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#INFORMATION

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RELIGIOUS FORMATION CONFERENCE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE



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.

Image | Snow blankets the campus of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (PBVM) in Dubuque, IA.



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WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE IN 2024?

I do a lot of thinking while walking my rambunctious Airedale Terrier, Cooper. On our evening walks he paces the streets with an eye out for neighborhood cats and discarded food. I think the cats know our routine, and steer clear of Cooper's hangouts!

As the new year takes shape, one of the things Mr. Cooper and I have been reflecting on during our walks is what 'success' looks like. Our predominately western mindset usually centers this around *doing* more and quantifying it: goals, benchmarks, success indicators, assessment, data-driven decision-making. Don't get me wrong, these things are important and certainly guide our work forward. We do need goals, and a strategic plan and the resources to attain them. That's why earlier this month we asked our constituents to fill out an [online survey](#) geared toward helping us think critically about membership and programming initiatives. I hope you'll take the time to give us some feedback!

For all the good doing produces, I think there's another 'success indicator' that's important to focus on. How do I want to *be* in 2024? What are the key questions and curiosities that will inform how I show up in the new year? What will feed my soul and offer both sustenance and resilience? In a world frayed by polarization and discord, stress and anxiety, what affirming and lifegiving praxis encourages wholeness?

Holiness, too, of course. Not buttressed by being set apart or steeped in purity, but in the Pope Francis vision of getting our hands dirty in the field hospital of the world sort of way. In the prophets of encounter and the missionaries of mercy sort of way. In the Synodal spirit, listening and dialogue sort of

way. Close to the people. Close to our humanity and theirs.

For all we do in formation ministry (and it's a lot, I don't have to tell you!), this is perhaps the most important: *the ability to accompany those coming to a deeper, and oftentimes more complex, understanding of God's dream for them in the world.* To hold space for and nurture the sacred places their humanity intersects with God's giftedness and grace, as incomplete and broken as it may be. It's the fractures, after all, that invite the greatest learning and offer the most transformation. As Leonard Cohen famously quipped, "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." These days, we're restless for more light and love.



What will success look like for you in 2024?

As we begin this new journey together, know of my prayers and best wishes. I'd be grateful if you could keep me in your prayers as well.

Warm regards,

Ryan J. Hoffmann, DMin
Executive Director

P.S. Cooper loves the Chicago snow! Our winter walks get *longer*. More time to think?



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

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DISCLOSING GOD'S LOVE

CARDINAL ROBERT MCELROY

It is with great joy that I join with you today. For last month's meeting of the synod in Rome has convinced me with even greater depth that the conversion to a synodal church constitutes the call of the Holy Spirit to the people of God in this epoch of history. And I am ever more convinced, also, that the degree to which religious communities have already enshrined synodality in their life and ministries equips them to become uniquely powerful witnesses to the synodal conversion to which the spirit is leading us.

The very nature of the synodal assembly in Rome testified to the identity of the church as the entire people of God in a piercing manner. Bishops, laywomen and men, religious, priests and deacons all sitting around common tables together in union with the pope, dialoguing in deep faith and insight, and voting equally

upon the interim report — that will be the basis for future action. These dimensions of the assembly experience point to the reality that we were truly all journeying together on this pilgrimage on Earth in the name of Jesus Christ. It was a stark contrast with past synods, where bishops alone voted and the bulk of the sessions were spent listening to a seemingly endless series of speeches that left participants passive and disengaged.

The starting point for the synod was the *instrumentum laboris*, which reflected the global process of discernment that brought together the experiences, the joys, the sorrows and the hopes that millions of Catholics shared about the faith that animates their lives.

Uniting these testimonies of faith was a deep devotion to the fundamental and enduring

mission of the church which it receives from Christ, the one sent by the Father. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the church witnesses to the Gospel in its fullness and thus cooperates with the coming reign of God. It is this mission which is the heart and soul of a synodal church.

The method of dialogue in Rome was conversation in the Spirit, a process of deep discernment which truly opened up the hearts of the synod participants. Beginning with the word of God and prayer, the participants at each table would share their initial reflections on the question at hand, each listening to the other, with substantial pauses between contributions for prayer and reflection. Then, building upon a series of such rounds, each table moved toward more directly addressing the issue for that session.

This method diminished frictions and magnified commonalities, precisely because all came to see with a greater understanding the faith of the other. As you in religious life fully recognize, such a process of discernment allows the grace of God to be recognized more clearly in our midst, and points to the commonality of our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ, bound together in our love for God and the church, even amidst sometimes contentious topics.

The synod was a profound experience of the universality of the church. Because we switched tables five times during the course of the synod, each of us came into contact with the face of the people of God in every continent and across a multitude of cultures. It was fascinating, transformative and powerfully transcendent to witness God's diverse tapestry of grace at work throughout the world.

There were enormous issue areas on which there was broad consensus — the centrality of the kerygma; the missionary identity of the church; the importance of placing the Eucharist at the center of every element of ecclesial life; the need to expand and invigorate ministries open to the laity; the church's imperative to go out of itself to embrace and advocate for the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed and the hopeless; the importance of a paradigm

shift in the church's invitation to, and treatment of, women; and the need for a global rather than a national or mono-cultural perspective.

But there were also areas of deep divide — on how to meaningfully include the laity in the church while maintaining the integrity of its hierarchical nature; on how deeply inculturation and decentralization should proceed in the Catholic community; on questions of the diaconate; and inclusion for LGBT communities.

The method of dialogue in Rome was conversation in the Spirit, a process of deep discernment which truly opened up the hearts of the synod participants.

Yet both the areas of consensus and those of division only served to underscore more deeply that the vision of synodality which Pope Francis has proposed for the church will be critical to guiding the people of God along the pathway to which the Holy Spirit is calling us.

Synodality is not rooted in specific outcomes, no matter how important. It seeks nothing less than a recasting of the culture of the church that will endure for generations. For this reason, the Holy Father has insisted the synodal reflection and action that we are undertaking throughout the world must be thought of as a process of conversion.

A specific architecture of synodality underlies Pope Francis' call to transformation in the life of the church. It is rooted in the methodology of seeing, judging and acting, and it springs from his belief that synodality is vital to "plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands."

The “i” had to become the “we,” and the “we” had to seek, at every moment, the grace of the Holy Spirit to ensure that our earthly perspectives, interests, alignments and desires did not cloud the call of the Gospel.

