News
Religious Life



Pope Francis kisses a gift presented to him by Sr. Jane Wakahiu during an audience with the board of directors of the Conrad Hilton Foundation at the Vatican on Jan. 22. Standing to the right is Sr. Joyce Meyer, a member of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, member of the foundation's board of directors, and international liaison to women religious for Global Sisters Report. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation announced Jan. 22 a $15 million effort to help care for Catholic sisters who are aging and live in underserved communities.

Among some of the first initiatives of The Anna Trust: Catholic Sisters' Elder Care Fund, as the new nonprofit is called, is the funding of 100 grants to support 10,000 sisters, with an emphasis on underserved geographies. It also will "educate 5,000 sisters in training modules that address the needs of congregations in elder care"; launch a "study to document the impact of grantmaking on sisters' mental health, physical health, and spirituality"; and raise an additional $15 million to support endowment and operational costs, the Hilton Foundation said in the Jan. 22 press release. (The Hilton Foundation is a substantial funder of Global Sisters Report.)

"Sisters spend their whole lives faithfully serving others. As sisters enter their twilight years, they should be cared for with the utmost dignity and compassion," said Sr. Jane Wakahiu, associate vice president of program operations, and head of the Catholic Sisters initiative at the Hilton Foundation.

The announcement of the new trust came as the Hilton Foundation's board of directors visited Pope Francis and thanked him for his support of sisters' ministries, saying he was one of the "motivating forces" behind the effort, which is a collaboration with the International Union of Superiors General, or UISG, the foundation said.

"My grandfather, Conrad N. Hilton, had profound respect and admiration for the Catholic sisters, who work tirelessly to transform the lives of children, youth and families living in disadvantaged conditions," said Linda Hilton, chair of the foundation's board of directors, in a press release.

The foundation said congregations of Catholic sisters worldwide lack financial, mental and physical preparedness to support their older members.

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"Research supported by the Hilton Foundation shows that in the United States, where 80% of sisters are over 70 years old, the vast majority of congregations are not prepared to care for their aging sisters," the press release said. "In Asia, Latin America and Africa, the Foundation supported the creation of three research centers and six elder care networks. The lessons from these grants highlight the urgency of significantly increasing support to care for the holistic needs of elderly sisters across the globe."

The foundation says its "primary focus is on programs that support sisters and their congregations to ensure sisters age with dignity and have a high-quality life after a lifetime of service."

Sr. Patricia Murray, UISG executive secretary and chair of the new trust, said the effort "underscores the broader commitment of the Church and of consecrated life to the elderly in an aging world."

Susan Raymond will be the trust's executive director.

"We have taken the first steps on a long road," Raymond said via press release. "The Anna Trust is focused on solutions that will ensure dignity for elderly sisters who have given their lives to the poor. It is our sacred trust to give back to them our very best efforts to protect their futures and the future of all elderly persons."