

April 2016

LCWR Board Meets in Tucson, Arizona



LCWR national board and staff at the Redemptorist Renewal Center

The LCWR national board and staff met in February at the Redemptorist Renewal Center in Tucson, Arizona. LCWR employed the service of Cathy Bertrand, SSND to facilitate the four-day gathering using processes of contemplative engagement.

LCWR Regions

The regional chairs had an opportunity to report twice about their regional activities. In the first report, each shared an item of good news, questions and concerns expressed by members of the region, and any comments on the use of contemplative processes and emerging conversations on the regional level. In the second report, chairs shared information on ministries or projects being carried out collaboratively across congregations within the region.

After hearing the reports, the board noted the desire and need to address a number of challenges facing the LCWR regions including: the declining pool for regional leadership, the geographic distances in some regions, connecting LCWR with religious from other countries who do not have leaders in the United States, and the

challenge of balancing national and regional LCWR business.

Challenges Facing LCWR

Throughout the meeting, the board discussed several of the opportunities and challenges currently facing LCWR. Among them are:

- the changing number of LCWR members (both individual elected leaders, as well as congregational units) and the impact of this new number on the conference
- the need to discern what the world most needs of religious life now and into the future, and how to plan for and design initiatives to support this emerging sense of religious life
- the utilization of the transitional services that LCWR can now offer to congregations of women religious, particularly those that are in their last generation
- ensuring the accessibility of LCWR programs and resources for all members, as well as their sustainability

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From the LCWR Presidency

Thinking Like a Mountain!

by Marcia Allen, CSJ — LCWR President

Once a long time ago I was intrigued by *Thinking Like a Mountain: Toward a Council of All Beings*, a book by John Seed, Johanna Macy, et al published in 1988. I went around for several years trying to think like a mountain, like a bee, like a snake, like a tree, like a fresh running stream, like a cloud, like the earth in my garden, like the garden itself. I held several councils of all beings with retreatants, workshop participants, and my local community. Basically, I can say that it was an idea ahead of its time. Although I had always had an affection for the things of the natural world and loved to be out hiking and camping among them, I'm not sure that I actually ever got the point: that these things are creatures – not to be used, but as themselves, subjects with whom to be in relationship. The encyclical, *Laudato Si'* has once more called me to consider thinking like a mountain.

How do mountains think? The Rocky Mountains, the Cascades or the Pinos Altos Mountains? In the tourist literature they all seem pretty safe and sure of themselves. Rising high, presiding over the West, serene in their snow caps and forest blankets. What do they think as the human traffic rolls by? What about the great open pit mines and deep gouging blasts within for coal and precious metals? Do they wince as raging fires rampage through them? Do they cringe from the inroads of "progress"? Do they miss the flora and fauna that disappear into extinction?



And the Appalachian Mountains? What do they think? We contemplate their beauty – and the horrible wreckage that their decapitation leaves. Mountaintop removal – the euphemism for strip-mining, is the blowing away of a mountain's top and stripping it down to the coal or mineral vein and when that is depleted stripping it again to the next vein. This, until nothing remains but the shattered detritus – the "gray mountain" wasteland, beauty ravaged, flora and fauna devastated to the extent that it is unredeemable, at least not in our lifetime.

Now think like a mountain!

Would the individuals in that company begin to see each creature as part of a web of life on which they actually depend in a partnership founded in the deep ecology of *communio*?

I wonder what would happen if before the next mining corporation buys up the next mountain, it would sit down with the mountain and all the creatures within its watershed and let the council begin? Would the individuals in that company begin to see each creature as part of a web of life on which they actually depend in a partnership founded in the deep ecology of *communio*? Would they come to understand the essence of each piece of rock, each tree, each fox or bumble bee as a mutual and reciprocal actor in

the reality of Life?

Would I, if I sat down with a mountain – come to such understanding that my whole being would empathize

Would I, if I sat down with a mountain – come to such understanding that my whole being would empathize to the point of comprehending it not just as a creature worthy of deep reverence, but, in fact, as my very self?

to the point of comprehending it not just as a creature worthy of deep reverence, but, in fact, as my very self? Something to contemplate – thinking like a mountain...

