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

LCWR?s Farrell speaks at event honoring Chicago sister

Joshua J. McElwee | Sep. 24, 2013 NCR Today

A Chicago area Catholic sister was honored on Saturday for her decades of work on social justice issues by one of the region?s most well known Catholic agencies.

Also celebrating the life and work of Benedictine Sr. Benita Coffey was one of the nation?s most recognized sisters, Franciscan Sr. Pat Farrell, the former leader of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR).

Coffey, a native Chicagoan who has been a member of the her religious community for 64 years, received The Mary Elsbernd, OSF Award from the 8th Day Center for Justice.

The 8th Day Center, founded in 1974, is supported by some 39 congregations of men and women religious in a coalition effort for the communities to focus energy together on social justice work.

Elsbernd was a former director of Loyola University Chicago?s Institute of Pastoral Studies who passed away in 2010. The Center has given an award in her honor each year since her death.

The organization presented the 2013 award to Coffey Saturday evening at Chicago?s Irish American Heritage Center in a ceremony named ?Revel in the Revolution.? Farrell, a leader and member of Elsbernd?s Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque, Iowa, gave a speech centered on the event?s additional theme of ?Roll Away the Stone,? taken from the Gospel accounts of Jesus? resurrection.

Farrell, who has since stepped down as the leader of LCWR, was its president when the national sisters? group was sharply criticized by the Vatican?s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in April 2012.

Speaking to some 315 people one of the organizers told *NCR* were present for the event, Farrell spoke briefly of her time as LCWR?s leader, but focused more on her own efforts to fight violence and injustice.

Mentioning the event?s theme, she said ?the big, heavy stone and the effort that it takes to roll it away, captures so well the experience of coming up against structures of injustice and violence.?

?The long-term justice work that defines the 8th Day Center community is a David and Goliath story,? she continued, according to her prepared remarks, which were given to *NCR* by the Center. ?We all know the feeling of contending with forces that seem larger than the best energies we bring to the task.?

Farrell spoke following the presentation of the award to Coffey, who currently serves as the promoter of justice for the Chicago community of Benedictine sisters.

A short biography of Coffey given out during the event says that she began ?learning early from parents and teachers the presence of God in life and the importance of the gospel mandate to love.?

Mentioning the Chicago Benedictine community?s work against the death penalty, military spending, and torture, the biography says Coffey is ?attentive and responsive to situations of injustice and inhumanity, of

violence and waste.?

In her speech, Farrell urged the people honoring Coffey not to give into cynicism in their work for justice issues.

Quoting from a variety of historical figures -- from American architect Buckminster Fuller to Indian politician and spiritual leader Sri Aurobindo -- Farrell mentioned her own time ministering in Chile in the 1980s and said ?in our efforts to bring about social change, we need to help each other roll away the stone of cynicism.?

?We need to catch ourselves in a social analysis that demonstrates just how bad things really are without an accompanying vision of how different things could be,? she said. ?And our analysis will have credibility to the degree that it comes from a place of standing with those who experience pain and conflict.?

Farrell said she had also spent four years living in community with Elsbernd, who she said had ?a certain un-dramatic dailiness? and evinced a need for ?historical patience.? Living with the late sister, Farrell said she saw her community member?s discipline in preparing her lessons.

?There was nothing flashy about it,? said Farrell. ?But I was inspired by her quiet passion, determination, decisiveness. She had clearly chosen where she would focus the energy of her life. It played itself out in the un-dramatic dailiness of her commitment, year in and year out.?

Quoting the German theologian Albert Schweitzer, Farrell continued: ?No ray of sunshine is ever lost, but the green which it awakens into existence needs time to sprout, and it is not always granted for the sower to see the harvest. All work that is worth anything is done in faith.?

Briefly touching upon her time as LCWR leader, Farrell said she and the other LCWR leaders, when considering their response to the Vatican critique of their group, ?knew only that we had to respond with integrity.?

?I felt personally called to speak from the pregnant gap somewhere between submissiveness and rebelliousness, neither of which, in my estimation, would have been appropriate,? she said.

?The situation is ongoing, but while LCWR continues to creatively hold the tension of it, shifts are happening in the church which are changing the context and hopefully affecting the outcome,? she said.

Farrell continued on the theme of rolling away the stone by asking the audience to call upon ?the strength of balance and patience.?

?What we do and the results of what we do are usually visible to us,? she said. ?But there is another part of the process that is not visible. We don?t see the gradual shifts taking place in the collective mind and heart of the human family as consciousness evolves.?

Farrell also encouraged the attendees to think of themselves as yeast, ?sending the best of our energies outward in all directions, and to find hope in the awareness that the dough is indeed rising all around us.?

[Joshua J. McElwee is *NCR* national correspondent. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org [1]. Follow him on Twitter: @joshjmac [2].]

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-30 02:16*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/lcwr-s-farrell-speaks-event-honoring-chicago-sister

Links:

[1] mailto:jmcelwee@ncronline.org
[2] http://www.twitter.com/joshjmac