Voices of Sisters
Religious Life

"We pledge to each other to go out with a bang, to leave no question unanswered for as long as we are able," writes Sr. Margaret Cessna. "And we do it together, even though we may wobble a little." (Unsplash/K Mitch Hodge)

by Sr. Margaret Cessna

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Sixty-seven years ago, almost exactly to the day (Oct. 8, 1957), I left my home, my family, my friends and everything familiar to me to enter the novitiate of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary. Once there, I met other young women who would become lifelong friends and companions on this remarkable journey.

Seventy years after that day (May 10, 2024), I left my home, the city that I love, lifelong friends and everything familiar to me again, in order to move to the motherhouse of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary. Once again, I joined some of the friends of a lifetime. But this time, it was more to remember than to plan or work.

This time, I shared a different kind of journey. No longer teens in our salad days, but wizened veterans of having walked the path, sometimes marching for a cause but always working with our community promise in our minds and hearts: to provide more abundant life, especially to those who are poor.

During these days of being elderly, there is sometimes sadness as we hang up the energy that fueled us for so many years, as we worked shoulder to shoulder to help gentle the life of this world.

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And now, we still walk shoulder to shoulder. Some with canes or walkers or a limp. In our infirmity and with tired bones but hearts full, we share treasured memories. There are no regrets, but sometimes there are moments of sadness — keeping vigil with a friend as she fades away from us, missing pals who have already gone before us, maybe wishing for more vigor and energy to continue working on issues we still care so much about. We use moments together to remember, to rejoice, to be grateful for what has been and to be ready for what will be.

We pledge to each other to go out with a bang, to leave no question unanswered for as long as we are able. And we do it together, even though we may wobble a little. This is our home once again. We cannot escape the reality of advanced age. We are here together to share a different kind of journey.

There is a certain sadness being here — as we all know this is the beginning of the journey's end. But there is no giving up as long as there is any spark of energy for the mission. The mission we have shared for more than 70 years together. We still

do what we can. And we try, as we might, to make life gentle for each other, as we protect our memories that no one can take away. It has been a great ride and I don't think there is one of us who would trade it or change it.

These days of being old are far from rosy, although some of them are. It might be as simple as floating down one of the long hallways looking for a room to sit and chat. Even today, I stopped to chat, and what I got was: "We are all close to the end. We may as well just sit back, laugh and enjoy the ride."

"There is a certain sadness being here — as we all know this is the beginning of the journey's end." (Unsplash/Clemens Van Lay)

On another day, I am lonesome. So I stop in another room for a visit. "Tell me something new," I say. Or: "Do you have a good book for me to read?" Or maybe: "Is there any good news to hear?" Or: "Is there anything you need?"

I stopped at my old apartment for one last time, mainly to label items for destination or donation. Final packing will be done by others soon. And then professional movers

will finish the job.

I stood on the balcony and gazed out over Lake Erie, which had been my front yard for 20 years. I thanked the universe for the gift of the soothing laps of water that so often calmed me down and for the gorgeous clouds that appeared on a regular basis.

As I left the city and hit the road for the trip back to my new home, there was a heaviness in me as I realized what is gone: work, home, friends, independence. I don't know how I will fill these empty spaces.

One of the layers of this transition is a force that causes this emotional heaviness as I move on and leave what was once life-giving to me behind.

For me, more time is needed to deal with the emotion. It will happen eventually, I know.

But today is not the day.