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# Millea discusses apostolic visitation at Chicago meeting

Heidi Schlumpf | Apr. 11, 2011

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Mother Mary Clare Millea (CNS photo)

**CHICAGO** -- While women religious wait for the final report from the controversial three-year study of U.S. congregations, the woman religious overseeing the apostolic visitation continues to promote the process as positive for the renewal of religious life.

At a closed meeting in the Chicago archdiocese March 30, Mother Mary Clare Millea spoke on "The Apostolic Visitation as an Experience of Ecclesial Communion" and took questions from superiors of men's and women's religious communities.

One goal of the meeting was to :engage each other in open, frank and fruitful dialogue, finding points of convergence even when we disagree," said an invitational letter about the event from the archdiocesan Office for Religious.

"Given the nature of this topic affecting all of us, participation is limited to major superiors, regional superiors and council members only....Consider this a private session," the invitation letter said.

The meeting was "pleasant" and "relaxed," with a "pretty good back-and-forth flow of questions," according to one attendee, who asked to remain anonymous. "People weren't afraid to ask questions, although some of the more pointed questions were answered very generally. [Millea] gave an answer to each question, but I wouldn't say she answered all of them."

Millea, a Connecticut native and superior general of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, was invited to the meeting to address the role of religious life in the church and "the desire for unity many of us share," according to the archdiocesan invitation. Yet a wide divergence in ecclesiologies was evident at the meeting, the attendee said.

Last month Millea met in another closed session with the 78 "visitors" -- nuns, priests and brothers -- who last year visited 90, or roughly one-fourth, of U.S. congregations of religious women engaged in service to church and society. Contemplative, cloistered communities are not part of the study.

The visits to a cross section of communities were the third phase of the inquiry, following individual meetings between Millea and major superiors of congregations, and circulation of a survey to all U.S. congregations on such areas as religious and prayer life, charism, governance, ministry and demographics.

The process now enters its final phase, in which Millea will file written reports on each U.S. congregation as well as a composite report to the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, commonly known as the Congregation for Religious.

Millea did not share any new information about the visitation process at the Chicago meeting, although she mentioned specifically that each individual report about each congregation will include her recommendations about its strengths and what she termed "fragile areas," the attendee said.

"She is a very sincere person, and she's doing her job as best she can as an obedient daughter of the church," the attendee said. "She has a huge task, and she said it's daunting."

Many at the meeting said they felt more positive about the process, the attendee said. "It's a whole different tone since Archbishop [Joseph] Tobin became [secretary] of the Congregation for Religious. Some communities have made the best of it."

But this religious superior was not so optimistic. "I don't have a positive feeling about it myself. In the short run, this may finish in a way that is satisfactory. But in the long run, I worry."

The meeting was this year's annual convocation for leaders of men and women religious congregations in the Chicago archdiocese. Cardinal Francis George of Chicago attended the daylong event and celebrated Mass. An archdiocesan spokesperson refused comment, saying it was a private meeting.

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**Editor's Note:** Lots of background and commentary on the apostolic visitation can be found online at **NCRonline.org/apostolicvisitation** [1].

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