitoli di molti Istituti hanno studiato la propria storia per scoprire come rispondere con creatività e decisione ai problemi della società attuale, come oggi farebbero le loro fondatrici/fondatori.

Riconosciamo con gratitudine questo fervore apostolico tra le religiose e le appoggiamo nella loro volontà di continuare a rispondere coraggiosamente al pressante appello del Santo Padre per "la conversione spirituale, l'intensità dall'amore a Dio e al prossimo, lo zelo per la giustizia e la pace, il significato evangelico dei poveri e della povertà (*Ibid.*).

Come Papa Francesco ulteriormente insiste, solo lavorando insieme per creare una nuova mentalità di solidarietà, prenderemo quelle decisioni concrete che ci condurranno a eliminare le cause strutturali della povertà e permetteranno "a tutti i popoli di giungere con le loro forze a essere artefici del loro destino" (*Ibid.*, 190).

La Chiesa negli Stati Uniti è fortemente arricchita dalla miriade di esperienze e di doni delle sue attuali cinquantamila religiose e dalla moltitudine di donne consacrate che le hanno precedute. Preghiamo lo Spirito Santo affinché continui a guidarle lungo il cammino del rinnovamento interiore come *partners* vitali nella missione della Chiesa di portare la Buona Notizia della salvezza a tutti.

Grazie per l'attenzione.

[02074-01.01] [Testo originale: Inglese]

Statement of Sr. M. Clare Millea, A.S.C.J.

I imagine that each of the women religious here present and those who are following this press conference via internet remember the moment we heard the announcement of the Apostolic Visitation. For me, it began with a totally unexpected phone call from Cardinal Franc Rodé, then Prefect of the Congregation for Consecrated Life. I immediately felt overwhelmed by such an enormous task and keenly aware of my own limitations. At the same time, I knew there could be no other response on my part but yes, in loving obedience to the Church and to the religious life which I deeply love. I tried to carry it out with unwavering faith in the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the support of much prayer.

Throughout the entire Visitation, I not only felt the weight of this responsibility but also the deep trust of the Dicastery. From the outset, Cardinal Rodé clearly wanted an American religious to be the Holy See's envoy in this delicate mission, giving me free rein to choose my own collaborators to assist in the Visitation's design, the formulation of its strategies and the ongoing evaluation and modification of the process. He readily agreed to let us establish a first-ever visitation website to keep the women religious and the general public abreast of its developments. Each time I returned to Rome from my U.S. office, he attentively listened to my updates and encouraged our efforts. From the time of Archbishop Joseph Tobin's appointment as Secretary of the Dicastery in 2010, he always showed great sensitivity to the women religious and intense interest in the process. I thank them as well as Cardinal João Braz de Aviz and

Archbishop Carballo, who have brought the Visitation to its completion in a very pastoral manner and have given us a wonderful message of hope today.

My core team of dedicated religious offered invaluable voluntary service to the Apostolic Visitation. Their commitment to the Church and to the values of religious life, as well as their belief in the sacred dignity of every human person enabled the Visitation to take place with profound respect for each individual religious and congregation. I am happy for this opportunity to publicly thank them for their great contribution. I also gratefully acknowledge the wise counsel of various other consultants and the fine service rendered by nearly eighty religious from forty-six congregations who conducted the on-site Visits.

My personal contact with many of the dedicated leaders and members of the religious institutes in our country has filled me with joyful gratitude. I now understand as never before how enriched and blessed the Church in the United States is because of the myriad experiences and gifts of its current fifty thousand women religious and the multitudes of dedicated women who have preceded us.

