Columns
Horizons
Religious Life



A group of Giving Voice members gathers at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious assembly on Aug. 14, in Orlando, Florida. Giving Voice is a group of women religious under age 50. (Courtesy of Giving Voice)

by Giving Voice

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As younger women religious, we often find ourselves as minorities within our own communities: fewer in number, yet filled with the same passion and commitment of older generations. Unlike the sisters who came before us, we rarely have the comfort of a peer group within our congregations, making every gathering with other young sisters a rare and treasured experience. The Aug. 13-16 Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) annual assembly in Orlando, Florida, was one such occasion.

Recently, a good number of us members of Giving Voice had the opportunity to meet at the LCWR assembly. We represented organizations such as the Catholic social justice lobby Network, Leadership Collaborative, Friends in Solidarity, National Black Sisters Conference, Global Sisters Report, Dominican Sisters Conference and Giving Voice itself, among others. A few sisters were there as leaders of their own congregations.

One of the most striking aspects of this year's assembly was seeing the growing diversity within LCWR. As Nicole Trahan, of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate observed, "What struck me this year that was different from previous years was the diversity of those gathered. Not only was there more age and racial/ethnic diversity, but there were many more lay people than I remember."

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But the members of LCWR present for the closed session, she said, "still look pretty much the same. The diversity was brought by the invited guests more so than membership. So, things are shifting, but not necessarily because leadership is more diverse." She is a member of her congregation's provincial leadership team, vocations director and pre-novitiate program director; she also attended as a representative of the National Black Sisters Conference.

This diversity was also evident in the talks that urged us to advocate for justice and equity in every aspect of our lives and ministries. In his keynote address, Fr. Bryan

Massingale's call to engage actively in defending democracy left a deep impression on Nodelyn Abayan, from the Sisters of Social Service of Los Angeles. "I am compelled to respond to this urgent call and consider it my duty to step up as a poll watcher in this critical election," she said. Inspired by his message, she urges Giving Voice members to join her, because "as religious sisters, it is our sacred responsibility to ensure that the rights of our brothers and sisters are protected and upheld."

For many, the assembly was a time of deep connection and meaningful dialogue.

"The most memorable thing about the LCWR for me were the meaningful conversations I had with a variety of sisters throughout the days," said Leslie Keener, Congregation of Divine Providence, who attended as a newly elected member of her community’s leadership team.

"I appreciated the diversity of perspectives and the chance to break open what we heard in the talks and reflect together about our own experiences," she said. "And the dance party was epic!" Whether in structured sessions or informal moments, there was a strong sense of community, reminding us that even in our diversity, we are united by our call to serve and transform.



Sr. Mumbi Kigutha, a member of the Sisters of the Precious Blood - Ohio (left) and Sr. Romina Sapinoso, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, connect during a break at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious 2024 assembly in Orlando, Florida. (Courtesy of Giving Voice)

Abayan, a sister from the West Coast, also felt a profound sense of connection through her time with the Giving Voice sisters: "Our shared dinner was filled with laughter, joy and the unmistakable energy of the Holy Spirit. It was a moment of deep camaraderie that left me energized and revitalized."

As younger sisters, we feel the weight of these challenging times, but we also feel the hope that comes from our gatherings. Through our conversations, we share not only our struggles but also our dreams for a church and a world that truly reflect God's inclusive love. We know that building bridges requires effort and perseverance, and we see that change, while slow, is indeed happening.



Giving Voice members gather one evening during the LCWR assembly in Orlando. Florida. (Courtesy of Giving Voice)

Benedictine Sr. Helga Leija, columns editor for Global Sisters Report, also found the diversity and discussions enriching.

"The most memorable part of the LCWR assembly was the opportunity to have conversations with people of different congregations, cultures, and countries," she said. "I always learn new things and feel I am in the presence of the greats. I appreciated seeing so many young people and diverse cultures present at a leadership conference. I was deeply touched by the Leadership Award given to Dubuque Franciscan Nancy Shreck. I, too, aspire to live a life of service because 'there is no place in religious life for mediocrity.' Thanks, Nancy."

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The 2024 LCWR assembly reminded us of the strength that lies in diversity and our commitment to justice. It's about showing up for each other, listening deeply, speaking truthfully and acting boldly. As we returned to our communities, we carry the energy and inspiration to continue this work. We are not alone! We hope for a day when the diversity we see in these gatherings becomes the norm — a true reflection of the richness of God's creation.

This story appears in the **LCWR 2024** feature series. View the full series.