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LCWR president's six 'tools' for answering Vatican

Joshua J. McElwee | Aug. 13, 2012 NCR Today

Among the highlights of last week's annual assembly of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, held last week, was an address by Franciscan Sr. Pat Farrell, then the head of the group.

While I wrote about that address here [1], some of her remarks didn't make it into the final story.

Farrell, who at the time was LCWR's president, has been chiefly responsible for handling the group's response to a sharp Vatican rebuke, which came in an April 18 mandate ordering the group to revise and place itself under the control of three U.S. bishops.

Taking the stage to a standing ovation from the some 900 sisters representing religious orders present at the LCWR gathering Aug. 10, Farrell directly addressed LCWR's response to that mandate.

Before getting to that, however, Farrell presented six ways she thought LCWR could use ?tools that have served us through centuries of religious life? to ?navigate the shifts? of a God who is ?calling to us from the future.?

The six tools Farrell mentioned:

1. Contemplation: ?How else can we go forward except from a place of deep prayer?? asked Farrell. ?We have a lifetime of being lured into union with divine mystery...it?s the surest way into the darkness of God?s leading.?
2. A ?prophetic voice:? ?Our rootedness in God needs to be deep enough and our read on reality clear enough for us to be a voice of consciousness,? said Farrell.
3. Though ?solidarity with the marginalized:? ?We cannot live prophetically without proximity to those who are vulnerable and marginalized,? said Farrell.

   ?This is where we belong,? she continued, pausing to hold back tears. ?This is who we are as women religious. But also, the vantage point of marginalized people is a privileged place of encounter with God, whose preference is always for the outcast.?

4. Community: ?Religious have navigated many shifts over the years because we?ve done it together,? said Farrell.

   ?We have effectively moved from a hierarchy structured lifestyle in our congregations to a more horizontal model,? she continued. ?Sometimes I think we forget how amazing that is.?

5. Nonviolence: Citing the example of Jesus, who ?defined no one as an enemy and loved those who persecuted him,? Farrell said that while women religious cannot ?take on the passivity of the victim,? they must be able to accept suffering, ?rather than passing it on.?

?We can absorb a certain degree of negativity without drama or fanfare, choosing not to escalate or lash out in return,? said Farrell. ?My hope is that some measure of violence can stop with us.?

6. ?Living in joyful hope:? Joyful hope, said Farrell, is ?the hallmark of genuine discipleship.?

   ?Hope makes us attentive to the signs of the inbreaking reign of God,? she continued.

Following a ceremony Aug. 10, Farrell moved to the position of past-president of LCWR.

In LCWR's model, three sisters -- a president, president-elect and past-president -- govern the group collaboratively with the group's secretary, treasurer and executive director.

The group's membership chooses a president-elect at each year's assembly. Following a year in the position, she automatically succeeds to the presidency, then to the position of past-president the following year.

Franciscan Sr. Florence Deacon and St. Joseph Sr. Carol Zinn are now the group's president and president-elect, respectively.

You can read all of Farrell's address, as published by LCWR [2], below:

Farrell Address

[3]

Previous reports from *NCR* on the LCWR assembly:

- **LCWR will continue dialogue, but not compromise mission** **[4]**, Aug.10
- **LCWR president to sisters: Be 'fearless' on Vatican mandate** [1], Aug. 10
- **Sisters contemplate surrender, discernment, authority** [5], Aug. 10
- **Sister, NCR contributors discuss religious life with LCWR** [6], Aug. 10
- **Keynote: LCWR 'seed bed' for 21st century** [7], Aug. 8
- **LCWR 'gathers collective wisdom' of members to discern next steps** [8], Aug. 8
- **LCWR past presidents reflect on Vatican mandate** [9], Aug. 7
- **LCWR to determine course at next week's annual meeting** [10], July 31

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