Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Kellie Enge)



by Sr. Corbin Hannah

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

July 24, 2026

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

As I write this reflection, my religious community is engaged in chapter, the highest governing body of the community, that gathers every five years. Due to limited capacity, I am unable to attend the 10-day gathering. I feel both grief and relief. I am relieved because I know the toll that overextending myself takes. I am grieving the loss of connection, intimacy and communal transformation that happen during these meetings. This is just another loss I am experiencing after a brain injury. Lately, it has been helpful to view these losses through the lens of the vow of poverty. How are these changes inviting, guiding and supporting me to live a Gospel life?

Primarily, the vow of poverty directs our relationships with external, material and economic realities. This vow is about living evangelical poverty in response to the evils of economic want or social oppression that rob others of life-sustaining resources. Shaped by the lived example of Jesus and his disciples, the vow of poverty is one way to co-create the kin-dom of God on Earth — where no one is poor. Professing this vow, I freely commit to actively relieving the suffering of my local and global neighbors by living simply, sharing resources, and caring for the whole community of life, especially the poor.

The vow of poverty invites communities of Catholic religious to counter a culture of greed, materialism, consumerism and rugged individualism. An alternative economic system that is Gospel-aligned is a gift economy. In a gift economy, value is placed on being, not doing, and sharing, not accumulating. Joyful and generous sharing and stewarding of Earth's gifts are the measure of wealth and a good life. As a group-centric approach, mutuality and interdependence are recognized truths. The well-being of the community is based on the well-being of the individuals and vice versa.

Since my brain injury and subsequent disabilities, I have contributed less financially to the common fund (think of the early Christian communities described in the Acts of the Apostles). than I have benefited from it. Communal resources are shared with me according to need, even if that means I use more than other sisters. This is not how I imagined things would be for me in my 40s. It challenges my overachieving, can't-be-a-burden ego to know that instead of financially supporting the community, the community is financially supporting me.

I experience much more stability and access to medical interventions than many of my disabled siblings. I have wondered why I should have access to so much support while watching my friends struggle. I have befriended feelings of guilt and

unworthiness as well as thoughts of being a burden. They have taught me much about gratitude and awakened my heart's desire for everyone to have their needs met.

Advertisement

Alongside the human need for security is the common impulse to contribute. I need sufficient resources to feel secure, healthy and free enough to engage in ministry. In the gift economy, each is asked to sustain the community — to offer what they can to the well-being of the whole. As a sister, the impulse to be of service is ever present, like something I need to feel whole. I can thrive when I have enough stability and ways to contribute meaningfully.

From a gift-economy perspective, my primary contribution is myself. Second is what I can do or produce. This perspective has been a grace as I struggle with being less capable. In the countless moments when I can only care for this body and heart-mind, it reminds me that being as well as I can be is a contribution to the common good. When I feel shame because I contribute very little financially, I recall that who I am is valuable too.

Beyond material and economic realities, the vow of poverty speaks to the internal, spiritual and cosmic realities. It shapes not only what I do but how I am in the world. Acceptance of my fundamental poverty — that all is gift, that I truly possess nothing, and that I depend on spirit and the whole Earth community — calls me to an internal disposition of deep trust and gratitude. The vow invites me to wonder how I can carry my own burdens, honor my limitations, and still find something to offer for life's flourishing.

Just as we need to conserve physical resources for the good of future generations, I can be a better steward of life's energy when I conserve my internal energy. Living with an energy-limiting disability, I am learning what is essential. I do not want to waste energy by being who I think others want me to be. Authenticity and genuineness are much more energy-efficient. By clearing physical and mental clutter, I am learning what is enough. I am seeking simplicity that allows me to be more present and available.

I've learned that mutual and caring relationships are essential. Since my inner life

affects how I am with others, I have spent time cultivating loving qualities of heart and spirit. I am learning to meet others in their suffering as I meet and tend to my own suffering. I judge my well-being by how compassionate I am to myself and others. My main intention is to ease the suffering of others, to offer what I can to bring comfort and beauty in the midst of pain. I offer my quality of presence, a listening heart and wisdom from my journey.

The experience of a life-altering injury has given me many opportunities to practice the vow of poverty. In the process of letting go of ministries, identities, mental and physical capacities, social networks and dreams about the future, I learn that I am more than what I can do. Even if I can't work 40 hours a week, I can still embody generosity, hospitality, gratitude and a joyful interdependence with a provident God. I can be frugal, thrifty and inventive with the resources I have access to.

As the chapter ends, holding grief and relief lightly, I am proud of my creative contributions. I am delighted that they were meaningful ways that respected my capacities (mostly). Around 30 houseplants I had lovingly cultivated were on every table, blessing the space. I was present in prayer. I was available to accompany a dear sister to the emergency room. I couldn't be in the room where it was all happening and yet, I could show up in care, support and presence — turning my poverty into abundance.