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#INFORMATION

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Photo: St. Benedict's Abbey and Retreat Center, Benet Lake, Wisconsin benetlake.org

The Religious Formation Conference (RFC) is a national Roman Catholic organization serving religious institutes of women and men with programs and services for those in the ministry of initial and lifelong formation, and general congregational membership.



ReligiousFormation CONFERENCE

Religious Formation Conference
1200 W. 35th St. #414
Chicago IL 60609-1305

Phone: 773.675.8362
Email: rfc@relforcon.org
Web: www.relforcon.org

Managing Editor
Susan Oxley

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'HERE I AM' MOMENTS

In her reflection "[Your Tears are my Tears; Your Pain is my Pain.](#)" Franciscan Missionary of Mary Sister Maria de Lourdes Lopez Munguia speaks of *Here I am* moments. They are moments, she explains, where we "become aware of the depth of the incarnation of God." Sister Mary recounts moments in her life where a profound awareness of God-with-us has impacted her life:

Here I am, with my story....

Here I am, in a deep moment of reflection....

Here I am, in silence....

Here I am, trying to listen....

Here I am, rediscovering God's invitation....

Here *you* are. What is the awareness or invitation of *this* time? Like Sister Mary, what God-with-us moments summon you forward?



Here we are: RFC team at our fall retreat at St. Benedict's Abbey and Retreat Center in Benet Lake, Wisconsin. This was a great opportunity to spend some time together and get to know each other. From left: Brian Michalski, program manager; Susan Oxley, communications and membership manager; Ryan Hoffmann, DMin, executive director; and Sister Jane Aseltyne, IHM, program assistant.

As the autumn season takes hold in the United States, perhaps a pause to consider 'Here I am' moments provide the contemplative prism to get in touch with the rumblings of our heart and the key moments that continue to define and inspire the "letting go" and "giving over" of that which hasn't served us well. As the adage goes, "The trees are about to show us how lovely it is to let things go."



My hope is that this edition of *InFormation*, with key articles by Sister Ellen Dauwer, SC, and Father Jeffrey Kirch, CPPS, helps focus us on the gifts of "letting go" and cultivating the new. Like the Paschal Mystery, it is an invitation to lean into the transformative power of death and new life. Here I am moments, chock full of incarnational wisdom, seem to point the way amidst the clamoring of the world and the anxiety of uncertainty.

Here I am, friends, reminding us of God's faithfulness in moments of change and transformation.

Here I am, friends, in this season of giving thanks, ever grateful for the gift of this community.

Here I am, friends, trying to listen well, with all of you, to the future God's laying out before us.

Indeed, here I am. Here we are.

Autumn blessings,

Ryan J. Hoffmann, D.Min.
Executive Director

What do you think of this edition of *InFormation*? Send us your feedback at rfc@relforcon.org.

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CHARISM: THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

BY SISTER ELLEN DAUWER, SC

Keynote given at the Religious Brothers Conference assembly in July 2024

What is the charism of religious life? Is there a charism (common charism) of religious life? In our attempts to answer, I believe that we sometimes use what I call a “reductionist” method: one that seeks to find something common among our congregations’ charisms. It is like finding the least common denominator.

In this article, based on a recent keynote address I shared at the annual assembly of the Religious Brothers Conference, I would like to turn these attempts to discern the charism of religious life on their head by taking a more top-down approach rather than a bottom-up, “reductionist” one. In doing so we will begin with a long loving look at prophecy, followed by an exploration of charism. Then I will bring these two together to reflect on the charism of prophetic witness of religious life in charism families.

Religious Life as a Prophetic Life Form in the Church

What does it mean to be a prophet? Who are the prophets of the past and of the present? How might we describe them?

While there are not enough pages in this publication to describe fully who a prophet is and what a prophet does, I would like to use three key descriptors for this exploration. First, a prophet is called by God. Prophets who were self-designated were called “false prophets” in the Old Testament. A prophet never chooses this role, but rather is called by God, sometimes in a singular, dramatic fashion; other times the call might gradually evolve over time. Second, a prophet is integrally a part of his/her people or society. He/she does not live alone in the desert or on an island, but rather is fully integrated into his/her time



Br. Paul Bednarczyk, CSC

and place. This implies also that the prophet is cognizant of the needs of his/her society, painfully aware of them. Finally, a prophet interprets the current reality in light of God’s dream for the people. He/she sees the needs of society, is well familiar with God’s dream (or the Reign of God), and points to the gaps between the two.

Let’s use these three descriptors and apply them first to some prophets of the Old and New Testaments. Moses is often considered the greatest of all prophets. We are familiar with his call story as recounted in Exodus 3 in which God speaks to Moses through a burning bush. While he did not grow up among his own people, his identification with them is first manifested in his murder of an Egyptian who mistreated a Hebrew slave (Ex 2:11-12). He recognizes the slavery of his people and is

Prophets are good listeners; they listen deeply to the voice of God. They are also see-ers who read closely the signs of the times. They bring what they hear and see together and focus the Word of God in their time and place, responding to unmet needs, often in innovative ways.

called to lead them to freedom and to faithfulness to God's covenant.

Hosea is another prophet of the Old Testament, one of the 12 minor prophets. He lived in the 8th century BCE in the Northern Kingdom of Israel until its fall in 721 BCE. While his call story is not explicitly recounted in the writing attributed to him, his God-given task is to shed light on the idolatry and false worship of his people and to bring them to faithful relationship with God. This is the role of most of the Old Testament prophets: to call the people to faithfulness to the covenant that God made with them.

Jesus, too, is called a prophet. He lived in first century CE Palestine under Roman occupation, in the Herodian kingdom of the Roman empire. At his baptism, Jesus heard the voice of God proclaim, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt 3:17). From this moment of call, Jesus embarked on his ministry in which he called people to a change of heart, spoke of and shared the inclusive love of God, reached out to those at the margins of society, and preached the reign of God.

Anna and Simeon are favorite figures of mine in the New Testament. Anna is described as a prophetess from the Tribe of Asher, a widow of 84 years who engaged in prayer and fasting and never left the Temple. She proclaimed God's dream for all as she "spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem." (Lk 2:38) Simeon was a just and devout old man from Jerusalem who was promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw the Christ of God. His beautiful canticle, that we often sing in Evening Prayer, speaks of God's dream for all people (both Jews and Gentiles). (Lk 2: 29-32)

Moses, Hosea, Jesus, and Anna and Simeon clearly fit the threefold description of prophet that I proposed above. What about founders of our congregations? Might they be prophets? My guess is that most of us do not call them as such, though we might describe their lives and words as prophetic. Let's look at a few, and see if they might rightly be called prophets.

