

# *Apostolic Visitation*

OF INSTITUTES OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN THE UNITED STATES  
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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Vatican initiates study of Catholic sisters' institutes in the United States**

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has begun an Apostolic Visitation or comprehensive study of institutes of women religious in the United States.

The action was initiated by the Congregation's prefect, Slovenian Cardinal Franc Rodé, C.M. The decree, issued December 22, 2008, indicated the Visitation is being undertaken "in order to look into the quality of the life" of the members of these religious institutes.

The Visitation will be conducted under the direction of Mother Mary Clare Millea, A.S.C.J., whom Cardinal Rodé appointed Apostolic Visitor. Mother Millea, a Connecticut native, is superior general of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an international religious institute headquartered in Rome, with approximately 1250 professed sisters worldwide, including 135 in the United States. She entered religious life in 1965 and professed perpetual vows in 1973.

The Visitation, which will collect and assimilate data and observations about religious life, will be limited to apostolic institutes, those actively engaged in service to Church and society. Cloistered, contemplative sisters, who have distinctly different lifestyles, are excluded from the study. Mother Millea will submit a confidential report to Cardinal Rodé at the conclusion of the task. Though there is no deadline, she hopes to complete the task by 2011.

Catholic women religious have been involved in apostolates such as education, healthcare and a variety of pastoral and social services in the United States since before the nation was founded. According to the Washington-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) however, the number of U.S. women religious has been in decline during the past 40 years, while their median age continues to increase.

"I am truly humbled, and a bit overwhelmed," Mother Millea said of her assignment. "While I have visited each of the communities and missions in my own congregation, the thought of gathering facts and findings about nearly 400 institutes across the United States can be daunting in scope."

"I am praying for all the sisters who will be a part of this Visitation, and hoping for their prayers – both for the good of the process as well as for me in this role," she continued. "I ask the prayers of the American Catholic clergy and faithful too."

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Despite her sense of awe at the size of the task, Mother Millea was encouraged by the project. “I know that the object of this Visitation is to encourage and strengthen apostolic communities of women religious, for the simple reason that these communities are integral to the entire life of the Catholic Church, in the United States and beyond.”

Mother Millea indicated that while she is not obliged to visit every community of women religious, she looks forward to learning and better understanding the “multi-faceted dimensions of the sisters’ religious lives, as well as their abundant contributions to the Church and society.”

A website, [apostolicvisitation.org](http://apostolicvisitation.org), has been launched to provide basic information about the project.

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