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Buona Sera!

Good Evening.

It is humbling to be among you, much less to have the opportunity to share some reflections. I come to you, first of all, as a School Sister of Notre Dame, of Lebanese descent, originally from St. Louis, Missouri in the Central United States and now in California. I know that my own General Superior is among you, which makes me a little nervous and responsibly conscientious. My words come from the heart of an educator now in the world of philanthropy.—philanthropy translated means giving someone else's money to great people doing good things.



I have been invited to share with you some reflections on the Emerging Global Sisterhood, most especially as I have come to experience it and even have the opportunity to plant seeds of it in my role at the Conrad Hilton Foundation.

Throughout these days we have been reflecting on the question “To what are we being called today?” I’d like to begin with that question?

Our foundresses in discerning their calls, consistently assessed the concrete realities of their times—the signs of the times. So as we gather here, May 11, 2016 we ask: “What is the unique gift and charism needed today?” What is the spirit that animates the life of God among us that we are called to bring and called to be.

There are three critical forces that speak to the concrete reality of our world and to our call today:

- The tremendous humanitarian crisis among us
- The person and message of Pope Francis
- The response of our sisters (your sisters) worldwide

These three forces are unique, dynamic and interactive, even interdependent.

The Humanitarian Crisis today is uniquely critical...

1.3 Billion live in extreme poverty (less than \$1.25 per day) in US dollars.

95,500 are displaced every day by violence, conflict and natural disasters. Over 60 million were displaced by violence and conflict in 2015. The highest number since World War II.

One figure estimates that 700,000 are trafficked across international borders every year (80% are female and 50% are children)

How is our world responding?

The United Nations has called the first ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Turkey just ten days from now. 5000 global leaders from government, business, aid organizations and foundations, civil society, affected communities and youth will discuss how respond to the major humanitarian challenges today and be better prepared for the future.

In 2014, \$24.5 Billion was given in aid -- the largest ever recorded, but created the biggest ever shortfall with just 62 % of the total needs being met.

Humanitarian need is escalating faster than the aid. Foundations, aid organizations, governmental agencies realize that the amount of aid will not meet escalating needs, therefore, we must multiply the impact by collaborating more and partnering constructively together. In addition, there is an urgency to address the **drivers** of the exponential growth in humanitarian demand (thereby shrinking the needs).

On September 25, 2015, 193 nations signed on to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). No poverty, gender equality, climate action, peace and justice. The target date

to achieve these 17 goals is 2030. THIS AGENDA IS AGGRESSIVE – SOME SAY ASPIRATIONAL!

In order to make progress and achieve these 17 goals, aid alone is not the answer.

The second powerful force today – is the force of God’s providential gift to our world in the person of Pope Francesco. His person and his leadership are calling all consecrated women and men to Wake Up the World—which he announced during the Year of Consecrated Life. It is the core of our vocation to be prophetic witnesses to God’s call today – a prophet speaks the reality of her times with honesty, dignity and persistence.

This year Pope Francis announced the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Ordinarily Jubilee Years are announced every 25 years. This is an EXTRAORDINARY Jubilee Year (in that it is just 15 years since the last one was declared by Pope John Paul II). This EXTRAORDINARY Year – acknowledges the extraordinary need for mercy to respond to and relieve our extraordinary reality of suffering, poverty and affliction. Even more than the lack of aid, it is the lack of mercy that gives rise to the abundance of suffering.

Pope Francis exhorts us to “Be merciful like our loving God is merciful...” In his prayer for this Jubilee Year of Mercy, he reminds us that everyone who approaches us feel – LOVED, SOUGHT AFTER AND FORGIVEN.

Our call today is to WAKE UP THE World to be merciful!

The third powerful force today are women religious – your sisters—who are delivering mercy throughout our world – living with, caring for, advocating on behalf of and praying with and for the vulnerable and disadvantaged – being living signs of mercy! Receiving everyone who approaches them as loved, sought after and forgiven.

