

Historic First Joint Meeting of UISG/USG Membership

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November 22 – 24, 2023 was an historic occasion for the UISG (International Union of Superiors General – Women) and the USG (Union of Superiors General – Men). 250 Superiors General – 125 from men’s congregations and 125 from women’s congregations – gathered at the Fraterna Domus retreat center in Sacrofano, about 40 minutes north of Rome, to pray, share, and reflect on phase I of the recent Synod on Synodality. While the boards of these two organizations have met frequently over the years this was the first time that a large group of members from both organizations gathered.

The theme of the gathering was, “Synodality: A Renewed Call to the Prophecy of Hope.” On the first day, a panel of superiors general who had participated in the Synod shared their thoughts and reflections about the content of the Synod as well as their personal experience of being a part of the Synod. Panelists agreed that the experience was marked by respect, a diversity of opinions, and developing the skill of “conversation in the Spirit” a method that was used throughout the Synod to facilitate deep listening among the participants.

On the second day of the gathering, we had the deep joy of participating in a private audience with Pope Francis. He had specifically requested that no journalists or video recordings be present at the gathering so he could speak openly and frankly with the superiors general. Participants asked prepared questions of the Holy Father, including, “How can we help to carry the work of the Synod forward as men and women religious?” and “How do you [Pope Francis] cope with the negative responses or false information about the Synod and your other initiatives?” Pope Francis encouraged us to continue to focus on the values of the Gospel and not those of the world and to work toward unity in the Church. Each participant was able to greet the Pope personally after the meeting.

On the final day of the meeting, using the “conversation in the Spirit” method, participants reflected on what we might do together as men and women religious leaders to promote synodality. A very practical recommendation was to offer to the Holy Father a joint commission to help with the revision of the document *Mutuae Relationes* (Mutual Relations), the document guiding relationships between Bishops and religious communities that were written in 1978 and need updating.