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August 22, 2006

**Leadership Conference of Women
Religious Celebrates 50th Anniversary with
Call to Respond to the Urgent Needs of the
Times**

[Atlanta, GA] The leaders of US orders of Catholic sisters met in Atlanta, Georgia from August 18 to 21 to commemorate the 50th anniversary year of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). More than 800 leaders from across the country gathered in assembly and discussed key religious life issues. A special feature was the participation in part of the assembly of approximately 100 local Atlanta women leaders from various faiths and professions.

Speakers called the assembly to be moral and faith-filled leaders in both church and society. Keynoter Sister Joan Chittister, OSB said, “We must continue ... to light the way for a world reeling from the anguish of the hungry in our streets, the danger of ecological devastation, the obscenity of war as a political strategy, the sins of systemic oppression, the stench of corporate greed, and the heresy of sexism.

“We need, as Vatican II defined us, to be prophetic congregations,” she continued. “We must be those who live at the center of society to leaven it, at the bottom of society to speak for it, and on the edge of society to critique it.”

LCWR president Sister Beatrice Eichten, OSF noted, “As a conference and as member congregations, we have committed to peacemaking, to voicing our belief that God loves all persons equally and totally, and that we are all sisters and brothers. We join together with like-minded people, trusting the hypothesis of Jean Shinoda Bolen that ‘when a critical number of people change how they think and behave, the culture will also, and a new era begins.’”

Four leaders of orders based in New Orleans whose lives and works were severely damaged by the 2005 hurricanes spoke of the challenges of leading and finding meaning during an experience of incomprehensible devastation. They noted that their grounding in faith and the sisterhood that exists among women religious are empowering them to recover, heal and continue in ministry.

More than 300 LCWR members participated in a pre-assembly interfaith prayer for peace at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, co-sponsored by the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta, the Atlanta Conference of Sisters, and LCWR. The assembly also endorsed a resolution which condemns torture in all its forms. The resolution, which had been approved by the assembly of Conference of Major Superiors of Men, encourages support and help for victims of torture throughout the world, but especially in areas under the control of the United States government.

LCWR presented its 2006 Outstanding Leadership Award to Sister Catherine Pinkerton, CSJ, a well-known lobbyist at NETWORK who has advocated for social and economic justice issues on Capitol Hill for more than 22 years. LCWR members also elected Sister Mary Whited, general superior of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, as the conference president, and reelected Sister Jeanne Bessette, OSF as the conference secretary.

LCWR has a history of being at the forefront of change and renewal in the US Catholic church. The conference was created in 1956 at the initiative of the Vatican which sought to bring together the heads of religious orders in national associations to explore how to most effectively serve the needs of the Catholic church. Since that time, LCWR has taken an active role in the renewal of religious life, as well as advocacy for systemic change and social justice within the Catholic church and society.

Today LCWR has approximately 850 members who are elected leaders of their religious orders, representing approximately 67,000 Catholic sisters. The conference develops leadership, promotes collaboration within church and society, and serves as a voice for systemic change.