



UNIONE INTERNAZIONALE SUPERIORE GENERALI

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Rome, February 20th, 2014

His Holiness Pope Francis
Vatican City

*“But we need to create still broader opportunities
for a more incisive female presence in the Church.”*

Evangelii Gaudium # 103

Dear Pope Francis,

As the Executive Board of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), we write to you on behalf of all women religious throughout the world. We appreciate the spirit in which you have called the Church to live the Gospel. Your comments in these past eleven months relative to greater participation of all the faithful within the Church have renewed our belief that the calls of Vatican II “to be church” will be more fully realized. Your statements that women must have a more “incisive presence in the Church”, and your belief that women need to have a greater role in the venues in which the most important decisions are adopted, give us great hope.

At a recent gathering of the Roman Constellation of UISG, at which almost 80 General Superiors of international congregations with generalates in Rome were gathered, we reflected on your call to broaden the space for a more inclusive feminine presence within the Church. Our reflection and dialogue was very life-giving. We would like to share with you some of the key ideas which surfaced at this Assembly. These suggestions are easily attainable and will contribute towards accomplishing your desire to include women “in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the church and in social structures”. (*Evangelii Gaudium # 103*)

1. Women could be named to high level decision-making positions within the dicasteries and other such offices.

We represent sisters who are serving the people at the peripheries and wouldn't their experiences and perspective bring many gifts to the places of such decision-making for the life of the Church? We agree with you that it is important to increase “the role of women in decision-making in different areas of the church's life” (*Evangelii Gaudium # 104*). It seems

appropriate that leadership positions, including that of Secretary of certain dicasteries, could be open to religious and lay women. This could include, for example, the Congregations of Evangelization of Peoples, and Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; and the Pontifical Councils of the Laity, of Migrants and Itinerant peoples, and of Inter-Religious Dialogue and Culture.

2. ***Women could be engaged from the beginning in synods and other places of critical dialogue within the Church.***

We are aware that there are and have been spaces for women in some of these dialogues. We ask that it become a regular practice that women are part of such dialogue from the beginning so that their experience and contribution becomes an integral part of the reflection and outcomes.

3. ***Women theologians be called upon to reflect on the role of women in the Church.***

In our discussion concerning your call for a theology of women, our leaders had mixed reflections. We understand the Church as the People of God, therefore, it is not just women nor just men. A theology of the human person which incorporates a contemporary understanding of and thinking about women would be a more integrated approach than simply a theology of women. Because of our history, however, it is important to first call on women theologians to reflect on a theology of women and the role of women in the Church. At a later time this group could be expanded to include others, men and women, who may or may not be theologians.

4. ***Women could be involved in the formation of seminarians so that future priests may have a better understanding of the psychology of women and also of feminine religious life.***

The presence of women in various ways in the life of the seminary will help nourish an integrated formation.

5. ***The language of the Church become gender inclusive.***

We appreciate your use of inclusive language (“fratelli e sorelle”) and of feminine images in your writings and oral presentations. We ask that the language of the liturgy and other church documents also become gender inclusive.

The UISG would be happy to propose names of women religious who are competent to contribute in the leadership roles we have mentioned; to serve in seminaries on the academic faculty and in pastoral-spiritual accompaniment; and to propose names of women theologians and other women who are competent for the reflection on the theology of women.

Pope Francis, we have read with great interest the report of your meeting with the General Superiors of Men in November 2013 and appreciate your understanding of religious life and its challenges. We invite you to meet with the Roman Constellation of the UISG in January 2015 or sooner if it would be more convenient to your schedule.

We hold you in prayer as you continue to follow the tremendous graces which God has given you to refresh the life in the Church, that we may live more faithfully and generously the gospel of Jesus.

Thank you for listening to our reflections and suggestions.

United in prayer,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light grey background. The signature is cursive and reads "Sr. Sammut".

Sr Carmen Sammut, MSOLA
President UISG

and the members of the UISG BOARD OF DIRECTORS for the years 2013-16:

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