News
Religious Life



Pope Francis is assisted by his aide, Sandro Mariotti, right, and Msgr. Leonardo Sapienza, an official of the prefecture of the Papal Household, as he gets up from his chair during his general audience May 4 in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Carol Glatz

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Because of unscrupulous people, religious communities need to be prudent and diligent when selling their assets and properties, Pope Francis said.

The decommissioning and "disposal of patrimony is an especially sensitive and complex topic, which can attract misleading interests by unscrupulous people and be an occasion of scandal for the faithful," he said in a written message.

This is why there is "the need to act with great prudence and attention and also to create institutional structures of accompaniment to help less well-equipped communities," he wrote.

The pope's message, which the Vatican released May 4, was sent to participants in a May 4-5 international conference in Rome. The gathering was dedicated to discussing ways to protect, evaluate and manage the cultural heritage of communities of consecrated life.

The conference, "Charism and creativity: Catalogs, management and innovation regarding the cultural heritage of institutes of consecrated life," was sponsored jointly by the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and the Pontifical Council for Culture.

In a message to conference participants, Pope Francis said it is necessary to catalog all assets of every variety, including archives, books and art, so that they can be preserved, studied and protected and so they can help the church's mission.

"Cataloging is necessary for reasons of service to culture, management transparency and prudence, considering the many natural and human dangers to which these fragile treasures are exposed," he wrote.

Today's technology makes it possible to "collect an infinite amount of data and images and to make them public or confidential in a selective and extremely accurate manner," he added.

When it comes to managing these assets, he wrote, it is important to address how it can be done in ways that are economically sustainable and promote evangelization.

"Finally, there is a need to address the reuse of unused real estate assets, a need that is all the more urgent today," he wrote, "not only because of the shrinking number of communities of consecrated life and the need to find the resources necessary for the care of elderly and sick sisters and brothers, but also, in particular, because of the effects of the acceleration of legislative change and the necessary requirement to adapt."

Communities most often divest from these assets because of the "economic burdens of ordinary and extraordinary maintenance and preservation" needed, he wrote. "The problem must be tackled not with hasty or impromptu decisions, but with a holistic vision and farsighted planning, and possibly also by turning to proven professional expertise."

Prudence, care and support structures for more disadvantaged communities are greatly needed in decommissioning properties, he wrote.

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