The Apostolic Visitation provided many opportunities for reflection, dialogue and communion among women religious in the United States as well as with the Church's pastors and lay faithful. Congregation leaders, including those who expressed resistance initially to this initiative, have shared that the process has yielded surprising positive results, such as:

- honest confrontation with the transformative power of the Word of God,
- deep spiritual conversations with our sisters about the life, witness and message of our foundresses and founders,
- earnest delving into Church documents about consecrated life,
- increased solidarity among women religious and renewed desire to move beyond attitudes which prevent us from being in communion with one another,
- a wonderful outpouring of loving gratitude expressed to women religious by bishops, clergy and lay persons which has sparked new energy and resourcefulness among us and has awakened a renewed interest in the promotion of vocations to the religious life.

Like the major superiors present here today, I too, as superior general of an international institute, have been eagerly awaiting the response of the Congregation for Consecrated Life at the conclusion of the Apostolic Visitation. As the person who conveyed the complex reality of our religious congregations to the Holy See with as much integrity and reverence as was possible, I affirm that the report given to us today reflects my findings in a concise and accurate manner.

I thank Cardinal Braz de Aviz and Archbishop Carballo for hearing our voices, our concerns and our goodwill, and for responding to us with sensitivity, respect and clarity. Your message to us today shows that you do understand our ongoing struggle to faithfully serve the Church in challenging times, despite our shortcomings and limitations. While you affirm the importance of our life and ministry in the Church, you challenge us with clear guidelines for an effective *metanoia*, the ongoing conversion essential to the effective revitalization of our vocation and life style. Thank you for inviting all of us to continue our open and honest dialogue with one another, with our pastors and with you, so that whatever remains of uncertainty and hesitancy among us might be transformed into collaborative trust and effective witness.

I sincerely hope that the positive energy generated by the Apostolic Visitation will continue to bear fruit in the ongoing revitalization of the vocation and ministry of women religious in the United States. The Visitation has given us a priceless opportunity to renew our commitment to the consecrated life and to place our unique gifts at the service of the Church, as together we

confront new and emerging threats to human dignity, religious freedom and conscience protection. May the affirmation and challenges of this final report impel us all to become – as Pope Francis urges us – joyful, Spirit-filled evangelizers who cultivate in prayer the interior space which gives a Christian meaning to our commitment and activity (cf *Evangelii Gaudium* 262). In true synergy with all other vocations in the Church, may we spread the spirituality of communion in our own communities, in the ecclesial community and in the existential peripheries of a world looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine (cf Pope Francis, *Apostolic letter for the Year of Consecrated Life* 3-4).

Thank you.

[02075-02.01] [Original Text: English]

Statement of Sr. Sharon Holland, I. H.M.

Thank You.

First of all I would like to express thanks to Mother Mary Clare. The organization, preparation and carrying out of this enormous undertaking was truly amazing. The training of the team of religious who visited our institutes resulted, when the time came, in a great sense of freedom.

As the Report itself acknowledges, the Visitation was met by some religious with “apprehension and suspicion” (n. 11). The expressed purpose, “*to look into the quality of life of religious women in the United States,*” was troubling. Some congregations reported that their elder sisters felt that their whole lives had been judged and found wanting. Despite the apprehension however, today we are looking at an affirmative and realistic report which, we know, is based on the study of written responses and on countless hours of attentive listening.

A reflection on my own experience of the visitation may put in perspective some of what happened in many of our U.S. religious houses. A large number of Sisters gathered in our Motherhouse chapel; they were Sisters who live there and others living near enough to come for the opening of the visitation. There was a certain anxiety in the air.

After our two visitors were introduced, one began to explain the purpose of the visit and how they would proceed. It was clear that they would observe the official process as it was entrusted to them, but their tone and the quality of their presence began to change the atmosphere. It was evident that these were sisters like us to whom we could speak openly and honestly. The personal visits took place in open conversation, sharing the joys and hopes of post conciliar renewal; the anxieties, concerns and hopes for the future. We spoke of a deepened life of prayer rooted in Scripture, of the enthusiasm for our charism and fidelity in mission, often in collaboration with other institutes and with laity.