It is essential to understand 10 distinguishing marks that characterize Pope Francis’ vision of a synodal church, and the manner in which these distinguishing marks shaped the global dialogues which have taken place during the past two years and the dialogues of the assembly in Rome.

Walking in Communion

Synodality points to the reality that the whole of the people of God are journeying together in the life of the church and in synodal action. This means that we cannot operate from a mindset of complacency or one that accentuates the differences among the baptized. Rather, we must view ourselves as the people of Israel were called to do in the desert, united in their faith and in their understanding that God was calling them to an ever new way of life. As we were reminded at the Roman assembly, our individualistic perspectives on issues needed to be replaced by a communal understanding rooted in our common identity as disciples of Jesus Christ. The “i” had to become the “we,” and the “we” had to seek, at every moment, the grace of the Holy Spirit to ensure that our earthly perspectives, interests, alignments and desires did not cloud the call of the Gospel.

Discernment, both individual and ecclesial, is not primarily cognitive, but spiritual and intuitive. Our intellect provides critical guidance, but is not the central element in apprehending the mystery and the call of God within our souls and within the soul of the church.

The synthesis of the synodal assembly characterized synodality in these words: In its broadest sense, synodality can be understood as Christians walking in communion with Christ toward the kingdom along with the whole of humanity. Its orientation is towards

mission, and its practice involves gathering in assembly at each level of ecclesial life. It involves reciprocal listening, dialogue, community discernment and creation of consensus as an expression that renders Christ present in the Holy Spirit, each taking decisions in accordance with their responsibility.

Change and Continuity

Synodality demands a willingness to change. We all tend to become set in our ways in a manner that limits our ability to authentically grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Synodality calls us to overcome our complacency and remain actively engaged in the process of growth and sanctification that lies at the heart of discipleship.

This issue of change and continuity in the life of the church became one of the most difficult for the synodal assembly in Rome. How do the doctrinal tradition and history of the church restrict the church’s ability to refine its teaching when confronted with a world where life itself is evolving in critical and often scary ways, and it is becoming clear that on some issues the understanding of human nature and moral reality upon which previous declarations of doctrine were made were in fact limited or defective?

Last week, Pope Francis pointed to a pathway for answering this question with his *motu proprio*, [*Ad theologiam promovendam*](#). In it, he calls for a transformation of Catholic theology so that it moves away from abstraction and ideology and towards “mercifully addressing the open wounds of humanity and creation and within the folds of human history, to which it prophesies the hope of an ultimate fulfillment.”

Such a theology is inherently pastoral, with theological reflection starting from “the different

contexts and concrete situations in which people find themselves,” placing itself at the service of evangelization. It seeks “engagement and dialogue in every sphere of knowledge, in order to reach and involve the whole people of God in theological research, so that the life of the people may become theological life.”

Such a reorientation of theology will not eliminate the enormously difficult tension which the synodal assembly wrestled with: namely, identifying the specific parameters that the word of God and the doctrinal tradition

Listening was the keystone for the synod meeting in Rome. It changed hearts. It opened dialogue. It made meaningful discussion across ideological and cultural barriers possible.

of the church place on the nature and content of Catholic teaching. But such a fundamental shift in our understanding of the objective of theology can prevent our teachings from becoming disengaged from the actual life situations of women and men and the insights of human wisdom that have become apparent to us through other, non-theological forms of knowledge.

Such a pathway for theology will foster greater authentic fidelity to the deposit of faith, not less. It will, as the synod motto professed, seek “to disclose the love of God.”

Word of God

Synodality demands at its core listening to the word of God and celebrating the Eucharist that is the source and summit of the Christian life.

At every level in the global dialogues that preceded the meeting in Rome — in parishes, movements, dioceses and at the national and continental levels — the love for the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the church was the greatest joy that Catholics found in their ecclesial life.

But in many parts of the world, including our own nation, the appreciation for the power and the essential nature of the word of God is underdeveloped. The synodal meeting in Rome recognized this deficiency and called for deeply enhancing the understanding of the people of God about the imperative to read deeply the Scriptures, come to understand their context and meaning, and integrate them into our individual spiritual lives and that of the entire ecclesial community.

Authentic Listening

Synodality demands a profound stance of authentic listening from every believer who seeks to participate in and contribute to the life of the church. The Scriptures tell us that God listens attentively to the cry of God’s people. Listening is the respect we owe to others in recognition of their equal dignity. Listening flows from a recognition that we have so much to learn. Listening lies at the heart of true encounter with the other disciples we meet in the life of the church. Yet a stance of authentic listening is hard to embrace and sustain. It can be frustrating and it is always demanding. But it is the only pathway through which others can without fear truly open their hearts, and through which we can genuinely open our hearts to others.

Listening was the keystone for the synod meeting in Rome. It changed hearts. It opened dialogue. It made meaningful discussion across ideological and cultural barriers possible. It established deep bonds of common discipleship. We as a church must come to listen, truly listen, if we are to embrace a synodal church and the mission of evangelization and encounter.

Forthrightness and Unity

If building a church and a synodal process that reflects a stance of authentic listening at all levels is one necessary ingredient for genuine dialogue, the willingness of Catholics to speak out honestly is its companion virtue. So often processes of discernment and decision-making in the life of the church are crippled by people’s reluctance to forthrightly present their opinions without fear. This creates

Humility for the disciple is not putting yourself down or ignoring your good qualities. Christian humility is simply the commitment to present yourself honestly to others, without pretense.

false perceptions about the actual needs of the community, the issues of faith and pastoral practice that are at stake, and the community's genuine voice.

As the synodal meeting proceeded, this willingness to speak forthrightly grew significantly. It contributed tremendously to efforts to recognize and bridge our differences. But when it came time to write the final synthesis, the desire to reflect consensus at times weighed against forthrightness. This tension is inherent in the nature of a gathering such as this which treasures unity as an essential dimension of ecclesial life. But as synodality develops in the church, this tension between forthrightness and unity will have to be explored further. I believe the experiences of communities of consecrated life can make a significant contribution to this question.