LCWR Board Meets in Tucson

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- reimagining the structures of LCWR so that they are most appropriate for the immediate future
- interacting with and, when possible, assisting the growing numbers of women religious living and ministering in the United States who come from other countries

Contemplative Engagement

Throughout the meeting the board and staff worked through the agenda in ways that helped them read the signs of the times and deepen their conversations. They spent time with the following questions:

- How has the contemplative dimension/engagement found a home in you?
- How might living from a deeper contemplative consciousness inform everything LCWR does?

The board also reviewed suggestions for how LCWR regional meetings might be conducted in a contemplative manner.

Other Business

Other board business included review of officer and staff reports and a report on the office building jointly owned by LCWR and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), updates on grants, plans for the 2016 LCWR assembly, the SHARE El Salvador delegation in December 2015, and a conversation on racism.

Meeting at the same time and in the same location as the LCWR board were the board and staff of CMSM. Both boards participated in prayer, Eucharist, socials, and meals together, and held one joint session that included sharing about how the encyclical *Laudato Si'* influences religious life leadership ministry.

LCWR Joins Faith-Based Organizations in Defending Stays of Deportations

Immigration guidelines permitting deferral of the deportations of millions of people provide “substantial humanitarian benefits” and should be permitted to stand, argued an amicus curiae brief, filed March 8 in the US Supreme Court by LCWR and 24 other US faith-based organizations whose ministry includes advocating for and supporting recent immigrants and their families.

The brief supports the administration’s use of prosecutorial discretion to stay the deportations of immigrants through the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) and an expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA).

As LCWR executive director Joan Marie Steadman, CSC explained, “Women religious know the suffering of families torn apart by needless deportations and children who live in fear that their parents will be taken from them. That is why we are parties to this amicus brief and why we are committed to ensuring the implementation of the expanded DACA and DAPA.”

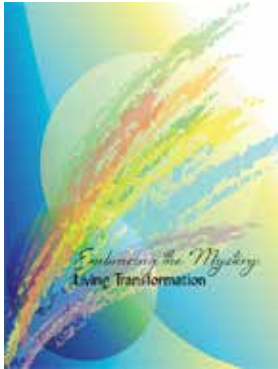
The case is *United States v. Texas*, in which some states have challenged the federal government’s implementation of immigration guidelines issued by the administration Secretary of Homeland Security, Jeh Johnson. The guidelines effectively stay the deportation proceedings of four to five million undocumented people who pose no national security or public safety threat and who have longstanding ties to people in the United States.

The full text of the brief is available at tinyurl.com/gm-4vnsh.



The board and staff discuss the key conversations that LCWR needs to have for the sake of both the conference and religious life.

Preparing for the 2016 LCWR Assembly Embracing the Mystery: Living Transformation



The 2016 LCWR assembly will be uniquely structured to assist members to reframe their perspectives about religious life away from diminishment and toward transformation. As a resource to reflect on this new reframing, LCWR offers this essay, written by LCWR associate director of programs **Marie McCarthy, SP**.

A Handful of Flour and a Little Oil

*“There is only a handful of flour in my jar
and a little oil in my jug.” -- 1Kings 17:12*

It is not uncommon to hear the current moment in religious life described as a time of diminishment. Dwindling resources, a significantly aging population, few if any new vocations, and the transfer of many ministries to lay boards are cited as evidence of diminishment.

Yet, when I am in the midst of a group of women religious most often I find myself moved by an astonishing degree of vibrancy – an energy that belies the age of most of those gathered.

As I watch all of this I have come to the conclusion that we would do ourselves and our world a great service by banning the word diminishment from our vocabulary. Religious life today is not in a time of diminishment. It is in a time of profound transformation and we should be naming it as such.

I’m not talking about denial here. It is imperative that we look with unflinching courage at the totality of our lives – our age, our properties, our finances, our vocations, our capacity to continue the mission. It is imperative that we open our eyes and hearts wide and take a long and a loving look at what is, that we mourn our losses, that we acknowledge our vulnerabilities, that we let go of that which we can no longer sustain.

Let’s name the reality, describe it, experience it fully. Grieve the losses. Allow our memories to be purified. Only thus can we open to the future coming to us. This is the birthplace of hope.

The problem with naming our current reality as a time of diminishment, is that it is too small a story. It is only a chapter in the much larger story of ongoing transformation. The language of diminishment is the Ego wishing to cling to what it knows and how it sees things. What really constitutes diminishment? Is death a diminishment or an opening to new life or both? Is the loss of a loved ministry a diminishment or the opening of a new possibility or both? Transformation does not mean that we do not feel loss, grief, pain, confusion. Genuine transformation always involves these. And it also always involves the emergence of an as yet unimaginable new life and possibility.

