Blog
Spirituality

Julie Tragon, liturgist for the LCWR assembly, raises her hand in praise as CeCe Winans' song "Goodness of God" plays Aug. 15. (GSR photo/Dan Stockman)

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I was taking photos of the crowd at LCWR's assembly, working hard to get just the right angle of sisters in the viewfinder — some standing in the power of the moment, others with hands raised in praise, all of them deeply moved — when something seemed to go wrong with my camera.

The camera I use has a wonderful autofocus, but as the song being played swelled, it appeared to be having trouble getting a clear view. A second later I realized it wasn't the camera at all — it was the tears in my eyes.

Assembly liturgist Julie Tragon had just shared how a brain tumor changed her life, but that listening to one song every day since the diagnosis had sustained her, given her hope, and allowed her to carry on. The song, she said, was "Goodness of God" by CeCe Winans.

My family likes to say I'm grumpy or crusty or even grizzled, but I think I'm just picky about what moves me. There are many songs that move me deeply, but there are many, many more songs that move others that leave me saying, "That's nice," while inside I'm saying, "Meh." I hadn't heard "Goodness of God" before, but I expected it would be, well, nice.

It was much more than just nice. Despite the simple, straight forward lyrics and the stripped-down music, it somehow moved me profoundly. And I clearly wasn't alone: Dozens of sisters spontaneously stood as it played, others raised their hands in prayer and praise. The movement was powerful.

This was Aug. 15, the last day of the assembly, and it was just the latest in a series of powerful moments.

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There was the presidential address by St. Joseph Sr. Kathy Brazda, an unexpectedly moving event where she described how battling cancer the last 10 months had profoundly changed her, how it had completely altered her view on leadership and how this new kind of leadership could remake religious life in the United States.

I could list many more moments like those, but what stuck out to me was how *many* there were this year. LCWR assemblies are wonderful, and I love covering them for GSR, but they don't usually change your outlook on life. This one, for me at least, did exactly that.

Before the assembly, LCWR executive director St. Joseph Sr. Carol Zinn told me there would be much more space for sisters to discuss what they were seeing and hearing and to share with each other how the Spirit was moving in their lives. For a reporter, 600 sisters talking among themselves is difficult to cover, but the effects of that time were clear: moments that became unexpectedly powerful and the Spirit moving among everyone in the room.

We can plan events to the last detail, determine the timing to the second. But God doesn't work according to our schedules. He doesn't follow our plans. Sometimes, it seems, we need to simply get out of the way.

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The songwriters could have added an entire symphony to the song or added more verses — there are only two — but instead they got out of the way, so the message could ring clear.

"I love you Lord, for your mercy never fails me. All my days, I've been held in your hands," it begins. Simple and direct, but it immediately takes me to how God's mercy has never failed me, and how he has carried me all my days.

All of the song is wonderful, but it is the bridge that gets me every time: "Your goodness is running after, it's running after me."

Like the story of the prodigal son, when the father — despite everything his son has done, how he has rejected his father and family over and over — sees him far off, the Bible says "he ran to him." He didn't wait for the son to come and beg for mercy, he *ran* to him. God's goodness, despite our messes, failures and mistakes, is running after us. He sees us far off, and *runs* to us.

I don't know that I will listen to Winans' song every day from now on, but I have listened to it every day so far. And when I cover the LCWR assembly next year, I will listen much more closely for how the Spirit is whispering.

And every day I will watch for God's goodness, running after me wherever I go.

This story appears in the **LCWR 2025** feature series. View the full series.