



LCWR Assembly Challenges Catholic Sisters to Examine the Meaning and Purpose of their Lives in Light of Global Perspectives

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[**Scottsdale, AZ**] The 2019 assembly of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), entitled **Imagining Leadership in a Global Community**, presented an array of challenges for women religious leaders centered on bringing hope to a struggling world. The assembly, held from August 13-16 in Scottsdale, Arizona, brought together 663 leaders of orders of Catholic sisters, along with more than 100 guests. Designed to provide leaders with information and inspiration, the assembly included speakers and processes that engaged the participants in the exploration of religious life leadership today and possible new directions for LCWR. A unique element of this year's assembly was the presence of the guests who included young religious, religious from a variety of ethnicities, facilitators who work with religious communities, and representatives of many of the national organizations serving religious life.

The main speakers, **Sister Pat Murray, IBVM**, executive secretary of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), and **Sister Sharlet Wagner, CSC**, LCWR president, addressed the challenges and opportunities of leadership in a globalized world. Speaking from her unique vantage point as the head of the Rome-based organization of 2000 women religious leaders who represent more than 500,000 sisters worldwide, Sister Pat stated, "We live in a globalized, interconnected world where millions of people are on the move within and across continents, fleeing poverty, war and famine, seeking new opportunities in distant places, struggling to build new lives in unfamiliar cultures and contexts. Our world is marked by pluralism, growing differentiation and complexity.... This global scenario tests the very meaning and purpose of our consecrated life and the commitments we make...."

Sister Pat offered four images for envisioning the call to women religious leaders today: widen the tent of our hearts, be present at the borderlands, embrace vulnerability, celebrate our luxurious cultural diversity, engage in web-watching and web-weaving, and listen to the long notes. After expanding on each of these images, she concluded, "We are called to be a contemplative presence in the world, discerning how to respond to changing landscapes; telling one another what is happening wherever we find ourselves, how we feel called to respond and inviting support from one another."



Sister Sharlet also addressed the opportunities before women religious as they become a “global sisterhood” which she defined as living in solidarity with and supporting one another through the sharing of realities and resources. Noting the growing cultural diversity within religious life, she spoke to the need to grow more proficient in intercultural as well as intergenerational living. Speaking of those entering religious congregations today, she asked, “How well do we enable those coming to us from different realities to be fully themselves?”

She concluded her address with a look ahead, noting that it is not “ours to direct the future of religious life” nor to “create a plan for the new to emerge,” but rather to “create a space for the new to emerge.” She added that the world need leaders with passion. “The type of passion that takes risk in service of the reign of God,” she said. “The type of passion that leads us to keep getting up when we keep falling down, that moves us to walk into situations from which we would far rather walk away, that compels us to speak a Gospel Word even when the world seems deaf, that moves us to stand up and reach out our arms and wrap them around the entirety of this moment in which we find our congregations. Because if this life is worth anything at all, it is worth living passionately.”

Several sessions of the assembly were dedicated to further reflection on trends occurring in society and religious life that shape the type of leadership that LCWR and its members must provide. The conference has engaged in a multi-year process to reimagine itself as a relevant resource for religious life in this time of dramatic and rapid change. During the assembly the participants looked at the body of critical new insights into how religious life is shifting and changing and how these insights might direct LCWR’s mission and services.

Weaving world and local realities into the assembly prayer, content and conversations, the participants engaged in two actions to make their collective voice heard. In the first, the 663 members sent a letter to President Donald Trump beseeching him to end all divisive rhetoric. The letter states in part, “We implore you to never use language that disrespects, dehumanizes, or demonizes others. We expect our president, and all who serve this nation as leaders, to be always mindful of the common good and the dignity of each and every person. You hold a position that has the potential to inspire the best of every one of us and we ask you to use this unique status to bring about healing and never seek to create division.” Describing the practice that Catholic sisters use to daily examine their own words and actions in light of their beliefs, they urged the president to



adopt a similar practice in regard to use of his moral authority. The conference shared the letter publicly and urged its members to share this letter with their local media outlets.

In a second action, the members [affirmed a resolution](#) in which they committed for the next three years to continue to explore the root causes of injustice and, in particular, the intersection of racism, migration, and climate crisis, as well as the complicity of their congregations in these injustices. They pledged to further work with these issues through education, prayer, advocacy, service, impact investing, and collaborative projects. The resolution was affirmed after members listened to a panel on the intersection of these three matters by LCWR member Sister Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN; Maria Elena Perales, director of the St. Joseph Justice Center for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange; and Sister Joan Brown, OSF, executive director of New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light. Following the affirmation, the assembly participants were asked to implement the resolution by contacting that day President Trump and members of congress urging that they address these interrelated crises.

During the assembly the members elected new leadership for the organization. Sister Elise Garcia, OP, a general councilor for the Adrian Dominican Sisters in Michigan was selected as the president-elect. She joins Sister Jayne Helmlinger, CSJ who will serve as president for 2019-20, and Sister Sharlet Wagner, CSC, who will serve as immediate past-president. Elected to the LCWR national board were Marcia Ann Fiutko, FSSJ; Susan Francois, CSJP; Jane Herb, IHM; Theresa Sandok, OSM; and Michelle Stachowiak, CSSF.

LCWR honored with its 2019 Outstanding Leadership Award Sister Norma Pimentel, MJ, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley and one of the nation's strongest champions of immigrants. She received her award at the closing banquet of the assembly when she addressed the participants saying in part, "Our job is to bring together everyone that believes and agrees that respect for human dignity is a must."

Sister Norma concluded by saying, "It is now, my sisters, that we must ask ourselves what else can I do to change this world to one that is more caring and compassionate. If it is not now, when? If it not you, then who? For extreme times of pain and suffering,



extreme measures of love are needed! Let us continue to do our part and get others to do the same.”

The text of the addresses and other materials are available on the [LCWR website](#). Portions of the assembly were [livestreamed and archived](#).

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