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**High-resolution photos available upon request.*

A Decade After the Inaugural GIVEN Forum, The GIVEN Institute Commissions Largest Cohort of American and International Catholic Young Women Leaders

Washington, D.C., June 29, 2026 — The GIVEN Institute concluded its fifth week-long Catholic Young Women's Leadership Forum in Washington, D.C. on June 28th, marking a decade of leadership formation for young Catholic women leaders. This year, more than 300 women attended the GIVEN Forum, including 165 young women leaders between the ages of 21 - 35 representing 16 dioceses across 32 U.S. states, as well as 150 additional lay and religious women leaders serving as mentors, spiritual directors, counselors, and event volunteers.

The 2026 GIVEN Forum commemorated ten years since the inaugural Leadership Forum, welcoming back 2016 GIVEN Forum Co-Chairs Sister Bethany Madonna Burwell, S.V. and Sister Mary Gabriel Devlin, S.V. as 2026 Forum speakers, and more than 30 GIVEN alumnae as Forum speakers, mentors, and volunteers. 27 religious sisters from 16 different religious orders, as well as consecrated women, are serving as mentors.

Reflecting on GIVEN's growth over the past decade, Sister Bethany Madonna recalled how the Forum's distinctive vision emerged during its earliest days.

“The three pillars of GIVEN were born: to receive the gift that you are, realize the gifts you've been given, and respond with the gift only you can give,” she said. “It has been such an inspiration to see these young women come forward to contribute to the ministries of the Church and contribute their ideas, their writings, their artistic talents, and their minds to society.”

GIVEN helps young women discover and activate their personal gifts through the Catholic Young Women's Leadership program, which includes the flagship Leadership Forum, a year of dedicated mentoring after the Forum, and the development and support to launch an Action Plan. Action Plans are new initiatives spanning Catholic, secular, entrepreneurial, humanitarian, and artistic fields that women prayerfully design in service of the Gospel within a particular community on a local or global scale.



The 2026 Forum marked GIVEN's expanding international reach. Twenty-one women traveled to Washington, D.C. from nine countries, including Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Lebanon, Mexico, Peru, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. International alumna Amanda Achtman, founder of the Canadian initiative, Dying to Meet You, participated as a speaker on the "Women on Mission" panel at the GIVEN Forum. Sister Bethany Madonna observed that the Institute's growing international presence reflects a broader reality: "You realize that GIVEN is something for the Church Universal."

Sister Mary Madeline Todd, O.P., a GIVEN Board Member and keynote speaker, reflected on the global impact of the Forum through the Action Plan of one 2026 cohort participant from Lebanon. The participant's Action Plan seeks to introduce the Church's understanding of women's dignity and the Theology of the Body in ways that can foster dialogue among both Christian and Muslim women.

A highly anticipated keynote address was presented by Montse Alvarado, GIVEN Board Member and EWTN President and Chief Operating Officer, who was recently appointed Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication effective November 1, becoming the first non-consecrated laywoman to lead a Vatican dicastery.

Speaking to participants about perseverance in faith amid the distractions of modern life, Alvarado challenged women to remain rooted in Christ.

"How do we remain in Christ in a world that is constantly asking us to remain somewhere else? That's the battle. Not accomplishing things, not finding the perfect vocation, not even courage. It's remaining in communion. The Christian battle is remaining."

Jennifer Cole-Schaefer, Executive Director of The GIVEN Institute, reflected on Alvarado's new Vatican appointment with enthusiasm.

"We are exceedingly proud of Montse and deeply grateful for her years of service to GIVEN. She has helped shape this mission and formed countless young women leaders. We rejoice with the Church that the Lord has called her to this pivotal role, where her gifts, faith, and generous spirit will serve the Church universal in a powerful way."

A highlight of the Forum included the Catholic Women Leaders Celebration on Saturday evening, where the 2026 GIVEN Fiat Award was presented to Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, S.V., founding member and former Superior General of the Sisters of Life. The award recognizes women whose lives embody Our Lady's fiat through faithful leadership, service, and love for the Church and the world.



Following the award presentation, Mother Agnes participated in a conversation with Helen Alvaré, legal scholar, author, and GIVEN Advisory Board Member. The conversation spanned diverse topics, such as spiritual motherhood, leadership, and faithful service.

As the Forum's closing keynote, Samantha Kelley, founder of FIERCE Athlete, encouraged participants as they prepared to return home to implement Action Plans.

"I can't say what God will do," Kelley said. "He might challenge you. He might heal your heart. He might inspire you. But don't be afraid of whatever God calls you to. If it's of the Lord, then it will be beautiful."

On Sunday, following Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception celebrated by Bishop Keith Chylinski of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, all were commissioned to go forth in faith to bring their joy and their gifts back into their spheres of influence, according to their personal call.

The GIVEN Institute is expanding from a biennial Leadership Program to an annual program, including the in-person Forum and year of mentoring, with the goal of reaching more young Catholic women and supporting their leadership in the Church and in the world.

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About the GIVEN Institute

The GIVEN Institute is a not-for-profit organization that activates the gifts of young adult women for the Church and the world. Through leadership training, faith formation, and mentoring, GIVEN forms women for mission and for life. As part of the GIVEN Catholic Young Women's Leadership Program, young women leaders from across the world attend the GIVEN Forum for a week-long immersion in leadership development, spiritual formation, and the creation of Action Plans while fostering a lifelong network of Catholic women leaders.