

# Leadership Conference of Women Religious



Discerning Our Emerging Future

## What We Are Seeing

An Analysis of Conversations about Religious Life  
as it Moves into the Future

February 2021

# Introduction

“**W**hat We Are Seeing” provides a summary and an analysis of what LCWR has learned in the period of August 2020 through January 2021 in the conference’s Discerning Our Emerging Future Initiative. This initiative is exploring how LCWR religious institutes may collaborate to find new ways of supporting religious life so that those living it can fully participate in the mission of the Gospel now and into the future.



The ideas contained in this document came from the feedback provided in many different gatherings with a variety of persons. These included the:

- 2020 LCWR assembly conversations in breakout sessions
- Fall 2020 LCWR regional meetings
- Feedback from congregations that engaged the LCWR Discerning the Emerging Future process in fall 2020
- 27 listening sessions held in November and December 2020 with LCWR members as well as vicars for religious and facilitators working with institutes of women religious
- Various consultations held by the Discerning the Emerging Future Planning group with other women religious and organizations serving religious life.

This document is divided into four sections:

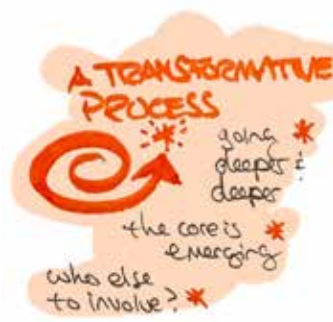
- Process to date (p. 3)
- Emerging themes -- *Ideas and insights that surfaced repeatedly in all of the feedback* (pp. 4-8)
- Focus areas -- *Five categories into which the ideas and insights fall* (pp. 9-11)
- Next steps -- Two ways forward and a sampling of possible means to get there (p.12)

The insights, ideas, hopes, and challenges shared in all of this feedback were processed by the planning group in three discernment sessions in January 2021. We looked for patterns, differences, obstacles, and significant questions in the data. We then asked ourselves: What did we hear? How does what we heard matter? What does it mean? We then posed a number of “What if” responses. From those responses, we suggest two focus areas as next steps.

