

Statement on the Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States

November 20, 2009

We want to express our support of, and solidarity, with women religious in our country and in this Archdiocese, who are generously participating in the Vatican study of their congregations, and its review of certain views of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

The Vatican inquiries encompass both the “quality of life” of apostolic orders and a “review of the work of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious”. The former investigates some forty questions on the congregations’ religious identity, governance, vocation policies, spiritual and communal life, mission and ministry, and financial administration. The latter seeks, in reality, to explore doctrinal concerns raised by the Congregation of the Faith about the LCWR’s stance on the ordination of women, “the problem of homosexuality”, and the Congregation’s 2000 declaration *Dominus Jesus* on the unique role of Christ in salvation.

We find the study’s goals, origin and general procedures, and secrecy troubling. The process appears not to involve dialogue. There was no prior communication with LCWR by the Vatican about troubling issues. There has been lack of full disclosure about funding sources for the study. No specific clarity has been given on who is requesting this study or why it is taking place for women religious in only our country. The religious orders are not being permitted to see investigative reports about them submitted directly to the Vatican.

Both religious and secular media in our country have found the study disturbing. The United State Congress passed a unanimous vote (412) on September 22 honoring and commending “Catholic sisters for their humble service and courageous sacrifice throughout the history of this Nation”.

We are aware of the pain, confusion, and humiliation felt by women religious as they undergo this process, and wish to honor their sentiments and convictions, while underscoring their fidelity to the reform and renewal of their communities that the Vatican Council called for. These women have been faithful, as well, to the charism of their foundresses, and to their religious observance and life in their communities.

They have served from the margins of our church, when many others feared to do so.

We believe we are a stronger church with deep vitality because of their desire to live for God alone. We are a stronger church thanks to their fidelity to the risen Jesus, to their evangelical authenticity, and to their choice to follow Christ - chaste, poor, and obedient - so that our world may believe and be saved.

We are heartened by the November 2 statement of Cardinal Mahony on behalf of

the bishops of California that they are “aware of the special anxieties which surround our women religious these days...[and offer their] prayers of gratitude and support for all of your members.”

We are also heartened by the sincere dialogue that took place in Boise, Idaho, October 18-19 between religious superiors of women’s and men’s congregations in our ecclesiastical region and bishops of the region. The visitation process was discussed in depth, the sisters’ mistrust and disappointment was shared, and support was expressed for the sisters and their ministries. We are further encouraged by Archbishop Brunett’s November 17 letter expressing his genuine affirmation and support to the sisters of our Archdiocese.

As a group of lay ecclesial ministers, vowed religious, deacons, and presbyters ministering in the Archdiocese of Seattle, who gather regularly for mutual support and collaboration, and to sustain the vision of the Second Vatican Council, we join with our own Archbishop, the California bishops, and those of our region in offering our continuing prayers for these valiant women who have shaped and formed us into the church that we are.