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

Pope reportedly receives letter criticizing treatment of LCWR

Joshua J. McElwee | Jun. 23, 2014 NCR Today

Pope Francis has received a letter from a number of prominent U.S. theologians and nonprofit Catholic groups criticizing the Vatican's treatment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), according to a group that organized signing of the letter.

The effort, announced Monday by the group Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, may represent the first direct appeal known to be received by the pontiff regarding LCWR, a group that represents some 45,000 U.S. Catholic sisters and has been placed under a sort of receivership by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

There have also been a number of other efforts undertaken by U.S. Catholics to reach Francis on the LCWR issue, including an online petition organized in May that reachednearly 10,500 signatures[1].

"We believe the recent criticism of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) has been unjust," reads Monday's letter, which is signed by half a dozen theologians, the heads of Catholics in Alliance and the Franciscan Action Network, and former leaders of the Center of Concern and the Catholic Theological Society of America.

"It seems to have ignored your call for a 'poor Church working on behalf of the poor' and opted instead to unjustly accuse the LCWR of failing to keep in the forefront the very teachings you rightly have said must be put into proper perspective, especially when compared to the overwhelming need for our Church 'to be led by shepherds who smell like the sheep' and who concentrate on the needs of 'the least' amongst us," the letter continues.

"We ask today only that the work of these women be honored instead of criticized and that their devotion not be impeded by the retributive sanctions of the past few years," the letter concludes. "We very respectfully wish you to know that we Catholics love our sisters and believe that their unselfish service is the most authentic demonstration of your vision of our beloved Church."

Christopher Hale, a senior fellow at the Catholics in Alliance group, said in a brief interview Monday that the letter had been given to someone with "close ties" to Francis who was able to deliver it to the pontiff.

LCWR, which traces its roots to the 1950s, was sharply criticized by the Vatican congregation in April 2012. At that time, Pope Benedict XVI appointed [2] Seattle Archbishop Peter Sartain the group's apostolic delegate, giving him authority to review and revise the organization's practices.

While news of the effect of the mandate on the sisters' group has been scarce since its 2012 promulgation, the

head of the Vatican congregation in May again sharply criticized [3] LCWR while speaking to its leaders during their annual visit to Rome to meet with Vatican congregations.

LCWR has repeatedly said the reasons cited by the Vatican for Sartain's appointment were not an accurate representation of their work. The sisters' group will meet in August in Nashville, Tenn., for its general assembly, an annual event that sees some 800 leaders of U.S. Catholic sisters convene and where the Vatican matter is likely to be discussed.

[Joshua J. McElwee is *NCR* national correspondent. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org [4]. Follow him on Twitter: @joshjmac [5].]

Source URL (retrieved on *09/18/2014 - 03:16*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/pope-reportedly-receives-letter-criticizing-treatment-lcwr

Links:
[1] http://action.groundswell-mvmt.org/petitions/pope-francis-support-u-s-nuns-remove-the-unjust-mandate-against-lcwr
[2] http://ncronline.org/node/29834
[3] http://www.ncronline.org/node/76671
[4] mailto:jmcelwee@ncronline.org
[5] https://twitter.com/joshjmac