

UNIDAS EN CRISTO

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Sisters participating in the Mini-Encuentro in the Archdiocese of Chicago, September 2, 2024.
(Photo courtesy of Global Sisters Report)

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Celebrating Latina Sisters: A Joyful Mini-Encuentro in Chicago

By Elizabeth Ann Guerrero

On September 2, 2024, the *Asociación de Hermanas Latinas Misioneras en América* (AHLMA) gathered for a heartwarming and enriching *Mini-Encuentro* at the Felician Sisters Convent in Chicago, Illinois. The theme was *Celebrando Nuestro Servicio* (Celebrating our Service). The warmth and hospitality of the Felician Sisters provided a welcoming space for reflection, dialogue, and celebration, and AHLMA extends its deepest gratitude for their generosity.

A Day of Faith, Connection, and Inspiration

Forty sisters from 17 diverse religious communities—including Latina, North American, African, and Asian sisters—came together for a day filled with meaningful conversations, prayer, and cultural celebration. The *Encuentro* was a sacred

time to discuss the joys and challenges of religious life as experienced by Latina sisters in the United States.

One of the highlights of the day was a moving presentation “*El Buen Vivir en las culturas andinas y amazónicas de América del Sur*” by Sr. Mila Diaz Solano, OP, who offered profound insights that resonated deeply with participants. Sisters also engaged in thoughtful table activities, including a mandala meditation exercise led by Sr. Yuli Oncihuay Mendoza, OSU, which invited contemplation and renewal. These moments of reflection allowed the sisters to share their experiences and reaffirm their commitment to supporting one another in their vocations.

The *Encuentro* offered simultaneous interpretation in English and Spanish, ensuring that all participants could fully engage in the discussions and activities. The Master of Ceremonies and facilitator of the day's events was Sr. María de Jesús Bringas, CCVI, whose guidance and presence enriched the gathering.

Faith at the Center: Eucharist and Celebration

At the heart of the *Encuentro* was the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, presided over by Bishop Robert Casey of Chicago. This sacred liturgy was a powerful reminder of the unity and mission of religious sisters serving the Church. The day continued with an atmosphere of joy and fellowship as the sisters enjoyed dinner together, accompanied by lively mariachi music—an expression of cultural heritage that brought smiles and dancing to the gathering!



Addressing the Needs of Latina Religious Sisters

Throughout the *Encuentro*, sisters engaged in discussions about critical issues impacting Latina religious women in the U.S. Topics included the need for legal support, ongoing formation opportunities, and the importance of greater representation in Church leadership. Many sisters voiced a strong desire for continued theological education, spiritual formation, and professional training, especially in Spanish, to ensure accessibility and inclusion.



Another key area of discussion was the need for stronger networks within religious life. AHLMA continues to advocate for greater Latina representation in leadership roles, including advisory councils and advocacy committees. Strengthening these networks is vital to ensuring that Latina sisters' voices are heard and that their contributions are fully recognized within the Church.

Collaboration and a Path Forward

The *Encuentro* welcomed representatives from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the Leadership Collaborative, and the Religious Formation Conference (RFC), all of whom expressed their support for the mission and initiatives of AHLMA. Building partnerships with these organizations will help ensure that the needs of Latina sisters remain a priority within the broader landscape of religious life.

AHLMA extends its heartfelt gratitude to Sr. Mary Beth Bromer, CSSF, Vicar for Religious of the Archdiocese of Chicago, whose collaboration was instrumental in making this event possible. Special

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MENSSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“Celebrating a Jubilee Year of Hope”

Dear Sisters,

Peace and joy to all of you in this special year of grace!

As we embrace the Year of Jubilee 2025, proclaimed by Pope Francis as a time of reconciliation, pilgrimage, and renewal, we are invited to be Pilgrims of Hope—journeying together in faith amid a world suffering from war, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the climate crisis. It is in these challenging times that your witness as consecrated women becomes even more vital, as you bring the light of Christ to those most in need.

