

Pope Tells Nuns to Be Spiritual Mothers, Not 'Spinsters'

Pope Francis on Wednesday told leaders of women's orders from around the world to be "fertile" spiritual mothers in the Catholic Church, not "spinsters."

The Argentine pontiff addressed some 800 leaders of female religious orders who are in Rome for the meeting of the International Union of Superiors General.

Speaking about the nuns' vow of chastity, the pope stressed that it must be a "fertile" chastity, generating "spiritual children in the Church."

With one of the more colorful off-the-cuff expressions that have become a hallmark of his young pontificate, Francis said that "the consecrated are mothers: they must be mothers and not 'spinsters'!

"Forgive me if I talk like this, but this maternity of consecrated life, this fruitfulness, is important!" he added.

Echoing a theme that has often resonated in his public speeches, the Jesuit pope also lashed out against "careerists" and "social climbers" who "use the Church ... as a springboard for their interests and personal ambitions," saying they do a "great damage" to the church.

The Vatican-mandated overhaul of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the largest umbrella organization for U.S. nuns, loomed large over the May 3-7 meeting of Catholic sisters, which is devoted to discussing the issues of authority within the Catholic Church.

On Sunday, Brazilian Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, who heads the

Vatican office that oversees religious orders, told the meeting that he had been left in the dark about the Vatican investigation into LCWR. The Vatican's top spokesman on Tuesday said it was "not justified" to infer that there was a "divergence" on how to deal with American nuns.

In his Wednesday speech, the pope reminded the nuns that it is "absurd" for religious women to think of carrying their vocation "outside of the church."

"It isn't possible that a consecrated woman or man might 'feel' themselves not to be with the church," he said.

After the pope's speech, a group of nuns was allowed to briefly greet the pope personally. Sister Florence Deacon, president of the LCWR, "was present at the audience but did not have the opportunity to greet the pope," according to LCWR spokeswoman Annmarie Sanders.

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