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

From Australia to Nebraska, LCWR on the mind

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The head of Australia?s oldest religious congregation has written about the Vatican?s rebuke of U.S. sisters, relating it to reflections on the process of dialogue by Pope Paul VI and St. Benedict.

Writing from Nebraska, where she is currently attending a study program on the sixth century saint, the congregational leader of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict writes that recent accounts between the sisters and Vatican officials led her to reflect on the question of dialogue.

Representatives of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) met June 12 in Rome with Cardinal William Levada and Seattle Archbishop Peter Sartain.

Levada is the head of the Vatican?s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which in April ordered LCWR, which represents some 80 percent of women religious, to revise and place itself under Sartain?s authority as an ?archbishop delegate? of the group.

In an *NCR* interview following the meeting June 12 [1], Levada warned it could signal a ?dialogue of the deaf? between the two groups.

Franciscan Sr. Pat Farrell, LCWR president and one of the two representatives from the group at the Vatican meeting, said June 18 [2] that she thought the two sides were struggling to ?get beneath the polarizations out of which we?re speaking to one another.?

In her piece on her order?s website, Good Samaritan Sr. Clare Condon writes that news of the struggle for effective dialogue led her to look to Pope Paul VI?s encyclical letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, written in 1964.

Condon quotes five excerpts from the encyclical on the subject of dialogue:

- "Dialogue is an example of the art of spiritual communication."
- "Its characteristics are: clarity above all? the dialogue supposes and demands comprehensibility? dialogue is not proud, it is not bitter, it is not offensive. Its authority is intrinsic to the truth it explains, to the charity it communicates, to the example it proposes; it is not a command, it is not an imposition. It is peaceful; it avoids violent methods; it is patient; it is generous."
- "Trust is not only in the power of one?s words, but also in an attitude of welcoming the trust of [the other]. Trust promotes confidence and friendship."
- "In the dialogue conducted in this manner, the union of truth and charity, of understanding and love is achieved."

Condon also looks to the Rule of St. Benedict on the matter.

?St Benedict?addresses the very reality of coming to decision-making in the community through dialogue,? she

writes.

?He exhorts the Abbot to present the facts, to gather the information, to seek the advice of ALL the community, to turn this advice over and over and to weigh it up in prayer and with Scripture. It is only after such a spiritual encounter between all those involved and affected that a decision can be forthcoming. Benedict finishes this chapter with the words: ?Do everything with counsel and you will not be sorry afterward.??

You can find Condon?s full reflection here: **"The Vatican, LCWR, and dialogue."[3]**

Some background on her order: Founded in 1857 by Australia?s first bishop, Archbishop John Bede Polding, it follows the Rule of St. Benedict. The Good Samaritans minister in five different countries: Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Kiribati, and East Timor.

They were invited to serve in Japan by the bishop of Nagasaki following the atomic bombing of the city by the U.S. at the end of World War II, and provided medical care for the survivors.

While they no longer minister in Nagasaki, they maintain a community further north in the country in the ancient capital city of Nara. I reported on the faith journey of some of the sisters in that community last September. If you're interested in learning more, see: **"Japanese sisters recount the road of conversion." [4]**

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