Columns
Religious Life



As consecrated men and women, we strive to listen to the voices within ourselves and of today's reality because, without witnesses, the spirit of Jesus fades away. (Pixabay)



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Editor's note: *"Evolving Religious Life," a new series from Global Sisters Report, is exploring how Catholic sisters are adapting to the realities of congregations in transition and new forms of religious life. While we write often about these trends, this particular series will focus more closely on sisters' hopes for the future.*



Religious life is always evolving, especially within communities like the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and others experiencing a decline in vocations. The sisters' ages are increasing and with that, their vigor and vitality are waning, resulting in the closure of convents and missions.

Toward the end of this year, I found myself confronted with this reality due to the outcomes of the recent general chapter. During this gathering, decisions were made to shut down certain convents and initiatives, including the community I belonged to.

Navigating through this experience has proven to be quite challenging, as many keenly feel the absence of the sisters. Simultaneously, there's a palpable sensitivity among people due to the shared moments in the mission, the profound connection

to the charism, and the spirituality centered around the heart of Christ.

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At this time, I hold onto the belief that God, our Mother and Father, never abandons God's daughters and sons; God's Spirit continually strengthens each person. As consecrated men and women, we strive to listen to the voices within ourselves and of today's reality, even if sometimes we cannot find the answers to the many questions we ask ourselves.

Despite everything, what truly matters is taking risks, standing up for our beliefs, because, without witnesses, the spirit of Jesus fades away. Let's embrace the path of living as mystics and prophets, united in following Jesus, who leads us on this journey.

When embarking on a new mission, it's refreshing to arrive in a location with a different environment, people and culture. Meeting new individuals and experiencing the thrill of commencing a journey with the community, the locals and the country brings joy. These steps are taken cautiously or swiftly, depending on the openness of each congregation.

Opening new communities may present challenges, given the current situation, yet I remain hopeful about living and sharing at the intercongregational level without losing sight of the essential, which is following Jesus.

Nevertheless, we must accept changes as stages in life; each one is unique, with its own richness and weaknesses, all of which remain beautiful. The same holds true for the various experiences that occur throughout life. I believe it's important to share this reflection as we welcome 2024.

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The mission to which we've been called, grounded in our identity as consecrated women, sets us on a journey that demands learning from our reality. This mission compels us to stand in solidarity with those we're called to accompany. We must not succumb to passivity, lamentations or, even worse, indifference.

The transition also offers an opportunity to step out of ourselves and share who we are and what we possess within us. It's crucial that we prioritize taking care of each other and those placed under our care.

With discernment and the common good in mind, we remain open to continual change. We plant seeds of hope and foster unity in accordance with the heart of God. With confidence, we eagerly anticipate all that is new, working steadfastly toward a better world. Let us not forget that everything we do is carried out with generosity and dedication.

It's pertinent to reflect on the channels of commitment in a world that craves hopeful witnesses: men and women who are willing to transcend, who step out to speak words of life and perform gestures that renew faith in the importance of kindness and tenderness.

We're encouraged to engage in a dynamic of itinerancy and stepping out of ourselves, mirroring the Trinitarian model, in order to proactively reach out to our brothers and sisters in need and contribute to their humanization. The journey of humanizing ourselves within our own communities starts by immersing ourselves in this cycle of love and allowing life to flow freely, making it our primary goal.

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As we embrace the people of God, we are convinced that it is time to generate spaces of encounter, dialogue and consensus as small communities. We're tasked with expressing, through our individual missions, our shared commitment to life, justice, solidarity and care for one another.

This requires us to maintain a vigilant gaze and listen attentively. It's the perspective of the missionary disciple, guided by the illumination and empowerment

of the Holy Spirit. It's a compassionate gaze, an invitation extended by the heart of Christ, for true compassion is fundamentally rooted in solidarity with others.

The joy of living, even amid the uncertainties of both the human and spiritual journey, is an essential aspect of the kingdom. In our surroundings, it's crucial to remain vigilant to the changes presented by today's society, ensuring we establish solid foundations for discernment to avoid falling into falsehoods.

In this current reality, God calls us once more to envision new forms of consecration. He prompts us to move toward a fresh expression of church, to envision new horizons.

This column was originally published in Spanish.

This story appears in the **Evolving Religious Life** feature series. View the full series.