My congregation, the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth, uses an adapted version of the rule of St. Vincent de Paul. Vincent (1581-1660), a peasant from southern France, later lived in Paris at a time of war, disease, and poverty. In 1617, he experienced God's call through ministering at the bedside of a peasant. With a continual focus on "what must be done," he strove to meet the needs of the poor and to reform the clergy. He founded the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians), the Ladies of Charity, and many charitable organizations. Working alongside him was St. Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), who was born to a prominent family in northern France. Her moment of illumination came at Pentecost, 1623 when she was reassured that she would make vows and be in a small community. After her husband died, she met Vincent de Paul. She served the sick and poor in their homes, established the Hotel Dieu in Paris, and founded the Daughters of Charity. Together, Vincent and Louise were instrumental in breaking free from the monastic form of religious life and laying foundations for the apostolic era.

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini (1850-1917), whose life and mission has become popularized through the recent movie, *Cabrini*, was born in northern Italy. Poor health prevented her from entering religious life. Not to be deterred, she founded the Missionary Sisters of the



At Mt. Nemo in Jordan, where Moses viewed the promised land from a distance.

Sacred Heart of Jesus to care for orphans as well as serve educational needs. Sent by the Pope to minister to Italian immigrants in New York, she eventually established 67 missionary institutes throughout the United States.

A final example is St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the founder of my congregation, who was born in 1774 in New York City shortly before the American Revolution. Established within New York society, she helped to found the Society of the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children. She responded to the call of God within her and converted to Catholicism in 1803 following the death of her husband. Continuing to discern God's will, she founded

the first American congregation of women in Emmitsburg, Maryland, to address the unmet educational needs of Catholics, both rich and poor. She also established the first orphanage in Philadelphia in 1814. Three years later, she sent sisters to New York, her native city, to establish an orphanage there.

Consider the founder(s) of your congregation. What was his/her story of call? How was he/she embedded in the society of the time and place? How did he/she respond to the needs of society in light of God's dream for all? Might all these founders, those described above, and all we each bring to mind, be considered prophets?

Pope Francis describes a prophet as one who "...helps others read the present under the action of the Holy Spirit...who helps to understand God's plans and conform to them. In other words, the prophet is the one who shows Jesus to others, who bears witness to him, who helps live today and build the future according to his designs." (Angelus, July 2, 2023) For Pope Francis, a prophet is one "...demonstrating how Jesus lived on this earth, and to proclaim how the Kingdom of God will be in its perfection." (Interview with Pope Francis, Sept. 21, 2013)

A prophetic life requires a life of prayer, freedom, and authenticity. Prayer is fundamental to hear the voice of God, converse (recall the conversations that Moses often had with God), and respond. Freedom enables the prophet to follow God's call without impediment. In religious life the vow of poverty frees one to see needs and respond. Finally, authenticity means a coherence between one's words and deeds; colloquially we say that one walks the walk and talks the talk.

We see these three characteristics of the prophet in Jesus who took extended time for prayer, "had nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8:20), and had a close coherence between his words and deeds. I believe we can see the three in the lives of our founders as well: the importance of prayer in their lives, a freedom from attachments, and authenticity in their lives and messages.

Let's take the descriptions of *prophet* that we have used above, that clearly apply to figures in the Old and New Testaments as well as to our founders, and ask how they might apply to our congregations. First, we know well the primacy of prayer in the lives of our members both personally and communally. Second, we see the integral role of evangelical poverty in the vow of poverty in religious life. Third, there are many examples of individual and corporate witness that congregations demonstrate through sponsorship, corporate stands, and ministries.

Our founders, who lived prophetic lives, were joined throughout the ages by many who were also called by God to this way of life. The congregations that they founded are prophetic and extend prophetic witness. This is the charism of religious life.

Prophetic Witness as the Charism of Religious Life

Let's explore more deeply the meaning of charism. The word derives from the Greek *charisma* that means gift or favor granted by God. Another meaning, often seen in the writings of Paul, is a spiritual gift that enables one to perform an office or function in the Church. Charism is a gift of the Spirit, given for the good of the community and its works, not to the individual. It often makes God present in bold and tangible ways.

Note that these descriptions need not only apply to religious congregations; charisms are given to the entire Church. We will be applying them to religious life but will also reach out broadly to charism families and other collaborators.

Other descriptions for charism include particular facets of the likeness of God, the energy of God, freedom, something new and fresh, and how the Kingdom of God will be in its perfection. Perhaps you have others to add.

Saint Paul provided some inspiring ways of understanding charism. His words were foundational for theologians at Vatican II

Religious congregations give corporate expression to the charism originally given by the Spirit to the founder(s).

who used them to uncover and develop this important gift and function in the Church.

“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to each of us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly.” (Rom 12:6)

“And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” (Eph 4:11-12)

“Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord...But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Cor 12: 4-5, 7)

Note the references to the common good (good of the community), the variety of gifts, the responsibility to share gifts, the use of gifts for ministry, and the Spirit as the source.

Religious congregations give corporate expression to the charism originally given by the Spirit to the founder(s). This treasure has been beautifully described in various ways: as the deep story of a congregation, as the life and energy of God that pulses through a group. For their part, members are responsible to steward the charism, handing it down to new generations, often reinterpreting it through changing times and needs. Stewarding, I venture to say, can sometimes be understood as holding close for safe keeping, but I believe it calls us to hold our charisms without grasping, with open hands and outstretched arms.

While charism is part of the language of the Church today, it was seldom used prior to

Vatican II. Religious life was often described as a “state of perfection” with a focus on apostolic works. Charisms were viewed as extraordinary and rare gifts. It was Cardinal Suenens and others who opened up St. Paul’s use of charisma, thus taking it down from its pedestal and developing new ways of understanding it as gift given broadly to the whole Church.

