

Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) reform prompts Twitter duel

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Reaction to the Vatican's announced reform of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) took form on the social media site Twitter, where supporters of religious sisters dueled with the group's critics.

Fr. James Martin, SJ, an editor for America magazine, launched a Twitter hashtag "#WhatSistersMeanToMe" to show appreciation for all religious sisters on the micro-blogging site where 140-character text messages and popular tags can spread with rapidity. *Fr. John Zuhlsdorf and Fr. James Martin, SJ*

"Catholic sisters teach me what it means to persevere without the benefit of institutional power," he tweeted April 19. "... People could show their gratitude for sisters, and read other messages of support, without being in any way negative. No need to be anti-Vatican or anti-bishop or anti-anything. Just pro-sister," he said in an April 26 Washington Post column.

His comments brought in many appreciative tweets, but also drew a response from Fr. John Zhulsdorf, a blogging priest, who believes some LCWR defenders are ignoring the problems in the women's religious orders.

"The upcoming reform of the leadership of the LCWR is not about the Holy See or American bishops

being mad at under-appreciated women who built and ran hospitals, schools and orphanages,” he said April 24.

“[It] is about the fact ... that many of the women religious in leadership positions over several decades embrace and still actively propagate a radical feminism to such a degree that they now promote, as part of their systems and power structures, unnatural acts between people of the same sex and the killing of babies within, and even mostly out of, the womb.”

Father Zhulsdorf encouraged his readers to use the “#WhatSistersMeanToMe” hashtag to note problems in the women’s religious orders, such as sisters who advocate abortion rights.

Father Martin said some critics of the LCWR were “vindictive, cruel, mocking” on Twitter and flooded the hashtag with “snotty comments about who were faithful sisters and who were not.”

The spat follows the release of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s assessment of the women’s leadership conference, which has more than 1,500-member organizations representing 57,000 vowed religious.

The assessment found a doctrinal “crisis” within the organization. It called for a greater emphasis on the conference’s relationship with the US bishops’ conference and on the need to provide “a sound doctrinal foundation in the faith of the Church.”

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