Christian Humility

A synodal church is a humble church. There are tremendous misperceptions within the church and among believers about the nature of Christian humility. Humility for the disciple is not putting yourself down or ignoring your good qualities. Christian humility is simply the commitment to present yourself honestly to others, without pretense. Our American culture particularly encourages us to present ourselves in the strongest possible light, hiding our weaknesses and exaggerating our strengths. This imperative often becomes for us a prison of our own creation, leading us to feel obliged to live up to the false expectations and images that we have created. Christian humility liberates us from that prison.

So, too, it is for the church. Our love for the faith community that is our home and treasure leads us at times to deny or hide harsh defects

in the Catholic communion. We feel compelled to present and defend a counterfeit church, devoid of error or sin. The search for a humble church alone can free us from that prison.

A humble church acknowledges and seeks to atone for the wounds it has brought to others, particularly the sexual abuse of young people. A synodal church genuinely seeks to discern its woundedness and embrace reform. Its holiness is exemplified by its humility, not by denial or the protection of its reputation.

A humble church confronts the evil of clericalism that corrodes its spiritual and ministerial life. The synod synthesis states:

Clericalism stems from a misunderstanding of the divine call, viewing it more as a privilege than a service and manifesting itself in the exercise of power in a worldly manner that refuses to allow itself to be accountable. This distortion of the priestly vocation needs to be challenged from the earliest stages of formation by ensuring close contact with the people of God.

One of the most significant contributions that lay members made to the synodal assembly was to press deeply and continually for transparency rather than secrecy in the life of the church. This too is a dimension of being a humble church. On issues ranging from finances to processes for assessing allegations against leaders in the church to questions of episcopal appointments and the evaluation of clergy, the lay participants in the synodal assembly made clear that there should be a major transformation of the manner in which the church approaches secrecy and accountability. Both laity and bishops fully recognized that confidentiality constitutes a necessary element

of ecclesial life and justice, but they recognized also that confidentiality has too often been a smokescreen for limiting transparency without justification.

A Discerning Church

A synodal church is a discerning church, not a parliamentary one. It must empower the voices of all, but its search for God's will cannot be reduced to building majorities or forming coalitions. It is essential to recognize that synodality is more concerned with nurturing a spiritual culture within the life of the church rather than specific policy outcomes. It recognizes the important hierarchical dimensions of our ecclesial life and tradition and also finds its foundation in the equal dignity of all of the baptized. Synodality refuses to be governed by the delusion of self-sufficiency, or ideological frameworks that obscure realities of our lives and our world.

Universal and Particular

A synodal church seeks a healthy decentralization in its structures and life. At the very heart of synodality lies the heritage of the church of the first millennium that embodied genuine *communio* through emphasizing collegial participation of the bishops, both regionally and universally, in addressing questions of faith, worship and practice. The heritage of synod in the early church also pointed to the integral office of bishop of the local church as a constitutive dimension of the church, not a derivative or deputized one. As the Second Vatican Council proclaimed, the bishop is the shepherd of the local church, not in a manner of delegation from the pope, but as a direct sacramental and pastoral reality that lies in the structure of the church itself. The preeminence and jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome must be fully recognized in any actions and structures that seek to embody collegiality. But a true principle of subsidiarity is also critical for the building of a synodal church.

One of the central topics for decentralization in the life of the church flowed from the diversity of cultures in the global Catholic community. The interplay between unity and diversity is

especially pronounced in the effort to understand the proper relationship between particular cultures and histories and the need for adaptation on local levels.

The synodal synthesis states:

The cultural, historical and continental contexts in which the Church is present reveal different spiritual and material needs. This shapes the culture of the local churches, their missionary priorities, the concerns and gifts that each of them brings to the synodal dialogue, and the languages with

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which they express themselves. During the days of the Assembly, we were able to experience directly, and most joyfully, the diverse expressions of being church.

Many of you in consecrated life have had deep and powerful encounters with the richness of the global church and know this joy. For us in the assembly, it was profoundly hopeful and illuminating to sit with bishops, lay leaders, priests and consecrated religious and behold how the challenges to and opportunities for enhancing the mission of the church look entirely different across the world. This truly was a privileged moment of grace.

The assembly synthesis concludes that: We need to cultivate a greater sensitivity towards the riches of our diverse expressions of being Church. This requires a search for a dynamic balance between the Church as a whole and its local rootedness, between respect for the bond of Church unity and the risk of homogenization that stifles variety.

Meanings and priorities vary among different contexts, and this requires identifying and fostering forms of decentralization.

Co-Responsibility

Synodality demands a participative and co-responsible church. If missionary discipleship is to become a reality, it must be rooted in an ecclesiology and pastoral culture that genuinely promotes these concepts in practice. Church structures that stifle full-bodied participation by Catholics in every facet of the life of the parish, diocese or universal church must be reexamined and reformed. Practices that effectively exclude individuals or groups from feeling welcome in the church must be rejected.

Church structures that stifle full-bodied participation by Catholics in every facet of the life of the parish, diocese or universal church must be reexamined and reformed.

Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, the Dominican preacher who gave the retreat that began the synod, underscored that baptism forms the foundation for the fundamental equality of all believers in the life of the church. He stated that every baptized Catholic is called to participate actively in the life of the church and has authority and responsibility in the decision-making of the church.

The synodal synthesis expressed these realities in these words:

Before any distinction of charisms and ministries “we were all baptized by the one Spirit into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Therefore, among all the baptized, there is a genuine equality of dignity and a common responsibility for mission, according to the vocation of each.

Much of the time of the synodal assembly was spent in understanding this truth and its implications for the life of the church at this moment in its history.

A critically important fruit of this discussion was to refine the teaching of the Second Vatican Council about the role of the laity in the internal life of the church. The synthesis states:

Vatican II and subsequent magisterial teaching present the distinctive mission of the laity in terms of the sanctification of temporal or secular realities. However, the reality is that pastoral practice, at the parish, diocesan and recently even the universal levels, increasingly entrusts lay people with tasks and ministries within the life of the Church itself.

Vatican II had proclaimed that the laity had a privileged place in the transformation of the world. The assembly was stating that lay women and men also have a privileged place in the transformation of the church.

The synthesis points to [*Praedicate Evangelium*](#), Pope Francis’ apostolic constitution on the reform of the Roman Curia, as a pivotal pathway for understanding this new reality. Many of the participants at the synod shared their frustration about the inability of local churches to invite lay leaders into important positions in the life of dioceses and parishes because of impediments in canon law affirms a notion of authority and power that distinguishes between those positions that truly require orders and those that can be empowered in the Roman Curia by the pope. They are not coextensive.

