

Franciscan friars back American nuns in Vatican spat

by [Daniel Burke](#)

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c. 2012 Religion News Service (RNS) The brothers have come to the sisters' defense. Leaders from the seven Franciscan provinces in the U.S. publicly backed a group of American nuns on Thursday (June 7), calling a Vatican crackdown on the women "excessive."

The Franciscan friars are believed to be the first Catholic religious order to voice support for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious since the Vatican announced a full-scale makeover of the group in April.

The Vatican said the LCWR, which represents most of the nation's 57,000 nuns, does not adequately advocate against gay marriage, abortion and women's ordination.

The Vatican's "doctrinal assessment" also faulted the sisters for sponsoring conferences that featured "a prevalence of certain radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith."

Noting that many members of LCWR belong to female Franciscan orders, the friars pledged solidarity with the sisters and called the Vatican assessment "excessive, given the evidence raised."

The sisters have been wrestling with complex contemporary issues, the Franciscans said, and those deliberations should not be equated with disobedience to Catholic doctrine.

"The efforts of LCWR to facilitate honest and faithful dialogue on critical issues of our times must not result in a level of ecclesial oversight that could, in effect, quash all further discernment," the Franciscans said.

Catholics since the Middle Ages have disagreed about how to apply church doctrine to public policy, the friars argued, and seldom were those disputes deemed "equivalent to questioning the authority of the Church's magisterium."

Many church observers suspect the Vatican crackdown was at least partially a response to prominent Catholic sisters' support for President Obama's health care overhaul, despite bishops' objections.

"Rather than excessive oversight of LCWR, perhaps a better service to the people of God might be a renewed effort to articulate the nuances of our complex moral tradition," the friars said.

The LCWR itself has called the Vatican's assessment "unsubstantiated" and a source of "scandal and pain."

LCWR leaders will meet on June 12 in Rome with Cardinal William Levada, the former archbishop of San Francisco who now heads the Vatican's doctrine office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.