The Report we are receiving today reflects our reality—in its commonality and diversity. Perhaps because so many voices were heard and a remarkable synthesis made, Institutes will easily recognize their own truth, and also respect the diversity among us. Our achievements have been recognized with gratitude, and the nature of our challenges reviewed. We are urged to reflect, to strengthen, to take up opportunities, to discern, to act in extending the Church’s evangelizing mission, according to our distinctive but complementary charisms.

I am very aware that, in addition to the media, I am speaking to American religious, about whom and for whom this report was written, but who have not yet seen it. Soon all will have it

in hand. It occurred to me that as the Report is read, many may recognize expressions in the document which could have been copied from their Institutes' Chapter documents.

In a particular way, it is the realism of the text which appealed to me first. For example, in the section on vocation promotion and formation, there is the common concern for the dramatic decline in vocations. However, the Report goes on to recognize that the vocational peak of the 1960's was unusual, and not a norm to which we can return. Rather, the focus is on providing the formation needed for today's candidates who often are highly qualified professionally, but lacking in theological formation.

The section concerning Financial Stewardship likewise shows our complex current realities. Religious are praised for wise stewardship, socially responsible investing and strategic planning for the needs of members and ministries. Simultaneously, there is a very concrete acknowledgment of many causes contributing to our financial problems: years of undercompensated ministry, a diminished number of earners, volunteer ministries of elder religious, work with the poor and disenfranchised and the fact that sisters serving in ecclesiastical structures receive relatively low salaries and have sometimes lost their positions due to downsizing.

I mention these factors simply to emphasize again how much has been heard and understood. There is an encouraging and realistic tone in this Report. Challenges are understood, but it is not a document of blame, or of simplistic solutions. One can read the text and feel appreciated and trusted to carry on.

The Year of Consecrated Life is seen as an opportune moment, for all – religious, clergy and laity – to take steps toward forgiveness and reconciliation in witness of ecclesial communion. It offers “an opportunity to transform uncertainty and hesitancy into collaborative trust...” in service of mission. Using the words of Pope Francis, the need for a “more incisive female presence in the Church” is repeated.

Written by those who listened deeply to many sisters, to many stories, experiences, fears and hopes, the Report tells with integrity, not only the “what” of our contemporary reality, but also much of the “why”.

As our members read, study, pray over and discuss this Report, I believe they will feel affirmed and strengthened. Through participation in this process, we have deepened spiritually, reaffirmed our belief in our religious life and renewed our commitment to our mission in the Church and the world. We have benefitted anew from the experience of collaboration and communion among institutes, with pastors, and with laity.

In this Advent Season, we claim one more reason to express the joy of the Gospel.

[02076-02.01] [Original text: English]

Statement of Sr. Agnes Mary Donovan, S.V.

When the Apostolic Visitation of Women's Religious communities in the United States was announced, the Members of the *Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious* (CMSWR) welcomed the invitation from the *Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life* (CICLSAL) to prayerful self-reflection, self-evaluation and dialogue. We were genuinely confident that we would be both affirmed and challenged in the process.

In speaking with Religious Superiors, Pope Francis has said, “... it is not possible that a consecrated woman ... not ‘feel’ along with the Church. A ‘feeling’ along with the Church

which was generated in us in our Baptism; a ‘feeling’ with the Church which finds its filial expression in fidelity to the Magisterium, in communion with the pastors and the Successor of Peter, Bishop of Rome, the visible sign of unity.”¹

The Apostolic Visitation offered us a tangible opportunity to ‘feel’ along with the Church. In the words of one member Superior of the CMSWR, “from the beginning preparations to the closing prayer, (the Visitation) was an overwhelmingly beautiful experience.” Another was grateful that the process opened up “community-wide study and discussion, providing each sister the opportunity to reflect on fundamental areas of our life and apostolate, and to share with one another.” The on-site visit for a third was “refreshing and gave me a deeper sense of joy in the Holy Spirit working within our charism...” Another Superior summed up her community’s experience by stating, “We were not disappointed during any phase of the Visitation.”