This teaching can be a foundation for opening *new* pathways to lay leadership in critically important areas of church life at diocesan and parochial levels.

If the desire to open ecclesial life more fully to lay leadership and participation resonated widely in the assembly, the desire to bring women more fully into leadership and decision-making roles provided the most inspiring

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moments of the meeting in Rome. Repeatedly during the spiritual and theological reflections which took place during the assembly, the point had been made that Jesus, in his invitation to women as disciples and witnesses to the Resurrection, produced a paradigm shift for the treatment of women in the culture of his time. Many in the hall felt that the time has come for just such a shift in the life of the church.

The assembly synthesis states that “churches all over the world have expressed a clear request that the active contribution of women should be recognized and valued, and that their pastoral leadership increase in all areas of the church’s life and mission. ... It is urgent to ensure that women can participate in decision-making processes and assume roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry.” There were more than 80 proposals for action contained in the synthesis. This was the *only* one that was labeled urgent.

An Inclusive Church

A synodal church must be an inclusive church. The global synthesis forthrightly proclaims the need to make men and women effective protagonists of their life in society and the church, despite barriers of poverty, education, race or gender. It condemns all of these barriers as sinful. It recognizes and condemns powerfully the structures in society and the church that grind people down with unceasing exclusion. It calls for a deepening of the church’s preferential option for the poor and the elimination of all forms of violence and exploitation in the Catholic community. Moreover, it condemns all of these evils with the humble recognition that they have existed

within the life of the church and are a repudiation of Jesus Christ.

But regarding the exclusion of the divorced and the remarried and LGBT Catholics, the synthesis is far more muted.

It does call for the church to genuinely listen and accompany these members of the people of God who live on the periphery of the church.

More importantly, the synthesis advances in the discussion of these very issues a moving understanding of the pastoral approach of the Lord himself:

Several Gospel passages reveal that Jesus meets people in the uniqueness of their personal story and situation. He never begins from the perspective of prejudices or labels, but from the authenticity of relationship to which he commits himself wholeheartedly, even at the cost of experiencing misunderstanding and rejection. Jesus always listens to the cry for help of those in need, even in situations in which it remains unexpressed. He engages in gestures that communicate love and restore confidence; he makes new life possible with his presence; those who meet him come away transformed. This happens because the truth of which Jesus is the bearer is not an idea, but the very presence of God in our midst; and the love with which he acts is not just a feeling, but the justice of the Kingdom that changes history.

Let us pray that in the coming year this beautiful vision of Jesus’ pastoral ministry may light the way for the church’s ministry to those who are marginalized in the church

because of their marriage status or orientation or identity.

A Proposal for Those in Consecrated Life

Consecrated women and men have been powerfully present at every stage of the synodal process which has led to this moment. In my own Diocese of San Diego, the synodal meetings of the consecrated women and the consecrated men in their respective small group sessions were a source of richness, insight, vision and inspiration. At this particular moment in the life of our church, those in consecrated life have a *unique* ability to energize, enlighten and spiritually deepen the process of synodality that Pope Francis has launched.

The synodal synthesis put it in these words:

The Church's charismatic dimension is made manifest in the rich and varied forms of consecrated life. This testimony has contributed to renewing the life of the ecclesial community in every age and provides an antidote to the perennial temptation towards worldliness. The diverse families that compose religious life demonstrate the beauty of discipleship and holiness in Christ, whether in their distinctive forms of prayer, their service among the people, whether through forms of community life, the solitude of the contemplative life or at the frontier of new cultures. Those in consecrated life have often been the first to sense important historical changes and to heed the promptings of the Spirit. Today, too, the Church needs their prophetic voice and action.

As we move from the first synodal assembly in Rome back to consultation with the people of God, and then to next year's final meeting in Rome, there are four pivotal areas in which your prophetic voice and action can bring us much closer to the call of the Holy Spirit.

Discernment

Through your experience with discernment in community and ecclesial life, you can help the church in the United States to construct and implement realistic and spiritually rich pathways of discernment that could bring parish and diocesan life and decision-making

closer to the grace and the presence of God. Our experience with conversation in the Spirit was magnificent in Rome. But it required repeated full days of prayer and sharing and dialogue. Those in leadership in our parishes and dioceses cannot replicate this experience because of the time it demands.

The synod synthesis recognized this reality when it proposed that other models of ecclesial discernment be investigated. Some of these would be extremely valuable in the life of the local church. As those most familiar with discernment — its richness, its demands, its

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ability to bond with God and one another — you can be central instruments for translating discernment into ecclesial reality, by training those who can lead and by assisting decision-makers who seek God's guidance.

Prophets of Humility

You can be advocates and prophets for a humble church. The assembly synthesis locates in consecrated life an antidote for the worldliness to which we all succumb. There is no greater worldliness in ecclesial life than the mistaken notion that secrecy, denial and pretense constitute an authentic path for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Help transform the institutional life of our church into a transparent and honest reality which is willing to face its errors and its sins.

Lifelong Formation

One of the central themes of the assembly in Rome was the need for comprehensive and lifelong formation for all members of the church. The synthesis states: "we propose that

priority should be given to providing programmes designed and intended for the ongoing formation of the entire People of God (laity, consecrated and ordained ministers).”

As the assembly progressed, and its discussions of the baptismal call to ministry unfolded, there was a recurring conclusion that every facet of ecclesial life required authentic formation.

You who are in consecrated life can be crucial leaders in defining and implementing that formation, both because you have entered into a life of continuing formation and because in your ministries you have come to possess tremendous expertise in what such formation can mean.

Advocates for Inclusion

You can become even stronger advocates for the type of inclusion that the synthesis pointed to in its discussion of Jesus’ pastoral mission. You are already enormously committed and effective in supporting all those who are excluded within the life of the church and society. You witness to the rights of the poor, immigrants, the unborn, victims of ethnic and racial injustice and the disabled. You constantly seek to bring all of God’s children into the

life of the church. Deepen this mission as the church moves forward on the synodal path. Help us to follow the pastoral example of Jesus in the Scriptures. Help us to embrace all ... *todos, todos, todos.*

The synodal journey has now stretched over two years. It has summoned millions of Catholics from every continent to prayerfully present their dreams, their hopes and their sorrows in the life of the church. These dreams, reflected in the grace of the Holy Spirit, will forge the pathway for the church that we love for the coming decades. As consecrated religious, as formers of souls, as witnesses to faith and justice in a world which so often rejects both, may the role of religious women and men be as central to this synodal reform as it has been to every moment of great reform in the history of the church of Jesus Christ. Let us all work together to radically disclose God’s love as we move toward a fuller conversion within the church we cherish.