In *Lumen Gentium* we hear of the variety of gifts, given by the Spirit, for the purpose of ministry and for the good of all: “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God... but, ‘allotting his graces to everyone as He wills’ He distributes

special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: ‘The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit.’ These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church.” (LG 12)

In addition to describing charism broadly for all people, Vatican II also applied it specifically to religious life and clarified its role in the Church: “From the point of view of the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church, the religious state of life is not an intermediate state between the clerical and lay states. But, rather, the faithful of Christ are called by God from both of these states of life so that they might enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church and thus each in one’s own way, may be of some advantage to the salvific mission of the Church.” (LG 43) The document continues: “...the spiritual life of these people should then be devoted to the welfare of the whole Church...to implant and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ in souls and to extend that Kingdom to every clime. This duty is to be undertaken to the extent of their capacities and in keeping with the proper type of their own vocation. This can be realized through prayer or active works of the apostolate. It is for this reason that the Church preserves and fosters the special character of her various religious institutes.” (LG 44)

In *Evangelica Testificatio*, the apostolic exhortation issued by Pope Paul in 1971 on the renewal of religious life according to the teachings of Vatican II, its charismatic nature is more fully described: “Only in this way will you be able to reawaken hearts to truth and to divine love in accordance with the charisms of your founders who were raised up by God within His Church. Thus the Council rightly insists on the obligation of religious to be faithful to the spirit of their founders, to their



Sharing charism symbols

There is much we have in common as religious: vows, ministry, community, and prayer; each with its own forms of expression. Intercongregationality does not mean a boiling down or reduction of charisms into a generic one. Rather, it is a complementarity of gifts from the same Spirit for a common purpose in the Church: prophetic witness. Might this be our call to the future: to discern together what we hold in common, the call that we embody in our lives and in our works?

evangelical intentions and to the example of their sanctity. In this it finds one of the principles for the present renewal and one of the most secure criteria for judging what each institute should undertake. In reality, the charism of the religious life, far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church.” (ET 11)

The work of renewal of religious life referred to in the above passage had begun a decade or two prior to Vatican II, initiated by Pope Pius XII in the 1950s. It involved the return/rediscovery of the stories of founders and original charism, creation of stronger links between charism and the mission of the Church and its social teachings, greater engagement in the modern world, increased attention to professional education, modification of habits, and many other types of modernization and adaptation of religious life. Integral to renewal were special general chapters and rewriting of congregational documents.

To review before stepping ahead, we began by asking what a prophet is and what are key characteristics of a prophet. We saw examples in Old and New Testament prophets and then applied the descriptions to founders of religious congregations as well as to religious life broadly. We concluded that, while seldom described as such, founders clearly responded to God’s call to bear prophetic witness and established congregations that continue their work, albeit

in new centuries and in response to changing needs. We then looked more closely at this call and gift given to founders: charism, a term that sometimes eludes definition. We reflected on Paul’s use of charisma and then examined the rediscovery of charism at Vatican II, both for the Church broadly and for religious life specifically. Let’s now apply this concept of prophetic witness as the charism of religious life now and into the future.

Charism Families

A primary prophetic task is to point to the gaps between current reality and God’s dream for the world. Prophets are focused on both the concrete needs of a particular time and place as well as on the Reign of God. This involves standing at the gap or the intersection between the two, often at the margins of society, places of greatest need. In these gaps and marginal spaces prophets ask what is needed to bring God’s dream closer to reality. Often this alternative reality or dream is an innovative, creative, and fresh gift of the Spirit: an expression of charism.

Today, some decades following Vatican II, we have come to see that charism is generously bestowed by the Spirit on many. Founders of religious congregations were called to bear prophetic witness to the needs of people of their time and place. They were gifted by the Spirit for this task with a special gift, charism. They gathered others around them to break open the gift and to respond to overwhelming needs. Over the decades and centuries, thousands

have followed in their footsteps, reinterpreting the charism for changing times and needs. Often, they form a charism family.

Some founders started several congregations. Other times, multiple groups were formed that follow the same or adapted founding rule. These congregations may be joined together as a federation of both women's and men's congregations that share a rule and/or charism. Examples are the Dominicans, Franciscans, and Benedictines.

For decades religious congregations have collaborated with each other: in ministry, formation, retirement, social justice, and community.

Prior to the evolution of apostolic religious life, monastic orders shared their charism with laity to live it out in the world. This led to the formation of third orders and oblates, the roots of today's lay associates. They are non-vowed persons who share in the spirituality and mission of a religious congregation and express the charism through their life commitments and careers.

The core of a charism family, then, may include federations and extend to lay associates. These concentric circles of charism can reach more broadly to incorporate many other lay groups such as associations and volunteer groups. For example, the Vincentian Family (those who share in the charism of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac), consists of federations of religious orders as well as individual orders that follow the rule of St. Vincent including the Sisters and Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians), the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Ladies of Charity, the Miraculous Medal Association, the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, the Missionary Cenacle Family, Vincentian universities, Vincentian Youth and Volunteers, and other groups and resources. If we include

sponsor and cosponsor groups as well as ministry partners and other collaborators, the circles expand even more. The bottom line is that there are myriad ways to express and extend a charism. We discover over and over that the gift cannot be contained, for it is continually expanding to reach those in need.

Charism families, traditionally grouped around a shared founder or rule, may also be formed around a common spirituality or mission. For example, in the recent national gathering of religious brothers, those who shared a missionary identity found commonality when discussing charism in small groups. Congregations and their lay partners with particular devotion to the Sacred Heart, Precious Blood, or the Immaculate Heart of Mary are only some examples of existent or potential charism families. Creativity in the Spirit abounds with new possibilities!

For decades religious congregations have collaborated with each other: in ministry, formation, retirement, social justice, and community. I participated in intercommunity formation over 40 years ago. Increasingly these efforts are not mere side-by-side projects; they are the emergence of intercongregationality.

I venture to say that we have been faithful to the imperatives of Vatican II to rediscover our charisms and founding stories. We have done it well, despite the challenges, and have taught the following generations well. New members attest to this with their articulate descriptions of their congregational charisms and lively stories of their founders. Might we be called now to discern less about what differentiates us and more about what we share and have in common, without denying our unique gifts? Could this be one of the ways in which apostolic religious life will evolve in the future: a mutual discernment of the call and response to prophetic witness?

It is no coincidence that we ask these questions in a time of synodality in the Church, one that invites us to walk and journey together. Let us then, in synodal ways, continue to discern

what it means to live apostolic religious life together: to be attentive to the call of the Spirit, the needs of the people, and the signs of the times; to embrace and embody the call to prophetic witness as the charism of religious life; and to call all to live fully God's dream for the world.

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Sister Ellen Dauwer, SC, PhD, is a Sister of Charity of Saint Elizabeth, Convent Station, New Jersey. She served for eight years as the executive director of the Religious Formation Conference.

