

Award presented to LCWR by Pax Christi

July 18, 2010 – Chicago, IL

Response by Marlene Weisenbeck, FSPA – LCWR President

(After the award was received, Sister Marlene acknowledged the presence of LCWR National Board Members Sister Patricia Crowley, OSB and Sister Nancy Reynolds, SP.)

I ask all the Sisters here to stand. This is your honor, Sisters!

LCWR is truly honored to receive the Eileen Egan Peacemaker Award and to be named with her, Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa as exemplary women of courage and nonviolence. Likewise, we are happy to be in the company of Camilo Mejia and Rev. Vien The Nguyen, past recipients of this award who have been icons of Gospel justice for us.

Our passion is to persevere as did Jesus in the face of opposition to bring our world into closer conformity with the beatitudes of the Gospel. Our mission is to:

- assist our members personally and communally to carry out more collaboratively their service of leadership in order to accomplish further the mission of Christ in today's world;
- foster dialogue and collaboration among religious congregations within the church and in the larger society; and
- to develop models for initiating and strengthening relationships with groups, [such as Pax Christi](#), that are concerned with the needs of society, thereby maximizing the potential of the conference for effecting change.

When an institution such as LCWR becomes an ecclesial legal person, it takes on a special *raison d'être*. LCWR as a conference serving the stated purposes for its leaders is concerned with living values, but not blind implementation of the law. The conference works at the service of the Gospel. We cooperate in the same service of the Body of Christ that is shared by all the baptized. It is a matter of unity in the work of service. These are the reasons why, since 1981, LCWR has passed more than 100 resolutions to action, prayed and fasted, participated in vigils and demonstrations, advocated with government leaders, taught students and co-workers about conflict resolution, written articles, witnessed to nonviolence as a way of life, and collaborated with others in peacemaking activities.

A Call To Action, a 1971 Apostolic Letter by Pope Paul VI, issued a call to political action for the transformation of the world in peace and justice. It identified the gaps in social development and asked Christian communities to act against these injustices. This was followed

in the same year by a statement from the Roman Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* that requested action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world as a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel. Msgr. John J. Egan, an American clergyman and a noted social activist, summarized the response of women religious by saying:

“Interesting enough, and none of us would have predicted it, the women religious have assumed a forthright and responsible position of leadership in social ministry. Perhaps they may have been closer to the people and their suffering, or it may be that they felt injustice more keenly (possibly because of their own minority status in Church and society). Was it that their chapters prepared them better to implement the documents of Vatican II? In the process, they became finer women, more dedicated religious, and persons who were clearly in tune with the best theological thinking in the Church. Their prayer life took on more profound dimensions, and in the service of peoples and the church their community life assumed forms which strengthened faith and the demands of charity.”¹

Since 1981 with the resolution on Systemic Change which included opposition to the MX missile and neutron bomb, LCWR members have approved 14 assembly resolutions which deal directly with peace, nonviolence, weapons, and military intervention. In addition there have been resolutions to close the School of the Americas, oppose the death penalty, oppose apartheid in South Africa, and promote peace and human rights in Haiti, El Salvador, and Guatemala. A number of LCWR *Resolutions to Action*, have offered analyses of peace related issues and suggestions for action. Others have focused on immigration, oppression of women, world debt, the Maquiladoras, use and abuse of power, unjust trade agreements, and privatization of water. Approximately 6-8 alerts are sent monthly, sharing information and calling for action on various national and global situations of war, violence, and injustices of all kinds. LCWR has frequently “spoken the truth to power” through letters, statements, and signing on to statements created by other organizations. All of these issues have implications of violence and thus call for peacemaking efforts.

Quoting from the LCWR Annual Report for the past year –

We look over a year of challenges, contrasts, and commitments. We find ourselves immersed in the Paschal Mystery as we conclude the initial decade of this 21st century. One cannot place theoretical observations on the great mysteries that fidelity requires. As the Paschal Mystery women found themselves in a chaos they neither desired nor chose, so too

¹ St. Rose Convent. La Crosse, WI: *Social Concerns News*, Vol. 1 – No. 8, October, 11, 1974. Some who attended this ceremony indicated that Msgr. Egan wrote this statement shortly before his death.

with us! We have found ourselves celebrating the stories of our foremothers in America through the great exhibit we have called *Women & Spirit*. Each showing of the exhibit in Cincinnati; Dallas; Washington, DC; and Cleveland has etched more deeply into our hearts the memory of the great-souled women who served the needs of the poor with an unrelenting response for right relationships in their world. These very stories have provided us the impetus to face our own surprises of the past year. . . As if the chaos of ecclesial brokenness all around us was not enough, our very earth itself has shaken with quakes and floods and eruptions. Could mystery be any more evident in cosmic destruction and the disruption of human relationships happening simultaneously?

We women religious are not afraid of chaos. We have our terrors and our doubts that can threaten the work of the Spirit. Even so, we transmute one thing into another, turning disappointments and tragedies into new stories of healing and loving. The call to [justice through nonviolence] in disturbing times is a calling like no other. It is an urge that howls for expression in shadows seeking more light. It is an act of faith to respond to this inner voice, to give it our time and our love, and if grace be with us, to bring forth blessing and peace. (Creating in Chaos 2009-2010 LCWR Annual Report, page 3)

In the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* by Pope John XXIII, four clear principles were enumerated as criteria for the proper establishment of a humane peaceful order in the world. They are: Freedom, Justice, Faith, and Solidarity. We cannot underestimate “Good Pope John’s” message for peace. We continue to be inspired by his urging to work for the beatitude life of the Gospel. He understood so intimately Christ’s promise of peace. Christ leaves us peace; he brings us peace. Pope John XXIII closed his great encyclical with this prayer, and may we pray it also:

May Christ banish from the hearts of [all people] whatever might endanger peace;

May Christ transform them into witnesses of truth, justice and brotherly [and sisterly] love.

May Christ enlighten the rulers of peoples so that in addition to their solicitude for the proper welfare of their citizens, they may guarantee and defend the great gift of peace;

May Christ enkindle the wills of all, so that they may overcome the barriers that divide, cherish the bonds of mutual charity, understand others, and pardon those who have done them wrong;

By virtue of Christ’s action, may all peoples of the earth become as brothers [and sisters], and may the most longed-for peace blossom forth and reign always among them. (*Pacem in Terris* 171)

As Pope John XXIII said in his spiritual testament to his family, so your LCWR Sisters also say to you: *You are a fine chorus of souls. Be of good heart. You are in good company!* Likewise, we are in good company -- the company of this Pax Christi family that celebrates its acquisition

of wisdom through the window of love. From all of us in LCWR, thank you good friends, and God bless!