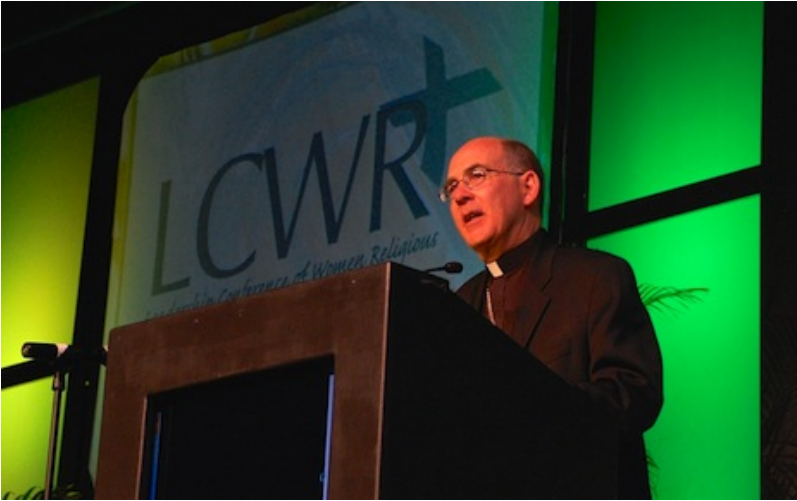


Vatican official's olive branch for US sisters



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I'm here as 'brother and friend,' Sartain tells LCWR assembly Picture: National Catholic Reporter
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Seattle Archbishop J. Peter Sartain, the Vatican-appointed head of the effort to reform the largest leadership organization for U.S. women religious, is attending the sisters' annual assembly "as a brother and a friend."

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious, made up of Catholic women religious who are leaders of their orders in the United States, represents about 80 percent of the 51,600 women religious in the United States. Nearly 800 of the group's 1,400 members have gathered here for their four-day annual conference. But the gathering is under a cloud, and Sartain is its American face: LCWR has been undergoing a Vatican-ordered doctrinal assessment since 2009.

Following the investigation, in 2012, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ordered LCWR to reform its statutes and appointed Sartain to oversee changes. After this assembly, Sartain must approve speakers at the group's events. But there was no mention of those troubles at Tuesday's welcoming ceremony, which opened with music, song and interpretive dance. Sartain thanked the LCWR members for "an extremely warm welcome" and noted that as a native Tennessean, he was able to welcome them to his home state, a place where faith is a strong tradition. "In this place of prayer, in this place of faith ... this place is a fertile ground to talk about our love of the Lord," Sartain said.

LCWR members also heard from a voice perceived to be much friendlier to their cause: Fr. Hank Lemoncelli, who read a message from Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, who has led the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life since 2011.

Last year, Braz de Aviz said the decision to put LCWR under the control of bishops was made without his knowledge, though his office normally deals with matters of religious life. The move, he said, caused him "much pain." The message read was a series of questions Braz de Aviz is posing to all consecrated religious around the world during the Year of Consecrated Life, asking each order to examine its priorities and motivations.

Though the questions were not directed at LCWR specifically, given the criticism the group has

received, they caused murmurs throughout the crowd when Lemoncelli read them. Braz de Aviz presented the same list of questions to the annual assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, which met Aug. 6-9 in Pittsburgh.

Pope Francis has called for a special reflection on consecrated life beginning Advent 2015 and running a year. The doctrinal congregation's report on LCWR says certain LCWR presentations "risk distorting faith in Jesus and his loving Father who sent his Son for the salvation of the world" and "even undermine the revealed doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the inspiration of Sacred Scripture." Full Story: Sartain to LCWR assembly: I'm here 'as a brother and a friend' Source: National Catholic Reporter

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Dan Stockman for National Catholic Reporter