

Apostolic Visitation

OF INSTITUTES OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN THE UNITED STATES

November 5, 2009

Dear Sister,

On September 18, 2009, the *Questionnaire for Major Superiors* was made available to you and you were asked to complete and return it by November 20, 2009. As that deadline approaches, I thought it would be helpful to all concerned to reiterate the fundamental purpose and goal of the Apostolic Visitation and underline the importance of sincere and wholehearted cooperation with the Holy See on the part of each institute.

Religious life provides the whole Church an indispensable and corporate witness to the person of Jesus Christ and to the Gospel. From this consecrated witness flows a multitude of good works in education, social services and health care, to name a few. It is widely acknowledged that our witness to Christ and our works of love have in large measure built up the Church in the United States and continue to contribute to the vitality of its faith.

The Apostolic Visitation has been initiated so that religious life and the life-giving works that flow from it will continue far into the future. Each of us has a serious obligation to not only preserve but to foster the precious legacy we have inherited from our foundresses and founders as well as the sisters who have gone before us, a legacy we rightfully celebrate. The Apostolic Visitation seeks to listen to and affirm the dignity of all women religious who serve the Church with exemplary love.

As Cardinal Rodé recently stated, “this Apostolic Visitation hopes to encourage vocations and assure a better future for women religious.” It offers us a valuable opportunity for prayerful and thoughtful self-examination to discern whether or not those conditions exist which foster avenues of growth and vitality in our congregations. Where those conditions are lacking, we are being given the opportunity to work with the Apostolic See and with one another to introduce or re-introduce them.

Among the conditions for growth and vitality, pride of place belongs to communion with the Catholic Church – the Pope, the bishops and indeed the whole people of God in the profession of “one faith, one Lord, one baptism”. Closely allied with this spirit of communion are the fundamental aspects of consecrated life, which are lived in various ways, according to the unique religious identity of our respective institutes.

I know that many of you are engaged in thoughtful dialogue with your members regarding your religious identity and ministry, as suggested in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. It is my hope that, in addition to your own perspective, the responses to the *Questionnaire* will also reflect the wisdom that is in the heart of your sisters.

A number of completed *Questionnaires* from major superiors have already arrived in the Apostolic Visitation Office. It is a joy to discover in them the deep commitment of religious congregations to the Church’s mission as well as a profound love for religious life and for the individual sisters. Many of the responses reflect the prayerful and communal effort of women religious to express and, more importantly, live the charismatic ideal of their foundresses / founders. They express your generous response to the many challenges we face within our communities, in the Church and in today’s society, with a particular sensitivity to our most vulnerable sisters and brothers.

To those who have already submitted your responses, I thank you for sharing the unique gift that your congregation is to the Church with me, and through me, to the Apostolic See. I urge those of you who have not yet completed the *Questionnaire* to respond with honesty and sincerity about the distinct identity of the group of sisters you represent. If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the

Apostolic Visitation Office. I will do my best to help make this task a genuinely positive experience for you and for each of your sisters, even as I want it to be a positive experience for the institute that I lead and serve.

Many major superiors have already addressed concerns to the Apostolic Visitation Office regarding confidentiality and protection of privileged information about their congregation, the sisters themselves and their apostolate. Although our canonical and civil advisors concur that the Apostolic See has the right to all the information contained in the *Questionnaire*, in response to your legitimate questions, I have determined that documents number 5, 6, and 7, requested in Part C of the *Questionnaire*, are not to be submitted to the Apostolic Visitation Office as part of this Visitation.

The documents not to be sent to the Apostolic Visitation Office include:

5. A list of each sister, year of birth, address and type of ministry (full time/part time)
6. A list of properties owned and/or (co)sponsored by your unit.
7. A complete copy of the most recent independent audit of your religious unit or your last internal financial statement if an external audit has not been made. This should include a statement of financial position, statement of activity, statement of changes in net assets and statement of cash flows.

The Apostolic Visitation Office will return Documents 5, 6 and 7 to those Congregations which have already submitted them.

This change in the design of the *Questionnaire* was made after listening to your concerns and after considerable prayer and counsel. I have every confidence that the purpose of this phase of the Apostolic Visitation can be satisfactorily achieved with the data provided in Parts A, B and the first four documents listed in Part C of the *Questionnaire*.

All data gathered through Parts A, B, and C of the *Questionnaire*, through individual correspondence, and site visits where indicated, will be treated with strict confidentiality and will be used to prepare the comprehensive report mandated by the Apostolic See. The data you send will be held in a secure place and, when no longer needed, will be returned to you or destroyed. In addition, The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University will prepare a composite analytical report of the standard, objective data contained in Part A of the *Questionnaire*. This report will be made public but will not reveal the identity of the individual institutes. It will provide a broad overview of the present reality and likely future trends of religious life in the United States.

I thank the major superiors who have contacted the Apostolic Visitation Office with their concerns and questions and I encourage all of you to contact us if you need any further clarification regarding the *Questionnaire* or any other aspect of the Apostolic Visitation.

Let us entrust this initiative to Our Mother Mary, so that we may be more effective and loving witnesses of her Son Jesus Christ to one another and to our world.

In the Heart of Christ,



Mother Mary Clare Millea, ASCJ
Apostolic Visitor