News



Sisters and collaborators gather to pray and reflect at the end of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Catholic Sisters Initiative Convening Oct. 31 in Mexico City. (GSR photo/ Rhina Guidos)



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Mexico City — November 5, 2025

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Missionary Sister of the Guardian Angel Sr. Hortencia del Villar encouraged those in the room to listen deeply and see what kind of collaboration the Spirit would spark among them.

At the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Catholic Sisters Initiative Convening in Mexico City Oct. 29-31, which brings together women religious from Latin America, one of the most notable whispers of the Spirit came in the form of a comment from an official from the U.S.-based Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

Carol Zinn, LCWR's executive director, hinted Oct. 30 at a possible upcoming alliance between the U.S.-based women religious group and the Confederation of Latin American and Caribbean Religious, known as CLAR, its counterpart in Latin America, which includes men religious.

Consecrated life from Canada, the United States and Latin America have developed a good relationship and "we are trying to make it stronger," said Zinn, a Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, who hinted at such an alliance during a CLAR meeting reported by Global Sisters Report in 2023.

"Next time we meet, we might be the Consecrated Religious of the Americas," she said, looking at Missionary of the Holy Spirit Fr. Jose Luis Loyola, CLAR's president, without further elaborating.



Sisters pull on a string to illustrate networking during the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Catholic Sisters Initiative Convening Oct. 29, 2025 in Mexico City. The gathering brought together sisters from throughout Latin America, a few from the U.S. and some from the Vatican. (GSR photo/ Rhina Guidos)

In the room were more than 60 sisters — most from Latin America, along with Vatican officials and representatives from organizations that work with sisters in the initiative.

The foundation, on its webpage, says the initiative helps sisters with education and leadership training, as well as their long-term care after lives of service.

Attendees were encouraged by Del Villar, the initiative's senior program officer for the U.S. and Latin America, and the foundation's Vice President of Programs Operations Sr. Jane Wakahiu, who oversees the initiative, to get comfortable with a

word more abundant in a board room than in the world of women religious: networking.

Wakahiu, a member of the Little Sisters of St. Francis in Kenya, told those gathered to dream and dream big about what they wanted.



Sr. Jane Wakahiu, associate vice president of program operations and Head of Catholic Sisters Initiative for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, takes notes Oct. 30 in Mexico City. Wakahiu, a member of the Little Sisters of St. Francis in Kenya, encouraged sisters in the room to get to know one another, connect and dream big about how they can collaborate. (GSR photo/Rhina Guidos)

When the foundation's Latin America convening first gathered participants two years ago, they could barely fill a small room, she said, and two years later, as a result of dreaming, it had ballooned to more than 80.

"We can build a very beautiful house," Wakahiu told the sisters Oct. 29. "You dream of giving life, of elevating the dignity of human persons. … [Imagine] what we could do regardless of what is happening globally. Think about the house we are building together."

The metaphorical house Wakahiu spoke of is one that gives comfort and opportunities, as well as uplifting the dignity of the world's most disadvantaged, something the sisters gathered already take part in with their ministries while caring for migrants, the elderly, those without access to health care, preventing violence against women, defending the environment and caring for aging members. Some do so under the watch of repressive governments.

Over three days, sisters, and others who work with them, bonded over food and dance, gathered in small groups to listen and talk about collaborating with other congregations, but also shared concerns about dwindling resources and members.

Hosted by the Hilton Foundation, a substantial funder of Global Sisters Report, the event welcomed 33 organizations from 10 countries. Also participating were officials from several Vatican dicasteries, as well as organizations from Italy and Germany. Two bishops and members of various religious conferences also participated.

CLAR's Loyola, who also serves as the head of the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious in Mexico, said that Latin America, like much of the world, finds itself going through various crises at the same time.

"We continue to experience poverty, inequality, violence, environmental degradation and forced migration," he said. "All of this weakens transformative actions, limits our proximity to the most vulnerable, and restricts our influence in building a more just, more fraternal society that belongs to everyone."

Loyola told the sisters and others to take heart from Scripture, which teaches that the Kingdom of God springs even from the smallest of seeds. Those in consecrated life sow those seeds with members' gifts, irrigate them with patience and passion, knowing that seeds will continue to grow, including at night when it's dark, he said, alluding to the adverse conditions Latin America faces.



Comboni Sr. Clara Torres and Karina Frias, of Casa Eudes in Mexico, share a conversation during the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Catholic Sisters Initiative Convening Oct. 30 in Mexico City. (GSR photo/Rhina Guidos)

Among those in the crowd were women religious who long have tackled social ills that seem impossible to solve. One was Comboni Sr. Clara Torres Acevedo, who spoke on a panel about her work to prevent human trafficking. Acevedo collaborates with other congregations and lay groups in trying to convince people desperate for work to be wary of online job offers that seem too good to be true, all while facing opposition from some church leaders for speaking out about the issue.

"We have shared very painful situations, of migrants who suffer greatly, from those of us who work with victims or people vulnerable to human trafficking, about people who work with those who suffer violence, with people who care for elderly sisters who do not have the resources to live a dignified life. … So many situations," she

told Global Sisters Report on Oct. 31.

Yet the gathering helped the sisters locate pockets of hope, inspiration and support to continue alleviating pain for others, she said.

"So many people want to make the world a better place, want to share compassion and mercy in these situations, some by giving of their lives, others by offering their compassion, some through volunteer work, others like Hilton with their financial resources," Torres added.

Those in the room included a few who were not members of religious orders, but had received support from the initiative to work with sisters on an issue important to them.



Salesian Sr. Soraida Moreno Sahagun shares what inspires her work during the opening event of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Catholic Sisters Initiative Convening Oct. 29, 2025 in Mexico City. (GSR photo/ Rhina Guidos)

Sr. Adriana Lillo Escalona, a member of the Daughters of Jesus of Kermaría, represented Chile's Corporación Tejiendo Solidaridad (Weaving Solidarity Corporation), which cares for elderly sisters. She said that beyond learning about all the different ministries and efforts to help women religious, the event fostered a sense of kinship among those who attended.

"It gives you a sense that we are part of a bigger body, that among the small things we do and its challenges, we can keep responding from the point of view of our faith," she told GSR. "We are committed to tackle these new realities and crises that we face day to day within our countries."

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LCWR's Zinn took a moment Oct. 30 to thank the Latin America participants for welcoming the organization's presence in the room given some of the U.S. government's conflicts with countries in the region.

"We are deeply, deeply sorry for what our country is doing to you and to the world," she said. "We are heartbroken. We are angry and we are outraged. And we are doing everything that we can to cry out, to speak for justice, to uphold the values of the Gospel and to protect human dignity. We are ashamed of our country. We thank you for welcoming us to this gathering knowing full well that we are from the United States. It touches our hearts with courage and we promise you that we will continue to be angry, outraged and stand in solidarity with you."