Columns
Religious Life



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During my participation in the April 11-14 Workshop for New Leadership in Dallas, Texas, hosted by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, or LCWR, in the United States, I heard about the "nonnegotiables" that are at the heart of religious life.

I have heard some parents say to their children: "When I tell you no, it is not negotiable," as a way of remaining firm and avoiding the persistence of their children. I found it interesting, in this sense, to hear about the "nonnegotiables" of religious life because they give us identity in who we are and what we do.

God's call is one of the "nonnegotiables" of religious life because, in the face of personal experience of feeling loved and attracted by God, we must give a response. Our vocational search begins with this call to look for where, with our gifts and talents, we can best serve by giving life to society.

Almost always, when someone asks me about my call to religious life, I find it difficult to explain, because the call is an inexplicable experience that only those who live it can understand. Our vocational call is also shared in community, where I can see it joy in the sisters, the joy and conviction of feeling called by God to a community with a specific mission and charism.

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The community is a living cell where we share the personal call of God with other sisters in the community from different countries, ways of being, thinking and understanding the world.

This is why, together and from the diversity of the community, creativity and mutual learning emerge. It is in the differences where we grow, we get to know each other, and our strengths and weaknesses are manifested.

Community is not perfect, nor will it ever be, but this does not mean that we do not strive to be better every day. Each one of us is different and, at the same time, similar in many ways. It is in community where we dream, plan, dialogue, discern,

decide and forgive. It is also where we grow, take risks and accept challenges for the good of others, within and outside the community.

Mission and ministry are other nonnegotiable elements of religious life. Neither the vocational call, nor community, can be understood without mission. Each religious congregation has a mission, embodied in its charism from original inspiration of our founders, through which we are called to make present the Kingdom of God, adapting ourselves to the "contexts in which we find ourselves," as the Chapter Direction 2023-2029 of the Missionary Guadalupanas of the Holy Spirit says.

The mission to which God continues to call us is to transform society, the church and our surroundings in a prophetic way. To do this, we must take care of our personal and communal call, and the prophetic living out of our congregational charism in the ministries we carry out.

Prayer, spirituality and discernment are fundamental to religious life. We cannot live our personal call, the experience of community or congregational ministry if we do not pray, discern and live our spirituality. Otherwise, we will be bombarded and consumed by social, political, economic, and ecclesial matters as well as media, trends, etc., which will drain us. Instead, we must be attentive to Jesus, filling our jars with new wine, as at the wedding at Cana, when Jesus said to the servants: "'Fill the jars with water.' So they filled them to the brim" (John 2: 1-12). It is up to each of us, personally, communally, and apostolically to be "good wine" in the realities of war, poverty and injustice that require transformation and that are within our reach.

The vows of chastity, poverty and obedience are other "nonnegotiables" of religious life. Chastity is lived out of love for God and others; obedience out of freedom; and poverty out of the choice to live with what is necessary for our life and ministry. These three vows are considered through the lens of the congregational charism. None of them are disconnected from vocational call, community, mission, prayer, spirituality and discernment.

Every religious community has traditions, customs, values, histories, ways of being and existing in the world, that are negotiable. However, there are nonnegotiable elements, and these are what constitute the raison d'être of religious life.

For this reason, Pope Francis, when speaking of consecrated life, says it is "the treasure worth more than any worldly good … a gift of love that we have received." And today, religious life continues to be valuable in our world.

I celebrate 34 years of having said "yes" to the call to religious life this year, and today I continue to say that the vocation to consecrated life is a gift, a gift of love from God to the world. That is why I say to all young women: If God calls you to consecrated life, do not hesitate to say "yes," because somewhere in the world there is someone who is waiting for your generous response.

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