

The Emerging Orientations
of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious



A Reflection

2020

LCWR 

Introduction

Two years ago, the LCWR board recognized a need to explore the emerging future of the conference with new eyes. It created a planning committee, eventually named the “Design Team,” who engaged in a wide consultation process with both members of LCWR and diverse groups of persons who offered their insights about current reality and a vision for the future of religious life. LCWR has hosted national conversations about the future of the whole of religious life, wondering how the conference can meet that future in the midst of our lived reality of holding three movements: dying, liminal space, and the emergent future.

Our call as leaders today is to facilitate and hold space for a future with multiple dimensions.

- We hold the creative tension of both the whole of our congregations and the parts.
- We hold the three movements of dying, the liminal space, and the emergent.

In the midst of this reality, we are being called to boldly forge uncharted paths that will lead us to new expressions of religious life and mission.

The following reflection is a summary of the learnings of the design team and the national board about how we are challenged as leaders (and members) to meet the future of religious life. The design team chose the word “orientations” to describe its findings. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an orientation is the determination of the relative position of something or someone, especially oneself. As such, aren’t these orientations already a part of us? Aren’t they directions in which we choose to continue growing?

The emerging orientations identify realities and impulses of the Spirit in our world that are impacting and shaping our context as we live into what is emerging religious life. They illuminate the new space in which we find ourselves.

The emerging orientations invite us to:

- Use them as a lens to discern and meet the future
- Be aware of them as signs of the times that challenge us
- Make space for wayfinding -- for new seeing, thinking, doing
- Recognize the seeds of the new already present in and among us
- Tend the evolving religious life for the sake of our fragile earth
- Embrace our vulnerability and meet God in the experience of dislocation
- Imagine leadership at “the crossing place”

*While you search your heart’s yearnings:
What am I seeking? What is my quest?
When your star rises deep within,
Trust yourself to its leading.
You will have light for your first steps.
This is Trasná, the choosing place.
Choose!
This is Trasná, the crossing place.
Come!*

*-- Excerpted from “Trasná,”
by Raphael Consedine, PBVM*



Orientation 1: Global Consciousness – Encounter

- Recognizing how our international travel, live-streamed conferences from other countries, and, in some cases, being members of international congregations have expanded our need to view religious life from a global perspective.
- Engaging with the whole of religious life. Understanding the movement towards transnational, transcharism, and transcultural religious life leads us to discover beyond our own individual charisms and countries, a rich charism of religious life itself. Newer members are already a part of this movement. Perhaps this movement is a hint of the future.
- Embracing the work of inter-cultural encounter as essential to being “sister” now and into the future
- Exploring ways to support women religious in all parts of the world. We are making decisions for radical solidarity with women religious across the globe.
- Deepening our capacity to live in diversity and with complexity and building bridges across cultural divides. By 2050 there will be no one dominant culture in the USA.

Our communities and congregations are nodal points of a much larger canvas of cultural, historical, and economic dynamics. What happens in one part of the world, or in one congregation or in one part of the congregation, reflects the whole and speaks on behalf of the whole.

With that global perspective we begin to realize that the “luxurious diversity” within religious life and our connectivity across the world can make a significant impact.

-- Pat Murray, IBVM



Questions for Reflecting, Sharing, and Acting:

What are some of my personal experiences with global “seeing,” consciousness, encounter?

How can we as leaders of religious congregations contribute to the emerging global reality?

One way I commit to broadening my experience of global seeing and encounter is by...

Orientation 2:

More Porous Borders for LCWR — ‘To Widen the Tent’

- Collaborating and partnering with other congregations and organizations. The solo path is no longer viable for the emerging future of religious life.
- Collaborating and partnering as a conference, for example, by:
 - opening leadership programs and resources to non-members
 - making the national conference available to persons who serve religious congregations, women religious with no formal leadership in the United States, women religious of non-dominant cultures
 - inviting younger members and local leaders of international communities to LCWR regional meetings.
- Intentionally engaging newer/younger religious in mutual relationship where both leaders and members share their own wisdom and learning.
- Creating spaces for listening to women religious of many cultures serving in the United States.

“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtain wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.” (Is. 54:2)

The image of widening the tent of our hearts speaks of both flexibility and rootedness, unbounded hospitality and secure identity.

-- Pat Murray, IBVM



Questions for Reflecting, Sharing, and Acting:

Is “the solo path” serving the current reality in my community? What is one example of collaboration/partnering that has been a success story?

How are the newer/younger members in my congregation being prepared for the emerging future of religious life? What are some ways in which their future appears different than my own?