I am honored to serve as Executive Director of the *Asociación de Hermanas Latinas Misioneras en América* (AHLMA), a vibrant network of consecrated women called to journey, accompany, and uplift the People of God—especially the Hispanic community, the most vulnerable, and the poor. Together, we celebrate the unwavering commitment of our Latina Sisters, who continue to serve with joy, resilience, and deep faith.

In this issue, we highlight the incredible work of our sisters, sharing their stories of hope, challenge, and transformation. We also celebrate the Jubilee anniversaries of those who have walked faithfully with God's

people, dedicating their lives to mission. A special highlight of this past year was the AHLMA *Encuentro* in Chicago, a moment of unity, reflection, and renewed commitment to our shared mission.

None of this would be possible without the great vision and leadership of our Board of Directors, comprised of women religious from North America, Mexico, and Peru, and the invaluable collaboration with our partners in religious life—including the Mexican American Catholic College, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Religious Formation Conference, the Leadership Collaborative, and the Vicars and Delegates for Religious Life of diocese across the vast nation. These partnerships enrich our mission, allowing us to weave stronger networks of support, formation, and empowerment for Latina Sisters serving in the United States.

We recognize the unique challenges that many of our sisters face—navigating a new culture, language barriers, and the realities of ministering in a constantly changing society. AHLMA is committed to accompanying and strengthening each of you, offering formation programs, leadership development, and spaces for dialogue where your voices are heard and valued.

As we step into this Jubilee Year, may we embrace the call to be a people of hope—renewing our trust in the Holy Spirit and allowing the light of the Risen Christ to guide our missionary outreach. Together, we broaden the tent, welcoming new sisters into the AHLMA family and enriching the wider Church with our unique gifts and perspectives.

May we continue walking together, as consecrated women who accompany the pilgrim People of God. Thank you for your commitment, your faith, and your courage.

United in Christ,

Elizabeth Ann Guerrero
Executive Director, AHLMA

He Loved Me First

By Sister Ana Cecilia Montalvo, FSpS

Twenty-eight years ago I responded to the call of Jesus Priest and Victim to belong to a beautiful Congregation whose mission in the Church is to "Extend the Reign of the Holy Spirit by cultivating vocations in and for the People of God."

I am a Daughter of the Holy Spirit and mine is to cultivate vocations. My response to follow Jesus in the consecrated life as a Daughter of the Holy Spirit is based on the experience of his free, unconditional, and merciful love. It has been almost 25 years since my first vows, and the experience of HIS FIRST LOVE (Cf. 1Jn 4,19) is still very much alive in my heart. With gratitude and humility, I recognize that every step I have taken, the service I have given in favor of vocations, the love and care for my sisters in community, the compassion towards the young, the migrant, the seminarian, the sick person..... it is only a movement that springs from that FIRST LOVE, that does not leave me, that catches me and propels me to be, in union with Him, bread broken and shared.



This vocation to which God has called me, I have walked it uphill. We are followers of "a God crucified by love" and together with Him we travel the way of the cross. A way that presents itself to us as a style of surrender that gives meaning to

existence, passions and rouses us to build "a new possible world" where each one discovers her place and where we live as brothers and sisters.

And in this celebration of my 25th anniversary, I pray for this gift: That every human being may open himself to the gratuitous and unconditional love of God the Father "a thousand times Mother", find his meaning of life in Jesus, the Beloved Son, and live at the impulse of the Spirit, walking through this life doing good as Jesus did (Cf. Acts 10:38).

Sr. Ana Cecilia was born in Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico, to Isidro Montalvo and Ana Maria Villanueva. She is the second of 4 children. Sister Montalvo has been an Associate Vocation Director for the Archdiocese of San Antonio for 9 years.

Celebrating with Gratitude

By Sister Angela Erevia, MCDP

Sister Angela Erevia, MCDP, a member of the Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence, is celebrating her 70th anniversary of profession of vows. At the age of 14, she entered the convent and made her first profession of vows on August 14, 1955.



Sister Angela is serving in the leadership of her congregation. Recently she resigned from being on faculty and director of the pastoral program at the Mexican American Catholic College.

