

**Leadership Conference of Women Religious
2015 Assembly
Houston, Texas**

OPENING REFLECTION

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August 11, 2015

God of deep waters, you call us to cast our nets into the depths where there is hidden more treasure than we can ask or imagine. Open our hearts to the abundance of your gifts and the promise of your life, that we may venture into the deep with your Creative Spirit, drinking from your profound mercy, compassion and love.

This prayer focuses our attention where we are drawn by grace, in good times and in bad – toward our good and faithful God. These words articulate our common desires as we gather as a national Conference. The people of Houston know that deep waters are as terrifying as they are inviting. Recently, deep waters have flooded this beautiful city and as we gather, we pray for the people of Houston and those in parts of Texas whose lives and hearts suffered trauma and loss these past months.

We assemble in a year when young, promising lives in our cities have been taken from us yet again through acts of hatred and violence. Whole communities have been rendered grief-stricken and saddened beyond words. We see Gospel witness and hope in the magnanimity of family members like those slain at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, NC who drew sustenance from the depths of their faith and offered forgiveness to the assassin of their loved ones and we knew again the power of Amazing Grace spoken and sung and lived.

We have seen small children who were seeking asylum dying or turned away as they attempted to cross the border into the United States and we have welcomed new immigrants into our towns and into our homes.

We have witnessed our own members reach down into the depths of their souls and the soul of their communities as they have made difficult decisions about ministry with courage and compassion and integrity.

We embrace Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si*, whose bold words call us away from the abyss of global annihilation into right and creative relationship with one another globally and with Earth herself. We anticipate his upcoming visit to the United States with joy and pray he finds welcome here. May the moral authority with which he speaks touch the minds and hearts of national and world leaders as well as the millions of people who will hear his words. May God's protection be with him and all who will gather to experience his gracious and challenging presence.

Each of you comes to this event with story upon story of valor and courage and heartbreak and sadness as you lead communities in extraordinary times. May you be at peace here. May you feel welcome. May we create space for one another here to go as deeply as the Holy Spirit wishes to take us.

It is within this context - in this city, in our country, our Church, and our world abounding with beauty and promise and challenges beyond measure, that you, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious meet, called by grace. We come together, perhaps more aware of both our gifts and limitations than we were three years ago. This conference has grown in age, in wisdom, in grace coming out of an almost hidden life into a very public arena. May we listen deeply to the Spirit these days that what we do and how we do it may reflect the public life of Jesus.

And so, God of deep waters, we come as we are. Wash over us with your grace. Refresh us with your Spirit. Lead us into new depths that we may emerge from these days as if baptized anew, strengthened and renewed for your mission. May we be what you want us to be in our time. And may what we are about here be healing for our world. To this we say AMEN.