

Rally in Solidarity with Catholic Sisters

Linda Donaldson remarks

May 29, 2012 – Washington, DC

Good morning everyone.

It is my great honor and deep privilege to welcome you to the Rally in Solidarity with Catholic Sisters. We join our voices with the tens of thousands of others across this country who have expressed their support for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and all Catholic sisters. From East to West, people have been holding rallies and vigils and other events to support the LCWR and Catholic sisters. One petition has over 51,000 signatures. So we are part of a larger movement, a spirit-led movement for justice for our sisters.

We stand here to celebrate and lift up the work of the LCWR and Catholic sisters. We stand here today to send them our love, our support and to ask the Holy Spirit to be with them in their discernment over the next three days. We stand here in solidarity with them because Catholic sisters have been our teachers, our mentors, our spiritual directors, our friends. Their lives have demonstrated what it means to be a follower of Christ. They are the ones who minister to people who are hungry, homeless, and struggling in this world. They recognize the dignity and worth of all people, particularly those on the margins. They teach us how to be Christ to others by their example. They show love for God and love for neighbor even to their death.

The purpose of this rally is to celebrate and lift up the LCWR and Catholic sisters, to offer a “collective love letter” to them so they may know we are with them in prayer and spirit. But before we begin our love letter, we want to take a minute to give voice to the anger and outrage we feel because an injustice has been done. Catholic sisters are the most authentic and credible witnesses of Jesus' message of peace and justice, and they don't deserve to be treated with such callous disrespect and disregard. Acknowledging that many of us were moved because of our anger, we thought it would be important to set aside a just a moment to

express that anger so we can move beyond to a place of love and celebrate our sisters with hope for the future.

So, on the count of three, let's express our anger with a big roar. . Ready? One, Two, Three, "ROOOOOOAAAAAAR."

Now let us proceed with our love letter to the Catholic sisters by starting with a prayer:

Prayer

Gracious God,

We come to you today in gratitude for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and all Catholic sisters.

- In their teaching ministries, they stretch our minds and move our hearts to be more in union with Christ.
- In their service in hospitals, among immigrants, among people who are poor and powerless, they are Christ's hands.
- In their courageous willingness to walk into the unknown, now and for hundreds of years, they are Christ's feet.

Spirit of Life,

We thank for the opportunity to gather together as a community to stand in solidarity with the Catholic sisters,

- to support one another through this very difficult time, and
- to harness our collective prayers for the gifts of the spirit to come upon our sisters as they gather over the next few days.

Help us to turn our swords into plowshares, to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Amen.

We have responded “yes” to the call of the spirit to come here today to stand as a community in solidarity with the sisters. To give voice to that “yes,” let us sing:
Here I am Lord.

Here I Am, Lord

Our love letter continues with our first testimonial shared by Karen O’Brien.

Testimony, Karen O’Brien

Now, we have Honora Precourt who will offer some words to acknowledge and give gratitude for the work of Catholic sisters. Honora is the former Development Coordinator for LCWR’s traveling museum exhibit, *Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America*.

Words of Wisdom: Honora Precourt

To further celebrate how Catholic sisters model the way as Christ's hands and feet, let us sing “They will Know We are Christians by our Love.”

Song: They Will Know We are Christians by Our Love

Our second testimony will be given by Joan Conway.

Testimony: Joan Conway

The organizers of the rally were very moved by an open letter written by women, who come largely from protestant denominations, that expresses deep solidarity and support for the Catholic sisters. To give context for and to read the letter is Dr. Reverent Frances Taylor Gench, a New Testament Scholar and Professor at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond.

Letter: Rev. Dr. Frances Taylor Gench

To extend our courage and strength to our Catholic Catholic sisters in song, Susan Pearson will lead us in the call and response, “Stand Firm.”

Song: Stand Firm

Our last testimony in this love letter will be offered by Kate Kelley.

Testimony: Kate Kelley

Now Susan Pearson will offer the song “Let Nothing Trouble You” to the LCWR as they discern their next course of action.

Solo: Let Nothing Trouble You

Closing Words:

We are a people of hope. Now that doesn't mean that we, individually, don't lose hope. That's why we need each other, we need community so that we as a community can have hope and carry each other when one of us feels despair. Our hope comes the knowledge that Jesus promised he would send his Advocate to to guide us to the truth, to help us live in love, to give us courage, wisdom, strength, and right judgment to live in the spirit and to follow the spirit.

We call on the spirit to come to the aid of our Sisters, to shower on them her gifts, to help them palpably feel her presence.

And we continue to pray and wait in hope. Scripture tells us that hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts, into the hearts of the Sisters, through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

Scripture acknowledges that as we wait in the spirit, “we still groan within ourselves” as we wait for a church, for a world we do not yet see. But in hope we are saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance” remembering that “with God, all things are possible.”

So let us give voice to that hope by singing: “If You Believe and I Believe”

Song: If you Believe and I Believe and We Together Pray” (3 times)

Let us close with a prayer that was written by Sr. *Chris Koellhoffer, IHM* for the LCWR during this time.

Closing Prayer: God's Spirit – LCWR Prayer

In this time of pain and promise,
we call on God's Spirit to bless
the leadership of LCWR, of their member congregations,
and all women religious
who strive to live the gospel in these
uncertain times.

We call on the Spirit of God to reveal
the way forward that is faithful to God's
dream for them and their lives together.

May all who are called to engage
in prayer and conversation come to
the table with hearts that are open,
transparent, and faith-filled. May their
reflection be marked by a deep listening
to the voice of the Spirit at work in
our world.

May the holy ones who have gone
before us inspire us by their courage
and wisdom and affirm that we and they are
not alone.

May we continue to faithfully live the
questions of our time and witness to
the people of God that we are women
at home with mystery and filled with
fierce hope for our shared future.

Amen.

Prayer by Chris Koellhoffer, IHM