Sister Angela was born to Pablo Erevia and Angela Montalvo in Lockhart, Texas. She is the sixth of eight siblings – seven sisters and one brother. She is grateful for the years of service to the Church as she reminisces: "Through all the years of my religious life, the Lord has blessed me as I have served his people. A lot of people have given me the opportunity to share the Good News of Jesus with great joy! I thank you, my family, the Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence, friends, the MCDP associates, and people with whom I minister, for your friendship, prayers, support, and kindness. May God embrace you with his compassion and love as you live out the commitments of your life!"

Sister Erevia acquired a BA in Religious Studies from Our Lady of the Lake University, San Antonio, Texas, 1969, and an MA in Religious Education from the University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas, 1973. She spent one semester at the Instituto Pastoral Juan XXIII, Madrid, Spain, with studies in sacraments, liturgy, and *comunidades pequeñas eclesiales*.

Sister Angela has received many national, regional, diocesan, and parish awards of recognition for her ministry in catechesis, formation of ecclesial ministers, especially, with Hispanics. She is best known for the materials she has developed for the preparation and celebration of the quince años tradition. She continues to serve the Church with enthusiasm and joy!

Beacon of Hope

By Sister Nora Ruiz, SHSp

A young child from Venezuela asked me, "Why do they hate us?" after watching the national news. It's a question that breaks my heart.

I work with immigrants and asylum seekers at a shelter near Brownsville, Texas, close to the Mexican border. Our shelter, the only long-term shelter in South Texas, allows residents to stay for 3 to 6 months. Alongside another sister from my community, The Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate, we live on-site and are available to our clients 24/7. Our shelter provides more than just basic needs like clothing, food, and shelter; we offer ESL classes, life skills lessons, computer classes, local school enrollment for children, and free legal aid. Yet, what truly sets us apart is the compassion, empowerment, and dignity we give to our clients.

The trauma these immigrants have endured is unimaginable. They recount their harrowing journeys through the jungle, the smell of death, and the fear of kidnappings or killings by cartels or gangs. Women, girls, and young boys live in constant fear of being captured, raped, or sold into human trafficking. As they reach the U.S.-Mexico border, they often face robbery by Mexican police or gang members, leaving them with nothing.

Despite these challenges, our shelter is a beacon of hope. We create a safe and nurturing environment where immigrants can rebuild their lives. The children, for example, are given the opportunity to receive an education and regain a sense of normalcy. The adults learn valuable skills that empower them to become self-sufficient and contribute to society.



Working with immigrants has profoundly transformed me. These resilient individuals have endured unimaginable hardships, yet they remain hopeful and courageous. I am deeply grateful to Jesus for the gift of accompanying them on their journeys. By offering light and hope in these challenging times, I strive to make a positive impact on their lives. I cherish this journey, finding purpose and fulfillment in being a source of support and compassion for those who need it most.



Sister Nora L. Ruiz was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas. She is a temporary profess member of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate. She is compassionate and dedicated to service, multitasking with a diverse skill set, and experienced in both business and religious fields. .

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Transformative Experiences

By Sister Giovana Fuentes, IHM

My stay in the United States, the country that has welcomed me for some years now, has been full of experiences that have had a significant impact on my life, transforming it in some way. These profound changes, growth and learning have allowed me to open my horizons and redefine my vision of the world around me.

In the midst of adapting to the new culture, with its beliefs, and its way of perceiving reality that contrasted with mine in some respects, I realized that the differences, even in the simplest, easiest and most functional things, became a challenge for me. Mealtimes, language, and even the way we expressed our faith, made me aware of the genuine culture shock I was experiencing. However, in this process, God was present to accompany me on this new journey, and although at first it seemed to be a clash of cultures, I soon understood that it was an encounter of cultures that enrich and transform each other.

The “Weaving Culture” program, offered by the Mexican American Catholic College (MACC), was a blessing for me, as it helped me to process and better understand my experiences, and at the same time gave me the opportunity to expand my horizons. In this intercultural learning process, I had the clarity and conviction that it was not about assimilating a new culture, but about integrating shared experiences without losing my cultural identity, creating an environment where efforts to embrace the richness of diversity are welcomed and mutually respected.