As we welcome the Final Report, we are particularly grateful for those who have given countless hours of thoughtful labor to this effort, hopeful that, in time, it will bear fruit for the good of religious life and the Church.

The Final Report acknowledges the fact of the “widely diversified expressions of apostolic religious life” in the United States while focusing on the overall trends evident in the majority of communities. Underneath that broad brush stroke, there is another trend. It is a quiet one and small, but nonetheless significant, and one which has consistently grown over these first 15 years of the new millennium. While the overall trend may be towards aging and diminishment, apostolic Religious Life is not dying in the United States. There is reason for hope. The same voice of love which called women to courageously and selflessly tend the poor, weak and young in the past is still calling young women today. It is the voice of Jesus, and the experience of His personal love continues to lead young women to our doors.

Within the 125 communities of CMSWR members, nearly 20% (almost 1,000) of the Sisters are currently in initial formation (in the years prior to final vows). The average age of Sisters is 53 years -- well below the overall trend.² There is cause for wonder, here, and gratitude. Our culture can be quite antagonistic towards the faith, and skeptical at best towards religious life, and yet from this milieu the Lord is surprising women with His love, His mercy, and the possibility of a new and beautiful life consecrated by public vows.

Those who enter our communities have benefitted from the avenues opened to women over the last 50 years. They are educated, and have been formed in family, school and work environments that have encouraged and developed their native capacities and gifts as women. They fully expect that the Church will, likewise, receive their “feminine genius,” their voice on behalf of the poor and vulnerable Jesus in our midst, and their thoughtful contributions to the concerns of the Church at large. These women know the power of vowed religious to spark new life in weary hearts, and anticipate giving themselves in the apostolate to bear this life to those most in need.

Women enter religious life out of a world they know well in order to follow and give themselves totally to that which the world cannot give. They are responding to an invitation from the Lord that holds a Divine promise confirming the goodness of their identity as women and their purpose in life, their essential mission of spiritual, maternal love. These women are looking to live – concretely and definitively – in a manner which confirms what they have first experienced in their hearts. The CMSWR has assisted the formation of these young religious that they may, for a lifetime, live religious life “from the inside-out”, i.e., not so much from rule as from the principle which the rule manifests.

The observations of the Final Report and the findings of the 2009 Center for the Applied Research on the Apostolate (CARA) study on candidates to religious life ring true to the Members of the CMSWR.³ These candidates are seeking a way of life which includes elements which have always been core to the identity of religious life, and yet they do so without the influence of a culture where such elements – or even religious life itself - is prevalent or familiar. What are some of these elements?

- They have encountered the living Lord in prayer and begun to follow Him in a new life in the Spirit. Young women look, above all, to live a religious life founded on the Sacraments and which includes a rich, robust and daily common and personal prayer life as an irreplaceable means of personal growth and of spiritual communion in community.
- They know precisely through experience that to follow the Lord means to not be alone, and they want to walk this path closely together with others who share the fire of their love for the Lord. They want to be assisted and held accountable in a community where all are sincerely, even if imperfectly, striving towards perfect love.
- These women know they could live quite well, and successfully, in the world as lay women. The call they have experienced interiorly is to separate themselves from that world in order to serve it with and from the Heart of Christ. They want to be externally recognizable as tender mothers in the Church - so they can be found and approached at any moment, in any circumstance, with confidence, by the poor and needy who are often hidden on the margins of society or in the darkness of fear.

While we cannot but rejoice to see the initiative of God in the lives of the young, the Church and the world look for the witness of mature women religious who, by the radiance of their lives, communicate the fact that God's promises are true and trustworthy. There is no act so powerful, no act that can "wake up the world,"⁴ as much as a consecrated woman who says in her very being, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."⁵ That's precisely what women religious have been saying and living since the earliest days of our Country's founding, and to prodigious apostolic fruitfulness. Today, this legacy continues.

