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Attendees at the LCWR assembly carry a banner at the head of the Pilgrimage of Hope, a march through downtown Atlanta Aug. 14, where they sang and prayed for social justice. (GSR/Dan Stockman)



by GSR Staff

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Atlanta, Georgia — August 14, 2025

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Editor's note: *Global Sisters Report is covering the [annual assembly](#) for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, this year held Aug. 12-15 in Atlanta, Georgia. Here, you can find regular updates and reflections from GSR staff.*

Thursday's panel focuses on global healing: "Violence can be policy, hunger, forced migration"

BY DAN STOCKMAN

August 14, 5 p.m. ET

The nearly 600 Catholic sisters and 300 guests attending the Leadership Conference of Women Religious' assembly took part in a panel discussion focused on the call to work for the healing of the world.

Non-violence, panelists said Thursday, Aug. 14, is much more than just a lack of violent action.

The panel, moderated by Franciscan Sr. Maria Elena Martinez, included Pastor Dameon Madison, of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change; Angelo Martinez, also from the King Center; and Tom Crick from The Carter Center.



Members of a panel discussion on the call to work for the healing of the world, from left: Pastor Dameon Madison, of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change; Angelo Martinez, also from the King Center, and Tom Crick from The Carter Center speak Aug. 14 at the LCWR assembly in Atlanta. Moderating the panel is Franciscan Sr. Maria Elena Martinez. (GSR/Dan Stockman)

Crick spoke about The Carter Center's work and how all of the efforts toward social justice must be relational. Our society is incredibly polarized, he said, but we will never be able to change that as long as we demonize each other.

Madison said violence takes many forms.

"Violence can be policy, hunger, forced migration," he said.

But working to build the relationships Crick said are critical takes effort.

"Do I have the soul force to engage with someone who doesn't mean me well?" Madison asked. "How do I love my neighbor not just in a geographical context, but in a moral one? The most important work at this point is to have a conversation."

But changing others first requires us to change ourselves, he said. And we must be willing to truly listen.

"It's important that before we try to transform the external, that we transform the internal," Madison said. "It is very difficult to bring about transformational change when you dismiss someone's lived experience."

Thursday morning Pilgrimage of Hope a prayerful demonstration for social justice causes

BY DAN STOCKMAN

August 14, 4 p.m. ET

Hundreds of Catholic sisters shut down several downtown streets in Atlanta, Georgia this morning, Aug. 14, as they marched, prayed and sang for social justice.



A participant in the Pilgrimage for Hope holds up a banner as several hundred Catholic sisters march through downtown Atlanta Thursday morning, Aug. 14, singing and praying for social justice, during the LCWR assembly. (GSR/Dan Stockman)

At least 400 sisters attending the LCWR assembly turned out at 7 am for the Pilgrimage of Hope, a walk of several blocks that served as their morning prayer and a symbolic stance against racism, climate change and forced migration, and an observation of the 10th anniversary of *Laudato Sí*.

With a police escort blocking traffic, the sisters walked through downtown, singing as they went, and stopping for prayers. One impatient driver expressed their frustration through their car's horn; a police officer expressed her own frustration right back as she protected the sisters — some using walkers or oxygen. The sisters just smiled and waved.

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Sr. Kathy Brazda's "Dread Is Not of God" spoke to my grief and hope

BY HELGA LEIJA

August 14, 12:50 p.m. ET

I almost didn't attend the LCWR assembly in Atlanta this year. The day before I was to leave, my former prioress, Esther Fangman — a Benedictine Sister of Mount St. Scholastica, a dear friend and mentor — died. She had been my rock through my transfer to monastic life, helping me weather storms that I could not have navigated alone.



St. Joseph Sr. Kathy Brazda, delivers the presidential keynote address during the 2025 Leadership Conference of Women Religious annual assembly in Atlanta, Georgia, Aug. 13, 2025. (GSR/Helga Leija)

In her honor, I came anyway, because she was a strong advocate for training and education for women. Today's presidential address by St. Joseph Sr. Kathy Brazda confirmed that decision. Her words, "Dread is not of God," were exactly what I needed to hear as I try to do my work with Global Sisters Report while carrying a relentless grief that is pressing to be acknowledged.

As a sister under 50, it's hard to put into words the fear and loss I feel when elders, leaders, and mentors die. These are the ones who have guided me, shaped me, and steadied my steps. As I see them go, I find myself asking: Who will be left to guide me if I am called to lead?

Brazda spoke of being diagnosed with cancer at the start of her first year in LCWR leadership. She recalled wondering, "How can I plan for a future when I don't know if I'll even be a part of it?" Yet in that uncertainty, she learned to receive — from her

elders, from the LCWR leadership team, from her congregational leadership team.

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Her reality "reshaped" her leadership, she said. And my reality too, is being reshaped by loss. Death did not take Esther from us — it deepened the ways she will continue to shape my life and the community's future.

Brazda reminded us that the most significant leadership lessons don't come from workshops or retreats, but from lived experience, and from choosing to stay rooted in hope, even when the path ahead is unclear. Esther always told me: "When in doubt, always choose to love."



Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica, Esther Fangman and Helga Leija, after watching the movie Conclave in 2024. (GSR/Helga Leija)

Sometimes it is unbearably hard, but those moments are the lessons that shape us most. Esther's life and death have been both the best and worst of times for me: joy and grief woven together. Brazda reminded us that to "bring to birth an alternate way of being in the world" requires entering wholeheartedly into both, making room for God to work through our vulnerability. In these days of loss, that is the only way I know how to live.

So, I offer my loss to God. And, as the Trappist monk Thomas Merton wrote, and Brazda quoted, my prayer is that I may "become a window through which God shines" — even now, with grief as my companion, and hope as my choice.

This story appears in the **LCWR 2025** feature series. [View the full series.](#)