In 2022, I participated in the IV ALHMA *Encuentro*, with the theme “Called to Communion”, which was my first encounter with other Latina religious ministering in the United States. This experience was invaluable, as it allowed me to connect, bond and intertwine with other roots and cultures through our faith. In addition to recognizing that our stories and paths are similar, and that we share a common purpose: to serve and walk with our Hispanic people. In this communion encounter we

share our joys, desires and challenges and in turn celebrate our cultural life with joy and fraternity.

Another experience that has deeply touched my life has been witnessing the reality of our immigrant brothers and sisters. I have listened to their heartbreaking stories and empathized with their pain. These experiences have transformed me, teaching me the urgent need for compassion and empathy with those brothers and sisters who are looking for a light of hope in an unknown country.

I soon understood that it was an encounter of cultures that enrich and transform each other.

Thanks to ALHMA, in collaboration with MACC, I have the opportunity to participate in the Certificate of Intercultural Ministry. This program has allowed me to interact and share with peers from other cultures and other contexts, which has enriched my perspective and the value of diversity. In addition, as a mentee on the board of ALHMA, I continue to assimilate and be enriched more deeply in the knowledge of its mission and objectives.



Sister Giovana Fuentes has been a member of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for nine years. She is originally from Arequipa, Peru.

Journeys of Mutual Hope

By Sister Feliciana Mejia, CCVI

Sister Feliciana Mejia, CCVI, grew up in a typical Mexican American barrio of a small West Texas town. In those days, parents were the catechists of the children. The priest and a few religious volunteers would approve the readiness of the children for the sacraments. There was no church building in the small town; so a priest would celebrate Sunday Mass in a community hall when it was available. Other places for Mass were: at family homes, a movie theater, or a court room. This is where Sr. Feliciana learned about the meaning of community. Everyone would eagerly do their part for setting up for Mass. With no confessionals available, the priest held the sacrament of reconciliation/confessions, including First Confessions "Face to Face." In 1958, a parish, St. James Catholic Church, was established.

Sister Feliciana has always had the passion to be of service and helping others. The CCVI mission "To actualize the saving and healing of the Incarnate Word by promoting human dignity" has affirmed her foundation and commitment of respect for all individuals and creation. Her ministry experiences began in Texas with Children's Centers for children of divorced parents. She served in a Hispanic parish of El Paso and in the diocese of Lubbock, was Director of Renew, and; was also a licensed professional counselor in Lubbock and Kerrville, Texas.

She describes her fifteen years on the CCVI Leadership Team as the *Quinceañera* ministry and being a member of both the local and national Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) was enriching. She served as the liaison for the sisters in Peru for eight years. The experiences of ministry were always journeys of mutual hope. She realizes that she came in contact with the divine in everyone she met.

A few community based organizations which were part of her on-going understanding and growth of being united in Christ and being a companion on the journey were: in San Antonio, El Paso, Lubbock, Hispanic Women Conference National Organization, *Las Hermanas* and the *Tercer Encuentro* for Hispanics in Washington, D.C.

February 1, 2025 was a highlight of Jubilee 2025; when the Archdiocese of San Antonio celebrated the Jubilee of consecrated life, the gift of fidelity; the joy of perseverance. Sister Mejia shared that it was truly an experience of so many sisters and brothers of different congregations and charisms united in prayer, walking in community and in hope, as one body in Christ. The CCVI Congregation will celebrate the Jubilee of jubilarians on August 15, 2025.



Sister Feliciana is a Sister of Charity of the Incarnate Word (CCVI) San Antonio, Texas. She holds a B.A from Incarnate Word College and an M.A. from St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas. She studied at Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, California, and at the William Glasser Institute, Los Angeles, California, focused on Choice Theory. She is a member of Concept Therapy Institute, San Antonio. This Institute provides basic and on-going courses regarding holistic living.

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thanks also go to Sr. Claudia Carrillo, HMIG, and her religious community, and the many volunteers who dedicated their time and effort to creating a beautiful and meaningful *Encuentro*.

