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

LCWR to meet in May regarding Vatican order

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The leadership of the largest organization representing U.S. women religious announced this afternoon that the board of the group will meet in an "atmosphere of prayer, contemplation and dialogue" in May to discuss news that the Vatican has ordered it to revise its statutes and has appointed an archbishop to oversee the revision.

The announcement comes on the website of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) [1], which was the subject of the April 18 order from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and is signed by the group's president, president-elect, and past-president.

The statement says the national board of the group will meet from May 29-June 1 to "begin its discussion" on the matter.

"The board will conduct its meeting in an atmosphere of prayer, contemplation and dialogue and will develop a plan to involve LCWR membership in similar processes," the statement continues.

"The conference plans to move slowly, not rushing to judgment. We will engage in dialogue where possible and be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit. We ask your prayer for us and for the Church in this critical time."

News of the April 18 order from the Vatican first came in a press release that day from the U.S. bishops' conference, which was accompanied by an eight-page document of the doctrinal congregation and a one-page statement from its head, Cardinal William Levada.

The U.S. bishops' press release announced that Seattle archbishop Peter Sartain had been appointed archbishop delegate of LCWR. The Vatican document stated that in that role, Sartain was to be given wide authority over the group in five specific areas, including:

- Revising LCWR statutes;
- Reviewing LCWR plans and programs;
- Creating new programs for the organization;
- Reviewing and offering guidance on the application of liturgical texts; and
- Reviewing LCWR's affiliations with other organizations.

According to the Vatican letter, Sartain's mandate runs for "up to five years, as deemed necessary." Sartain is also expected to set up an advisory team that includes clergy and women religious to "work collaboratively" with LCWR officers and to "report on the progress of this work to the Holy See."

Today's statement from the LCWR is only the second time members of its leadership have publicly addressed the Vatican move. In a short statement April 19, the group said it was "stunned" by the order.

"The presidency of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious was stunned by the conclusions of the

doctrinal assessment of LCWR by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," read that release, which was also made on the group's website. [2]

"Because the leadership of LCWR has the custom of meeting annually with the staff of CDF in Rome and because the conference follows canonically-approved statutes, we were taken by surprise."

The signing of today's release by LCWR's president, president-elect, and past-president also reflects the unique governance structure of the organization. According to the group's model, the three leaders govern the LCWR collaboratively together with the group?s secretary, treasurer and executive director.

In previous years, a president-elect has been elected by the group?s membership at each year?s annual LCWR assembly, which brings together the group's leaders and membership. Following a year in the position, the president-elect automatically succeeds to the presidency, and then to the position of past-president the following year.

It is unknown whether the process will change following Sartain?s appointment.

Previous reporting from *NCR* on the Vatican's investigation of LCWR:

- **Vatican investigates U.S. women religious leadership** **[3]**, April, 2009
- **Women religious meet Vatican accusers in Rome** **[4]**, April, 2009
- **LCWR seeks full disclosure of Vatican visitation** **[5]**, August, 2009
- **LCWR leaders meet with Midwest bishops** **[6]**, May, 2010
- **Vatican officials, US women religious meet** **[7]**, July, 2010
- **Vatican orders LCWR to revise, appoints archbishop to oversee group** **[8]**, April 18, 2012
- **LCWR 'stunned' by Vatican's latest move** **[9]**, April 19, 2012
- **Options facing LCWR stark, say canon lawyers** [10], April 19, 2012
- **In LCWR oversight, key questions remain** **[11]**, April 24, 2012
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