NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Visits to religious women to begin in spring

Dennis Sadowski Catholic News Service | Jun. 17, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The superior general overseeing the apostolic visitation of U.S. orders of women religious is hoping to gather up to 150 names of people who will begin visiting a cross section of congregations starting in the spring.

Mother Mary Clare Millea, superior general of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the apostolic visitator charged by the Vatican with directing the comprehensive study, told Catholic News Service June 17 that suggestions of names to fill slots on the teams continued to arrive, 11 days after a deadline she set for submissions.

In the midst of meetings in the U.S. before returning to Rome June 19, Mother Clare said from the apostolic visitation office in Hamden, Conn., that the visits will encompass a wide variety of orders.

"We know we cannot possibly visit all the congregations," she said. "So we want to give a representative sample to the Holy See."

Mother Clare, a Connecticut native whose religious institute is based in Rome, began soliciting names of women religious and men religious for the visitation teams in a May 19 letter to superior generals. In all, she contacted nearly 400 Catholic institutes for women religious.

Men would join visits only to those orders that indicate they would welcome a male, the letter stated.

The congregations will have the chance to say if they would welcome a male team member in a questionnaire that is being prepared for distribution in September, Mother Clare told CNS.

Distribution of the questionnaire will mark the beginning of the second phase of the study announced in January and ordered by the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life under its prefect, Cardinal Franc Rode.

The religious superiors will have about two months to complete the questionnaire, which will seek information such as statistics, activities and community practices. Visits by the teams -- which mark the third phase of the study -- will be based on the responses, Mother Clare explained.

The fourth and final phase will be the compilation and delivery of a report to Cardinal Rode in mid-2011, she said.

Currently Mother Clare is nearing the end of the first phase of the apostolic visitation. She told CNS she has met with 127 superior generals in the U.S. and in Rome since March 31. She has several meetings scheduled in Rome in the coming weeks and said she expects the first phase to be completed by July 31.

The voluntary meetings thus far have been "very positive experiences," she said.

"The (superior) generals have been very open and have put a lot of energy into preparing for our visit," she explained. "I've asked them to reflect on their hopes and their dreams for their congregations.

"Many of them have told me that while the initial reaction to the visitation was not always very joyful, this has caused them to reflect on their identity," she said.

In her letter soliciting suggestions for members of the visitation teams, Mother Clare outlined nine criteria that individuals must meet. They range from a minimum of 20 years of religious profession to "the ability to respect confidentiality, listen attentively and dialogue honestly."

Team members also will be asked to make a profession of faith and an oath of fidelity to the church.

The profession of faith encompasses the Nicene Creed with three additional paragraphs added in 1989. The paragraphs state that the person who makes the profession will support the magisterium, the church's teaching authority.

The oath of fidelity requires that the person who takes it will act in accordance with canon law, uphold church teachings and act in obedience to the bishops of the church.

Mother Clare said having team members make the profession of faith and taking the oath of fidelity is "a very logical kind of requirement."

"Every person who will take part in the visitation process in any way will also be an envoy of the Holy See," she said. "It seems logical that anyone taking part would want to take the oath because they would objectively represent the Holy See itself."

Mother Clare compared the requirements to the oath of office that public officials take "to follow the rules of the body that they are representing."

"So it is a practice that is acceptable and also lends a lot of credibility of the seriousness of the undertaking in which the person will take part," she added.

In the meetings with congregational leaders, Mother Clare said she discovered that the religious orders have engaged in deep prayer over the process. She said she expects "many new signs of vitality in religious life" to evolve.

"Young people are following the process. Hopefully young people will begin to see religious life as a viable option for their life. Hopefully there will be some very beautiful results that we do not yet see," she said.

- - -

Editor's Note: More information about the apostolic visitation can be found online at www.apostolicvisitation.org.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/23/2016 - 05:28*): https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/visits-religious-women-begin-spring