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*UNH Media Relations*

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June 4, 2012

Catholic Scholar Available to Discuss Nuns' Strong Response to Vatican Criticism

 Michele Dillon

DURHAM, N.H. – Michele Dillon, a scholar of Catholicism and professor of sociology at the University of New Hampshire, is available to discuss the strong response by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) to the report critical of the Catholic nuns issued by the Vatican.

“Nuns have a strong history of independence, and it is not surprising that after a period of engaged and thoughtful deliberation they have made a stand regarding this report. Many laity and observers perceive too much of a muscular overreach currently by the Vatican and by the U.S. bishops,” said Dillon, who cited the church’s role in the contraception debate in recent months, and in particular, its political framing of the issue as one of “religious liberty,” as an example of perceived muscular overreach.

“The laity has long supported the nuns and their independence, and has admired their many, many important contributions to the dynamism and relevance of the church in contemporary society. The laity, too, of course, has for many years been in in strong disagreement with the Vatican and the hierarchy in regards to sex-related issues but are affirming of the social justice tradition of Catholicism. They recognize this gesture against the nuns as a reassertion of a church patriarchy whose credibility on several issues is so badly damaged,” she said.

The Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has accused the nuns of promoting radical feminism and contradicting the bishops. In its strong response to the Vatican, the LCWR concluded that the Vatican’s assessment was based on unsubstantiated accusations and the result of a flawed process that lacked transparency. The nuns said the sanctions imposed were disproportionate to the concerns raised and could compromise their ability to fulfill their mission. They said the Vatican report has furthermore caused scandal and pain throughout the church community, and created greater polarization.

Dillon has written extensively on Catholicism in the United States and elsewhere, and has been especially interested in the institutional and cultural processes that enable Catholics who selectively disagree with aspects of Catholic teaching to remain loyal to Catholicism. She also has examined the political engagement of the Catholic Church, and of other churches and activist organizations, in public moral debates in different western countries. She is the author of “Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith, and Power.”

## PHOTO

Michele Dillon, a scholar of Catholicism and professor of sociology at the University of New Hampshire.  
<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/liberalarts/micheledillon.jpg>.

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