OUR ROLE AS LEADERS IN THE CHANGING REALITY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

FATHER JEFFREY KIRCH, CPPS

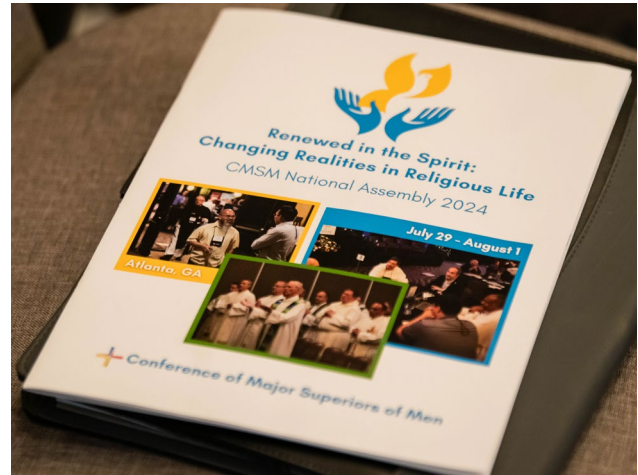
Introduction

In last year's presidential address, I highlighted the role of charism in the life of our congregations, and most importantly in our role in elected leadership. This year I will shift to address our role as leaders in a changing reality of religious life. This focus flows from our theme of "Renewed in the Spirit: Changing Realities in Religious Life." Within this brief address I will offer a glimpse of the current context that we find ourselves in, both from the leaders' perspective and from a congregational perspective. Second, I will argue that we must make a seismic shift in order to adequately address this changing reality.

Current Context: Changing Realities

There is no doubt that our world is in a state of perpetual change. Events that profoundly affect peoples' lives seem to be occurring at a perpetually faster pace. Spurred on by developments in technology, the push and pull of globalization, and the 24-hour news cycle, our world is changing. This is not a new phenomenon. The world has always been changing, for that is the trajectory of creation and human nature. What is new for us is the pace of the development. In prior years, one could be confident that you were getting up-to-date news by reading your morning paper. Now, you get your news instantaneously on your Twitter feed or Tik Tok. Technology, politics, and economics contribute to our changing world.

Our focus in this address is not the sociological or technological changing reality, but the context of changing realities in religious life. We will approach this from the perspective of leadership and from the congregational level.



The Conference of Major Superiors of Men commissioned CARA, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, to survey our members on various issues they are facing. The results of the survey, which were shared last year, helped the National Board to set priorities for the work of the conference.

The three top challenges which leaders identified were:

- 1) diminishing numbers;
- 2) aging population; and
- 3) excessive workload.

Each of these has a profound effect on the individual leader and on the exercise of leadership. First, let us turn to diminishing numbers. For most of our congregations, the large number of vocations as experienced in the 1940s and 1950s is clearly in the rear-view mirror. The vast majority of the Conference's members fall into the smallest two categories of member size. Cohorts of 10 to 15 seminarians have for the most part been replaced by classes of one or two. This puts profound

In the United States today, we need a seismic shift in our approach to leadership and religious life at large. Like all seismic events, the earth will tremble and some things will break and topple, but the core of the faith will hold.

pressure on leadership in the areas of formation, community life, and mission. Many of our current congregational structures were developed with larger numbers in mind. A formation program of two candidates requires a completely different approach than a program of 20. Stresses on community life are apparent when an increasing number of members are living further and further away from each other. And a lack of vocations ends up forcing the leadership team to “right size” pastoral commitments. For each of these areas, this changing reality puts tremendous stress on leaders.

The next two challenges identified in the CARA study, aging and excessive workload, are intimately tied to the lack of vocations. Today, this room looks very different than it would have in the 1980s or even the 1990s. Many of the leaders of our congregations from the 1990s may still be in leadership at an even older age than their predecessors. Aging leadership is coupled with aging membership. The overall aging of religious life in the United States puts pressure on the individual religious, the apostolate, and the community. We are asking our confreres to minister more and longer. This raises questions of justice, especially when coupled with the third challenge from the CARA survey, excessive workload. In many communities, a provincial director not only has a full time ministry in governance, but also may serve as a pastor at the same time. On top of increased diocesan and safeguarding bureaucracies, the workload for many leaders has become unmanageable, which quickly leads to spiritual fatigue and burnout.

These changing realities have a profound effect on the health, wellbeing, and ministry of not only leaders, but congregations themselves

face a changing context with which they must contend. These changing contexts influence the life and mission of a congregation. Religious life, especially in the United States, is finding itself in an ever more secular context. By that I mean, the level of cultural Christianity that once could be expected in the public square is absent. Cultural Christian literacy, knowing who Jesus was, having heard of the Ten Commandments, understanding what Easter refers to, in recent decades has waned. The growth of the “nones” and a civic life devoid of all reference to religion is the world many congregations find themselves in. It is not that portions of the population are anti-religious; instead, religious life and religion itself are not relevant to some people’s daily lives. This secular context adversely affects not only vocation efforts, but the effectiveness of mission as well.

In addition to a growing secular context, congregations are facing an ever more polarized world, both politically and ecclesiologically. The polarizing forces cause levels of discomfort when encountering the other. Pastors are valiantly trying to minister to Red and Blue parishioners. Internally, they are also holding the tension between people calling for more traditional expressions of the faith and those who are calling for a greater focus on the social gospel. While these two foci, and those similar, are not mutually exclusive, to hold both in tension becomes ever more difficult in our Church and world.

The final challenge facing our congregations in our changing reality is the internationalization of our congregations. This is not a new phenomenon in religious life. Most of our congregations are international and throughout history, members of our congregations have ministered in foreign lands. But in the United

States, when the large waves of immigrants came in the 1800s and early 1900s, the Germans brought German priests with them. Likewise the Irish. What is different now, is that, for example, my congregation with its roots in the German migration to Ohio in the 1840s now has three Tanzanians and an Indian confrere ministering with us. The international and multicultural context of many of our congregations will continue to grow and bring with that growth a certain level of difficulty in mission and community life.

Our leaders today need to have the imagination to rethink mission to be more effective.

Our leaders and our congregations have found themselves in a context marked by profound change. Internally, leadership faces difficulties due to a lack of numbers, an aging membership (including themselves), and an excessive workload. At the larger congregational level, communities are experiencing stress from wider movements in the world such as secularization, polarization, and globalization.

Response of Leadership

Having attended to some trends in the changing realities we are facing, how do we respond? Certainly a response is needed, but what kind of response would be most effective and fruitful for religious life in the United States?