***Cardinal McElroy** serves as Bishop of the Diocese of San Diego and gave the keynote address at the 2023 Congress in November.*

In Memory: Sister Peggy Nichols, CSJ

The Conference was deeply saddened by the news of the passing of Sr. Margaret (Peggy) Nichols, CSJ on November 9, 2023. Sister Peggy served as Executive Director of the RFC from 1983-1990, a pivotal period in the life of the Conference. As Sister Mary Ellen O’Connell, CSJ noted in her reflection on Sister Peggy’s life, “Her experience with the Sister Formation Conference brought her around the country, listening and supporting the religious communities in the 1980s, a critical time for formation of religious congregations.” In fact, it was during her tenure that the Conference began to award the Mary Emil Penet, IHM Award to those who had made significant contributions to formation ministry, a recognition and practice that continues today. Sister Mary Ellen’s eulogy concludes with her belief that “Peggy truly believed:



- It’s not what you do – but how you do it.
- It’s not what you see, but how you see it.
- It’s not what you say, or what you achieve,
- But it is the presence, the presence that you are, the way you share God’s presence.”

Upcoming *webinars*

WWW.RELFORCON.ORG/WEBINARS

1

FEB

Thursday 1:00-3:30pm CT

**Bread to be Broken, Blood to
*be Shed, Life to be Given***

Giselle Gómez Guillén, STJ

In partnership with AHLMA

7

FEB

Wednesday 1:00-2:30pm CT

**Are These The Golden Years?
Challenges & Opportunities
Women & Men Religious Face
As We Age**

Dianne Bergant, CSA

In partnership with SOAR!

15

FEB

Thursday 6:30-7:30pm CT

**Come Forth: How the
Raising of Lazarus Can
Offer You New Life**

James Martin, SJ



CALLED BY LOVE TO BE LOVE*

SISTER HELEN ADAKU OGBUJI, CCVI

How many of you have gone to a wedding feast recently? Did you bring your lamp and oil with you? I bet none of you did. But I am sure you went with a gift, which is a symbol of love.

In the Gospel reading from Mt. 25:1-13, Jesus tells a parable of Ten Virgins, what we will call in our modern-day terms: ten bridesmaids. All of them are virgins; all have lamps, and waiting for the same bridegroom. All of them were on the same journey and present for the same wedding. But one thing is different, half were prepared for the wedding and half were not.

When taking their lamps, the imprudent ones did not bring enough oil with them, but the prudent ones brought flasks of oil with their lamps. And it appears that the wedding feast was celebrated at night.

The bridegroom was late for his wedding! When he arrived, it was time to light the lamps. The imprudent ones just realized that they didn't have enough oil. They begged: "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise ones replied, "No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves." I wondered how the wise virgins knew what to do, that they needed to bring flasks of oil, just in case. They were in a culture where "time" was much more flexible. A celebration that may be scheduled for 10:00 am, could begin at 11:00 am!

Sometimes, I feel angry at these wise ones, and I call them selfish and stingy. Why did they refuse to share their oil? Did Jesus praise their unkind attitude as wise? Would it have

* RFC Congress: Thriving Together in Formation | Preaching on The Parable of the Wise Virgins (Mt. 25:1-13)
Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (November 11, 2023).

**To thrive is to flourish, to prosper, to bloom, to be successful, etc.
We cannot thrive when we don't have enough oil for our lamps.**

made a difference if they had shared their oil? These questions were going through my mind as I reflected on this passage.

The “helpers” (in the Enneagram) will understand how difficult it is to say “no” to someone who needs help! How many of us are “yes” people here? We find it difficult to say no, even when we know we are in a tight corner. We desire to help save the world. I bet that we could have shared our oil with the imprudent virgins when they had asked.

I think it is okay to say “no” when we are not able to help. In doing so, we are honoring the fact that we cannot be responsible for someone’s unpreparedness. The relationship with the Bridegroom is personal and it is our responsibility to prepare to meet Him! We cannot rely on others to get us prepared. It is our responsibility! Therefore, the wise virgins were not mean, they were wise, resilient, prepared, and ready.

Do we have extra oil, enough for your journey of faith? What is your extra oil? What extra thing could you do? How many times do you experience your lamp going out? How do you recharge your lamp? How is your relationship with the Bridegroom? Whatever it is, just do a little bit extra. That is wisdom! She is found by those who seek her! She seeks those worthy of her and graciously appears to them (Wis 6:12-16).

To be wise is to be prepared! Imagine you are planning a trip to Chicago for the RFC Congress, and you are driving! What do you do first? Check whether the car is in good condition. Fill the car up with gas, pack essentials, etc. All these are in preparation for a trip. However, if you do not get all these ready, you may surprise yourself on the way. That is what the wise virgins did. They planned for this wedding

feast. They had extra or enough oil with them, no matter how long it took the bridegroom to arrive for the feast. They were ready!

That is what we are called to do as religious men and women: to be ready! The theme for our Congress this year is “Thriving Together in Formation.” To thrive is to flourish, to prosper, to bloom, to be successful, etc. We cannot thrive when we don't have enough oil for our lamps.

The two symbols that Jesus used in this parable are lamp and oil. The lamp reminds us of Jesus’ invitation to let our light shine. To light our lamp and place it on the table, rather than under a table. We thrive by being the presence of Jesus in a darkened world. Jesus is the source of wisdom. To be in Him is to be wise and to reflect His light.

To reflect this light, religious men and women are found around the world ministering to the vulnerable immigrants and refugees at the borders and in our cities, and to the poor at the margins of society. We bring hope to families in parish ministries, to young people in youth ministries, to the elderly in our homes for the elderly, to the imprisoned in prison ministries, and in our hospitals, we take care of the uninsured. In our schools, we teach with our hearts and we advocate for justice in social work. We are called by Love, to be love. We make the presence of Jesus real and felt in our world. The option for the poor is not optional for us; it is the essence of our lives and who we have to be.

