

Vatican ends investigation of U.S. women religious

by [David Gibson](#) in the [May 13, 2015](#) issue

The Vatican on April 16 officially ended a seven-year investigation of American nuns with a compromise.

"We are pleased at the completion," said Sister Sharon Holland, president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, in a statement released after a meeting in Rome with the Vatican's top doctrinal officials. The investigation "involved long and challenging exchanges of our understandings of and perspectives on critical matters of religious life and its practice."

The investigation of the LCWR, a network of 1,500 Catholic sisters that represents about 80 percent of the 50,000 nuns in the United States, began in 2008.

"We learned that what we hold in common is much greater than any of our differences," Holland said.

In a brief statement, Cardinal Gerhard Müller, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and leader of the effort to rein in the nuns, said he was confident that the mission of the nuns "is rooted in the tradition of the Church" and that they are "essential for the flourishing of religious life in the Church."

The original report, issued almost exactly three years prior, had accused the nuns of promoting "certain radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith."

Müller's office charged that the theological speculations of some American sisters were straying too far from traditional doctrines and said the sisters were focusing too much on social justice issues, such as caring for the poor and advocating for immigrants. The CDF was also upset that many sisters were active in promoting health-care reform in the United States. The Vatican office said LCWR members should spend more time advancing church teachings on sexuality and abortion.

The final report issued April 16 indicated that the nuns acceded to some oversight of their publications and choice of speakers for their annual conference, and both sides agreed to a new set of statutes for the LCWR.

The delegation of American nuns met with Francis on April 16 for 50 minutes in an encounter that seemed to underscore the sisters' affinity for the pope's focus on social justice and his pastoral outreach to the world.

"Our conversation allowed us to personally thank Pope Francis for providing leadership and a vision that has captivated our hearts and emboldened us as in our own mission and service to the church," the nuns said in a statement. "We were also deeply heartened by Pope Francis's expression of appreciation for the witness given by Catholic sisters through our lives and ministry and will bring that message back to our members." —Religion News Service

*This article was edited on May 6, 2015.*