

Former LCWR president gives Dupleian Lecture

Zoe Ryan | Mar. 5, 2013 NCR Today

With a lecture titled "Priesthood of the Faithful: Light in the Darkness," former president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious Dominican Sr. Mary Hughes spoke about what it means today, after the Second Vatican Council, for a Catholic to fulfill his or her baptismal call.

Hughes spoke Thursday at the Dupleian Lecture at Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. The talk was also live-streamed, and it was to be available soon on the [divinity school's website](#) [1].

She quoted from the Council's documents and spoke of how the council expanded the laity's role in service to the church.

But she also named the struggles of the church today, mentioning things such as relations between religions, the sexual abuse scandal, and poverty across the globe.

And as more and more Catholic churches and schools lose attendance or close, it is easy to become an armchair critic of the church, said Hughes, prioress of the Dominican Sisters of Amityville, N.Y. But that would absolve the laity from all responsibility, she said.

She warned that "[t]he inherent danger in claiming our participation in the priesthood of the faithful is that we might inadvertently surround ourselves with persons who think like we do and begin to form our own version of church that is apart from the whole. That would leave us vulnerable to developing the kind of arrogance and self-righteousness that we are so quick to spot and to criticize in others."

She drew her advice on how to claim that participation by the [six tools outlined at last year's](#) [2] Leadership Conference of Women Religious annual assembly: contemplation, prophetic voice, solidarity with the marginalized, community, nonviolence, and living in joyful hope.

She also talked about the recent doctrinal assessment of LCWR. When the assessment was released in 2012, she was the past president of LCWR.

She said that one criticism from the doctrinal assessment was that LCWR focused on social justice work that took their attention away from other issues, such as abortion and euthanasia.

"Perhaps our critics have failed to note that as we stand side-by-side with the poor we deal daily with moral issues of abortion, euthanasia, human sexuality, and more," she said. "While some are privileged to be able to preach from pulpits, others of us must preach primarily from the actions of our lives. And it's all part of sharing in the priesthood of Christ."

After the announcement of the doctrinal assessment, LCWR received letters from Catholics, some lauding the Vatican's decision, but many more in support, she said. People "poured out" their personal faith stories in those letters, she said.

"Those letters bound us to you in very profound ways," she said. "We clearly recognize now, in ways that we probably didn't before, that your struggles and our struggles are one and the same."

The oldest and most distinguished endowed lecture at Harvard, the Dudleian Lecture was established in 1751 by alumnus Judge Paul Dudley. This year's theme is the validity of non-episcopal ordinations.

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