One way I will “stretch my tent curtain wider” to make space for those different than me is by...

Orientation 3: Integrative Partnerships

- Inviting partnerships and collaboration with other conferences and persons who serve religious life:
 - keeping the national conversation going about the reality and emergence in religious life
 - discovering a collaborative way to build leadership capacity to meet today's reality
 - continuing to explore the emerging future
- Learning the skills of web-watching and web-weaving. What evolving patterns challenge us to new ways of connecting/relating?
- Deepening the bonds between leaders of LCWR and CMSWR. These bonds are already intentionally being created and nurtured among younger religious



Can we lead conversations about fragility and vulnerability? Do we believe that God is preparing the way for something new in our own lives? In the life of the world?

-- Pat Murray, IBVM

Questions for Reflecting, Sharing, and Acting:

What are some ways that as a leader, I have been web watching and web weaving within my own congregation, fostering more collaboration and relationship?

What have been some positive outcomes from efforts to serve the Gospel together with other people of good will?

One way I will continue to demonstrate my support of and build communal capacity for integrative partnerships is by...

Orientation 4: Mission in the Public Square

- Being present in the “public square.” Others want and need us there and our collective voice makes a difference.
- Claiming our credibility and moral authority, given our work in the margins and our public stance on social justice and ecological issues.
- Being a healing presence for a broken world.
- Collaborating with other organizations who share our values.
- Supporting newer religious to be in new ministries and new places.



While the needs of the world are complex and extensive, do we believe that it is the small, the hidden, the unknown acts of kindness and love that will transform our world? It is the quality of our presence individually and in our community living that matters above all...

-- Pat Murray, IBVM

Questions for Reflecting, Sharing, and Acting:

What are some of the public stances my congregation has taken? Were there consequences for my community?

What justice networks does my congregation belong and/or contribute to? Have we helped create any? Do we encourage our members who take an active stance for justice?

One way I commit to strengthening public witness to Gospel values for the sake of transforming society is...

Orientation 5: Technologically Astute

- Using videoconferencing technology for forming relationships, sharing learning, broadening experiences, hosting on-going conversations and more inclusive meetings.
- Using live-streaming technology for including many more members in congregational gatherings and events.
- Intentionally prioritizing accessible and reliable technology for all.
- Recognizing that using technology is non-negotiable as we move into the future. Use of technology is an important way for us to stay connected as women religious with one another. Connecting via technology is a way of life already for newer/younger members.
- Using technology to keep telling the emerging narrative of religious life and to share resources for growing a meaningful spiritual life.

Using new means of communication, religious life has become a transnational network with a global identity. We are pilgrims in a globalized world seeking new ways to express our life and our mission.

-- Pat Murray, IBVM



Questions for Reflecting, Sharing, and Acting:

What are some ways in which the use of technology has allowed me and/or my congregation to form broader, more inclusive relationships?

The 2019 LCWR national assembly was live-streamed and links made available to the keynote talks. Has this ease of availability made a difference for you?

One technology skill which I am committed to using more effectively is...

Conclusion

Do we believe that our congregations are exactly where God wants them to be at this time?

That religious life is exactly where it is meant to be at this time?

We make a mistake when we attempt to do the impossible of trying to live forever and fail to fully embrace the now.

It is not ours to see the future of religious life, nor is it ours to direct the future of religious life.

*We can thank God that our task as elected leaders is not to create a plan for the new to emerge;
it is to create a space for the new to emerge.*

-- Sharlet Wagner, CSC

The ending is a beginning. Here are some ponderings, learnings, and questions as we stay faithful to what is emerging in religious life.

- Denial of where any of us are on the continuum of life will impede our ability to live in the present and move into the future.
- Movements are part of the future of religious life, as other men and women become the leaders and carriers of our charisms in a variety of ministries.
- The five orientations are not new to us. These are values we already espouse, helpful guideposts as we take each emerging step. We commit to growing our capacities in these areas.
- If we remain focused only on our individual congregations, we do a tremendous disservice to religious life. We are a global sisterhood.
- As elected leaders, we must allow newer members to shape the future in ways that diverge from our known ways of being and doing.
- The intergenerational, intercultural, and global aspects of religious life will continue to influence and shape us as we move into the future.
- Connectivity, web-searching, and web-weaving will be ways of influencing and being influenced in mission and in religious life.
- We are called to be a healing presence in the world and bring our voice and moral authority to the critical issues of our day.

What border, threshold, liminal place am I called to cross as a leader?
What border, threshold, liminal space is calling my community?
What border, threshold, liminal place are we called to as an LCWR region?
The LCWR board? The LCWR national staff?

