

## Sisters ask for prayer, fasting to support LCWR dialog

Joshua J. McElwee | Dec. 12, 2012 NCR Today

One of the largest groups of U.S. Catholic sisters has asked its members to join in prayer and fasting in an effort to support dialog between American sisters and three bishops appointed by the Vatican to oversee their work.

The statement, which came after a November meeting of the leaders of the 16 congregations of the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, asks the federation's some 5,500 sisters and their nearly 3,000 lay associates to choose at least one day a week to dedicate to the effort.

"We commit ourselves to continuing prayerful support throughout the process," [writes](#) [1] the federation's leadership council. "We carry in our hearts and prayer all relationships in need of healing."

The statement, made by the leadership council Dec. 6, comes as members of the main representative organization for U.S. sisters continues to dialog with the three bishops in the wake of a harsh rebuke from the Vatican.

That rebuke, which was issued in April by the Vatican's powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, centered on the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, an organization which represents about 80 percent of women religious in the U.S.

The Vatican appointed Seattle Archbishop J. Peter Sartain as the group's "archbishop delegate," giving him and two assistants, Springfield, Ill., Bishop Thomas Paprocki; and Toledo, Ohio, Bishop Leonard Blair, [authority](#) [2] to revise LCWR's statutes and review its plans and programs.

LCWR representatives met officially for the first time with the three bishops regarding the matter Nov. 11. In a joint statement, Sartain and LCWR's president, Franciscan Sr. Florence Deacon, [said](#) [3] the meeting was "open" and "cordial."

In their statement, the St. Joseph Sisters write that they are asking their congregations to "join in prayer and fasting in support of the dialogue between the leadership of the Leadership Council of Women Religious and the Bishop delegates."

The statement, the sisters' write, came at the direction of the federation's leadership assembly, which meets annually in November. It will be shared both with LCWR and the three bishops, "and broadly with the people of God, hoping that many people of faith will join in prayer and action in these challenging yet hope-filled times."

The Vatican congregation alleged in an April 18 "doctrinal assessment" that there was a "prevalence of certain radical feminist themes" in LCWR's programs.

LCWR leaders have disagreed with the Vatican's portrayal of their group, saying in [June](#) [4] it came about from a flawed process and has caused "scandal and pain throughout the church."

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Following is the [full statement](#) [1] from the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph:

After 2-1/2 days of contemplative conversation about their relationship with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, the Leadership Assembly of the US Federation of Sisters of Saint Joseph provided the Leadership Council with a general sense of the actions they wish to take in regards to the current doctrinal assessment.

The doctrinal assessment was presented to the Leadership Council of Women Religious (LCWR) by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in the spring of 2012. The Leadership Council of the US Federation crafted the following statement, which will be shared directly with the LCWR and the Bishop delegates, and broadly with the people of God, hoping that many people of faith will join in prayer and action in these challenging yet hope-filled times.

Here is their statement:

Stimulated by the Holy Spirit of love and inspired by our charism, we invite all Sisters of St. Joseph, agrégées, associates and partners in mission to join in prayer and fasting in support of the dialogue between the leadership of the Leadership Council of Women Religious and the Bishop delegates. We commit ourselves to continuing prayerful support throughout the process. We carry in our hearts and prayer all relationships in need of healing.

The Leadership Assembly of the US Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph

The Leadership Council provides the following suggestions for actions:

- Choose one day a week for prayer and/or fasting
- Choose a month to focus your Congregation's/Province's prayer and fasting
- Form circles of prayer and support among Sisters, agrégées, associates and partners in mission
- Other

The Leadership Council further asked that each Congregation or Province choose a specific gesture and share it through the US Federation office so that the Leadership Council can assure ongoing prayerful support for our Sisters and the Bishop delegates.

The US Federation hopes to invite others to join with the actions of each Congregation and will use its website calendar and Facebook to publicize times of prayer or action and encourage solidarity with the Bishop delegates and Leadership of LCWR.

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.sistersofsaintjosephfederation.org/node/157>

[2] <http://ncronline.org/node/29834>

[3] <http://ncronline.org/node/39166>

[4] <http://ncronline.org/node/30610>