The widow of Zarephath had only a handful of flour in her jar and a little oil in her jug. It didn’t seem like much. Yet she listened to the words of Elijah, she did what she could with what she had and it, combined with her faith, was enough. We, too, have only a handful of flour and a little oil. We might wish we had much more. Yet like the widow, if we do what we can with what we have, if we give ourselves fully to the transformative action of Holy Mystery in our lives, we will find that we have enough and more than enough for the future which beckons.

Registration Now Open for LCWR Assembly

All LCWR members and associates are encouraged to register now for the 2016 LCWR assembly. Registration for both the hotel and the assembly must be completed online. Information is on the members section of the LCWR website:

www.lcwr.org.

LCWR's Imagining Justice Gathering Draws 50 Participants

From March 7 to 10 a group of 13 elected leaders and 37 justice promoters gathered together with Carol Zinn, SSJ and LCWR staff members Ann Scholz, SSND and Marie McCarthy, SP to imagine justice. Using a contemplative dialogue process, Carol wove together key insights from *Evangelii Gaudium*, the LCWR Call for 2015 to 2022, and *Laudato Si'* to assist participants to explore and deepen their understanding of the deep *why* of the work for justice.



Carol Zinn, SSJ

On the final full day of the gathering, time was set aside for participants to connect with members of their leadership teams or justice committees back home to share something of the experience and also to begin a conversation about how to bring the experience back to their daily ministry for justice. Participants left expressing gratitude for the spaciousness of the time and process, for Carol's wisdom and presence, for the contemplative engagement, for the opportunity to engage with other members of their justice team, and for being drawn back to the deep grounding of the ministry in which they engage. A bonus point for all was the near perfect weather and beautiful environment that Bethany Center in Lutz, Florida provided.



Leaders and justice promoters explored the "why" of their work for justice

Winter 2016 RTA Focuses on COP 21

The LCWR Global Concerns Committee has published the Winter 2016 edition of *Resolutions to Action* authored by Joan Brown, OSF.

Joan attended COP21, the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, November 30-December 11, 2015. The conference resulted in an historic international agreement on climate change with nations pledging to take action to keep global warming below 2°C.

The publication offers a brief social analysis of the cause and cost of climate change and a reflection in light of *Laudato Si'*, as well as suggestions for prayer, lifestyle changes, and policy advocacy.

"Progress on Climate Change—Finally" can be downloaded at lcwr.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/rta3-16.pdf



Imagining Justice drew 50 people to Bethany Center in Florida

Upcoming LCWR Dates

LCWR New Leader Workshop
Conference Center
University of St. Mary of the Lake
Mundelein, Illinois
April 7 — 10, 2016

LCWR Assembly
Atlanta, Georgia
August 9—13, 2016

LCWR Leading from Within Retreat
Bethany Retreat Center
Lutz, Florida
January 15 — 20, 2017

LCWR Assembly
Orlando, Florida
August 8—12, 2017

LCWR Assembly
St. Louis, Missouri
August 7—11, 2018

National Catholic Sisters Week Celebrated Throughout US

More than 110 events took place in 22 states to commemorate the third annual National Catholic Sisters Week (NCSW) running from March 8-14. The events were designed to celebrate the contributions of Catholic sisters, in tandem with National Women’s History Month.

This year individuals and communities of sisters applied to National Catholic Sisters Week, which is headquartered at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, to receive up to \$1,000 in grants to fund local activities that would celebrate Catholic sisters during NCSW 2016.

Additionally, NCSW activated a network of more than 50 ambassadors to focus event-planning efforts in five key religious communities: Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, Houston, and Los Angeles. The ambassadors orchestrated unique, local events in their cities to create more opportunities to bring a focus – and celebration – to the work of Catholic sisters. Initiatives planned by NCSW ambassadors include Cookies with a Sister at Xavier University and Loyola University in New Orleans, radio interviews with sisters in the Houston market, and a video series highlighting the ministry of sisters being produced by Presence Health in Chicago.



Please remember
LCWR’s generous
donors and their
intentions
in your prayer.



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Is Your Leadership Term About to End?

If your leadership term is ending this month, we ask you to submit a change of leadership form found in the LCWR Members’ Information section (password-protected) of the website at lcwr.org/members/lcwr-membership-information.