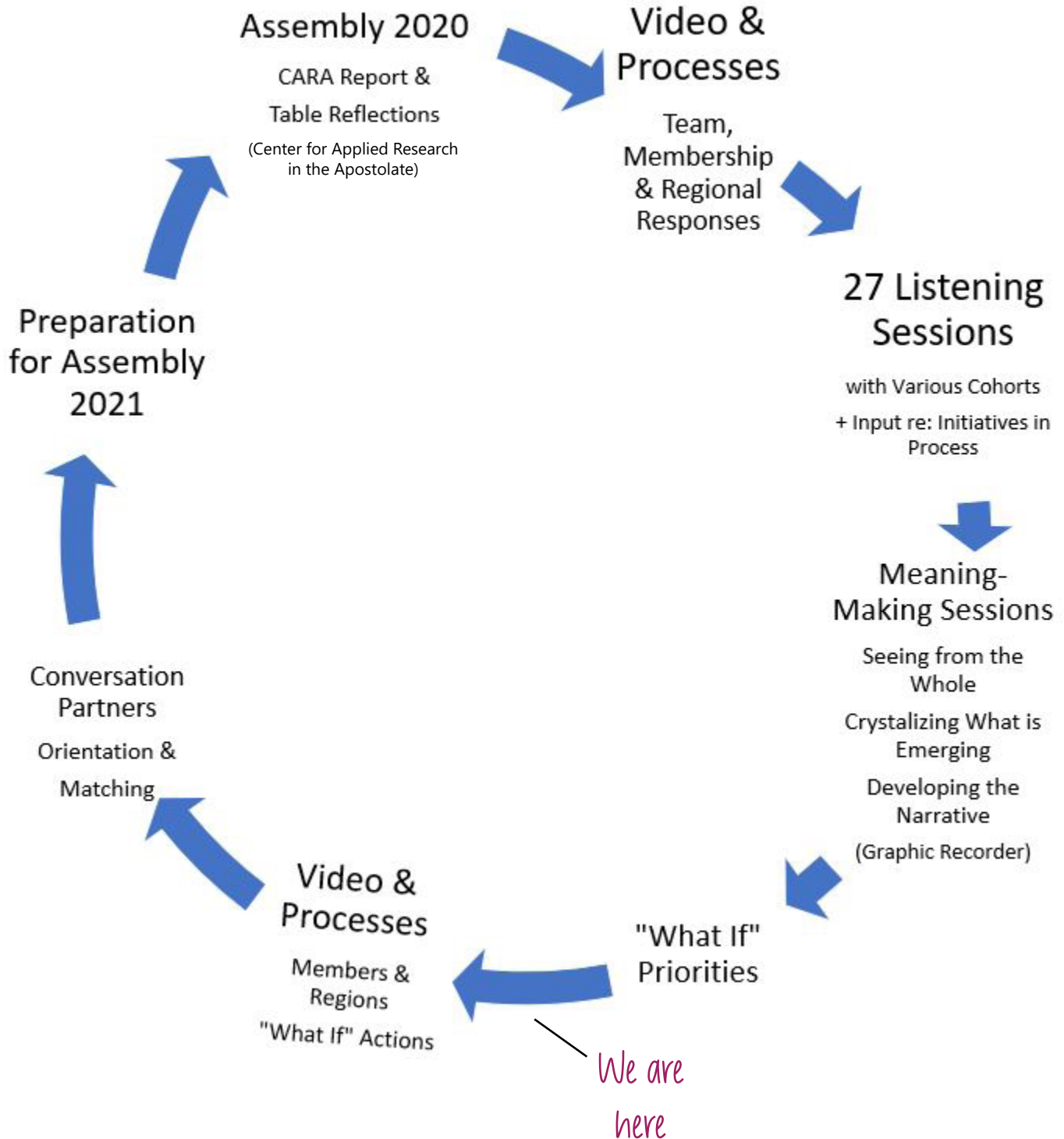
Graphic recorder Martha McGinnis was present at the last two discernment sessions to capture the essence of the conversations. The artwork used in this document is from her graphic recordings.

The LCWR Discerning Our Emerging Future Planning Group

Anne Munley, IHM (chair); Mary Dacey, SSJ; Bea Eichten, OSF; Mary Hughes, OP; Annmarie Sanders, IHM; Carol Zinn, SSJ



# Process to Date for Reorganizing Ourselves for Mission

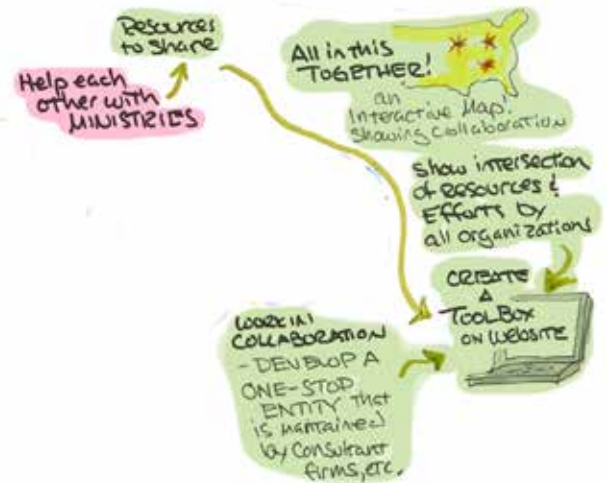


# Emerging Themes

## Request for a "Road Map" that Provides Tools to Navigate These Times

Leaders are seeking an easy-to-access location that lets them see all the resources they need at this time. The resources include:

- An overview of collaborative efforts already happening among LCWR members
- Models of changes to the exercise of leadership in religious institutes
- Names of other leaders interested in focused conversations about potential collaboration efforts
- Guides for leaders to frame the kinds of conversations necessary for today and questions they may use to prompt conversations
- A "toolbox" of processes leaders can use to engage their own members at looking at their own institute's realities



## Desire to Foster Life-Giving Opportunities for Younger/Newer Members

Leaders are concerned about what younger/newer members think, dream, feel, hope, and desire for the future living of their religious life. They are interested in creating viable ways for newer members to flourish and thrive in their vocation and providing freedom for them to imagine and create their future living of religious life. They see the possibility of intentional collaboration among newer members and also understand that there may also be a potential impact on the home institute of the newer members.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AS A WHOLE  
EXCITING!

