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Trump: The Joy and Responsibility of Leadership

SILVER SPRING (January 18, 2017). The Presidents of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) representing the elected leaders of more than 55,000 Catholic religious sisters, brothers, and priests sent a letter to President-Elect Donald Trump reminding him of the gift and responsibility of leadership.

LCWR President, Mary Pellegrino, CSJ and CMSM President, Brian Terry, SA write out of their concern for the critical needs facing the country and the world today, and the call to respond through the service of leadership.

They express deep concerns about the “fractures and divisions” that “threaten the well-being and freedom of all Americans and those who have fled in fear to our shores and borders.” They urge all of us to commit to “respectful and dignified civil discourse.”

Sister Mary and Father Brian invite President-Elect Trump and his administration to join them in promoting the “common good” and they renew their own commitment to “actively advocate against promoting the privilege of some over the needs of others and turning away from our shores those who are in need.”

They make this commitment in the context of the Holy Father’s message for the World Day of Peace and they urge President-Elect Trump “to join us in accepting Pope Francis’ challenge to political and religious leaders to apply the Beatitudes in the exercise of our respective responsibilities. ‘It is a challenge,’ the pope writes, ‘to build up society, communities and businesses by acting as peacemakers. It is to show mercy by refusing to discard people, harm the environment, or seek to win at any cost.’”

The letter to President-Elect Trump reads as follows:

The gift of leadership is given to American leaders by the “Right of the People.” Leadership brings with it a great joy and a great responsibility.

We serve as Presidents of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), respectively. Together we represent the elected leaders of 38,800 Catholic Sisters and 17,000 Catholic Brothers and religious priests who live and minister throughout the United States. As elected leaders we know and share with you both the joy and the burden of this service.

We and the members of our communities seek to be instruments of the reconciliation our people urgently need. In our poverty of spirit, we rely on the help of God and the example of Jesus, the one who came to serve us all. Since before the founding of our nation and often during its darkest hours, Catholic Sisters, Brothers and religious priests, ourselves often immigrants, have served the needs of both civic leaders and those on the outskirts of influence. We have chosen to live with those who were sick, dying or living in poverty. Our schools, hospitals and social services helped to build, shape and humanize American society by healing, educating and serving those in need regardless of ethnicity, religion, means or circumstance. Then and now, we strive to bring healing, hope and consolation in the face of sadness and despair.

As religious leaders, we are committed to contemplative prayer which compels us to take a long, loving look at what is real, to name its truth and to respond lovingly to its call through our service and leadership. We write today from this contemplative space, immersed in the Gospel call for all of us to grow in unity, peace, dialogue, and ultimately, conversion to the Reign of God.

We are deeply concerned by the fractures and divisions—seen so clearly during this past election season—which continue to threaten the well-being and freedom of all Americans and those who have fled in fear to our shores and borders. We remember how we struggled at our country’s very foundation as strangers and pilgrims in this land. From this humble beginning, we celebrate how the United States of America has often been a beacon of hope and unity to a broken world. We rejoice in how our diversity has been our strength. America is at its best when its people come together to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles with ingenuity and creativity even going so far as to courageously risk their lives to transform conflict into peace.

Jesus Christ’s Gospel of Love is the charter that moves us to action. In order to be “one nation under God,” we believe we are all called to live as true ambassadors of reconciliation, in all places and all times, so “that all may be one” (John 17:21). We believe that we need a President who transcends party politics and personal agendas in order to heal deep divisions that threaten the stability of our nation. We strongly believe that we all need to be dedicated to respectful and dignified civil discourse with those whose positions differ from our own.

We pledge our own efforts toward this end.

To the extent that the new administration seeks to promote the common good through its policies, practices and people, we stand ready to collaborate. We will actively work for the preservation of the dignity of all whose home is here in America and to welcome those who come to our shores in search of safety, freedom and a life worthy of their dignity. We will also actively advocate against promoting the privilege of some over the needs of others and turning away from our shores those who are in need. Together, we have the opportunity to advocate for and build a just, merciful and humane society worthy of the dignity of all.

We invite you to join us in our constant prayer and hope that God might act in our hearts and through our actions as leaders. We urge you to join us in accepting Pope Francis' challenge to political and religious leaders to apply the Beatitudes in the exercise of our respective responsibilities. (Pope Francis, World Day of Peace Message, January 1, 2017) "It is a challenge," he writes, "to build up society, communities and businesses by acting as peacemakers. It is to show mercy by refusing to discard people, harm the environment, or seek to win at any cost."

We pledge the service of our leadership and urge you to pledge yours toward this great endeavor of building a truly good and just society.

We congratulate you on your inauguration and assure you of our prayers as you begin your service as President of the United States.