



# The Holy See

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## ***GREETING OF THE HOLY FATHER TO MEMBERS OF THE HILTON FOUNDATION***

*Room adjacent to the Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 22 January 2025*

**[Multimedia]**

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*Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,*  
welcome, good morning and thank you for your visit!

I offer a cordial greeting to the Board of Directors of the Conrad Hilton Foundation.

In our time, as the numbers of the poor and excluded in our world continue to increase, which is notable, you have chosen to commit yourselves actively to promoting human dignity, personally with passion and compassion, like the Good Samaritan. That parable of Jesus exhorts us to identify with the needs of others, to reach out and lift up those who have fallen by the wayside, and in this way to benefit us all (cf. Encyclical Letter *[Fratelli Tutti](#)*, 67). Do not forget that only on one occasion, in one moment in time, is it licit to look down on someone: in order to help that person to get up. Otherwise, we can never look down on someone...only to help and lift a person up. Do not forget it...always.

Your Foundation has shown how such generosity and commitment can transform the lives of those who find themselves in situations of vulnerability. The service you freely offer in the fields of education, health, refugee assistance and the fight against poverty is a concrete testimony of love and compassion. Do not forget this word: compassion, “to suffer with”. God is compassionate; he draws close and suffers with us. Compassion is not throwing money into the hands of another without looking them in the eyes. No. Compassion is drawing close and “suffering with”. Do not forget the word: compassion.

Your founder, Conrad Nicholson Hilton, bequeathed you his dream, which continues to inspire the Foundation's projects. Among these is one that you have consistently promoted: that of supporting women religious. Conrad Hilton held religious Sisters in high regard; in his will, he asked the Foundation to support them in their mission of serving the poorest and the least of our brothers and sisters. Once a former agnostic was telling me about ending up in the hospital. The Sisters took care of him, and as a result, he was converted. He remarked, what would the Church be without the Sisters. That is beautiful! You are doing this with fidelity and creativity, especially through your contribution to the formation of younger Sisters and the care of the elderly in their Congregations. In some countries the Sisters are elderly but there is no need to send them to a care home, no. I remember one Congregation in Argentina that had a Sister who was originally from Italy. The Provincial arrived and said: "No, you have to retire at 70". The Sisters died because of sadness. The Sisters have to work until the end, in as much as possible, until the end. And if this does not happen, the other thing happens. We have a Sister here who has always worked with the poor. She is old but still drives and they let her do it. In this way, she still feels useful. Please, let the Sisters remain with the people. I am aware that you have cooperated with several Vatican Dicasteries in order to provide the Sisters with opportunities to grow in professionalism and missionary outreach. Thank you!

In the past, little was invested in this area, far less than in the formation of the clergy. It is true, since Sisters and other women are thought to be "second class citizens". They are thought of like this. Do not forget that since the time of the Garden of Eden, they have been in charge. Women are in charge! Yet the need for Sisters to pursue continuing education and training is urgent. Their work at the borders, in the peripheries and among the poor, requires training and competence. I would ask you to keep in mind too that the mission of Sisters is to serve the least among us. It is not to be servants to anyone. This must stop, and you as a Foundation are helping to bring the Church out of this clerical mindset.

Yet I should add something else: often we hear complaints that there are not enough Sisters in positions of responsibility, in Dioceses, the [Roman Curia](#) and universities. It is true. This is true enough: we need to overcome a clerical and macho mindset. Thanks be to God that now in the Curia we have a woman Prefect in the [Dicastery for Religious](#). We have a woman Vice-Governor of the Vatican State who will become Governor in March. We have three Sisters in the group that chooses Bishops. They also vote. We have the Undersecretary of Archbishop Piccinotti at A.P.S.A., a Sister with two degrees in finance. Thanks be to God that the Sisters are stepping forward. They know how to do things better than men. This is how it is...since women and the Sisters have the capacity to do things. I also hear Bishops say, "I would like to appoint nuns in some diocesan offices, but their Superiors will not release them". No, please, release them. So I would say to Superiors: be generous, cultivate a vision of the universal Church and of a mission that goes beyond the confines of your Institute.

Dear friends, I thank you for your tireless work and service. Thank you! Together we can build a

world in which every person, whatever his or her origin or condition, can live a dignified life. Together we can help to ignite hope in the hearts of those who feel alone and abandoned. Compassion, closeness and tenderness: do not forget these three words. Compassion, closeness and tenderness: they are the three attributes of God. God is compassionate. God is close. God is tender. I dream of a world where the discarded, the excluded, the marginalized can be the agents of much-needed change in society, so that all of us can live as brothers and sisters.

May God bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And please, pray for me. Now, with all of us seated, I will bless you. Thank you!