



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**November 26, 2012**

### **BISHOPS AND MAJOR SUPERIORS OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS ENJOY PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION**

On October 30, the bishops of Wisconsin and the major superiors of the state's women religious communities came together at St. Francis de Sales Seminary in Milwaukee for several hours to discuss the major issues facing the Church and how both groups can better demonstrate that they are united in service to God's people.

The meeting, which was organized by Archbishop Jerome ListECKI, Sr. Louise Hembrecht, OSF, and Sr. Linda Szocik, SSJ-TOSF, was open to all bishops and major superiors (or their representatives) of the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious Women and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious – Region 9.

The meeting opened with a prayer by Archbishop ListECKI. Bishop Donald Hying then offered a reflection on the spiritual friendship and collaboration of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal – to whom the day was dedicated – and the remarkable fruits that issued from their devotion to Christ.

The attendees, twenty-four in all, spent the rest of the afternoon discussing ways to evangelize more effectively both with active Catholics and to those outside the Church. Participants noted that the Church needs to give renewed attention to pastoral ministry. In an increasingly secular nation, where Catholics are becoming a cultural minority, the need to foster a living relationship with Christ becomes all the more pressing.

Several addressed the need for better outreach to immigrants, particularly Spanish-speaking ones, and the need for more priests to minister to them. Others spoke of working with marginalized peoples, from the reservation to the inner city.

Participants also described how to support families in an integral manner, not merely providing separate programming for adults, youth, and children. As an example of the important work of women religious in fostering the spiritual development of the whole family, special mention was made of the three families in Spooner (Diocese of Superior), which this past September professed the Promise to live the Evangelical Life in the Lay Diakonia Movement of the Order of Servants of Mary (OSM).

Some attendees suggested using the Year of Faith, not just to rediscovering the documents of Vatican II, but also to better understanding why some Catholics have left the Church, while others have stayed. The bishops and superiors agreed that all Catholics – ordained, religious, and lay – have an essential role to play in the New Evangelization.

Sisters and bishops discussed the tensions that have sometimes characterized their relations, from the debate over health care reform to the Vatican visitation of the U.S. women religious. They observed that the media often exaggerates the differences. All, however, agreed that more frequent communication between bishops and religious is needed in order to foster greater understanding and cooperation.

Following the discussion, participants attended a prayer service in the seminary chapel. This included a reflection by Sister Louise Hembrecht, OSF, on the profound friendship between St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare and its meaning for the Church.

The day ended with a dinner and a renewed sense that being members of the body of Christ demands genuine dialogue and ongoing collaboration between bishops and women religious.

-30-

For more information, contact John Huebscher at 608-257-0004.