It is clear that the changing realities religious life is facing in the United States today call for a robust response. We cannot ignore the context we find ourselves in today. No response to the challenges surfaced through the CARA survey will only ensure a continued decline in religious life. However, in our response, we cannot rely upon structures and strategies from the past. The changing reality calls for new wineskins. The old ecclesial structures and strategies served religious life and the Church well, but that was a different context

and time. The question is, how do we respond effectively in today's environment?

I will briefly highlight three areas which I assert call for new wineskins. In many dioceses parochial life is at a crossroads. And to the extent that our congregations minister in a parochial environment, our mission is at a crossroads. Demographic changes have necessitated a restructuring of parishes, in both city centers and in rural areas. A lack of vocations has certainly contributed to the need for restructuring, but also in many dioceses, the physical parish church is no longer located where it needs to be. The population has moved. Mergers, closures, and clustering are often the answers that bishops fall back on. And we as religious, become part of these strategies.

While this may seem inevitable, the question that we should be asking concerns the whole premise of the parish itself. Is the parochial structure the most effective structure for evangelization? The traditional parochial structure certainly met a real need at one time in the United States, and in many areas probably still does. But one size does not fit all. How can we reimagine our efforts to reach those who do not enter our parishes for a variety of reasons? How can we open the walls of our churches, so that instead of an insular, self-contained parish, we have a mission of "going out"? Our leaders today need to have the imagination to rethink mission to be more effective.

The second of our new wineskins has been discussed earlier. The old structure of leadership in our congregations will need to develop. Due to the pressure of demographics and aging, the old structure of 50-year-olds serving as provincial directors and then being replaced by the next set of 50-year-olds is not practical today for most communities. Our leaders skew older and are being recycled. While these sages bring much wisdom to the community, how just is it to ask an 85-year-old priest to serve in leadership? At the other end of the spectrum, we are often pushing younger members without much leadership experience into positions they may not be ready for, both in congregational

and ministerial leadership. The old paradigm no longer works. Most of us cannot afford to have a newly ordained priest serve as an associate for eight to 10 years before becoming a pastor. As leaders, we must address this, and it will require thinking outside of the box. How do we support our confreres who seemingly are asked to spend decades in leadership until the drop dead, and how do we prepare our younger members to step up? CMSM has been developing resources for this.

To draw this section to a conclusion, I have argued that the response of leadership to the changing realities of religious life cannot rely on old structures. They no longer work. We have to rethink how we live religious life today. The change, I believe we need to make, is not a programmatic change. A new prepackaged program is not what we need in order to effectively contend with the reality we find ourselves in. The time for tweaking this aspect of our governance structure, or our mission, or our personnel policies, has long passed. In the United States today, we need a seismic shift in our approach to leadership and religious life at large. Like all seismic events, the earth will tremble and some things will break and topple, but the core of the faith will hold. Much like the seismic shift that occurred at the Second Vatican Council, this new seismic

event is really an old one. Just as the Council fathers returned to the sources and reached deep into the tradition, Pope Francis is calling on us to do that as well.

Seismic Response: Synodality

I am arguing that the best way for our congregations' leaders to deal with the changing realities we face is through the lens of synodality. As a Church and more specifically as religious communities, we must realign our vision to the reality we are facing. That is the only hope we have for ensuring our mission is effective in this new environment. While the old wineskins served us well in the past, they no longer are useful. Pope Francis's vision of a synodal Church, and by extension, I would argue, more synodal religious communities, equips us to negotiate these changing realities. In this section I will briefly touch on three elements of synodality that may be helpful for leaders of congregations as they face the challenges outlined above.

In an address commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis presented a refreshed way of understanding the Church. He called for a "synodal Church that listens, with the understanding that listening 'is more than hearing.' It is reciprocal listening in which



PHOTOS BY ATLANTA EVENT PHOTOGRAPHY FOR CMSM

How are we broadening our understanding of religious life, without compromising our charisms, so that we are attracting more people? How might the structures of membership evolve to encompass other forms of membership? How can we as leaders be more inviting? How do we as a Church and as congregations understand what our fellow baptized Christians are longing for, and how can we welcome them?

everyone has something to learn.” (Luciani, 2) His understanding of a synodal Church is much more than an ecclesial structure or program. Instead, it is a way of existing. It is a way of being and positions the Church and religious communities to respond to the signs of the time and hear where the Spirit is calling us.

Francis’ understanding of synodality is supported by three important concepts that bear directly on religious life today. These three concepts can play a major role in our attempts to respond to the changing reality of religious life in the United States. Paying attention to these important hallmarks will give us the ability to deal with the diminishing number of vocations, the aging membership, and the excessive workload we have identified as the three most serious challenges facing us today. These three concepts are: People of God, Reform, and Mission.

People of God

First, the keystone to any synodal understanding of Church and religious life is the theological concept of “the people of God.” Rooted in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, Francis highlights that “Church” refers to the whole people of God. Baptism is the foundational sacrament. This understanding widens our concept of membership and role. All the baptized have a role in the mission of the Church. Distinctions of office and rank are all secondary concepts to the foundational understanding of the Church encompassing everyone, in varying degrees of association. Francis highlights this element in *Evangelii*

Gaudium in which he argues that all of the baptized have become missionary disciples and that this charge is not dependent on theological training or office in the Church. This responsibility flows from our baptism into the life of the Trinity. (EG 120). A portion of *Evangelii Gaudium* reads, “The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him “because of the woman’s testimony” (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, “immediately proclaimed Jesus” (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for?” Francis asks, “What are we waiting for?” If the Samaritan woman and St. Paul can immediately go and invite others to relationship with Christ, Francis challenges us as leaders as well. How are we broadening our understanding of religious life, without compromising our charisms, so that we are attracting more people? How might the structures of membership evolve to encompass other forms of membership? How can we as leaders be more inviting? How do we as a Church and as congregations understand what our fellow baptized Christians are longing for, and how can we welcome them?

Reform

Francis picks up on another development at the Council regarding the synodal Church which has serious ramifications for religious life. Francis often speaks of the Church in a state of permanent reform. The Church is the pilgrim people of God. The modifier, pilgrim, points to the Church “being on the way; in transit; journeying.” There are connotations of reform. In its response to the call of the



Gospel and the signs of the times, the Church is always making the necessary changes to be more faithful to the call of Christ.