You will find religious people in war-torn countries like Ukraine, Sudan, Israel, Palestine, Syria, etc. They are not afraid of war or violence. They suffer with the people and their presence brings hope to those devastated by war. Someone asked a sister in Sudan, why she didn't return

to her country during the war. The reason is because she desired to suffer with the people!

We thrive because our presence is light, hope, and love for the world. Just imagine for a moment a church without religious women and men! This reminds me of a member of a certain parish who complained that there were no longer religious women in their parish. He asked their pastor to open up an old convent that was formerly occupied by a group of nuns and invite them back, or at least invite another

To allow hope to flourish, we need to be ready to walk together, and we need to walk side by side.

group of nuns back. The pastor responded: "If you need nuns to become part of our community, you would need to encourage your children to join the convent."

Although our number is decreasing, we still thrive because we help people know that God loves them, even when they don't see it. It is not what we do, but how we do it. And it is not so much about what we do, but who we are. We make the gospel come alive in our ministries, communities, prayer and vowed life.

In our desire to be ready like the wise virgins, we collaborate with other like-minded individuals and organizations that share similar values of options for the poor and they become our charism carriers. Using the words of Pope Francis: "We need to rediscover that we need one another, and in this way, our human family can experience a rebirth...." (*Fratelli Tutti*, #35).

With the collaboration of our charism carriers, we continue to live out our founding charisms and share the love of Christ that is handed over freely. We walk together in faith. That is

a synodal walk! That is Synodal Spirit! Pope Francis expressed it well: "The purpose of synodality is not to produce a document. But it is to plant dreams, to allow hope to flourish, to inspire trust, to bind up wounds, to weave together relationships, to awaken a dawn of hope, and to learn from one another."

To allow hope to flourish, we need to be ready to walk together, and we need to walk side by side. An African adage says, if you want to walk far, walk together, if you want to walk fast, walk alone. And there is no guarantee that you will walk far when you are walking alone! As wise virgins, our presence still lights up the world. It is still appreciated and desired in a world ravaged by war, isolation, racial discrimination, violence, natural disasters, financial crises, and hunger for bread, love, and God's Word.

According to St. Augustine: "We must make ready the lamps, make sure they do not go out ...; renew them with the inner oil of an upright conscience" (Sermon, 93). Pope Francis reiterated: What Jesus asks of us is to be ready for a beautiful encounter, which means keeping our light burning with the lamps of faith, hope, and charity; keeping our hearts open to goodness, beauty, and truth, and taking care not to fall asleep. (General Audience, April 24, 2013).

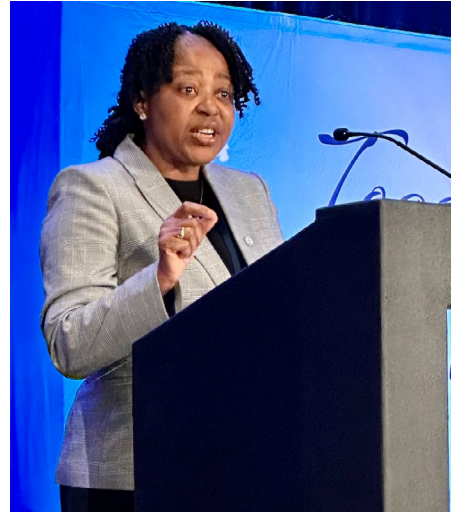
We cannot afford to fall asleep when we are waiting for the Bridegroom! We cannot afford to let our lamps burn out all because we don't have enough oil. That is not the spirit of thriving. That is not the presence of hope and love that we illumine. The world desperately needs hope. It is this hope that the presence of religious persons brings! Hope keeps the religious women and men thriving. To keep this hope alive, we must keep our light shining and have enough oil for the journey of faith. It is not a suggestion. It is an obligation!

Sister Ogbuji is a member of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word from Houston, TX and preached at the closing Eucharist of Congress.

Synodality in Action

SIGHTS FROM THE 2023 CONGRESS





the journey continues!

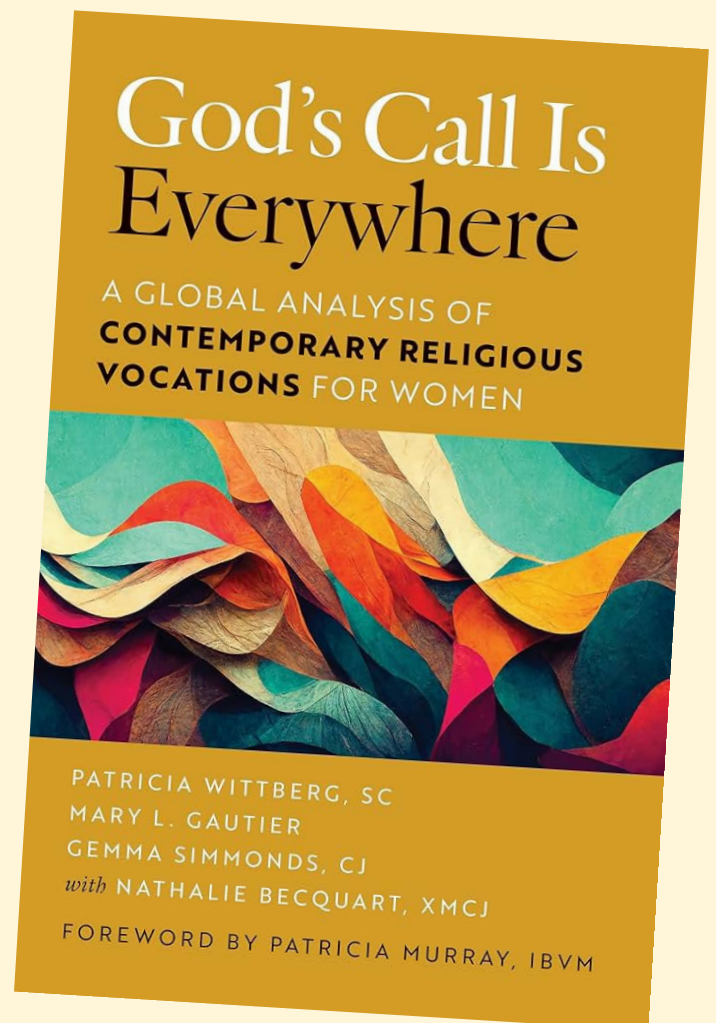
GOD'S CALL IS EVERYWHERE: A GLOBAL ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS FOR WOMEN

Religious life is vitally necessary to the Catholic church today. But it will exist in new and varied forms which speak to the spiritual hungers of different societies, ethnic cultures, and generations. *God's Call is Everywhere: A Global Analysis of Contemporary Religious Vocations for Women* (Liturgical Press, 2023) is the first comparative analysis of research in six countries investigating women who have entered vowed religious life in Catholicism in the twenty-first century. The data include survey responses from institute leaders, formation directors, and the women themselves, conducted in the United States, Canada, Australia, and France, along with focus groups and interviews in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and France. Through a careful summary of these studies and comparing differences, readers of this book will have a better understanding of the hopes and concerns of those discerning a vocation to religious life and learn how to move forward in the future.