The day concluded with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment. AHLMA and its members look forward to continuing their work in advocating for legal, educational, and pastoral support tailored to Latina religious sisters. The Mini-*Encuentro* was not just a gathering—it was a testament to the strength, resilience, and faith of Latina sisters as they walk together in their journey of service.

With hearts full of gratitude and determination, AHLMA remains steadfast in its mission: to support, accompany, and empower Latina religious sisters, ensuring they have the resources, support, and recognition they need to thrive in their vocations.

For more information about the Mini-*Encuentro* visit our website at <https://ahlma.org/en/>



The Mini-Encuentro was not just a gathering—it was a testament to the strength, resilience, and faith of Latina sisters.



Photos courtesy of *Global Sisters Report*. Find more photos in our gallery at <https://ahlma.org/en/fotos/>

AHLMA Networking

Thanks to generous resources and technology, AHLMA sisters have been able to participate in events throughout the United States in keeping with AHLMA's mission of networking to support, accompany and empower Latina sisters in their ministry and service to consecrated life. Highlighted below are some of the wonderful virtual and in-person events in which we collaborated.

Wounds of the soul and healing processes



On the path of responding to God's call within religious life, we recognize the importance of strengthening our personal integration in order to live in community in a harmonious way and to serve with greater dedication in our ministry. This process involves, among other aspects, the healing of painful experiences of the past.

In response to this need and listening to the concerns of its members, AHLMA organized a virtual workshop entitled "Wounds of the soul and healing process" with the purpose of contributing to the personal integration of the sisters.

This workshop was given on November 22, 2024 by Sister Ileana Urroz, STJ, who guided the participants in exploring the symptoms and causes of various emotional wounds that affect both their relationship with themselves and with others. The session also included inner healing exercises that allowed the participants to work on their personal restoration process.

The participants stated that the workshop was extremely enriching, as it helped them to identify their wounds and provided them with practical tools to initiate a healing process or address it in the present personal situation. They also highlighted the valuable integration of the human and spiritual dimension, as well as the support of biblical references in the presentation, which allowed for a comprehensive and profound approach to the topic.

To watch the recording of the workshop (available only in Spanish) go to the following link: <https://ahlma.org/project/heridas-del-alma-y-proceso-de-sanacion/>

Journeying in Mission

AHLMA: Strengthening Communion and Mission



The *encuentros* (gatherings) organized by AHLMA, both at the national and regional levels, either in person or virtually, have served as intimate spaces to share our identity as religious, our experiences in the mission, as well as the challenges and joys we face. These instances have furthered greater mutual knowledge, the strengthening of fraternal bonds, the promotion of friendships and the celebration of the richness of our cultural diversity.

In keeping with our commitment to continue fostering connection among us, we held five virtual gatherings under the title "Journeying in Mission", conceived as sacred spaces of communion in which we shared our lives and discerned, together, God's call in today's mission.

The sessions were facilitated by Sisters Rosario Bobadilla, CSJ, and Miriam Perez, SSC, both trained in psychotherapy.

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The participants valued these gatherings as enriching instances that allowed them to share their experiences in small groups, promoting a fraternal and meaningful dialogue. Among the most outstanding comments, deep gratitude was expressed for the opportunity to participate, appreciation for the content of the sessions and renewed encouragement to continue with the mission.

Let Us Talk on Immigration

Since the beginning of the year 2025, we have experienced a variety of emotions about the immigration issue. As Hispanic women religious, this has led us to dialogue and reflection as we want to be a prophetic voice and presence of the Gospel today and respond to the cry of God's people.



On March 21, 2025, AHLMA, in collaboration with the **Catholic Extension Society**, held a virtual session on the topic of immigration enriched with two presentations. The first part was presented by Miguel Naranjo, Graciela Mateo and Carolina Lugo, representatives of Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc (**CLINIC**) who presented the changes in the immigration laws up to that moment and the action steps for critical situations. They also talked about the requirements for religious workers with R1 visa and the process for its petition.

In the second part, Ramona Casas and Ruth Tiguila, representatives of A Resource In Serving Equality (**ARISE**) *Adelante* shared about the programs that ARISE offers to the *colonias* as a human and Christian response to the different needs of our brothers and sisters on the border.

