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US priests, brothers 'inspired and challenged' by Pope Francis

by Joshua J. McElwee

NCR Today
Pope Francis

The election of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as Pope Francis is a "moment of encouragement, inspiration and challenge," wrote the group that represents U.S. priests and brothers in religious orders.

In an open letter to the new pope, who is a member of the Jesuit religious order, the 17,000-member Conference of Major Superiors of Men said Thursday it is "inspired and challenged," particularly by the pope's choice of name.

Following is the letter.

Most Holy Father:

Greetings in God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

On behalf of the Members of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in the United States, we extend to you our affection, esteem and prayerful support as you assume your new calling as Bishop of Rome and Supreme Pontiff, a calling that you have accepted with faith, generosity and humility.

Representing more than 17,000 men in the United States who embody the rich tapestry of consecrated life in the Church, we express our gratitude that God has led you to serve in the ministry of Saint Peter. This is a gift to us all. On this happy occasion, we are mindful of the beautiful words of the great Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, and use them as our own. We, "... hearing of your faith in the Lord Jesus and of your love for all the holy ones, do not cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in [our] prayers,

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of Him." (Eph. 1:15-17)

As men called to consecrated life in service to the Church, we find in your election a moment of encouragement, inspiration and challenge. Recognizing your training and spiritual heritage as a member of the Society of Jesus, we are encouraged that you will have special insight into our lives as consecrated persons. We also are inspired and challenged on account of your appeal to the patronage of St. Francis of Assisi, whose humility and courage made it possible for him to embrace those who are poor, to live in evangelical simplicity, to proclaim the Gospel boldly, and to respond to the call of Jesus to rebuild His Church.

Holy Father, in your first words to the Church of Rome you expressed your desire for "a journey of brotherhood in love, of mutual trust" and your prayer for "a great sense of brotherhood" in the whole world. We join you in your desire and prayer for this type of authentic witness to the Gospel of Life and Love in and through the Church. With gratitude in our hearts for your election, we assure you of our prayers and ongoing commitment as men serving the Church and the Gospel in consecrated life. Through the intercession of Our Blessed Mother Mary, St. Francis, St. Ignatius and all the saints, may our loving God grant you the gifts of faith, hope and love, which will guide and strengthen you in your ministry to the Church and to all nations! *Ad multos annos!*

Sincerely yours in the Most Holy Trinity,

Very Rev. John S. Edmunds, ST
President

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