Blog
Religious Life

(NASA)

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In the early days of the pandemic, a sister in my congregation 500 miles away asked if I was lonely. She knew I was working from home, just like the other members of the Global Sisters Report team. I live with one other sister, and, being a good citizen, I was following the orders to stay home, only going out for a walk or to go to the drugstore or the grocery store. Not even in-person church services at that time, though that has changed now.

But I was surprised at my reaction to her question. Lonely? I laughed. That morning before breakfast, I had conversations with sisters in Zimbabwe, New Zealand, South Africa, Kenya, Spain and several places in the United States. They don't call us the *Global* Sisters Report for nothing.

These are real relationships. These are my sisters. Besides writing columns about their ministries and deep personal feelings, my sister-friends out there in the network share personal news, and we often get to know each other well. After a long back-and-forth chat, I feel like I've had a real visit with a friend. One of our sister-writers sent me a stack of greeting cards with lovely pictures she had taken herself. Another sister sent me a book she wrote. They send me poems they have written, links to funny articles, and pictures that make me laugh.

These relationships are the best thing about my job. No, not "job" — "ministry." What's not to love about this ministry? I almost feel bad about taking a salary.

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I have been reflecting on what I have learned about sisters working for Global Sisters Report, which turned 7 years old on April 22. Lesson 1: We are basically all the same all over the world. Alike in our motivations and how much we have in common, we can form instant connection, understanding and admiration.

Oh, sure, we are in different congregations and have different charisms. "Charism": That word used to stump the journalists on the GSR staff. I don't try to explain it anymore; deep down, we know what it is. It's the unique gift we bring the church carved out of our unique histories and founders' teachings and ethnic backgrounds and customs and spiritualities.

But working for Global Sisters Report and knowing sisters all over the world from countless different congregations, I have come to the personal conviction that the real charism is religious life.

Earlier this week, I was reviewing a webinar on women religious by Sr. Sandra Schneiders of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The presentation was part of a FutureChurch series called "Women Erased."

She said when she prepared to address the topic, she was a little puzzled at the idea of erasure when it came to women religious. Ignored? Denigrated? Abused? Maybe. But erased?

I laughed when she described how we had even survived recent attempts of a patriarchal church to "domesticate" us. Religious life continues to produce stellar women who excel in their chosen fields of the arts, education, health care, politics and theology — not exactly the faceless, nameless "good sisters" of yesteryear — and who are less dependent on numbers than on competence and call.

Acknowledging declining numbers and increasing age in some parts of the world, she marveled at how younger members entering in small numbers don't seem focused on ministry, property, dress or survival, but on how to engage with like-minded others in what they are giving themselves to: becoming religious women.

They are not preparing to take over the family business. They are committing themselves to answer the questions: "What's it all about for me? How am I to express my relationship to Ultimate Reality? To spend my one and only life in an irrevocable donation of myself to God? To find the One who asks for my total love?"

So neither Sister Sandra nor I think we are erased, that our license is expired, not when our identity comes from our quest for God. Oh, it gave me the shivers and made me want to make my final vows all over again.

On this seventh anniversary of Global Sisters Report, we congratulate all you global sisters who are engaged in this marvelous adventure we call religious life!