At the session there were over 90 sisters connected who expressed that they found the information and inspiration they received for migrant advocacy very valuable.

To find shared materials from both presentations and other resources on immigration, please visit our website at <https://ahlma.org/en/>





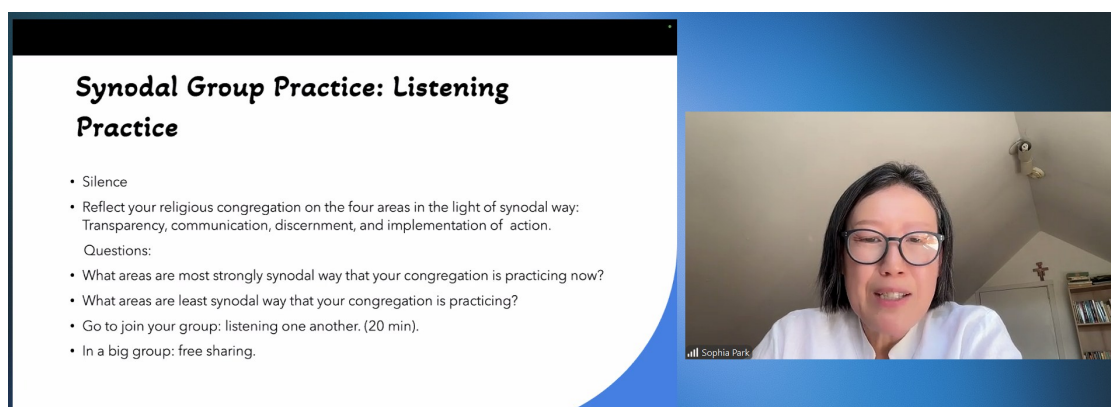
Webinars with the Religious Formation Conference

In collaboration with the Religious Formation Conference (RFC), a webinar entitled “Synodal Journey in Religious Life” was held on September 5, 2024 by Sr. Jung Eun Sophia Park, SNJM.

The Synod on Synodality represented a process of returning to the roots of mutual listening, a fundamental practice in the experience of the people of Israel and early Christian communities.

During the session, a profound reflection was promoted on the importance of dialogue and listening in the diversity of cultural and ministerial context in which religious life develops in relation to the people of God. Likewise, to evaluate our experience of synodality, discernment in the Spirit was proposed, taking as a reference the listening practiced in apostolic communities.

This was the third of a three-part webinar series co-created with the Religious Formation Conference. Recordings of this webinar and the first two webinars can be found in English and Spanish at the following link: <https://relforcon.org/video/free/synodal-journey-religious-life>



AHLMA networking with CLAR

One way of living our mission of networking in religious life has been through relationships with organizations serving religious life.

AHLMA has befriended the Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos (CLAR) by participating in their congresses in person in Latin American countries and also by meeting with them at the annual assembly of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) in the United States.

From May 1-4, 2025, Sisters Mila Aime Díaz, OP and Sr. Verónica Esparza Ramírez, OP, members of the Board of Directors of AHLMA, were present in the XXII General Assembly of CLAR where the new members of the presidency were elected. During the assembly, Sister Mila took the opportunity to make a presentation on the mission of AHLMA.

Joining efforts with CLAR, we will continue creating networks to strengthen the identity and mission of consecrated life in service to the Kingdom of God.



AHLMA

Who We Are

We are consecrated women, striving to be the maternal face of God. Sent to journey, accompany and encourage the people of God, especially the Hispanic community, the most vulnerable and the poor. Rooted in a spirituality of *encuentro* we give prophetic witness of unity, solidarity, joy and hope.

Our Mission

Network to support, accompany and empower Latina sisters in their ministry and service for consecrated life, for the Church and society in the United States.

Abounding in hope, we can bear credible and attractive witness to the faith and love that dwell in our hearts.

(cf. Pope Francis, Bull for the Jubilee 2025, 18)



AHLMA members participating in the national assembly of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.
August 13-16, 2024 in Orlando, Florida.

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Asociación de Hermanas Latinas Misioneras en América

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