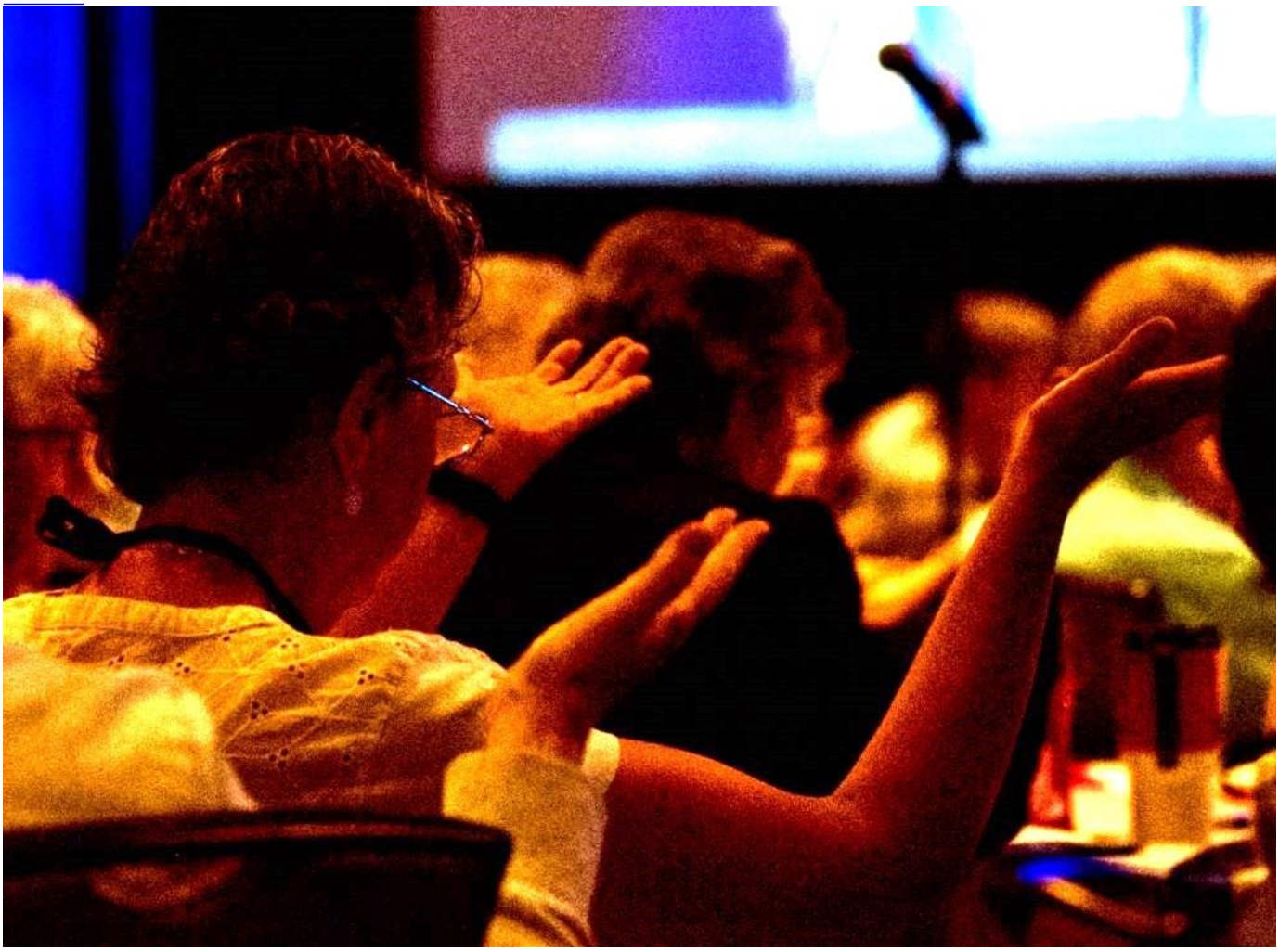
News



Participants at the 2023 Leadership Conference of Women Religious assembly bless the speakers during the gathering in Dallas. This year's assembly is set for Aug. 13-16 in Orlando, Florida. (GSR photo/Dan Stockman)



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Nearly 800 people are expected to fill an Orlando, Florida, conference center to answer the question of what Catholic sisters are called to be in the current times.

