Columns
Religious Life



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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.*

This is a time in religious life rich with potential for transformation. We need to hold on to our hope that Resurrection is real and ongoing. How can we plumb ever more deeply into what our tradition teaches us about eternal life?

How do we truly live in communion with all those who have gone before us, all who are now on this earth with us, and all who will come after us? And how do we allow this communion to assist us, as we imagine religious life for the future?

How do we explore our current understandings of what it means to live in communion as religious sisters in community and allow that communion to influence our service on behalf of the world?

Dreams have no frames and no boundaries. To create a religious life that will be relevant for the future, we need to dream new dreams and be open to new ways without allowing fear to paralyze us.

Religious identity will not be lost as long as we are deeply grounded in prayer, foster strong relationships, and deepen our education and knowledge. While we cannot predict what the future of religious life may be like, we can be fairly certain it will require a commitment to prayer, contemplation, community and a continuous reading of the signs of the times. Only when we practice these will we be able to grow in our capacities in each of these areas.

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Teilhard de Chardin wrote, "Our role is no longer to merely ease suffering, bind up wounds, and feed the hungry, but through every form of effort to raise the powers of love upward to the next stage of consciousness." Each person is part of the continuum of life, running like a river through time and across species. This will call for a decrease of self-centeredness or ego and a wider embrace of inclusion and love.

We will have to ponder the mystery of Christ anew so that we can experience Christ as the profound truth of our own lives. We will have to make the words of Galatians 2:20 a reality, we live, no longer ourselves but Christ lives in us, Christ works always and everywhere, laboring within us and through us — as "the center in whom and by whom we are illuminated." We will need to grow a sense of identity rooted and grounded in Love, in God.

Questions for reflection:

1. What efforts am I concretely making to raise the powers of love upward to the next stage of consciousness?
2. Traces of integral consciousness — a cosmological awareness of the evolutionary significance of the 14-billion-year universe story — may already be seen in us. How am I working to expect it, be alert for it, and especially take time to dwell in those moments when we are touched by something more?
3. What are some signs of new life that are emerging around you now?

We live in the paschal mystery paradox, not knowing where we may find ourselves in future. But let us keep the eyes of our hearts open to see what God has waiting for us tomorrow. Let us experience the joy of what we have known and hold dear.

One fire kindles another fire. Become the fire. Let us turn our hands up like a cup to catch all that God wants to give us now. The reign of God is still coming, and the followers of Jesus have more to do.

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