

LCWR 2023 Annual Assembly Breakout Session
Possibility Thinking: Living the Call Fully for the Next 20-30 or More Years
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Approximately 90 Sisters and guests gathered for the breakout session.

Our session had five movements:

- An introduction with welcome, context setting and flow of the session;
- A “stimulus piece” with three five-minute reflections on *Living the Call Fully: desires, questions and possibilities from generational perspectives* by sisters from different age cohorts, described as younger, middle and elder contexts
- Seeding discussion with some gleanings from the interviews
- Discussion in small groups of younger, middle, and elder participants on the questions: *What engaged your imagination? How might we work together to convert possibilities to life-giving realities?*
- Fishbowl conversations

I have recorded below in detail the comments that were shared in the fishbowl process. **As a general summary, I would note that:**

- Collaboration across congregation and charism family, at all levels, is desired. **Of particular relevance is the desire to offer opportunities and means for those in the “futuring cohort” – perhaps under 70? – to gather together in dialogue and exploration so that those who are alone or nearly so in their congregation will have companions into the future.** This desire seems to be beyond structure (yet, how do we address and break open and dialogue about the structures that are in fact crumbling around us? There was not discussion about this).
- Collaboration and dialogue that reach to our members’ members is sought. All are affected; all need to be engaged. I hear this as a need for process that brings what we do together at LCWR gatherings as leaders back home to our members.
- International collaboration is needed to foster religious life wherever it may emerge. This may include hosting inquirers in their own country for initial discernment before they relocate as part of an international congregation. It means openness to helping discerners even where discernment leads away from one’s own congregation. It means embracing a sense of the charism of religious life beyond individual charisms. Women are still being called; we don’t control to what congregation but if we believe in the life we will support wherever the call leads.
- There was energy around fostering experiences of community living even where a call to religious life may not be pursued. There is belief in the value of community in life writ large and belief that this is a contribution we can make.
- There was a call to “watch our language” (valuing abundance over scarcity, hope over surrender) and “watch our dominance” as religious life emerges in new places and in new ways. Also, to walk the talk of inclusion and relationship in multiple ways. And to keep possibility thinking at the elected leadership table at every leadership meeting.
- Surprise that there is not more energy directed at planning for living the life who we are, where we are and not only looking at where new life is springing up. We absolutely should support the life where it is springing up. And we should live it as vigorously and contemplatively as we can in congregations where it is fading out.

- There is a call to LCWR to do (even) more and be (even) more. Note the requests for more connection with UISG and more connection with “unattached” international sisters in the USA.

The fishbowl section was recorded with the following comments captured:

- Thea Bowman image of interlocking arms and Alice in Wonderland going into the hole and not knowing what she would find calls us to own our vulnerability as strength and dare to believe God is sending the exact right number and diversity of women. Address fear and narrative of failure. We have commissaries for the end of religious life for mutual support – what does mutual support look like for the new and emerging? For sisters in congregations coming to completion but who themselves have 20 or 30 more years, what if when the time comes we don’t think of transfer – rather, we **host** sisters from another charism as they live out their years of religious life? And those that have financial resources and no new members support others who need resources to support new members.
- Do leadership more creatively before crisis is upon us, e.g., serve on leadership teams of other congregations. Work with the possible before it becomes impossible.
- With global connections be VERY careful that white congregations don’t keep holding the dominant role in the rearrangement of religious life structures. Be conscious of our racism and don’t let it negate the gifts of our diverse sisters who are emerging in significant numbers in religious life
- Do more and more intercongregationally – e.g., shared justice coordinator, think bigger than own congregation. Have more intercongregational leadership teams rather than counting on one person to be commissary – start thinking and acting NOW in beginning intercongregational teams.
- Thinking of the middles, what if we called Sisters 70 and younger from all local congregations together to talk about issues and needs and hopes – bring these together across boundaries of congregation and charism
- Relationships are key – support younger members across congregational boundaries: meet the other, including LGBTQ+ members and seekers in every way we can with a different face of the church
- Replicate the model that brings together justice, vocation etc. in regions – open this to connection and dialogues of entire congregations in regions (or other groupings)
- Connect globally – 700,000 women religious in the world. Six hundred thousand belong to UISG. Strengthen LCWR connection with UISG to help bridge building so we can get to know each other – who is on each side of the bridge. Utilize UISG connections – one worldwide. Order! Dangle individual charisms from this bridge!
- Many congregations have a younger sector (relatively). Those futuring groups from various congregations should connect so the youngest members of congregations don’t feel alone – not all congregations have a core group of younger members! Bring collaboration to congregation level so congregation members can meet together.
- Shared leadership in roles in addition to elected leaders. Many opportunities for collaborative connections (justice, vocation, formation etc.)
- Within a congregation, what if we befriended our demographics and *lived with them into decisions* around care of sisters in all cohorts so each can live its full religious life, as they are and who they are. Own our realities and plan with them in mind. Don’t deny – plan!

- More and more collaboration across congregations and across charism families
- Embracing one charism of gospel living
- Vocations – to accept or not... make it into a discernment ministry for vocation that is broader than religious life. And help with vocations globally so inquirers can find a congregation in their own country/region and have enough support. Continue to be excited about this life and help bring people to it in whatever congregation. Help with expenses including room and board for inquirers in their own country as they discern joining an international community that might call them elsewhere.
- Be attentive to and challenge Eurocentric models as diversity increases.
- Use a lens of abundance more often than lens of scarcity and pay attention to the power of language. Leadership beyond elected congregational leadership can be part of leadership skills and capacity. Widen circle of who belongs.
- Pay attention to international groups that are serving in the USA without any connections beyond themselves. Can LCWR help make connections with these unattached congregations in support of their work and members. (Help us find them! – we know there are 4,000 such sisters in the United States.
- Collaborating with other religious with whom we may work internationally - share our resources and positive influence.
- Take advantage of smaller numbers that allow us to be nimbler.
- Expand benefits and blessing of LCWR. Keep mission alive. Remember our associates. What if we could include the leadership of our associate groups in this assembly
- Define ourselves in new ways. Great potential in looking at the language and images that we use to describe religious life. There is untapped potential, e.g., what to call our newer, younger cohort; how to talk about sisters and laity)
- Collaborating to offer a consistent community experience to young seekers who desire to live community for a period of time.
- Offer housing/community life to international sisters who are in the United States to study or learn English language.
- Reading and responding to signs of times – come together and take a long loving look at the signs, share resources, create space for response together .
- Are we being called to look at a new form of sistering one another?
- House of discernment – 6 months to two years. Share these opportunities.
- Change vocation ministry to companion ministry – fosters a wider view.
- Creating spaces for belonging, sharing forms of prayer.
- Commit at team meetings to dedicate time to possibility thinking and the future of the whole (religious) life.