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

LCWR receives Paulist award for social justice work

Joshua J. McElwee | Jan. 28, 2013 NCR Today

Boston?s Paulist Center Community has given its signature annual award to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), a group that represents the majority of U.S. Catholic sisters, in recognition of the social justice work of sisters across the country.

LCWR?s president, Franciscan Sr. Florence Deacon, accepted the 2013 Isaac Hecker Award for Social Justice at a ceremony at the Center Jan. 26.

Given annually since 1974, when its first recipient was Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day, the Isaac Hecker award is named for the Paulist Fathers? founder and is given to a North American Catholic or Catholic group ?committed to building a more just and peaceful world.?

Paulist Fr. Frank Desiderio, the director of the center, said in an interview its community wanted to give this year?s award to LCWR ?on behalf of the social justice work done by the sisters of the various congregations.?

LCWR, which represents some 80 percent of U.S. Catholic sisters, was sharply criticized by the Vatican?s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith last April. It has since tried to start a dialog [1]with Vatican officials and three American bishops named to oversee its operations.

Giving remarks before presenting the award on Saturday, Susan Rutkowski, the pastoral minister at the Paulist Center, said U.S. sisters have heavily influenced many U.S. Catholics.

?The women religious of the United States have taught us to pray, educated us on how to live and work in our ever-changing world, nursed our sick and old, cared for our abandoned, reached out to all the marginalized, and taught us how to respect the dignity of all,? said Rutkowski, according to a Facebook posting [2] by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston.

?They have, in sum, shown us how Jesus might live in our world today,? continued Rutkowski.

?Like Isaac Hecker, they have worked tirelessly to foster the growth and development of American Catholicism, showing us what a socially just society could look like. Let us support them and follow their example in our own quests to model a more inclusive American society and church focused on justice for all.?

Other past recipients of the Isaac Hecker Award include: Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton; the late Amarillo, Tex., Bishop Leroy Matthiesen; St. Joseph Sr. Helen Prejean; actor Martin Sheen; Boston-area Catholic Workers Claire and Scott Schaeffer-Duffy; and Jesuit Fr. Greg Boyle.

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