

## LCWR to honor former president Farrell's leadership during ?challenging time?

Joshua J. McElwee | Apr. 5, 2013

The main representative body of U.S. Catholic sisters is giving its highest honor this August to its former president for the leadership she showed ?through an exceptionally challenging time.?

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious, which represents some 80 percent of the 57,000 sisters in the U.S., announced Wednesday it would be granting its annual ?Outstanding Leadership Award? to Sr. Pat Farrell, the group's immediate past president.

A Franciscan who spent two decades in Latin America before heading the sisters' group, Farrell was at its helm when the Vatican issued a sharp criticism of LCWR last April and ordered it to place itself under the control of three U.S. bishops.

The announcement of the award comes at an uncertain time for the sisters and the bishops.

Before release of the official criticism of LCWR, the last years of Pope Benedict XVI saw the Vatican's powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith investigating the group. Separately, the Vatican's congregation for religious life ordered a multi-year ?apostolic visitation? of U.S. congregations of women religious.

A final report on the visitation has been filed with that congregation, but what Pope Francis will do with it or with the criticism of LCWR is unknown.

[Announcing the award](#) [1], the sisters' group said that Farrell ?has a long history of unwavering commitment to serving persons who are poor or marginalized? and accompanying ?people in settings of intense violence in Chile and El Salvador.?

?These life experiences, her clear dedication to Gospel values, and her deeply contemplative spirit are among the many gifts Pat has brought to the LCWR presidency as she helps lead the conference through an exceptionally challenging time.?

Farrell is to accept the award at the group's annual assembly this August in Orlando.

A representative for Seattle Archbishop Peter Sartain, who was appointed last April by the Vatican as the group's ?archbishop-delegate? and given wide authority over its operations, said Thursday the archbishop was ?currently unavailable for comment? on the matter or his involvement in the sisters' group's planning or giving of awards.

?Since his appointment as archbishop delegate of the LCWR is a Vatican appointment, the archdiocese would have no comment regarding the award to Sister Pat,? said Greg Magnoni, the archdiocese?s director of communications, in an email.

After a November meeting between the LCWR leaders and their three bishop-overseers, Sartain and the current LCWR president, Franciscan Sr. Florence Deacon, released a statement saying that a meeting between the groups was ?open and cordial and those present agreed to meet again to continue the conversation.? That has been the last official public statement from any party on the matter.

One former LCWR president, St. Joseph Sr. Mary Dacey, said she thought the granting of the award to Farrell ?could not be more appropriate, it could not be more fitting, it could not be more deserved.?

?From my point of view, and having had the experience of being inside the role, we could not have a more perfect representative at this time -- all the way through,? Dacey, who served as LCWR?s president in 2006, said in a phone interview Friday.

?She just is ? consistently the very best representative of women religious.?

Asked if some might interpret the group?s giving of the award to Farrell in light of tensions with the church hierarchy, Dacey said Farrell has modeled ?what everyone would hope for? in church leadership.

?She treats all the people who have been a part of this with a wonderful combination of truthfulness -- she doesn?t downplay who she is or who we are -- but, she?s always respectful,? said Dacey, who is now a co-chair of the leadership council of the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, which represents some 5,500 sisters and nearly 3,000 lay associates.

?And I think [she] fully appreciates the relationship with have with church, both the good and the challenging.?

Farrell?s accepting of the award in August will give the former president another chance to address some 900 sisters expected to attend the event.

At last year?s gathering in St. Louis -- one of many times Farrell took a nuanced approach to the situation facing her group -- Farrell drew a [prolonged standing ovation](#) [2] after she told those assembled to be "truthful, but gentle and absolutely fearless?" in their response to the Vatican.

Ending with a Spanish phrase she said she learned while ministering in Chile during the country's military dictatorship, Farrell told the sisters: "They can crush a few flowers, but they cannot hold back the springtime."

In its [April document](#) [3], the Vatican?s powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said there were a "prevalence of certain radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith" in LCWR's programs and ordered the group to place itself under Sartain?s authority.

Bishop Leonard Blair of Toledo, Ohio, and Bishop Thomas John Paprocki of Springfield, Ill., were also named to assist Sartain in his work with the group.

In a response in June, [LCWR replied](#) [4] that the congregation's criticisms were based on unsubstantiated accusations, came from a flawed process and had caused "scandal and pain throughout the church."

Following their meeting in St. Louis in August, [LCWR leaders announced](#) [5] that while they would continue discussions with church officials regarding the takeover, they would "reconsider" if "forced to compromise the integrity" of their mission.

The content of LCWR's assemblies was one of the reasons given by the Vatican for its criticism of the group.

LCWR's award last year went to Sr. Sandra Schneiders, professor emeritus of theology at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif., and a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Monroe, Mich.

Accepting the award, she spoke on the sometimes tense relationships between sisters and bishops, saying they point to wide-ranging questions about the structure of church leadership today.

At the heart of the Vatican's attempted take-over of LCWR, she said then, is "what kind of leadership the church needs."

Schneiders said church leaders should consider Jesus' exercise of power when designing their style of leadership. Jesus, [she said](#) [6], "did not come to exercise coercive power over recalcitrant sinners."

Other previous recipients of the LCWR award include:

- Daughter of Charity Sr. Carol Keehan, head of the Catholic Health Association of the United States, in 2011;
- Immaculate Heart of Mary Sr. Sharon Holland, who for 21 years served as one of the highest ranking women at the Vatican, in 2009; and,
- Mercy Sr. Theresa Kane, a former LCWR president who made headlines across the world when she welcomed Pope John Paul II to the United States in 1979 and pointedly asked him about the possibility of ordaining women to the priesthood, in 2004.

[Joshua J. McElwee is an *NCR* staff writer. His email address is [jmcelwee@ncronline.org](mailto:jmcelwee@ncronline.org). Follow him on Twitter at [twitter.com/joshjmac](https://twitter.com/joshjmac) [7].]

---

**Source URL (retrieved on 05/27/2017 - 19:52):** <https://www.ncronline.org/news/women-religious/lcwr-honor-former-president-farrell-s-leadership-during-challenging-time>

**Links:**

[1] <https://lcwr.org/media/news/pat-farrell-osf-receive-lcwr-award>

[2] <http://ncronline.org/node/31674>

[3] <http://ncronline.org/node/29834>

[4] <http://ncronline.org/node/30610>

[5] <http://old.ncronline.org/node/31691>

[6] <http://ncronline.org/node/31739>

[7] <http://twitter.com/joshjmac>