Voices of Sisters
Religious Life



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Have you ever had someone ask you the question, "Where did all the Sisters go?"

Such a question indicates how hard it has been, particularly in the United States, to communicate the changes that have occurred in religious life over these past decades. It has been difficult to spread the word about who religious are and what they are involved in. There were always sporadic articles, newspaper stories, but nothing consistent until Global Sisters Report (GSR) became a reality.

This year celebrates GSR's 10 years of daily reporting about and by women religious. Over this decade, we have met women religious of all ages from around the world, representing various congregations, involved in the ministries of education, health care and social services, as well as a host of other expressions of their commitment to the Gospel.

Here are a few of the places where you can find sisters: at the United Nations working on women's rights; in Washington, D.C., advocating for just public policies; with national organizations addressing the climate crisis and promoting nonviolent resolutions to conflicts.

They are found in Vietnam preventing child marriages; healing the emotional wounds still evident among survivors of the war in Croatia; working with survivors and perpetrators of Sierra Leone's civil war; taking in refugees; serving asylum seekers at the U.S. border and elsewhere in the U.S. And the list goes on.

In addition, other aspects of religious life are brought forward. There are reflections about the future of religious life, the importance of dialogue to move into the future, intergenerational sharings, the various Christian feasts, and the importance of spirituality, to name a few.

I can still remember the call in 2014 from Sr. Jan Cebula, a sister of St. Francis of Clinton, Iowa, asking if I would write about contemplation for this new project of the National Catholic Reporter, Global Sisters Report.

Jan had participated in one of the first programs of the Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue (ICCD) that I founded in 2002. It was called "Engaging Impasse: Circles of Contemplation and Dialogue." She saw the importance of reimagining how one responds to the impasse in our lives, a response rooted in the transformation of consciousness and contemplation.

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I was thrilled and a little nervous as I said yes. I felt it would be an opportunity to share the insights and learnings from the institute, but doing so with a global audience gave me pause.

As I began to focus on what this reflection would be, I realized that I needed more than one time to share about contemplation. Jan agreed I could do a series. That series became a monthly reflection/column over the past 10 years.

This global audience became a global community: When I would sit down to write, I imagined who was reading it. Faces of all shapes and colors swirled around me, as did persons of different ages, gender, ideologies and theologies. I knew I was speaking to a diverse group and always from my own experience as a woman and a religious in the United States. What I should write about and how to approach it could be quite challenging.

Perhaps what guided me the most came from my own contemplative practice, which strengthens the capacity to create a spaciousness within me so as to take a long, loving look at the real. I would be alert to what was happening in my life throughout the month. I trusted that even when the deadline was approaching and I felt no inspiration, something would stir within me.

Attuned into such stirrings, I knew when to take out my computer and begin writing. This waiting and seeing in new ways has never failed me.

Ten years, close to 120 reflections, a few retreats on GSR's Witness & Grace programs, and I feel that the readers are now my friends, my community. This opportunity for me is being replicated over and over as the GSR staff reach out to new writers encouraging them to provide their perspectives on their lives and how they respond to the concerns of today.

Global Sisters Report has been and continues to be an amazing gift to us all, but especially to women religious, whose love, compassion, commitment and imagination are captured and shared with so many. GSR answers the question of "Where did all the Sisters go?" in ways that we could never have imagined.

I am grateful that I have been part of this Global Community for its 10 years. May GSR continue for another 10 and another 10 and ... HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

This story appears in the **GSR at 10 Years** feature series. View the full series.