

To bring hope, first renew your spirituality

VATICAN CITY – Renewing their own spirituality and carefully studying the needs of others, women religious will be able to live the Gospel message and bring hope to the world, Pope Benedict XVI said.

The pope, meeting May 7 with almost 800 superiors of women's congregations, asked the religious to follow the biblical example of the prophets, who "first listen and contemplate and then speak, allowing themselves to be totally permeated by that love for God, which fears nothing and is stronger even than death."

The International Union of Superiors General was holding its plenary meeting in Rome. The participating superiors represent almost 600,000 sisters working in 85 countries around the world.

The theme of the plenary was "Challenged to weave a new spirituality, which generates hope and life for all."

During the May 6-10 plenary, the women were to focus specifically on helping other women, migrants, safeguarding the earth, working with the laity and interreligious dialogue.

Pope Benedict told them that prayer and prophetic action are "the 'threads' with which the Lord urges you, dear religious, to weave the fabric of your service to the church," giving witness to Gospel values "courageously incarnated in the contemporary reality, especially where there is human and spiritual poverty."

Some of the focus areas, he said, are new for many religious congregations, and the best way to "travel unexplored missionary and spiritual paths" is to maintain a solid grounding in prayer and contemplation.

An authentic prophet, he said, "does not worry so much about doing works, which are undoubtedly important, but not essential. The prophet tries above all to be a witness to the love of God, trying to live it among the realities of the world."

Pope Benedict told the superiors their first concern must be to help the members of their congregations to keep their eyes focused on Christ and to place themselves at the service of the Gospel.

He also encouraged them to share their gifts and talents with others – priests, laypeople and especially families – “who are committed to the one mission of the church, which is building the kingdom of God.”