God's Call Is Everywhere includes six major points of comparison:

- Demographic characteristics of the women entering religious life and their personal and familial backgrounds
- What attracted them to religious life and to their specific religious institute
- What they find most satisfying and most challenging about religious life
- Their hopes and concerns for the future
- Experiences and programs that were helpful in their vocational discernment
- Aspects of the larger society, of the Church, and of the religious institutes which make vocational discernment difficult for women today

The analysis is followed by six reflective essays, two of which discuss the implications of the findings for future vocational discernment programs and four of which compare the findings to religious life in Asia, Africa, and Latin America



For more information and purchase options, [click here](#).

tabenote

DELAWARE VALLEY

InSearch

Intercommunity Formation Program for Candidates and Novices

The Delaware Valley Member Area will be hosting **InSearch on Thursdays**. InSearch is a weekly program for candidates and novices held at Villa Maria House of Studies in Malvern, PA. Though the program is designed to be offered in-person, we do have capacity to welcome participants via Zoom. Cost is \$400 per semester for those attending in person and \$200 per semester for those attending online.

To inquire about the InSearch topics and themes for this spring, please contact Michelle Leshner, SSJ at mlesher@ssiphila.org.

Meeting of Formation Directors

For more information, please contact Michelle Leshner, SSJ at mlesher@ssiphila.org.

Peer Supervision

For more information, please Contact: Mary Mester, RSM, at MesterM@aol.com

HEARTLAND

Weekly ICN Program (1st or 2nd year novices)

You are welcome to consider joining us for some or all the sessions. We meet in and/around the **St. Louis area**. For more information, contact Marie Rachelle Cruz, DC by email at srmrcruz@doc1633.org.

HUDSON VALLEY

Feb. 16-18, 2024

Home is Where We Start From! Exploring Family Dynamics and their Influence on Religious Life with Mary Pat Garvin, RSM
Mount Alvernia Retreat Center | Wappingers Falls, NY

Mar. 15-17, 2024

Integrating the Vows with Michelle Leshner, SSJ
San Alfonso Retreat Center | Long Branch, NJ

Apr. 19-21, 2024

Intergenerational/Intercultural Challenges in Religious Life with Boreta A. Singleton, RSM and Don Bisson, FMS
San Alfonso Retreat Center | Long Branch, NJ

For more information about events in the New York and New Jersey area, contact Maco Cassetta, CND via email at cassetta.maco@gmail.com.

LAKE ERIE/OHIO RIVER

Peer Supervision (Columbia, Maryland)

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

Peer Supervision (Cincinnati, Ohio)

at Mount St. Joseph; contact Betty Finn, SC at elfinnsc@earthlink.net

Peer Supervision (Sylvania, OH)

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

MID-ATLANTIC

Washington Area Formators Network (WAFN) meets **4th 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 began Oct. 13th at Siena Retreat in Racine, WI with a weekend on Discernment with Sr. Carrie Miller, SLW. The ICPN meets 6 weekends a year at Siena 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.

Topics for this year include:

Feb. 23-25, '24: Luann Brown, BVM: **Community Living Skills**
Mar. 15-17, '24: Juliet Mousseau, RSCJ: **Intergenerational Living**
Apr. 12-14, '24: Javier Rodriguez, OFM Cap: **Transitions**

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

The **Midwest Area Inter-Community Pre-Novitiate Program** continues to meet at the Siena Retreat Center in Racine, WI in February and March, meeting **February 23rd-25th** with Sr. Luann Brown, BVM on **Community Living Skills** and **March 15th-17th** with Juliet Mousseau, RSCJ on **Intergenerational Living**.

If you are interested in learning more about the ICPN, please contact Br. David Hirt, OFM Cap at dhirt@thecapuchins.org or Priscilla Torres, OP at ptorres@sinsinawa.org. Br. David Hirt, OFM Cap who has served as the RFC Liaison to the Midwest Member Area is being transferred his community's inter-provincial novitiate in California in

May. If you are interested in serving as a full or co-liaison for the region, please email Br. David (email above) and Ryan Hoffman at rhoffmann@relforcon.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@technydwr.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

NRVC/RFC Member Area Gathering

April 30-May 2 | St. Placid Monastery | Lacey, WA
\$75 per person per night (room and board)

Presentation by Mary Pat Garvin, RSM, PhD on May 1:
Well-being: Gift to Self and Others.

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

SOUTH

Intercommunity Program for Novices and Temporary Professed generally meets on the **1st weekend of the month.**

The group comes together at Our Lady of the Lake Convent or at the Oblate School of Theology (both in San Antonio, TX).

Intercommunity Program for Pre-Novices and Discerners generally meets on the **2nd Saturday of each month**, sometimes using Zoom, other times at Our Lady of the Lake Convent in San Antonio, TX. The first gathering this fall will be October 14, 2023.

For more information about events in the South Member Area, contact Helen Marie Miksch, CDP at hmiksch@cdptexas.org.

Intercommunity Program for Novices and Temporary Professed generally meets on the 1st weekend of the month. The group comes together at Our Lady of the Lake Convent or at the Oblate School of Theology (both in San Antonio, TX). On **March 2**, Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso will be with us to present on social justice concerns at Oblate School of Theology.