Act to End Gun Violence

Faith leaders are invited to support The Zero Tolerance for Domestic Abusers Act (HR 3130) and the Protecting Domestic Violence and Stalking Victims Act (S 1520) which would close loopholes that allow convicted abusers and stalkers to buy and own guns. Currently, individuals convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence who have not cohabited with their victim or who do not have a child with their victim, and individuals convicted of misdemeanor stalking, are permitted to purchase and possess guns. When convicted abusers and stalkers have guns, women's lives are at risk. The bills can be supported by signing on at tinyurl.com/hvkuetw.

It is not too early to start planning for Millions of Moms Rising and Faiths United on September 25, a national day of remembrance for murder victims. Million Moms Rising is organizing a national concert and congregations will be encouraged to join by holding simultaneous local remembrance events. In 2015, 30,000 men, women, and children lost their lives to gun violence.

The 2016 National Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath Weekend will be held December 15-18. Event ideas and materials are available at decembersabbath.org.

Registration Open for Ecumenical Advocacy Days

Ecumenical Advocacy Days will be held from April 15-18. In a major US election year when lives, votes, and the global economy are at stake, followers of Christ ask, "Who has a voice?" The response is, "Everyone!" This year's theme for Ecumenical Advocacy Days is "Lift Every Voice!"

Registration is at: tinyurl.com/gmh6lo3.



Save the Date for JCWR Conference: March 5-7, 2017

The Justice Conference of Women Religious (JCWR) invites justice promoters from women's congregations to attend its second national gathering

March 5-7, 2017. The keynoter will be Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, a well-known Lutheran ethicist. She is the author of *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological and Economic Vocation* and currently has a joint appointment as professor of Christian ethics at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and Church Divinity School of the Pacific. The convening will be held at Techny Towers in Chicago, Illinois.



News from the UN

International Mother Earth Day—April 22

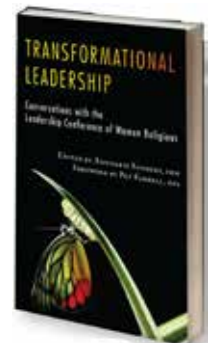
This year marks the 46th year of a movement that continues to inspire, challenge, and motivate people to action.

International Mother Earth Day promotes a view of Earth as the entity that sustains all living things found in nature. It honors Earth as a whole and human beings place within it. More information is available at: www.un.org/en/events/motherearthday.



Transformational Leadership

The book, *Transformational Leadership*, is a collection of interviews conducted by LCWR of 18 theologians, psychologists, educators, and religious leaders from various fields and disciplines who share their wisdom about a way of leadership able to meet the deep challenges of today's world.



Copies may be ordered at www.orbisbooks.com/transformational-leadership.html.



- Statement of disappointment with the Supreme Court’s decision to stay the Clean Power Plan. LCWR (2/15/16)
- Faith leaders letter to President Obama asking him to take dramatic steps to move the nation and the world toward nuclear disarmament in the time remaining in his presidency. Marcia Allen, CSJ (2/17/16)
- Letter to Senators McConnell and Reid in support of the children of Flint, Michigan, strongly urging them to provide emergency funding to address the urgent health and infrastructure crisis and the need for safe water. LCWR (2/19/16)
- Endorsement of the Generation Freedom campaign to inspire American leadership to break the back of human trafficking and modern slavery. LCWR (2/19/16)
- Letter to members of Congress urging them to support funding in FY2017 for poverty-focused international development and humanitarian assistance accounts. LCWR (2/20/16)
- Letter from faith-based organizations committed to ending extreme poverty and promoting the dignity of each human life asking chairs and ranking members of the appropriations committees to fund increases in the State and Foreign Operations budget for international humanitarian, global health, poverty-focused development, and peacebuilding assistance programs in FY 2017. LCWR (2/24/16)
- Support for Faith in Public Life’s statement on the values that must inform the 2016 elections. LCWR (2/24/16)
- Thank you letter to Representatives O’Rourke and Pearce for introducing the Border Enforcement Accountability, Oversight, and Community Engagement Act of 2015 (H.R. 3576) LCWR (3/1/16)
- Letter from faith leaders to Speaker Paul Ryan and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi asking that three important criminal justice reform bills, the Sentencing Reform Act, Corrections and Recidivism Reduction Act, and the Second Chance Reauthorization Act be brought to the floor for a vote. LCWR (3/1/16)
- Letter to Chair and Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee urging them to include robust funding for key accounts affecting refugees and other vulnerable populations in Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations. LCWR (3/1/16)
- A statement of principles from the faith community for use in the implementation of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Clean Power Plan at the state level. LCWR (3/1/16)
- Amicus Curiae brief of faith-based organizations arguing for the reversal of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in the case of United States et al. v. Texas et al. concerning the Administration’s immigration guidance on expanded DACA and DAPA which would reduce unwarranted deportations. LCWR (3/2/16)
- Interfaith letter to President Obama urging him to use Prime Minister Trudeau’s visit as an opportunity to discuss how Canada and the U.S. can work together to respond to the refugee crisis by welcome additional refugees. LCWR (3/8/16)
- Letter to Secretary of State John Kerry regarding the murder of Honduran human rights and environmental defender Berta Cáceres urging a response from the State Department that represents a profound change of direction towards improving the abysmal situation of human rights in Honduras. LCWR (3/9/16)
- Letter to Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Mikulski of the Senate appropriations committee urging them to include robust funding for key accounts affecting refugees and other vulnerable populations in appropriation for FY 2017. LCWR (3/11/16)
- Letter from faith-based organizations to members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security urging them to eliminate the immigrant bed quota currently required in the Department of Homeland Security budget. LCWR (3/11/16)
- Published the Catholic Coalition’s “A Revolution of Tenderness: A 2016 Election Pope Francis Voter Guide.” LCWR (3/11/16)



