

RALLY IN SOLIDARITY WITH CATHOLIC SISTERS, May 29, 2012, near Vatican Embassy, Washington, DC

On the bright and hot Tuesday after Pentecost, May 29, 2012, about 200 people gathered in a park near the Vatican Embassy. It felt like a reunion: although most had never met before, all were united in lively determination and solidarity. We began with song and prayer – and with a huge communal ROAR. We roared to express our enormous anger and frustration at the treatment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and of U.S. Sisters by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. And we roared to release those fierce feelings in order to create space within ourselves for the Spirit's presence.

Then wonderful speakers shared moving, inspiring stories, reflections, and prayers about U.S. Catholic Sisters and LCWR. A representative of the large and largely Protestant group that wrote "An Open Letter to Catholic Religious Women" read that powerful statement. Speakers were often interrupted by applause, cheers, and cries of "Amen!" On that Tuesday after Pentecost, we sang of our hope in the Spirit. Colorful hand-made signs attracted attention from drivers along Massachusetts Avenue, and many honked in support.

As we walked up Massachusetts Avenue to the Vatican Embassy, we continued to sing music that expressed the range of our aspirations. We filled the public areas in front of the embassy. When all had marched up the hill, a Secret Service agent escorted a delegation from the Rally coordination team to the door – and the door opened! We cheered when, after they provided contact information, Linda Donaldson and Arlene McGarrity were welcomed into the embassy and met with Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, the Papal Nuncio (ambassador to the US from the Holy See), as we had requested in advance without confidence in the outcome of our outreach. The archbishop indicated that our request for the CDF mandate to be withdrawn was unrealistic, but still he promised to deliver our letter to Pope Benedict. (Our package for Pope Benedict included your online signatures and beautiful comments.)

Linda and Arlene were greeted with more cheers when they came out of the embassy. They quickly outlined their conversation and then said that the archbishop had invited a group of about 20 to come into the embassy chapel and pray with him. Archbishop Vigano greeted each member of the coordinating committee as they came into the embassy and entered the small, lovely chapel nearby.

After a brief time of silent prayer, he spoke of his travels throughout the US since his arrival here 6 months ago, and said he was impressed with how "very alive" the Church is in the US. He told us he appreciated our decision to come and meet with him rather than simply staging an event to attract media attention. He encouraged everyone to bring concerns to their local bishops in a similarly personal way. He emphasized his desire to foster unity within the U.S. Church, and cautioned everyone to be wary of news media that focus on or foment division. He told us that he had met with LCWR that morning and he hopes that this will open not simply dialogue but also a continuing relationship. He expressed sadness that the situation with the Sisters had come to this, and wished that a relationship had been established long ago. He invited someone from our group to lead a song, and Linda led a rousing chorus of "If you believe and I believe." He shared our prayer for freedom but put this freedom

in context of the leadership role of the pope and bishops in the Church. As we came back outside, Archbishop Vigano came with us; he had relaxed conversations with many of the few dozen rally participants who had waited while we were in the embassy. Throughout, he lived up to his reputation as a man of integrity, and expressed himself with quiet, gentle, gracious warmth. We appreciate the time, attention, and hospitality he gave us.

We find hope and courage in the fact that Archbishop Vigano welcomed us and gave us the opportunity for a private meeting. He listened to us. He expressed his gratitude for the work of the Sisters, as well as hope for reconciliation in the relationship with U.S. Sisters. We continue to pray for more miracles, like the withdrawal of the CDF mandate. And we continue to stand in solidarity with LCWR and Catholic Sisters.

(NOTE: [Rally organizers](#) do not represent and are entirely independent from LCWR. None of the organizing team and none of the people who met with Archbishop Vigano are women religious.)