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Grassroots group plans May 29 rally near Vatican Embassy

by Alice Popovici

A group of Washington, D.C.-area friends are starting a grassroots movement to show support for Catholic sisters, and have announced a rally near the Vatican Embassy from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 29. Their press release has more details:

Catholics, former Catholics, and others whose lives have been profoundly touched by Catholic sisters are holding a rally near the Vatican Embassy to support and stand in solidarity with the Leadership Conference for Women Religious (LCWR), an organization that represents 80 percent of the 57,000 women religious in the United States. The rally is scheduled for Tuesday, May 29 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Kahlil Gibran Memorial Garden, 3201 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC. At 1 p.m., rally participants will process to the Vatican Embassy at 3339 Massachusetts Avenue, NW to deliver a letter to the papal nuncio that expresses their deep disappointment and sadness at the Vatican action, and convey their total and complete support for the Catholic sisters. The rally is a grassroots effort, and not sponsored by a particular interest group.

Arlene McGarrity, one of the rally organizers, shared: "The Catholic sisters are the bedrock of the Catholic Church. They are the hands and feet of Christ, and many have been martyred doing Christ's work. Those gathered are standing up for the freedom of the sisters to follow Christ according to their charisms." Betty Thompson noted, "The Second Vatican Council taught us that we are the Church, all of us together; it's not only the pope and the bishops who can hear God's word and act. We hear God's word in the work of the LCWR and the sisters. St. Francis of Assisi is said to have told us, 'Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.' These women live the gospel and preach with their lives. Their work every single day shows us what it is to 'respect life from conception through natural death.'"

The idea for the rally began with a few conversations among Catholic friends who quickly realized that people from all parts of the Catholic spectrum care about the sisters and want to stand in solidarity with them. This gathering adds to the outpouring of support that has been flowing to the sisters since the Vatican announced to the U.S. bishops on April 18 that it had appointed Archbishop Peter Sartain to oversee reform of LCWR's statutes, policies, and operations. LCWR officers were "stunned" when they subsequently were told of this decision and action, particularly because they were in Rome at the time for their annual meeting with the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Rally organizers suggested that this annual meeting might have offered an opportunity for respectful communication, if the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had not already made and announced its decision.

The website, www.solidaritywithsisters.weebly.com, includes a PayPal link for donations to cover the costs of the rally (e.g., sound system). Any donations beyond costs will go to Support Our Aging Religious (SOAR), a national fund that has helped to fund retirement for American sisters since 1986.

Those at the rally want to join the sisters in prayer and to demonstrate their solidarity with them, and to express their deep and heartfelt gratitude for the service and leadership of the Catholic sisters. Also, they want the Catholic sisters, and the church hierarchy, to know that the sisters have widespread spiritual and financial support as they provide leadership into the future.

For more information, email solidaritywithsisters@gmail.com.

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