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From the edges inward

Thomas C. Fox | Oct. 8, 2013 NCR Today

As my colleague and friend Dennis Coday, NCR editor, reported in this space [1] (NCR, Sept. 13-26), the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation has awarded the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company a $2.3 million grant over three years to expand our coverage of women religious and to amplify Catholic sisters' voices around the globe. The grant will require some internal company changes as we work to build our coverage networks. Specifically, by year's end I hope to relinquish my responsibilities as company president/CEO. We have advertised the opening in the newspaper and various other outlets. You can find **a listing of the requirements for the position** [2]on our website. Take a look and spread the word. As part of our company plan, I will continue as NCR publisher, collaborating with Coday and the new president in developing NCR's long-term editorial goals while working to raise money to reach these goals.

As grateful as we are to receive the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation grant, the long-term life of NCR depends on endowing the NCR mission. The reason for this is simple. Like virtually every other media organization, we are in a transition from print to electronic journalism. This print product has been our bread and butter for nearly five decades. But the future is clearly electronic. Our website, NCRonline.org, is expanding by the month. We are experiencing some 2 million page views monthly, and the number continues to grow. The problem, however, is that while our reach has dramatically increased in the past three years, we face the same problem other media outlets face: funding the enterprise. Very few news outlets have found successful business models to pay for these amazing technological innovations. NCR's long-term health is in our collective hands. If anyone wishes to speak to me about these challenges, please contact me.

We certainly live in exciting times. The Hilton Foundation grant comes just when Pope Francis is encouraging us to focus our eyes and ministries on the social "peripheries." This, he says, is where the mission of the church is going to be tested. These "peripheries" are also precisely where our Catholic sisters have been carrying out their work for decades -- but often almost invisibly and without recognition. With this grant, we hope to change this. As we report on the collective lives, missions and challenges of our women religious, we will report on the lives of those they work with. We will see more clearly life from the bottom up, from the edges inward. In explaining this initiative, I find myself at times using the old metaphor of the canary in the mine shaft. The health of that canary is the measure of our own health. The health of the sisters and their missions becomes the measure of the health of the larger church and global family.

We are grateful to the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for affirming the NCR mission of providing independent, professional Catholic journalism. The grant, meanwhile, will allow us to expand our international coverage at a time most other newspapers are closing or cutting back foreign bureaus for lack of funds. It comes at a time of alarming reportorial diminishment. As Coday has stated: "We plan to bring the same professional standards of journalism you have found in NCR for decades to our coverage of the Catholic sisters."

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation last August awarded several other grants aimed at supporting women religious. These included grants to support the education for sisters in Africa; to develop and launch a National Catholic Sisters Week in conjunction with Women's History Month; to expand and upgrade "A Nun's Life"

online ministry and blog; and to support Leadership Pathways, a program of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious designed to teach individual and congregational leadership practices.

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