Leaders hold a deep awareness that newer members feel burdened by an image of seeing themselves in leadership for the duration of their religious life.





## Desire for Quality of Life for All Members in this 'In-Between Time' of the Dreaming and the Not Yet

What are we  
SUPPORTING  
THEM IN and  
FOR?

Leaders desire to see that every member lives her religious life fully and well at every stage of her vocation. They wonder how they can invite all members into the mystery and fullness of these times and provide experiences that foster hope, nurture creativity, support the realities facing members, and encourage a felt sense of moving into the future together -- both within and beyond each individual religious institute. With the presence of many older members in their institutes, they wonder if we need to make a cultural shift in the ways in which elderhood is valued. They also recognize the value of the call to a "ministry of presence."

cultural shift in the ways in which elderhood is valued. They also recognize the value of the call to a "ministry of presence."

What makes a  
Healthy  
Holy  
Happy  
Elder?

it's the **WHY**  
that gives us HOPE  
& Energy

## Shifting Identity -- Challenges and Opportunities

Leaders feel some uncertainty as they wonder what religious life lived across institutes might be like. If we think of religious life as a common call, how might we also incorporate the charisms of individual institutes?

Religious Life  
"Common Call"



They wonder about collaboration possibilities within charism families, across charism families, within international congregations, among international congregations, at a national level as well as an international level.

Leaders recognize that US religious life will soon consist of members coming from a wide array of cultures and know that intercultural skills are essential.

## Significance of Institute Culture for Navigating Change

Leaders note that they must foster a passion for the meaning and value of religious life in and of itself. They recognize that the “culture” of their institute impacts the institute’s readiness and openness to transformation. Is there capacity within the members for relationship-building both within and beyond the institute, to “make space” for what is to come, to move from “either/or” to “both/and” thinking?

Leaders see themselves as “host” rather than heroine, as people who convene conversations and are attentive to who else needs to be in the conversations.

They see the importance of differentiating the canonical, pastoral, and administrative aspects of leadership and being clear about the differences as they work toward change.



## Widening and Deepening Collaboration

Leaders desire to engage in collaboration yet are uncertain as to how to initiate, proceed, and process such moves. They are curious about sharing leadership with other institutes yet are unclear as to what that might look like. They speak with ease about collaboration yet the ease is unmatched in planning and acting collaboratively. They hold some reservation about collaboration unless there is strong leadership among all collaborators, and uncertainty about the range/parameters for potential collaboration.



Leaders are aware of the need to shift from vertical models of collaboration to horizontal models that emphasize accompaniment and from perceptions of being individual institutes to an awareness of “we are in this together.”



## Lingering Dilemmas

An array of questions face leaders as they straddle the two dimensions of their service -- visioning and attending to practical realities. As they serve, they wonder:

- Should we continue our vocation ministry? If so, who will do it? Where?
- How do we embrace grief -- within individual members, within our institute, across institutes -- in order to move towards healing and hope?
- What should we do with our sponsored ministries -- i.e., assess their sustainability, initiate different models of sponsorship, develop lay leadership formation?
- Do our leaders have the capacity, stamina, and ability to vision?
- Do we have members with the capacity and availability to serve as chapter delegates?
- Are we seeing and accepting our institute's vulnerability or are we allowing our current number of members to mask our reality?
- How can we address the pastoral care that our members need, as well as the pastoral care we as leaders need?
- What kind of legacy are we leaving?



Vulnerability →  
a space for GRACE  
↳ TRANSFORMATION

## Liminality of Feelings and Perceptions

Leaders sense that we are engaging in a new founding of religious life. With the excitement of creating something new also comes the challenge and anxiety of living the Paschal Mystery with its dynamic of living and dying, letting go and welcoming new life. Aware that a paradigm shift is underway, leaders wonder what work they should be doing in the present to bring forth a future. The angst over the future is heightened by the impact of the pandemic.