Sisters have always been engaged in the Sustainable Development Goals, before they were recognized by the United Nations. Perhaps four that cross over many of our congregational charisms include:

No Poverty; Quality Education; Gender Equality; Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. My Congregation was founded on the premise that the education of women would change the world. Therefore, as a Congregation, we have a high priority for assuring that the voice, the influence, the leadership of women are at center stage in resolving conflict and determining policy that impacts the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

You here today are from 80 nations and represent 750,000 women religious across our world—almost equally distributed in the global north and the global south. However, the number of sisters in the global south is increasing, while the number is decreasing in the global north. From 2000 to 2010, the number of sisters in Africa increased by 26%, which coincidentally equaled the percentage decrease of sisters in the United States. These dynamics are creating an historical shift – as current trends continue there will be more in the global south than the global north. How do we turn this shift into an opportunity?

Women religious have always been an international force. Many of your congregations, both Pontifical and Diocesan live and minister across nations. Can this global shift become an impetus to strengthen, expand and deepen our international bonds among congregations? Can the distinguishing characteristics among sisters in the global south and global north become assets that move us across boundaries toward greater collaboration that enhances the mission of sisters worldwide?

How can we intentionally drive our global sisterhood? What are we learning at the Conrad Hilton Foundation that can inform, support and advance this emerging Global Sisterhood?

We did not begin our grantmaking in support of Catholic Sisters with this in mind. We began with the intention and legacy of OUR FOUNDER and with data across the landscape of sisters world-wide!

Conrad Hilton had an international vision. He believed that world travel would advance world peace. He also loved Catholic sisters and saw them as a powerful international force for good. He grew up Catholic and was educated by the Sisters of Loretto. Throughout his life he sought connections with sisters from many Congregations. Wikipedia will tell you that next to his mother, Catholic sisters had the greatest influence on his life and his philanthropy. He often said that his relationships with sisters made him a better person. As a good businessman, he saw sisters as a smart investment. You give a sister a dollar and she will turn it into \$100 worth of great works. His last will and testament states that the Foundation should give the largest part of its benefactions to Sisters all over the world.

Many of you are aware of the Hilton Fund for Sisters. Some of you are perhaps not aware that the Fund is separately operated from the Foundation. It received its endowment from Conrad Hilton's legacy, but is a separate organization with its own Board that supports the works of sisters.

In 2013, the Hilton Foundation initiated its own strategy in support of Sisters.

We, at the Foundation, asked the question, how can we support the works of sisters from a systemic direction that impacts not just individual works, but the vitality of the engine that is delivering those works?

Our hypothesis is that Strong Congregations systemically advance good works! We partner with organizations that support many congregations; for instance the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) provides programs for the post-secondary education of sisters in ten countries in Africa. Through their programming, sisters from over 500 congregations have earned a credential, diploma or baccalaureate degree. We partner with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious in the United States that network and support the leadership across congregations.

Our ultimate goal is to strengthen congregations and the network of congregations, thereby increasing the vitality of religious life. It is that vitality that deepens the impact of sisters in human development.

Since 2013, we have granted 66 grants totaling \$70 Million for programs in 22 countries (including 10 countries in Africa). Many of these programs support congregations across nations. \$12 Million has been to organizations that impact sisters globally:

The International Union of Superiors General

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

The Global Sisters Report in the National Catholic Reporter

What are we learning???

We are learning that, YES, strong congregations do advance the works of sisters in human development. We are also learning that the dynamism of the global sisterhood influences the vitality of religious life on a much greater scale. Your connections, your sisters connections across the globe have an exponential impact on the power and influence of all you are and do. The Global Sisterhood is THE source of vitality for religious life today.

You are a dynamic global force like none other. You are much stronger than the United Nations and, dare I say, much more potentially powerful.

This global sisterhood is growing on its own – even without our being fully attentive and intentional. What if we truly paid attention??? How can we together and in partnership with each other, strengthen our impact and influence as a global sisterhood?

Three essential qualities that intensify our global sisterhood. These are somewhat over-used words, but very meaningful and integral to the growth of our global connections.

## **COLLABORATION**

The global sisterhood is created by partnerships—not only in what we do, in our works, but also in our relationships – how we think, plan, organize, learn, believe and hope. Collaboration is a true sign of vitality of religious life today! How can we do more together than the sum of our individual parts? How can we believe more together than the sum of our individual beliefs? How can those of us in the global north learn from the youth and vitality in the global south; and those in the global south learn from the maturity of those in the global north?

