His Holiness Pope Francis  
Apostolic Palace  
00120 Vatican City  

Nov. 19, 2013  

Your Holiness,  

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas is an international congregation of women religious who over 180 years of service have responded continually to the changing needs of the times, as motivated by the Gospel of Jesus and inspired by the spirit of founder Catherine McAuley. Our congregation is made up of nearly 3,800 vowed members who are committed to addressing the causes and effects of violence, racism, degradation of the Earth and injustice to women and immigrants. Our sisters sponsor and serve in more than 200 organizations that work with those in need in the U.S., Central and South America, Jamaica, Guam and the Philippines.  

The Sisters of Mercy have identified racism as a critical concern for us to examine both internally and in the world in which we live. We have embarked on a multi-year process to become an anti-racist multicultural Institute and we take every available opportunity to speak out against racism in our society.  

The Institute Leadership Team, therefore, is pleased to join the Loretto Community in adding our voices to those of our indigenous sisters and brothers who are requesting of the papacy that the Papal Bulls of 1452 and 1493 (referred to as the Doctrine of Discovery) be rescinded. The language of that time is exceedingly offensive today and our work with indigenous communities throughout the Americas compels us to urge you to issue a compassionate public proclamation rescinding the demeaning and de-humanizing Doctrine of Discovery.  

The patterns of dominance and dehumanization that these papal bulls promulgated remain, more than 500 years later, the foundation for many unjust religious and civil actions as well as political and legal systems. As recently as 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court has issued rulings that rely on patterns found in the papal bulls and on the claimed Right of Discovery.
We call on you to take the next step on a path laid down by your predecessors to right some of these wrongs. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, for example, supported the United Nation’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Pope John Paul II asked forgiveness for the misdeeds ‘of the sons and daughters of the Church’ in 2000 and spoke to Indigenous people in 2001.

Thank you for your compassionate outreach to so many people who have felt alienated by the Church. We hope and pray that you see this request as yet another example of ways to redress historical injustices and to attribute to all human persons the dignity that they already possess by the very fact that they are children of God.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

President, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Members of the Institute Leadership Team