

# origins

CNS documentary service

## Commission to Study Women Deacons

Pope Francis

Pope Francis told the heads of women's religious orders from around the world that he would set up a commission to study the New Testament deaconesses, and he also insisted more can and should be done to involve lay and consecrated women in church decision-making at every level. Asked if he would establish "an official commission to study the matter" of whether women could be admitted to the diaconate, Pope Francis responded, "It will be good for the church to clarify this point; I agree." The pope spent more than an hour May 12 responding to questions posed by members of the International Union of Superiors General, repeatedly asking if

*"I think that it is useful to have a commission that clarifies this area properly, especially with regard to the early times of the church."*

they wanted further clarification and making funny asides or rephrasing his responses when it was clear they were not hitting the mark. "I like hearing questions because they make me think," the pope told close to 900 superiors general, representing almost 500,000 sisters around the world. "I feel like a goalkeeper who stands there waiting for the ball from wherever it comes." Asked about deaconesses in the New Testament and the possibility of the modern church admitting women to the permanent diaconate, Pope Francis said his understanding was that the women described as deaconesses in the Bible were not ordained as permanent deacons are. However, he said, "I will ask the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to refer me to some studies on this theme." The pope spoke in Italian; a Vatican translation of the Q&A follows, copyright © 2016 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

**question 1:** For a better integration of women in the life of the church. Pope Francis, you said that "the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society ... and in the church," and yet women are excluded from decision-making processes in the church, especially at the highest levels, and from preaching at the Eucharist. An important obstacle to the church's full embrace of "feminine genius" is the bond that decision-making processes and preaching both have with priestly ordination. Do you see a way of

*continued on page 50*

2249A



### contents

- 49 Commission to Study Women Deacons  
*by Pope Francis*
- 56 Homily at Mass for Canadian March for Life  
*by Cardinal Thomas Collins*
- 58 The Church as Field Hospital in the Digital Media World  
*by Father Thomas Rosica, CSB*
- 62 Obama Administration Directive on Transgender Bathroom Access 'Deeply Disturbing'  
*by Bishop Richard J. Malone and Archbishop George J. Lucas*
- 64 Datebook
- 64 On File

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