## Learnings About Language

The words we use matter. Leaders are exploring the best language to describe these new realities before us.

- Might we speak of “fulfillment” instead of completion as an institute nears its end?
- What words can we use to describe a way of thinking of religious life more holistically -- i.e., “collective call,” “global sisterhood,” “religious life as a whole,” “transcongregation,” etc.?
- What term might we start using to refer to “younger/newer” members who say themselves that they are neither young nor new?

### the Transformational Journey



- Name the New
- How Change Occurs



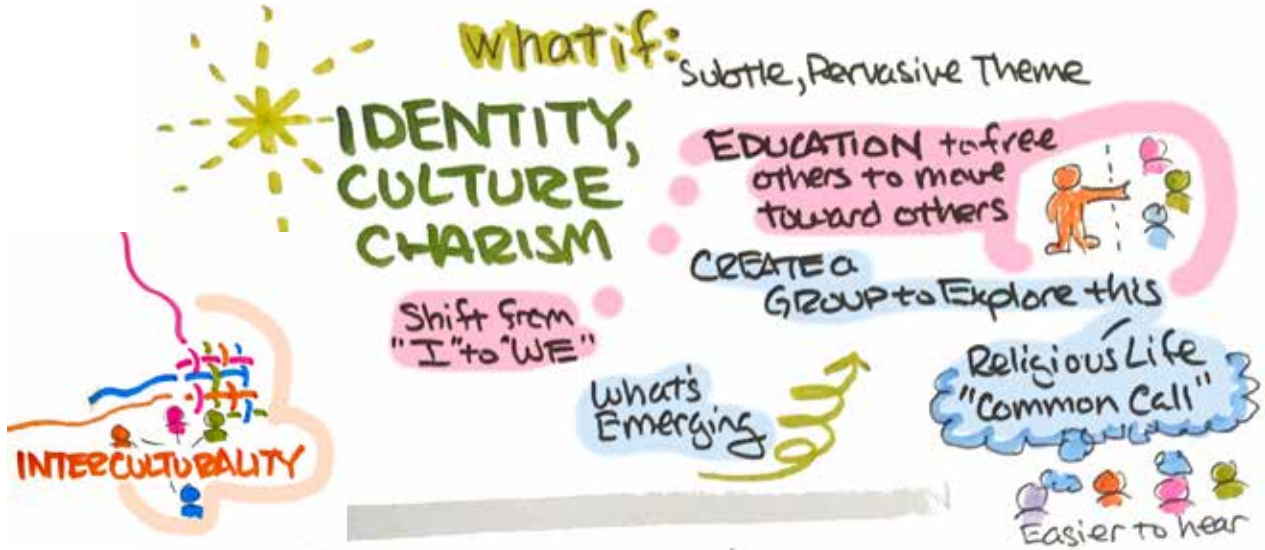
We're at the end of a time... opening to SOMETHING NEW





