

It's about the Church, not us, says sisters' new head



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(CNA).- Sister Carol Zinn, the newly elected head of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, said the Vatican's doctrinal assessment of the conference is "much more about the future" of the Catholic Church and not primarily about the conference itself.

"As women of the Church, we will discern how to move through the turbulent aftermath of the doctrinal assessment," Sr. Zinn, a member of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, said during her remarks to the LCWR Leadership Assembly, held Aug. 13-16 at the Caribe Royale Hotel in Orlando, Fla.

"The processes of inclusion and dialogue needed today may demand great suffering on our part as we work to create such processes," she added, according to the website of the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph.

Sr. Anne Myers, president of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, praised Sr. Zinn's new position.

"Sister Carol's calm articulate presence, love for religious life and the Church, and her global perspective are invaluable gifts that she brings to the LCWR Presidency," she said in an Aug. 22 statement.

"She cherishes our congregation's charism of unity and approaches the important and complex work of LCWR with this significant attitude of mind and heart."

Sr. Zinn had been part of her order's leadership team and was the congregation's representative to a consultative non-governmental organization with the United Nations.

She said she looked forward to serving the leadership conference as it continues to "discern the signs of the times, remain faithful to the Gospel message of Jesus and the dreams of our founders and foundresses while responding to the needs of the people of God in our day, for the life of the world."

With some 1,500 members, the LCWR constitutes about three percent of the 57,000 women religious in the United States. However, the group says it represents 80 percent of American sisters since its members are leaders of their respective religious communities.

The change in conference leadership comes at a time of continued controversy over the leadership conference's Catholic identity.

An April 2012 doctrinal assessment by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith found that the conference has not been faithful to the message of Christ's Gospel.

The assessment found need for significant reform. It noted "serious doctrinal problems" in the conference, including denial of Christ's divinity. It raised concerns over "certain radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith" that were prevalent in some presentations sponsored by the conference.

The assessment also pointed to a lack of adequate doctrinal formation offered by the group. Additionally, it cited letters from LCWR officers suggesting "corporate dissent" from Church teaching on topics such as the sacramental male priesthood and homosexuality.

Archbishop J. Peter Sartain of Seattle, who is leading efforts to reform the conference, attended the assembly at which Sr. Zinn was installed.

Sr. Zinn told the LCWR assembly that "we are privileged to live in a time of unprecedented challenges and grace."

"In deep solidarity with each other, our sisters in other countries beyond our own, and our other lay sisters and brothers around the world, we hear the call to respond to the God of the Future who invites us into waters of new life. This places us in situations of possibility and peril at every turn."

She added that "our fidelity to and love of God's people and our commitment to the Gospel and our vocation directs our path and that our way of being in the world is one of compassion and love. Thus, in the next three years, the critical issue(s) before us is to be who we say we are and who God calls us to become, for the life of the world, keenly aware of the costly graces."

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