As regards the apostolates of women religious in the United States, the communities associated with the CMSWR share in some of the overall trends of the Final Report, and again we note distinctions from these trends. Professed Sisters in our communities (81% of the members are in active ministry) labor in a variety of corporate apostolates. The greatest number of Sisters are dedicated to the care of the sick and elderly in health-care facilities and hospital settings; the second largest number of Sisters are serving in a ministry of education, teaching in every academic setting from nursery and pre-schools to university/seminary programs; and the third largest number bring the Gospel to people of all ages by way of evangelization, catechesis and religious education (outside of school settings). These most common forms of apostolate have long-standing and venerable histories among religious communities of women in the United States. Our gratitude and admiration for those who have gone before us grows with each passing year, as does our desire to give to those religious who will follow after us an inheritance "incapable of fading or defilement."⁶

Vita Consecrata reminded us that, "The first duty of the consecrated life is to make visible the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world."⁷ It is to this end, in faith, that the Members of the CMSWR and our communities renew our love and commitment to give our hearts, our love, our lives to Jesus in

His Church, echoing the words of Blessed Mother Teresa, “We try to pray through our work by doing it with Jesus, for Jesus, to Jesus.” Our small but significant numbers eagerly give the little we have - our five loaves and two fish – that Jesus – who can do so much with so little, so long as we give Him everything - may multiply our small offering into “something beautiful for God.”⁸ For “with God nothing will be impossible.”⁹

We consider it a providential blessing that the Final Report of the Apostolic Visitation comes at this moment of grace: the beginning of the *Year for Consecrated Life* called by Pope Francis. This year shines a spotlight on religious life not just in our country but across the globe, not just for religious but for the whole Church. We were happy to initiate a nation-wide, collaborative endeavor in celebration of this year of grace - together with all US women and men religious and with the enthusiastic support of the nation’s Bishops - of three theme specific Open House Days at convents and friaries throughout the US. The first Open House Day will take place on Sunday, February 8, 2015. The second, a Service Day with religious, will be held during the summer of 2015, and a Day of Prayer with Religious on Sunday, September 13, 2015.

It is a beautiful time for religious life in the Church and we look to all Religious Sisters in the United States that together, we may give witness and encouragement to one another as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, in the pattern of Our Lady, in love and ever increasing holiness.

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the *International Union of Superiors General* (UISG); May 8, 2013 <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-s-address-to-women-religious-superiors>

² CMSWR, internal demographic survey, 2013.

³ Sr. Mary E. Bendyna, O.P. and Mary L. Gautier, “Recent Vocations to Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference,” Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2009.

⁴ Pope Francis, meeting with Union of Superiors General of Religious Men, November 29, 2013; published on January 3, 2014; http://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articoli_download/extra/Wake_up_the_world.pdf

⁵ Gal. 2:20

⁶ 1 Peter 1:4

⁷ *Vita Consecrata*, 20

⁸ Malcolm Muggeridge, title of 1967 BBC Interview and later book: *Something Beautiful for God: Mother Teresa of Calcutta* (HarperCollins, 1971)

⁹ Lk 1:37

[02077-02.01] [Original text: English]

Closing remarks of Fr. Thomas Rosica, C.S.B.

I wish to thank the participants in today’s Press Conference and all of you have joined us here in Rome and those in the United States and elsewhere via the Internet. In his letter to Consecrated women and men a few weeks ago, Church, Francis reminded us of the old saying that will always be true: “Where there are religious, there is joy”. He is counting on us “to wake up the world”, since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. It is our hope that today’s conference from the Vatican and the release of the final report be an Advent sign of joy for the Church and a prophetic awakening for the world.

All of the texts of today’s Press Conference, including the full report, will be available shortly on the Vatican website as well as on the websites of the LCWR and the CMSWR and other websites. Three filmed interviews with the three sisters here present may be found on the Vatican YouTube webpage and on the websites of the two conferences of women religious.

Thank you.

[02080-02.01] [Original text: English]

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