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# California bishops offer support to U.S. women religious

Thomas C. Fox | Nov. 3, 2009

Cardinal Mahony (CNS photo)

**Updated Nov. 5.**

The California bishops voted last week to pass a statement of support on behalf of U.S. women religious who are facing a Vatican investigation.

Word of the support came in a letter dated Nov. 2 written by Los Angeles Cardinal Roger Mahony.

In the letter addressed ?Dear Sisters? the cardinal writes:

?We are all aware of the special anxieties which surround our women religious these days,? wrote Mahony, ?and I am writing to offer you my prayers of gratitude and my support for all of your members. The bishops of California met last week and passed a statement of support for all of you, and I am pleased to send a copy of that statement to you.?

He praises ?the historical presence? of women religious in California beginning back in the 1800s. ?I can honestly state that there would not exist our Catholic schools, hospitals, and social service outreach apostolates without you.?

The cardinal goes on to write that women religious in Los Angeles ?opened the first hospital, established the first schools, and provided the first social services to those most in need.? He added that our ?church?s history of outreach after the example of Jesus Christ and the Gospels would not exist today without your initiatives and creativity.?

He ended his letter reassuring women religious ?of my continuing prayers and support.?

The Vatican announced its investigation, officially callend an apostolic visitation, of U.S. women religious last January, saying the intention is to find out why the numbers of women religious have decreased during the past 40 years, and to look at ?the quality of life? in the communities.

The visitation is being carried out by Cardinal Franc Rode, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and is expected to take up to three years to complete.

**Bishops' statement available**

California's bishops have issued a statement of appreciation for the work and ministry of women religious in the nation's most populous state.

Adopted Oct. 29 during the semi-annual meeting of the California Catholic Conference, the statement acknowledged "with profound gratitude the contributions of these women of the Gospel who have lived and served in the Catholic dioceses and archdioceses of California."

The text of the message follows:

> During the month of October we honor the Blessed Virgin Mary, the faith-filled woman of the Gospel. As we, the Bishops of California, reflect on her generous response to God, we call to mind other faith-filled women-the thousands of Women Religious whose presence and ministry have helped to shape the face of the Catholic Church in California. We find it appropriate to acknowledge with profound gratitude the contributions of these women of the Gospel who have lived and served in the Catholic Dioceses and Archdioceses of California.
>
> Throughout the history of the Church in California, Women Religious, faithful to their founding charisms, have served a population characterized by ethnic diversity and challenged by the societal, economic and political conditions of changing times. For nearly two hundred years they have been faithful disciples and co-workers in bringing the message of the Gospel to the western regions of our country.
>
> By virtue of their vowed consecration, religious are indeed "signs of contradiction" to our world as they foster a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, a communal relationship with those with whom they share charism and spirit in their religious institutes, and an ecclesial relationship manifested in generous service to all members of the Body of Christ. Women Religious bear witness to the unique value of lives given totally to God in love and expressed in generous service to God's people.
>
> Deeply rooted in prayer and impelled by God's Holy Spirit, Women Religious further the Reign of God as they participate in the mission of Jesus through their ministries of education, health care, pastoral services and social outreach. Despite challenges and sacrifices of every kind, they have served in a spirit of untiring selflessness, generosity and charity and continue to do so to this day.
>
> We, the Bishops of California, join our people in thanking Women Religious for being our "sisters," for their presence among us, for their witness to the richness and varied gifts of the Spirit, and for the difference they have made in our lives. They have blessed us. We assure them of our sincere support and of our grateful prayers. May our Women Religious, like Mary, continue to witness hope in our Church and in our world.

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