

Solidarity with Sisters

P. O. Box 18

Ashton, Maryland 20861 USA

www.solidaritywithsisters.org

July 31, 2013

His Holiness Pope Francis

c/o His Eminence Cardinal João Braz de Aviz and

Most Reverend Carlo Maria Viganò, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States

00120 Via del Pellegrino

Citta del Vaticano

Dear Holy Father:

Since you became pope, new energy has been alive in our church! We see your warm, compassionate actions. We read your thoughtful homilies. We hear you calling our church to live the gospel of Jesus Christ, to let the gospel shine in our joyful faith and love. Thank you!

Solidarity with Sisters is a group of lay Catholics who have been inspired by the powerful faith and ministries of Catholic sisters. We write today to share our conviction that the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (*LCWR*) is a natural ally in your efforts to help the Church live the gospel with deep faith, hope, and love, and in solidarity with marginalized people.

LCWR represents 57,000 consecrated women who are trusted by Catholics and many others in the United States. LCWR helps its members to strengthen their spiritual life, their community life, and their leadership skills. LCWR offers workshops, training, programs and publications to support sisters as they live the same gospel values that you often mention: compassion, pastoral openness, generous love, prayer and contemplation, and solidarity with people who are poor or needy. Many Catholics and others experience and learn these values through LCWR and its sisters.

Many U.S. Catholics, and U.S. society in general, now respect LCWR even more than in the past. After the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) appointed three bishops to “reform” LCWR, many Americans felt angry. Catholics and others were surprised that LCWR and its sisters did not respond with public anger. Instead, LCWR led its sisters to prayer. They quietly turned to each other to discern the path God wants them to take, while they continued their ministries to people in need.

People often comment that women have gifts of love, nurturing, affection, and tenderness. This is certainly true of LCWR. But LCWR has much more to offer. LCWR members understand theology. And LCWR itself both teaches and models expertise that our church desperately needs, such as how to transform large organizations through prayer and gospel values; how to be leaders in times of change; how to dialogue; and how to create effective and accountable systems.

LCWR’s combination of prayer, community, and service seems so consistent with what you urge us all to do! **So we ask you to explore a visible and active alliance with LCWR and sisters to help you transform our church, an institution that seeks to embody Jesus Christ.** For example, you could:

- Meet with LCWR in order to learn about LCWR’s work, to understand the U.S. sisters more fully, and to express your care.
- Explore with LCWR how to increase the laity’s solidarity with people on the margins. The laity (and U.S. society) trust sisters as faithful and compassionate professionals in many areas, like education, health care, and service to the poor.
- Encourage warmer, less formal relationships among LCWR, the CDF, the Congregation for Religious, and U.S. bishops, particularly the three bishops appointed by CDF to oversee LCWR reform.
- Welcome the voices of women by adding women as members of groups that advise you on reform of the Curia, Vatican administration, and other Church matters. Include some of the many LCWR sisters who have deep faith and proven knowledge of how to transform organizations.

If you would engage positively with LCWR, it could go a long way towards healing our U.S. church community, deeply wounded in the wake of the abuse scandals.

As you said in your Pentecost homily, we know that the Holy Spirit continues to “unleash his irresistible power with amazing consequences”! Your example gives us hope. The example of LCWR also gives us hope. And your words about the Second Vatican Council give us courage. We take to heart the sacred responsibility recognized in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* “to express [our] opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church” (Chapter 4, Sec. 37). For the good of the Church, we ask you to welcome LCWR as your ally in renewing the Church, and to add expert women to the groups that advise you about Church matters.

Sincerely,
The Coordinating Committee of Solidarity with Sisters

Linda P. Donaldson

Lynn F. Bufka

James De Quattro

Susan De Quattro

Bill Fanelli

Anna M. Jelen

Arlene McGarrity

James M. McGarrity

Richard C. McGinnis

Mary D. Ott

Anne Regan

Frances Schueler

Judith Sholes

Joan Sklamm

Stuart Sklamm

Betty D. Thompson