As we think of the synodal journey, the simplest way to understand it is “walking together.” This is just the tip of the iceberg. We are called to do more than walk together. Francis understands synodality as a spiritual process in which through reciprocal listening the Church comes to understand the path that God is calling us to take. “It involves the dynamic of praying, meeting, and working together, but also of discerning, and making and taking decisions together... A synodal model involves the entire ecclesial community to seek new ways of proceeding as one people of God living in a multiform communion.” (Luciani 3) Reform is not a one-time event or even just the updating of structures. Due to our persistent need for conversion, the reform envisioned in a synodal Church is a “constant process of ecclesial conversion involving the whole Church.” (Luciani, 16).

Religious life in the United States is very different today than in 1965. Religious life in the United States will be very different than today in 2065. Ongoing reform is essential to religious life. As leaders, how are we ensuring that our congregations are agile enough to respond to changing contexts? How do we form our confreres with the tools necessary to recognize the changing context and respond appropriately out of our charisms and the Gospel?

Mission

Throughout *Evangelii Gaudium* Francis references the missionary stance of the Church. For Francis, mission is not what the Church does, it is a constitutive part of the Church’s very nature. Of who it is. In paragraph 24, he speaks of a “community of missionary disciples.” Roger Schroeder, in his book “What is the Mission of the Church?”, notes, “Christians as missionary disciples, following the example of the Samaritan woman at the well, are almost compelled by their experience of God’s love and grace to share this with others, both with and without words (Schroeder 97).

At the heart of religious life is our relationship with Jesus Christ. We have left all to follow him. If we are compelled by our relationship with Christ to evangelize, then we really do not have an option, if we are to be faithful to Christ. Francis writes, “Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’.” (EG 25). Flowing from the notion of the Church as the whole people of God, this mission is not reserved for the experts. Because this missionary mandate is all-encompassing, no part of the life of the Church is left untouched. The call to mission permeates throughout the life of the Church.

Each of our congregations has a charism gifted by the Holy Spirit. That charism is our charter, our reason for being. Rooted deep in each of those charisms, whether it is apostolic or contemplative, is mission. It is through our mission that the Spirit fills the world. As leaders, it is essential for us to be clear on the mission of our congregations. In responding to the changing realities around us, our mission guides us through uncertain waters. It is our compass. As I stated last year, the primary ministry of leadership is care of the charism.



Father Jeffrey Kirch, CPPS, is provincial director of the U.S. Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. He began serving as president of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in 2022.

UPCOMING WEBINARS

A Consistent Ethic of Life: Navigating Catholic Engagement with U.S. Politics

Thursday, Oct. 24 from 1 to 2 p.m. Central

Presenter: Dr. Steven Millies, PhD



Steve Millies's scholarship explores the Catholic church's relationship to politics in a perspective that embraces history, theology, law, ethics, sociology, philosophy, and political theory. As Pope Francis has called for a "politics which is farsighted and capable of a new, integral, and interdisciplinary approach," Millies's work resists seeing politics only as a conflict over individual interests. Instead, in Pope Francis's words, politics expresses our "conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for each other and the world."

Millies is professor of public theology and director of The Bernardin Center at the Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago. He studied political theory at The Catholic University of America. Before coming to CTU, he was associate professor of political science at the University of South Carolina Aiken where he held the Strom Thurmond Endowed Chair in Political Science.

Millies is a member of several learned societies, including the Association for Political Theory, the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the Society of Christian Ethics. He is a regular contributor to the *National Catholic Reporter*, and his commentaries have appeared in several periodicals, including *America*, *Commonweal*, *The Hill*, and the *Washington Post*.

Breaking Walls of Tension and Opening the Door of Hope

Tuesday, Dec. 10, from 1 to 2:15 p.m. Central

Presenter: Sister Mary Justine Naluggya, IHMR, PhD



This webinar will take us through different tensions of our life's journey in our different contexts, and explore how the message of Isaiah comes in during Advent to re-awaken our memories of God's goodness, to open the door of hope to the awaited Messiah: Word made flesh!

Sister Mary Justine Naluggya is a [Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Reparatrix - Ggogonya](#). She holds a doctorate degree in Canon Law from the Pontifical Urban University in Rome, Italy. Sister Mary has led workshops on promoting transformative-synodal leadership and fostering a culture of encounter which is inclusive. She is also passionate about collaborative-pastoral ministries and motivating young leaders, especially religious women in the Church. She is currently in Uganda, serving as the spiritual directress of St. Kizito High School Bethany in Mityana. Prior to this, she had been coordinating parish pastoral ministries of San Bernardino da Siena Parish in Assisi (Italy).

Simultaneous Spanish translation will be provided for this webinar.

There is no cost to attend either of these webinars, but registration is required. For more information, visit <https://relforcon.org/upcoming-webinars>

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

ICYMI: ONLINE WORKSHOP

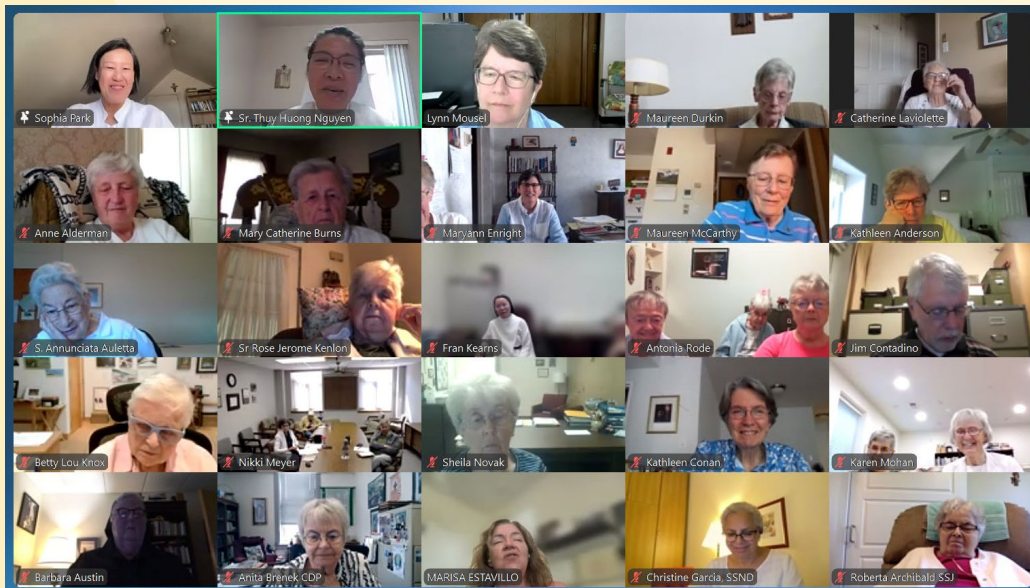
WITH SISTER JUNG EUN SOPHIA PARK, SNJM

“Where is the Holy Spirit leading us?” More than 170 participants joined us Sept. 7 for an online workshop, “Synodal Journey in Religious Life,” presented by Sister Jung Eun Sophia Park, SNJM. Sister Sophia offered insights and facilitated conversation on the synodal process in vowed religious life.

