

## Acceptance of 2016 LCWR Outstanding Leadership Award

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Thank you! It is truly humbling to stand here before all of you and accept this award. When the announcement was made that I would be the recipient of this year's award, I received an email from one of the NRRO consultants. She said, "I know you're saying, 'Not me,' but YES-- you!" Despite her encouragement, it still is difficult for me to fathom that I have been chosen for this honor. I think of myself simply as someone who has done the job I was given. I am deeply touched by your affirmation of the blessings that I have come into my life.

For me, it is particularly meaningful that I am accepting this honor on August 12. Today would have been the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of Sister Andree Fries. Many of you may have known Andree when she served as president of LCWR or as the Executive Director of the National Religious Retirement Office. Andree was my sister, my mentor, my friend. She changed the course of my life in 1980 when she asked me to serve as Secretary General and later as treasurer of our Precious Blood community. Andree's mentoring, and the skills I was able to develop in those roles enabled me to have the capacity to serve at the NRRO. Without her initial invitation and my subsequent "yes," I might still be trying to teach middle school -- who knows? I believe this honor is very rightly to be shared with Andree. And, as a mutual friend of Andree and me reminded me earlier this week, the timing is not an accident. It is God's time. So, happy birthday and congratulations, Andree!

I also am aware that I stand here because of the privilege that was mine to serve at the National Religious Retirement Office for the past 16 years. Those years were a marvelous opportunity to grow in appreciation of the beautiful mosaic of religious life in this country – to realize more fully the grace of the relationships that are ours in this sisterhood and brotherhood. It was an honor to serve both women and men religious, active and contemplative communities, members of CMSM, CMSWR and LCWR. While the external expressions of religious life vary, every community I have met – and I've met a few! – every community is deeply committed to living in fidelity to the Gospel. This inspires and supports me in my own efforts to be faithful.

During my years at NRRO I was graced to meet and work with many of you who are here tonight. I have learned so much from you about what it means to be a leader. As of today, I've been serving in elected leadership for six weeks. (Six weeks down; five years and 46 weeks to go – but who's counting?) Even in these few weeks, I've found myself drawing on the wisdom that you shared with me. So, thank you!

A key learning from my years at NRRO is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts! Together we have made it possible to move the retirement funding issue from a crisis toward a more manageable concern. As communities engage in the NRRO planning process, the differences among communities and conferences fade away. Participants are sisters and brothers to one another and generously share experience and wisdom in support of religious life as a whole. Consultants from long-established communities are walking with their peers and with younger, emerging communities. Respectful, trusting relationships are being built. Coming from a community that names reconciliation as its charism, I am truly honored to have played a role in bringing groups together.

As some religious communities in the U.S. approach completion, it is critically important for us to remember that the whole is, indeed, greater than any one of our individual communities. We need to celebrate this great adventure of religious life, what has been, what is and what will be. Each of us is called to support the future of religious life, no matter where our individual community may be in its own life cycle. From what I observed in my work at the NRRO, I suggest that a critical step in promoting the future of this life is an honest appraisal of where we stand NOW, today. Marcia Allen helped us yesterday to take a look at our current reality through a number of lenses.

Sometimes I have a hard time realizing I am not the same person you saw in those photos taken 60, 30 or even 10 years ago. The same can be true for us as religious communities. We can tend to think we still are who we were in 1980 or 2000 or even in 2010. Each of our communities needs to take some current photos and honestly assess the gifts we have to offer NOW in 2016. As Pat Farrell said yesterday, we need to take a long, loving look at what is! Women and men will be inspired to consider religious life – whether that be in our own

community or another -- only if they observe that we are happy as with who we are even as we strive to grow. And, to borrow again from Pat, they need to see us trembling with joy.

Andree's last words to me before she died were, "You know what to do." She said this in relation to my role as her power of attorney for health care, but I realize that this is a gift she gave to me throughout the years. You know what to do! Despite my inner uncertainty at times, her confidence and trust in my abilities enabled me to accomplish tasks of which I might never have believed myself capable. I thank you for reaffirming her message here tonight.

I believe one of our key responsibilities as leaders is to say to our sisters, individually and corporately, "You know what to do!" When we approach life from a contemplative stance, we will know at our deepest core how to journey into the unmapped future! At times we may tremble with fear and say, "Not me!" But God is saying to us, "Yes, you! You were chosen to be a leader for this time – the timing is not an accident. I am with you, and you know what to do."

I thank you again for this overwhelming honor. I share it with Andree and with each of you who are part of this wonderful sisterhood that we have experienced here this week. Thank you!