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

LCWR leader asks if Catholics can have 'questioning mind'

Joshua J. McElwee | Jul. 17, 2012 NCR Today

The head of the group of U.S. sisters which has come under harsh Vatican scrutiny said today that a key question facing the faithful is "Can you be Catholic and have a questioning mind?"

Franciscan Sr. Pat Farrell, the president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), made the comment today during an extended interview on the popular public radio program "Fresh Air."

While audio of the conversation, which was between Farrell and NPR host Terry Gross, is not yet available, NPR has posted a selected transcript of some of Farrell's remarks. [1]

In the parts of the interview posted on the NPR website, Farrell directly addresses the Vatican's condemnation of her organization, which represents some 80 percent of women religious in the U.S.

In a document known as a "doctrinal assessment," first released April 18, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said there was a "prevalence of certain radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith" in the group's programs and ordered it to revise and place itself under the authority of three bishops.

According to NPR, Farrell today said that there are three main options on the table for LCWR: Fully complying with the mandate, not complying, or seeking negotiation with the Vatican.

?In my mind, [I want] to see if we can somehow, in a spirited, nonviolent strategizing, look for maybe a third way that refuses to define the mandate and the issues in such black and white terms," says Farrell.

After asking the question about having a "questioning mind" in the church, Farrell continues:

> ?I think one of our deepest hopes is that in the way we manage the balancing beam in the position we're in, if we can make any headways in helping to create a safe and respectful environment where church leaders along with rank-and-file members can raise questions openly and search for truth freely, with very complex and swiftly changing issues in our day, that would be our hope. But the climate is not there. And this mandate coming from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith putting us in a position of being under the control of certain bishops, that is not a dialogue. If anything, it appears to be shutting down dialogue.?

Farrell also says at one point that the ?gift to the church? of women religious is to ?stand in very close proximity to people at the margins, to people with very painful, difficult situations in their lives.?

?Our gift to the church is to be with those who have been made poorer, with those on the margins," she continues. "Questions there are much less black and white because human realities are much less black and white. That's where we spend our days.?

Read the rest of the selected transcript here [1]. We'll update this post once full audio of the conversation is

available.

UPDATE: Full audio of Franciscan Sr. Pat Farrell's is now available. See below.

Before the interview, Terry Gross also mentioned she is planning to interview Toledo, Ohio, Bishop Leonard Blair about the LCWR on her program next week. Blair is one of the three bishops who is to oversee the group and was the bishop delegated by the Vatican to complete the "doctrinal assessment."

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[1] http://www.npr.org/2012/07/17/156858223/an-american-nun-responds-to-vatican-condemnation