

## Global women religious leaders to gather in Rome

Thomas C. Fox | May. 4, 2010



Some 800 women religious leaders will gather in Rome this week to assess the lives of their communities and to recommit them in efforts to seek justice and hope in the wider world.

They will gather under the auspices of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG). The theme of their general assembly, which meets every few years, is an examination of the mystical and the prophetic aspects of religious life.

The UISG represents some 600,000 women religious. The assembly begins May 7 and will draw together hundreds of religious superiors, including 465 from Europe; 67 from Asia; 102 from Africa; 152 from the Americas and 15 from Oceania.

The UISG is an outgrowth of the Second Vatican Council. It is a canonically approved organization of general superiors of institutes of Catholic women religious and is intended to provide an international forum in which women religious leaders can share experiences, exchange information, and set directions for their work.

Reflecting the hardships and sufferings of the marginalized of the world as well as the hope Christians brings to the suffering, the theme for this year's general assembly is "drinking from the fountain that springs forth and flows" although it is night." The words are taken from the writings of St. John of the Cross.

In 2001, at the outset of the new millennium, the UISG, working through a general assembly, issued what has since been viewed as a foundational declaration, pledging religious congregations around the world to "work in solidarity with one another" in order to address "the abuse and sexual exploitation of women and children with particular attention to the trafficking of women."

That assembly also declared it would work to "promote the education and formation of women within and outside our own organizations" to insure the holistic development of women at every stage of life" and to help women gain fuller "appreciation of their God-given gifts to promote and enhance life."

The UISG has also reflected a wider focus by international women religious communities that have worked to enhance human rights and reduce poverty. The 2001 declaration proclaimed "solidarity with the poorest countries" of the world and pledged to work with those nations for the cancellation of the international debt.

The UISG has also focused on peace and ecological issues. "As women opposed to the perpetuation of war and

violence, we express our commitment to the creation of a culture of peace and we call on heads of governments and multi-national companies to stop the sale and purchase of armaments,? the 2001 declaration stated.

?As women concerned about the preservation of Mother Earth, we will take action when and wherever possible to end the destructive behavior that causes global warming and climate change and threatens all forms of life on our planet.?

The international women religious group meets at a time that U.S. women religious are facing two Vatican investigations, one by the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and one by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith.

The former congregation is involved in a three-year study, officially called an Apostolic Visitation, of U.S. religious communities; the latter is examining the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, an umbrella organization that represents 95 percent of all the U.S. women religious congregations. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith has suggested that LCWR has not adequately upheld official church teachings on the issues of women?s ordination, homosexuality and abortion.

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