NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

US bishops discuss LCWR reform, visitation with Vatican officials

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service
| May. 2, 2012

Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan of Santa Fe, N.M., concelebrates Mass with bishops from Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming at the Altar of the Tomb in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican May 2. Also pictured at the altar are Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas of Tucson, Ariz., and Bishop Fernando Isern of Pueblo, Colo. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

VATICAN CITY -- Recent Vatican investigations of religious women have created opportunities for growth through reflection and for dialogue with their bishops, two U.S. bishops said after discussing the matter with Vatican officials.

Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan of Santa Fe, N.M., and Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas of Tucson, Ariz., told Catholic News Service May 2 that they had discussed the Vatican visitation of U.S. communities of religious women and the more recent order to reform the Leadership Conference of Women Religious earlier the same day with officials from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Archbishop Sheehan said that during the meeting, attended by bishops from Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Wyoming, who were making their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican, "the point that was made was that although some people were unhappy with the decision to make corrections" in the LCWR, it would be "an opportunity for dialogue" between the religious and the bishops.

The archbishop said he told Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, congregation prefect, "that if this would have happened some years earlier, it might have been better. But, anyway, it's going on now and I think it will be the occasion for some dialogue."

It also should help "some of the orders to pull back a little bit from some areas they have gone that maybe they shouldn't have," he said.

Citing "serious doctrinal problems" revealed in an assessment originally ordered in April 2008, the Vatican announced April 18 a major reform of the LCWR, a group which includes about 1,500 leaders of U.S. women's communities, representing about 80 percent of the country's 57,000 religious women.

The Vatican appointed Archbishop J. Peter Sartain of Seattle to provide "review, guidance and approval, where necessary, of the work" of the LCWR and to ensure fidelity in conference programs and meetings to Catholic teaching in areas including abortion, euthanasia, women's ordination and homosexuality.

Religious women in the United States also are awaiting the results of an apostolic visitation of their communities; the congregation for religious ordered the visitation in 2008, particularly in light of the steep decline in the number of religious women in the country. The visitation's final report was submitted in December but has not been made public.

Bishop Kicanas said that during the May 2 meeting, congregation officials made clear "the profound respect they have for the work our religious women, and I certainly share that. Our religious women in the diocese are doing a phenomenal job in our prisons, in our hospitals, in our schools, in our religious education programs, in our parishes, in our retirement homes. I don't know what we would do without our religious women."

"It was good to hear the congregation for religious be so positive about the work religious women are doing and I hope that the publication of the visitation reports will be beneficial," he said. Review processes like the visitation, he said, are helpful because they give "an idea of what you can do better to accomplish what you are trying to do."

The bishops of the region began their day by celebrating an early morning Mass at the tomb of St. Peter in St. Peter's Basilica.

Archbishop Sheehan was the principal celebrant and homilist and told his fellow bishops that the gift of the unity and universality of the Catholic Church sometimes requires that people accept decisions -- like the new translation of the Mass or the reform of the LCWR -- they may be uncomfortable with or not understand.

"There are small prices to pay" for the unity and universality of the church, he said.

"Some Catholics dislike this decision of Peter and his successor (the pope) or that decision, whether it is in the area of translations or texts or whether dealing with the issue of the LCWR in the United States," he said.

Differences are "part of the reality of being a human being," but accepting the pope's authority "is a small price to pay for our unity with our mother church," Archbishop Sheehan said.

St. Peter's Basilica, he said, offers people a concrete experience of the reality of Catholic Church: it was built on the rock of St. Peter, who is buried under the main altar; the church has been strengthened by the blood of the martyrs; it is universal and its members come from every language, race and nation; and "the church is one in the Eucharist that is celebrated throughout the entire world, one in the sacraments, one in the official teachings, one under the guidance of Peter's successor, Benedict XVI."

"The church is one and this basilica shouts it out," the archbishop said.

[Contributing to this story was Francis X. Rocca at the Vatican.]

Source URL (retrieved on *10/25/2014 - 14:13*): http://ncronline.org/news/us-bishops-discuss-lcwr-reform-visitation-vatican-officials