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious holds its annual assembly Tuesday-Friday (Aug. 13-16), bringing together more than 500 LCWR members and guests from other organizations serving religious life, leaders from other countries, and lay leaders that work for congregations of sisters. LCWR represents about two-thirds of the nearly 36,000 women religious in the United States.

"The LCWR assembly is designed as both an informative and reflective experience for the participants. The speakers and our own members will be providing solid theological input and spiritual wisdom throughout this assembly, and each presentation is followed by opportunities for the participants to reflect individually and collectively on how the input might impact their own lives and ministries," said LCWR executive director Sr. Carol Zinn, a Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, in an email to GSR. "We believe that the assembly participants will come away from this experience enriched and energized to return to their institutes with an even deeper commitment to the gospel mission."

> 'When we come together in an assembly, we find strength as we interact with other leaders who hold the same dreams and hopes for their communities and for the world we serve.'
> —Sr. Maureen Geary
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The theme of this year's conference is "Our Time is Holy: Who Then Shall We Be?" recognizing that even though there are challenges, this is a sacred time filled with potential to find even deeper ways to live religious life.

"We believe that this assembly will provide religious life leaders with inspiration as they continue their ministry of leadership amidst many challenges," said LCWR President Sr. Maureen Geary, a Grand Rapids Dominican, in an email. "The assembly theme invites us to remember that this is indeed a holy time and that God is the life

force within us. When we come together in an assembly, we find strength as we interact with other leaders who hold the same dreams and hopes for their communities and for the world we serve."

Officials said they hope leaders will leave the assembly with the confidence and energy they need to make changes in their congregations for the future.

On Friday, the conference will make its leadership changeover as Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Sr. Vicky Larson becomes president-elect, Congregation of St. Joseph Sr. Kathy Brazda becomes president and Geary becomes past-president. Current past-president Sr. Rebecca Ann Gemma, a Springfield Dominican, will end her time on the presidential team.

Geary will give the presidential address Wednesday morning, while that afternoon will see the first of the assembly's two keynote speakers, Fr. Bryan Massingale. Mexico City Benedictine Sr. Maricarmen Bracamontes will give the second keynote address on Thursday morning.



Nearly 900 sisters and guests are gathered Aug. 10, 2023, at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious assembly in Dallas. (GSR photo/Dan Stockman

Massingale is a priest and professor, specializing in social ethics, and has a passion for advancing a Black approach to Catholic theological ethics, focusing on the impact of religious faith as an instrument of social injustice and a catalyst for social transformation.

Bracamontes is trained in both medicine and theology and worked in the area of sexuality, affection and celibacy. She is on the team of theological advisors to the presidency of the Confederation of Latin American Religious (CLAR) and writes articles for various theological reflection journals.

Thursday will also see a panel of non-sisters — Sandra Coles-Bell, executive director of the National Black Sisters' Conference; Katie Gordon, co-founder of Nuns & Nones; and Kerry Robinson, president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA — who will address the question of who sisters are needed to be for the world.

On Friday afternoon, the public is invited to participate in an hourlong reflection that will be livestreamed on YouTube. The reflection, planned for 2-3 p.m. Eastern, will explore the question, "Who Then Shall We Be?" in light "of the many critical issues facing the nation and the world today." The link for the reflection will be available here.

This livestreamed event will utilize the arts and experiences of contemplation, LCWR officials said, in the hopes "that as many people as possible will choose to participate, thus increasing the power of our collective prayer, presence, and response."

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Friday night, the organization will close out the event with the presentation of the LCWR Outstanding Leadership Award. This year's honoree is Dubuque Franciscan Sr. Nancy Schreck.

Schreck has served in leadership and formation ministry in her congregation, as well as in the LCWR presidency and as a delegate to the International Union of Superiors General. She also served for eight years as a member of the council of the Franciscan Handmaids located in New York, has given keynote presentations at LCWR assemblies, and founded and is program director of a community service organization in Okolona, Mississippi.

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