

Report of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) to the Communicators for Women Religious

Annual Assembly – August 2016

At the annual LCWR assembly in August in Atlanta, nearly 800 participants engaged in contemplative processes to explore the assembly theme of “Embracing the Mystery: Living Transformation.” The presentations and processes led the participants to new understandings of the unique opportunities open to US Catholic sisters at this time and how those opportunities may be explored. All of the speakers pointed to the need for contemplative engagement with the struggles and sufferings of the world.

In her keynote address, Sister Pat Farrell, OSF, a former LCWR president, spoke of centering religious life leadership in contemplation, describing contemplation as “a response to the movement of Spirit that has been stirring in and among us for some time now, becoming increasingly manifest...The shift that has taken place in LCWR is not just for this moment, and, of course, not just for ourselves. I believe we are being led in this direction for the sake of the church and the world.”

Participants practiced contemplative dialogue in small groups following the two keynote presentations asking the questions: What is required of us as leaders having heard these addresses? What matters most for the future of our communities, religious life, and the world we serve?

Throughout the assembly participants were also invited to commit to spending time each day in personal and communal contemplation that placed them in deeper communion with the world, especially the places of great suffering and pain.

Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, assistant professor at the University of Knoxville, Tennessee also addressed the assembly on the existence of racism in the history of communities of US women religious. Following responses by LCWR members Sisters Anita Baird, DHM and Dawn Tomaszewski, SP, the participants renewed their commitment within a prayer service to build an inclusive church that welcomes ethnic and cultural diversity.

LCWR Journal: *Occasional Papers*

LCWR publishes a journal twice a year, *Occasional Papers*. It has become a source of education and reflection for many Catholic sisters and others who are looking for reading material on areas of spirituality, leadership and religious life. Anyone may now purchase a subscription to *Occasional Papers*, and recent out-of-print editions are available for purchase as PDF downloads. You may want to share this information with your members. <https://lcwr.org/publications/occasional-papers>.



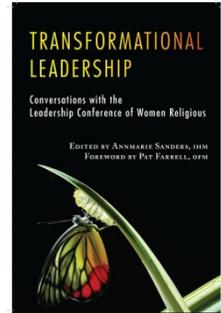
Exploring Contemplative Engagement

Because of the interest in and desire to better understand contemplation and contemplative engagement with the world, LCWR has created resources that are available to its members as well as the public. The resources include a one-hour video that shows an actual contemplative

dialogue session in process. There is also a version of the video which includes the introductory remarks and concluding observations with Spanish-language captioning. Available as well are documents that provide information on how to conduct a group contemplative dialogue experience. All are available at <https://lcsr.org/contemplative-dialogue>.

Catholic Press Association Award

The Catholic Press Association awarded the book, *Transformational Leadership: Conversations with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious*, the first-place award in the category of professional books. The book, published by Orbis, has also received several favorable reviews including the journals *Theological Studies*, and *American Catholic Studies*, and in publications of the National Federation of Priests' Councils and the Religious Formation Conference, as well as in publications of various religious communities.



Appeal for Civil Discourse

More than 5650 Catholic Sisters signed a letter asking the US presidential candidates “to engage in political dialogue that reflects the principles and values upon which this nation was founded.” Written by LCWR, the letter asks that the candidates refrain from rhetoric that stokes the fires of fear and engage in constructive dialogue during this campaign season. The 5671 signers of the letter are Catholic sisters from across the country who serve persons in need through education, healthcare, and other pastoral and social services. Copies of the letter were delivered to presidential candidates Secretary Hillary Clinton, Mr. Donald Trump, Governor Gary Johnson, Dr. Jill Stein, their running mates and party chairs on August 8.

Assistance to Congregations in Transition

Through a grant, LCWR is able to provide assistance to religious congregations that are facing significant experiences of transition, which may include recognition of a community being in its last generation, deciding to partner with another religious institute, merge, etc. LCWR director of transitions Sister Mary Hughes, OP is available to work with communities to outline the kinds of questions and issues that congregations need to attend to and the kinds of models that are developing in response to such needs. Mary also works with communities on individual and communal grieving, living with hope during transition, legacy planning, self-care of leaders, and other topics.

Other Action on Behalf of Justice and Peace

LCWR continues to respond to the moral imperative of the Gospel and use its collective voice, resources, and power to: promote economic justice, end modern-day slavery, ensure immigrant rights, promote nonviolence and protect Earth and its biosphere. You are welcome to visit the LCWR website (lcsr.org) and view the monthly newsletter for more detailed information.

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Leadership Conference of Women Religious
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