# Focus Areas

## Identity, Culture, Interculturality, Charism

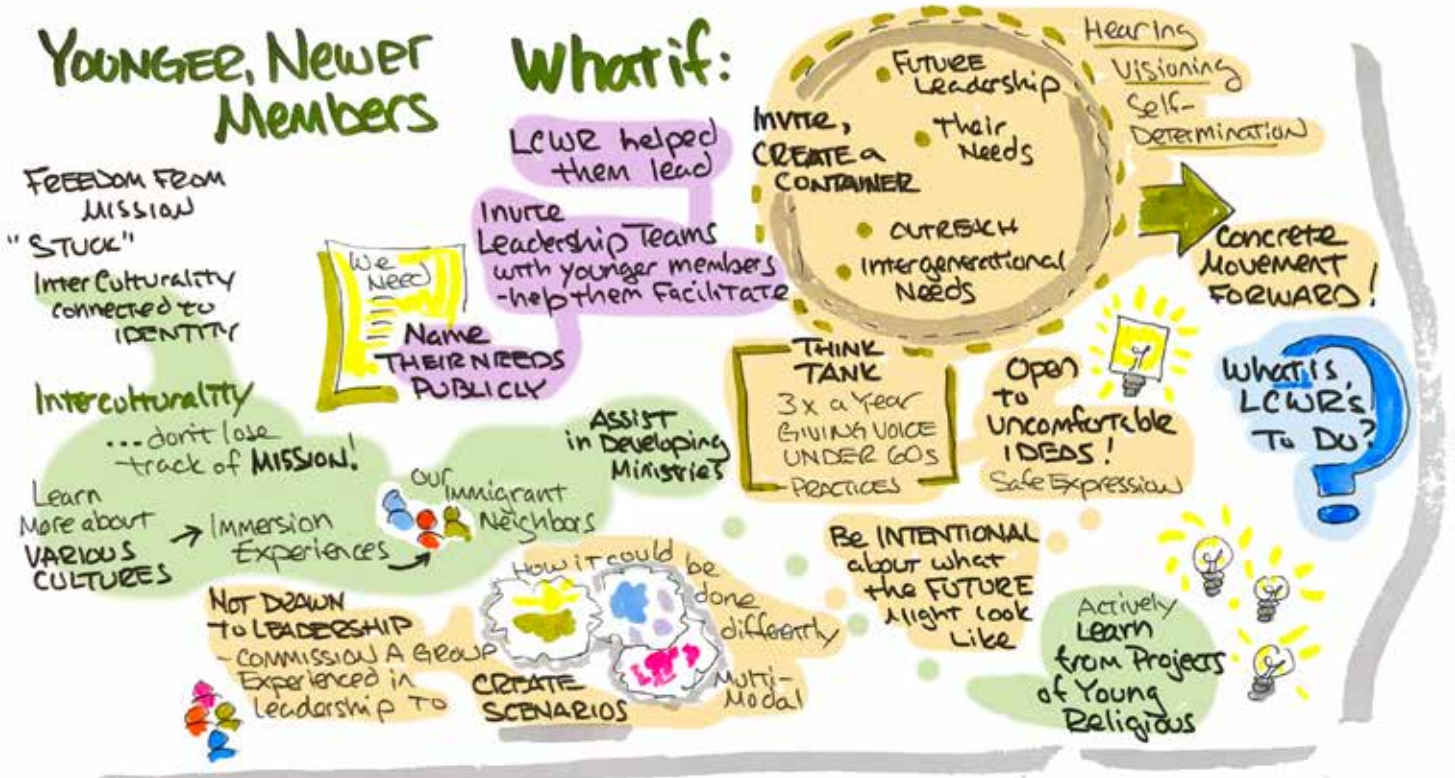


## Collaboration





# Younger/Newer Members, Inculturality



# LCWR as an Organization



# Resources



# Next Steps

## A Two-Tiered Approach

### 1. Engaging the Paradigm Shift in Identity, Culture, Interculturality, Charism

LCWR will explore through a variety of resources and events the significant paradigm shift occurring in US religious life in order to assist and support the transformation that is underway.

### 2. Assuring Resources are Available

LCWR will work to assure that the resources needed by religious institutes to participate in the transformation are available to all who need them.

## Exploring What Ifs... (a sampling of possibilities)

### Gatherings

What if LCWR members gathered in an atmosphere of contemplation and discernment to reflect on this moment of paradigm change in order to nurture what is emerging?

What if LCWR held a series of think tanks and/or retreat opportunities with various professionals, representatives of organizations, groups of religious to further develop ideas and possibilities that are emerging?

What if LCWR regions worked at imagining themselves as responsible for sharing leadership within their area?

### Exploring Questions

What if we explored the notion of religious life as a "common call" and what possibilities this could unearth?

What if we commissioned a group of young religious life leaders to envision new ways of leading across institutes?

What if LCWR worked more intentionally with women religious who are looking toward the next 25-50 years of religious life to see how they envision creating it together?

### Resources

What if LCWR worked with the many entities supporting religious life to pull together or create the resources leaders most need to move their institutes into the future?

What if, in collaboration with other organizations and firms, we developed a one-stop entity to respond to specific needs -- administrative, pastoral, property, sponsorship?

What if we developed best practice resources on collaboration?

What if LCWR created companion processes that leaders could use with their institute members each time the organization shared significant information on the national discernment with the leaders?