The workshop was recorded and is available in both English and Spanish on the [RFC web site](#). Sister Sophia’s PowerPoint presentation is also available in both English and Spanish.



The workshop was presented in collaboration with the Association of Latin American Missionary Sisters (AHLMA).



The Neighborhood

Members now have access to *The Neighborhood*, a closed Facebook group for paying members. *The Neighborhood* provides a virtual space to connect, build community, and learn from one another. To learn more and join, [click here](#).

When requesting access, please put the password **thrive** into the appropriate member question field.



(STILL) WAKING UP THE WORLD: RFC AND RELIGIOUS LIFE AT 70 YEARS

On **Wednesday, Nov. 13**, we invite you to join us for a virtual celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Religious Formation Conference (RFC). The program will begin at 6 p.m. Central and conclude at 7:30 p.m. Registration is required. [Register now.](#)

Our evening will include prayer and conversation, with input by **Sister Nicole Trahan, FMI, EdD**, and **Brother Patrick Sean Moffett, CFC, PhD**. **Sister Nancy Gerth, SCN**, will moderate discussion. We will close with a video presentation of “RFC Through the Years.”

Plan to join us as we look back at what we’ve accomplished together and explore our shared future!

We look forward to celebrating with you!



SAVE THE DATES FOR THE 2025 RFC CONGRESS!



THRIVE2025

PILGRIMS OF HOPE, PROPHETS OF LIGHT

October 23-26, 2025

Indianapolis Marriott East

relforcon.org/congress-2025

More information, including registration costs,
will be available soon. Stay tuned!

tabenote

DELAWARE VALLEY

InSearch

Intercommunity Formation Program for Candidates and Novices

The Delaware Valley Member Area will be hosting **InSearch on Thursdays** beginning Sept. 19. InSearch is a weekly program for candidates and novices held at Villa Maria House of Studies in Malvern, PA. The topics for the first semester include: **Drug and Alcohol Addiction, Dealing With Grief; Conflict Management; Transitions, Human Sexuality, The Vow of Chastity, and The Spirituality of Sexuality**. Though the program is designed to be offered in-person, we do have the ability to welcome participants via Zoom. Cost is \$800 per semester for those attending in-person and \$400 per semester for those attending online. For more information, contact Sister Mary Ann Spaetti, IHM at sp80lady@gmail.com.

HEARTLAND

Weekly Intercommunity Novitiate (ICN) Program

(1st or 2nd year novices) meets in/around the **St. Louis, Missouri**, area. You are welcome to consider joining us for some or all of the sessions. For more information, contact Sister Helen Adaku Ogbuji, CCVI, adaogbuji@gmail.com.

HUDSON VALLEY

Six programs offered monthly between September and April. Upcoming programs:

- **Oct 25-27, 2024** Villa Maria House of Studies, PA: The Wonder of the Incarnation: How do we live it out today? Brother Ephraim Arcement, OHC
- **Nov. 22-24, 2024** Loss, Grief and Resilience: The Pascal Mystery with Sister Maco Cassetta, CND. Sisters of St. Joseph Center for Spirituality, Ocean Grove, NJ
- **Feb. 14-16, 2025** Contemplation in Action: Called to respond to the needs of the world with Sister Susan Francois, CSJP. Mount Alvernia Retreat Center, Wappingers Falls, NY
- **March 14-16, 2025** Tending the Holy in Religious Experience with Don Bisson, FMS. Mount Alvernia Retreat Center, Wappingers Falls, NY

For more information and to register, contact Sister Maco Cassetta, CND, cassetta.maco@gmail.com or 773-841-4115.

LAKE ERIE/OHIO RIVER

Peer Supervision (Columbia, Maryland)

Contact: Walter Liss, OFM at wliss@hnpfriar.org

Peer Supervision (Sylvania, Ohio)

at Sophia Center; contact Rachel Nijakowski, OSF at rachel@sophiacenter.org

MID-ATLANTIC

Washington Area Formators Network (WAFN) meets the **fourth Wednesday of the month** through the academic year. Peer support/supervision, professional development and common initial formation events discussed. Contact Friar Paul for more information: schlomy@alumni.nd.edu.

MIDWEST

The **Midwest Inter-Community Pre-Novitiate (ICPN)** program meets six weekends a year at Siena Retreat Center in Racine, Wisconsin, for shared formation for women and men religious groups in the Midwest with postulants/pre-novices. Our purpose is to build community and peer group while providing input on important topics for our newest members. We also offer Peer Supervision three times a year for participating formators.

For more information, contact Br. David Hirt, OFM Cap at dhirt@thecapuchins.org or Sr. Priscilla Torres, OP at ptorres@sinsinawa.org

Chicago Area Intercommunity Novitiate (ICN)

Friday mornings from Sept. to mid-May

Meets normally from 9:15 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. at **Catholic Theological Union** (5416 S. Cornell Ave., Chicago, IL 60615).

First-year novices and their directors from both men's and women's religious congregations are invited to presentations on **prayer, conflict management, the Enneagram, Myers-Briggs, intergenerational relationships, poverty, obedience, discernment, mission, history of religious life, personal and ministerial ethics, reconciliation, leadership, spirituality, wellness, Psalms, etc.** *Although in-person participation is preferred, participation via Zoom is also possible.*

Twice in the fall and twice in the spring there are three-day workshops at Siena Retreat Center in Racine, WI. These longer workshops are on **family of origin, sexuality and celibacy, intercultural living, and addictions.**

For more information regarding the Chicago Area ICN contact: Tim Lenchak, SVD, at tlenchak@technydw.org

NEW ENGLAND

For more information about events in the New England Member Area, contact Frank Hagerty, SSE (hagertysse@gmail.com) or Michelle Bisailon, DHS (dhsjoy@live.com).

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

For more information, contact Charlene Herinckx, SSMO by email at srcharleneh@ssmo.org.

