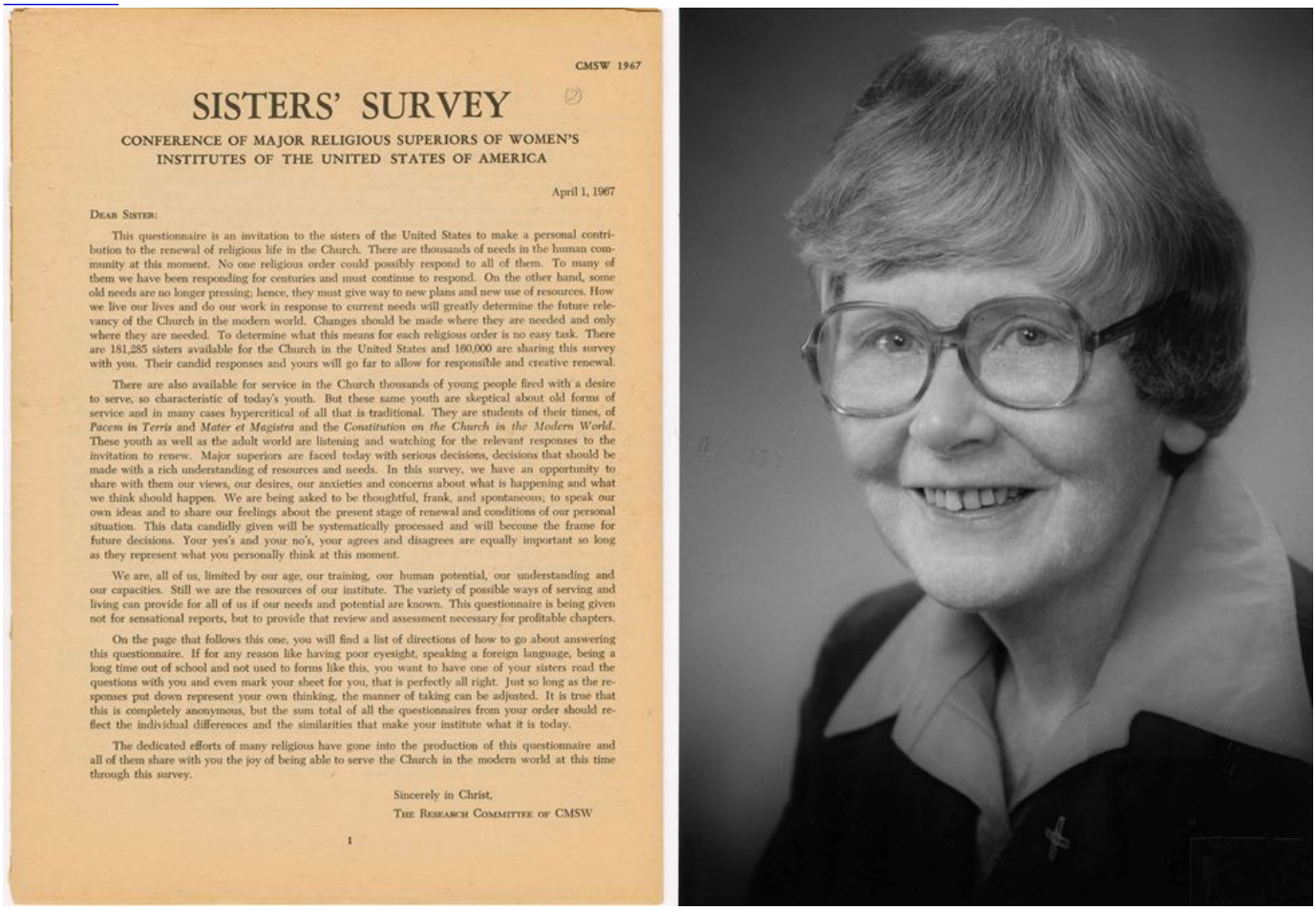
Spirituality
Vatican



CMSW 1967

SISTERS' SURVEY

CONFERENCE OF MAJOR RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

April 1, 1967

Dear Sister:

This questionnaire is an invitation to the sisters of the United States to make a personal contribution to the renewal of religious life in the Church. There are thousands of needs in the human community at this moment. No one religious order could possibly respond to all of them. To many of them we have been responding for centuries and must continue to respond. On the other hand, some old needs are no longer pressing; hence, they must give way to new plans and new use of resources. How we live our lives and do our work in response to current needs will greatly determine the future relevancy of the Church in the modern world. Changes should be made where they are needed and only where they are needed. To determine what this means for each religious order is no easy task. There are 181,285 sisters available for the Church in the United States and 160,000 are sharing this survey with you. Their candid responses and yours will go far to allow for responsible and creative renewal.

There are also available for service in the Church thousands of young people fired with a desire to serve, so characteristic of today's youth. But these same youth are skeptical about old forms of service and in many cases hypercritical of all that is traditional. They are students of their times, of *Pacem in Terris* and *Mater et Magistra* and the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. These youth as well as the adult world are listening and watching for the relevant responses to the invitation to renew. Major superiors are faced today with serious decisions, decisions that should be made with a rich understanding of resources and needs. In this survey, we have an opportunity to share with them our views, our desires, our anxieties and concerns about what is happening and what we think should happen. We are being asked to be thoughtful, frank, and spontaneous; to speak our own ideas and to share our feelings about the present stage of renewal and conditions of our personal situation. This data candidly given will be systematically processed and will become the frame for future decisions. Your yes's and your no's, your agrees and disagrees are equally important so long as they represent what you personally think at this moment.

We are, all of us, limited by our age, our training, our human potential, our understanding and our capacities. Still we are the resources of our institute. The variety of possible ways of serving and living can provide for all of us if our needs and potential are known. This questionnaire is being given not for sensational reports, but to provide that review and assessment necessary for profitable chapters.

On the page that follows this one, you will find a list of directions of how to go about answering this questionnaire. If for any reason like having poor eyesight, speaking a foreign language, being a long time out of school and not used to forms like this, you want to have one of your sisters read the questions with you and even mark your sheet for you, that is perfectly all right. Just so long as the responses put down represent your own thinking, the manner of taking can be adjusted. It is true that this is completely anonymous, but the sum total of all the questionnaires from your order should reflect the individual differences and the similarities that make your institute what it is today.

The dedicated efforts of many religious have gone into the production of this questionnaire and all of them share with you the joy of being able to serve the Church in the modern world at this time through this survey.

Sincerely in Christ,
The Research Committee of CMSW

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Left: Introduction page to the survey of American women religious; right: Sr. Marie Augusta Neal, who conducted the research. (Courtesy of Cushwa Center for American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame)

by NCR Staff

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October 27, 2017

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This week, NCR Vatican correspondent Joshua J. McElwee talks about a recent public correction Pope Francis made to an article by Cardinal Robert Sarah. Later, Global Sisters Report national correspondent Dan Stockman talks about a treasure trove of newly available information: the vast results of a 1967 survey, answered by a majority of the country's Catholic sisters in active ministry as they were grappling with Vatican II reform.

Show Notes

- Pope Francis issued a public correction to an article by Cardinal Robert Sarah about the changes the pope made last month to how the Catholic Church's liturgies are to be translated from the original Latin into local languages.
- Francis' letter to Sarah underscores his vision for a church engaged, writes Michael Sean Winters.
- Looking for more on the motu proprio? Read all about *Magnum Principium* here.
- We say: Francis' rollback of centralized power is, in political terms, a return to center, to moderation and to a trust of the community's local leaders.
- The results of a 1967 survey of 140,000 U.S. Catholic sisters have now been made available for anyone's research.

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