News
Religious Life



LCWR's 2025-2026 presidential team, from left to right: President-elect Sr. Debra Sciano, President Sr. Vicky Larson, and Past-President Sr. Kathy Brazda; the team and executive director Sr. Carol Zinn met with Pope Leo XIV March 26 at the Vatican. (GSR photo/Dan Stockman)



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The heads of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious made their annual trip to Rome last week, meeting with dicastery officials at the Vatican and having a private audience with Pope Leo XIV.

LCWR represents about two-thirds of the nearly 35,000 sisters in the United States; the trip was March 21-28. The delegation consisted of LCWR president Sr. Vicky Larson, president-elect Sr. Debra Sciano, past-president Sr. Kathy Brazda, and executive director Sr. Carol Zinn.

The three LCWR presidents and executive director spoke to Vatican News, the official publication of the Holy See, after the March 26 papal audience.

The leaders spoke to Vatican News about the loss of dignity and respect for people in the United States, and women's participation and leadership in the Catholic Church.



Pope Leo XIV receives the gifts from women religious as he celebrates Mass marking the feast of the Presentation of the Lord in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Feb. 2, 2026. The Mass also marked the Vatican celebration of the World Day for Consecrated Life. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

Zinn said Leo is well aware of what is happening in his native United States.

When the pope "listened to our story of the heart, about how painful it is right now in the United States in regards to the treatment of human beings, not even U.S. citizens, just human beings themselves, I could see the pain on his face," Zinn told Vatican News.

Larson told Vatican News that the pope shares their concern for immigrants. Zinn said the pope thanked them for their work.



Sr. Carol Zinn, a Sister of St. Joseph, who is executive director of the leadership Conference of Women Religious, participates in an Oct. 26, 2021, webinar called "The Pope and President: What to Watch and What's at Stake." (CNS/Courtesy of Network)

LCWR leaders also discussed the broader issue of polarization with Vatican News.

"One of the things that we need to do to work for justice is to work on relationships and build bridges across divides so that people understand one another and can work together," Larson told Vatican News.

"How do we transform the way we think about one another and then the words that we use when we speak to each other?" Zinn told Vatican News. "The issue of polarization is alive and well, not only in the United States, but it's pretty raw in the United States. There's a tendency to exclude the other, just about everybody, and to set up camps."

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Larson said Catholic sisters are particularly able to build unity because "consecrated life is really built around that concept of discernment and listening together," Vatican News reported, and that we are all called to Pope Francis' vision of synodality for the church. "I think he [Pope Francis] really gifted us with a call to look at the way that we are church together, and that we communicate and share wisdom."

Zinn and Larson also discussed the role of women with Vatican News, saying they were very pleased to read the synod's Final Document, which insists on women's participation in the church, and noted there is no reason women should not be in leadership roles.

"I'm pleased that the topic is being put on the table so that it can't go away," Zinn told Vatican News. "I'm also pleased that there seems to be some understanding that's coming forth that this whole issue of the role of women in leadership in the church is not theological, it's not ecclesial, it's not historical, it's not even canonical: It's cultural."