The second essential quality that drives our global sisterhood is **COMMUNICATION!** Our tools for communication today are so broad and expansive than ever before. When I first entered religious life international conversations were rare, much less audio and video together. Today, Skype, social media, and online information are so powerful and effective in assuring that our message, our influence, our wisdom and insight have

impact across the globe. I am not just referring to communicating with each other, but, also, communication with all those who can magnify the work we do and the love we have for others. Who is the voice for the disadvantaged and vulnerable, if not us? We are often so engrossed in doing the work that we do not think about communicating what we are doing and experiencing. Media is powerful. Our true example is in Pope Francis, called the tweetable Pope. His message, his following and his impact are so much more universal through his ability and willingness to capture a broader audience. This is not boasting or pride. We have a spiritual call – even a moral obligation—to tell our stories in ways that capture the hearts and spirits of others who can multiply our efforts. Let's COMMUNICATE!!!

The third essential quality of our global sisterhood is **COMMUNION!** Inter-cultural communion! Today, more than ever, we need to model love of differences and permit those differences to change us, empower us and make our hearts bigger and wiser!!! Throughout our world today, in so many instances, our cultural and religious differences divide us. Many of your sisters live and minister across cultures and across religions. We cannot be a global sisterhood without being united in spirit and love across our diverse realities—within our own congregations and also across congregations and our world – becoming a global community of sisters who are informed and empowered and mutually supportive!!

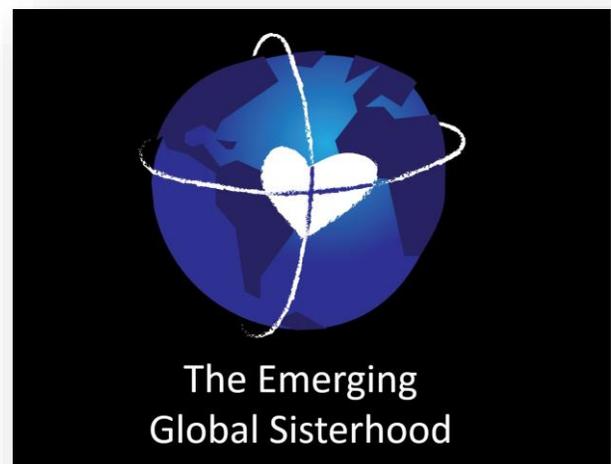
It is collaboration, communication and communion that builds our global sisterhood!!!

In assuring the success of the SDGs and the generation of mercy across our world – we need a powerful and influential global sisterhood magnifying the impact of our efforts, influencing not only the works of mercy, but the decisions, the policies, the distribution of aid, the local, national and international governments, other religions in ways that everyone feel loved, sought after and forgiven.

As we sit here at the UISG asking the question – To what are we being called?

Conrad Hilton had a motto: THINK BIG; DREAM BIG; ACT BIG! We are being called to think big; dream big; act big. Let us be attentive to the energy of our global sisterhood, alive here in this space so poignantly and intensely, This Assembly is a model of our global reality—not just a sum of our individual parts, but rather a whole. Let's assure that we bring the grace of our global sisterhood we experience here at this Assembly with us and within our sisters as we live and minister in all parts of our world through our commitment to collaboration, communication and communion.

There is a charism – a spirit – an animation alive within our global sisterhood, just as there are many charisms within our individual Congregations. This global charism reflects the charism of religious life



itself. It is the distinct spirit that animates us as a whole and gives our global presence a living identity. It does not detract from our diversity, but rather animates our universality within diversity. We can achieve so much more as a whole, while respecting the individual charisms that are the foundation for each of our congregations. We need to be attentive to and live that global charism as we live our own unique charisms. I am a School Sister of Notre Dame and I am a member of the Global Sisterhood. Each of you is a Superior within your Congregation and a leader within the global sisterhood. Our call today is to live both intentionally and jubilantly—with great joy!

Molte Grazie!!