by Joan Mumaw, IHM
US Regional
Development Director

The news coming out of South Sudan these days is quite alarming. The United Nations has increased its estimate of the death toll for the civil war from 10,000 to 50,000. Another NGO estimates that as many as 300,000 have died, if not casualties of the war, then from starvation. Humanitarian organizations have been prevented from delivering food because of insecurity in the country. One humanitarian staff person is killed every week. As one correspondent has written, there seems to be no respect for human life. No one has even bothered to keep track of those who have lost their lives in this war. We continue to pray for the estimated 70% of the people in war ravaged areas who have lost a loved one.

Given this dismal picture it is hard to find “Good News” coming out of South Sudan. And yet, there is “good news” to tell. Solidarity with South Sudan remains committed to its mission of building the capacity of teachers, nurses, midwives, farmers, and pastoral workers. The teacher training college at Yambio received students for the two-year pre-service program beginning on March 14. Students arriving found a new dormitory, an expanded dining area, and an upgraded solar power system.

More than 110 students are studying nursing and midwifery at the Catholic Health Training Institute, choosing to remain in Wau despite civil unrest in that area. A new dorm for women students has been developed with the renovation of a store room. More space for women students is needed and in the planning, pending funding. This is good news for women who rarely make it beyond grade four. Nearly one-half of the student body at CHTI is composed of women.

On the US front there is also good news. USAID, with motivation from leaders of faith-based organizations working in South Sudan (including Friends in Solidarity), has granted the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) \$6,000,000. over 2.5 years for initiatives aimed at

restoring peace to the country. This will be administered by Catholic Relief Services. The Catholic Church is an active member of SSCC.

Friends in Solidarity, Inc, is now receiving grants and donations in support of the work of Solidarity with South Sudan. For more information on how you can be involved, contact me at jmumaw.solidarity@gmail.com.



Search for Program Director

The Religious Formation Conference has opened its search for a program director who will be responsible for designing and delivering all major programs offered by the conference. The RFC offices will move to Catholic Theological Union in Chicago in June, with the expectation that the new program director will join the staff in late summer or early fall. Leaders are encouraged to share this opening with their members. The job description and additional information are available at www.relforcon.org.

ForMission Applications Now Accepted

ForMission, a formation program for perpetually professed religious preparing for or newly engaged in formation ministry, engages participants in four weeklong residential sessions over a two-year period as well as reading, reflection, and supervision between sessions. A unique feature of the program is the reading group each participant forms, composed of members of her/his own congregation, which contributes to the lifelong formation of other members of the province/ congregation.

A new ForMission class is forming now and will meet in Chicago from June 8-16, 2016. Applications are due April 15, 2016; more information is available at www.relforcon.org.

Upcoming Webinar

April 22, 2016 -- 3 PM, EDT

Divine Mystery at the Heart of the Cosmos

Presenter: Linda Neil, CSJ

More information and registration will be available at www.relforcon.org after Easter.