SOUTH

Intercommunity Program for RFC South

Intercommunity Program for Pre-Novices and Discerners generally meets on the second Saturday of each month, sometimes using Zoom, other times meeting at Our Lady of the Lake Convent in San Antonio, Texas. Some dates and topics on our schedule include:

Dec. 7, 2024 – Joyce Detzel, CDP – Prayer / Discernment

Feb. 15, 2025 – Eilish Ryan, CCVI – History of Church, of Religious Life

April 12, 2025 – Helen Marie Miksch, CDP – Stories of our Charisms

Intercommunity Program for Novices and Temporary Professed

Twice a year the men and women religious in initial formation meet. In September, we had a very enriching and fruitful September session of “Celebrating Charisms” moderated by Fr. Frank Santucci, OMI. Participants included 80 men and women in formation with their formators from five men’s congregations and seven women’s congregations.

Twice a year the women novices and temporary professed meet at Our Lady of the Lake Convent, San Antonio, Texas

February 15, 2025 – Nicole Trahan, FMI – Prophetic Call in Religious Life

Most of our novices will be celebrating their first vows during this year.

For more information about events in the South Member Area, contact Loretta Armand, SHSp at lorettaarmand@hotmail.com or Helen Marie Miksch, CDP at hmiksch@cdptexas.org.

UPPER-MIDWEST

For more information about events in the Upper-Midwest Member Area, contact Lisa Maurer, OSB by email at srlisa@duluthosb.org.

WESTERN STATES

Live Out Loud (LOL) Program

For more information about events in the Western States Member Area, contact Linda Buck, CSJ by email at lbuck@csjorange.com.

news and notes

Asociación de Hermanas Latinas Misioneras en América (AHLMA)

AHLMA promotes a culture of encounter through the collaboration of inter-congregational, national and intentional gatherings. These create spaces for dialogue, leadership development, facilitation of in-depth exchanges and networking. For more information, contact Laura Graham at 210-731-3135 or ahlma.office@gmail.com or visit ahlma.org.

Catholic Theological Union (CTU)

Graduate school of theology and ministry.

Seasonal lectures, symposia and workshops

For more information: ctu.edu/events

Center for the Study of Consecrated Life (CSCL)

Ongoing events and resources

Catholic Theological Union | Chicago, IL

For more information, visit the [CSCL web site](http://CSCLweb.site).

Communicators for Women Religious (CWR)

CWR provides professional networking and education to members who communicate and advance the mission and ministries of women religious. The organization is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. For more information, visit c4wr.org.

Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM)

National organization representing leaders of Catholic religious institutes for men, monasteries, and societies of apostolic life in the United States.

For more information, visit cmsm.org.

CMSM Winter Leadership Gathering

January 21-24, 2025 | Holy Name Passionist Retreat Center, Houston, Texas

This year’s gathering will feature deep conversation, once again introduced by case studies on the topics from other leaders, around the theme of community life. This year’s case study will focus on individualism, lifestyles that challenge religious identity, and communal challenges in small communities. Learn more: www.cmsm.org/wlg-2025/

CMSM National Assembly 2025:

July 21-24 in Baltimore, MD

Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR)

Major superiors and their vicars of communities of women religious in the United States.

For more information: cmswr.org

Giving Voice

Giving Voice is a peer-led organization that creates spaces for younger women religious to give voice to their hopes, dreams and challenges in religious life. Latest news: Sisters reflected on their experience at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) Assembly for *Global Sisters Report*. [Read article](#) in GSR. Visit giving-voice.org for more information. E-mail adminasst@giving-voice.org with questions/inquiries.

InterCongregational Collaborative Novitiate (ICCN)

Located in Chicago, the ICCN provides a quality novitiate experience with peers for novices from multiple congregations. The program facilitates ongoing discernment in a holistic and mentoring environment that fosters relational, spiritual, intellectual, and intercultural growth and development; nurtures individual charisms and the charism of religious life; and prepares novices to live vowed apostolic religious life. For more information: www.collaborative-novitiate.com

Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)

LCWR has designed an initiative, "Living into Our Emerging Future," for all women religious who wish to reflect on how we are being called to live fully religious life in the present and near future. The initiative, which runs through February 2026, includes six modules for reflection and conversation to be utilized over a three-month period. More information is available on the [LCWR web site](#). LCWR has also created a two-minute video that is an overview of the initiative. [Watch video](#) (Animoto)

National Association of Vocation and Formation Directors (Canada) | Vocations.ca

An association of Canadian Catholic leaders, committed to helping other members of Christ's body discover and live their vocations.

For more information: vocations.ca

National Black Sisters' Conference

As Black women religious we stand at the forefront in the struggle for justice, giving witness to the saving truth of the Gospel and the mission of Christ's Church on earth.

For more information: nbsc68.org

National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC)

2024 Convocation: "Walking Humbly Together"

Dates: Oct. 31-Nov. 4, 2024

Location: Minneapolis, MN

Convocation brings together all who support vocation ministry with its trademark excellence in workshops, liturgies, keynote presentations, and networking. Experience the NRVC culture of collaboration, joy, and hope while engaging in professional development and ongoing formation. Visit the [NRVC web site](#) for more information and to register for convocation, pre-convocation workshops on Oct. 31, and the Sacred Sites, Sacred Stories pilgrimage on Nov. 4. Visit our online store to make your selections, to register, and make payments.

Contact: Sr. Deborah Borneman, SS.C.M. debbiesscm@nrvc.net

Religious Brothers Conference (RBC)

The RBC gives visibility to the special charism and vocation of religious Brother. Contact: rbc@todaybrother.com

The Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI)

Provides integrated education, advocacy, consultation and collaborative initiatives to support religious institutes in meeting their stewardship responsibilities

For more information: trcri.org

Oblate School of Theology

Catholic graduate, professional and seminary school

Seasonal lectures, symposia and workshops

For more information: www.ost.edu

SOAR! Support Our Aging Religious

SOAR! raises funds and provides grants to help Catholic congregations in the U.S. care for their aging members.

For more information: soar-usa.org

Together Program

Co-sponsored by Catholic Theological Union (CTU) and the RFC, *Together* is a cohort-based, residential theology program for religious who wish to participate in theological education, formation, and community.

For more information: together-formation.com.

Contact: Chrissy Zaker, DMin at czaker@ctu.edu.





IF WE COULD BUT RECOGNIZE OUR COMMON HUMANITY

that we do belong together,
that our destinies are bound up in one another's,
that we can be free only together,
that we can be human only together,
then a glorious world would come into being
where all of us lived harmoniously together
as members of one family,
the human family.

- Desmond Tutu