Intercommunity Program for Pre-Novices and Discerners generally meets on the **2nd Saturday of each month**, sometimes using Zoom, other times meeting at Our Lady of the Lake Convent in San Antonio, TX. Upcoming dates and topics on our schedule include:

February 10, 2024: Theresa Samson, FMA — **Prayer: Relationship with God**

March 9, 2024: Deborah Borneman, SSCM — **Skills for Community Living: Communication**

April 13, 2024: Teresa Maya, CCVI — **History and Heritage in Religious Life/Moving into the Future**

For more information about events in the South Member Area, contact 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.

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.

news and notes

Asociación de Hermanas Latinas Misioneras en América (AHLMA)

AHLMA is a network to support, accompany and empower Latina sisters in their ministry and service for consecrated life, for the Church and society in the United States. More information online at www://ahlma.org/. Contact: Laura Graham by email at ahlma.office@gmail.com.

Catholic Theological Union (CTU)

Graduate school of theology and ministry.

Seasonal lectures, symposia and workshops

For more information: www.ctu.edu/events

Center for the Study of Consecrated Life (CSCL)

Ongoing events and resources

Catholic Theological Union | Chicago, IL

For more information: ctuconsecratedlife.org

Communicators for Women Religious (CWR)

Provides professional networking and education to members who communicate and advance the mission and ministries of women religious.

For more information: www.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: www.cmsm.org

CMSM Winter Leadership Gathering

January 23-25, 2024 | Houston, TX

Visit cmsm.org for more details. For questions, contact Greta David, Director of Communications, at [gdavid@cmsm.org](mailto:g david@cmsm.org).

2024 CMSM Assembly

July 28-August 1 | Atlanta, GA

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. Please see giving-voice.org for more information. Email 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 Collaborative (LC)

A resource for religious and charism carriers (associates, affiliates, etc.) to expand their personal development as a leader and increase consciousness of current and emerging systems.

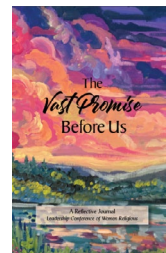
For more information: <https://thelc.global/>

Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)

An association of leaders of congregations of Catholic women religious in the United States.

For more information: www.lcwr.org.

By February 23 order LCWR's reflection book entitled ***The Vast Promise Before Us***, a collection of more than 40 reflections on hope written by women religious in elected leadership. The reflections are accompanied by artwork by Catholic sisters. For more information and to order, [click here](#).



2024 LCWR Assembly

August 13-16 | Orlando, FL

Live Out Loud (LOL) Program

LOL is a virtual program that offers modules on topics relevant to religious life. Open to pre-novices, novices, formators and members who live in formation communities. Offered in English and Spanish. For more information about the program visit seekingthemore.com or contact Linda Buck, CSJ at lbuck@csjorange.com.

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)

Our annual Summer Institute will offer five onsite workshops at the Marillac Center, in Leavenworth, KS, **July 9-30, 2024**. Choose to attend one or several workshops, it's your choice. All workshops include overnight accommodation at the Marillac Center. Registration opens in February in the online store.

Orientation Program for New Vocation Directors

July 10-14, 2024, presented by Sr. Deborah Borneman, S.S.C.M., and team

Ethical Issues in Vocation and Formation Ministry

July 16-17, 2024, presented by Rev. Raymond P. Carey, Ph.D.

Behavioral Assessment 1

July 19-21, 2024, presented by Rev. Raymond P. Carey, Ph.D.

Health and Wellness Issues in Candidate Assessment

July 23-24, 2024, presented by Sr. Mary Catherine Redmond, P.B.V.M., and Sr. Chero Chuma, C.S.J.P., D.N.P.

Understanding, Assessing, and Fostering Psycho-Sexual Integration

July 26-29, 2024, presented by Sr. Lynn M. Levo, C.S.J., Ph.D.

For more information and to register, visit NRVC.net.

Religious Brothers Conference (RBC)

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

2024 RBC Assembly

July 15-18 | Stony Point, New York

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.



THRIVE2023

Together in Formation

Order Recordings from the 2023 RFC Congress

2023 Congress recordings are now available for those who could not attend the RFC gathering in November.

Plenary and seminar (breakout) presentations are available for purchase in CD, DVD, MP3, and MP4 formats.

For more information and to order, visit:

<https://rfcconferencerecordings2023.com>

Presentations are an excellent source of input for initial and ongoing formation sessions in community or individually. Intercommunity Novitiates and other groups are encouraged to use presentations for learning opportunities around synodality, formation ministry, religious life, intergenerationality, interculturality and more.



ForMission

Two-year, non-residential formation and integration process for those who are new to or engaged in formation ministry and seeking to grow in knowledge and skills necessary to accompany those in various stages of formation. New class begins **June 8-16** at the Mercy Center in St. Louis.

Life Commitment Program

Annual week-long experience for religious women and men discerning or anticipating perpetual profession. Will take place **July 7-15** at the University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, IL.

Compromiso de Vida

Designed from a Hispanic cultural perspective and presented in Spanish, this program invites religious men and women discerning or preparing for final vows to share their stories and experiences. Dates to be announced in **early 2024**.

Orientation to Formation

Series of online sessions for those in ministries of formation as well as those in elected leadership. New group will begin in **October**.

Workshops

Presented periodically online and at various sites across the country on contemporary topics relevant to formation ministry and religious life.

Webinars

Offered regularly throughout the year to provide opportunities for ongoing formation and lifelong learning.

LENT WEBINAR

"Come Forth!" with Fr. James Martin, SJ
Thursday, February 15, 2024
 6:30-7:30 pm CST

Together Program

Cohort-based, residential intentional community for religious sisters and brothers. Three program components consist of (1) theological education at Catholic Theological Union, (2) formation opportunities on Thursday evenings, and (3) residing in a living/learning community of peers. For more information visit together-formation.com or contact Chrissy Zaker, Program Liaison, at czaker@ctu.edu.

Intercongregational Collaborate Novitiate (ICCN)

The ICCN provides a quality novitiate experience with peers from multiple congregations and facilitates ongoing discernment in a holistic and mentoring environment that fosters relational, spiritual, intellectual and intercultural growth.

For more information visit collaborative-novitiate.com or email the Co-Directors at directorsiccn@gmail.com.

Learn more and begin your next adventure by going to relforcon.org/new-adventure

For your inspiration

Walking.
I am listening to a deeper way.
Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me.
Be still, they say.
Watch and listen.
You are the result of the love of thousands.

- Mary Hogan, *Dwellings*