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Nearly 600 sisters and 300 guests gathered for LCWR's 2025 annual assembly. The group's 2026 assembly runs Aug. 11-14 in Orlando, Florida. (GSR photo/Dan Stockman)



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The Leadership Council of Women Religious has hosted some speakers with real star power at its annual assembly over the years, but none like this: This year, Pope Leo XIV will give a video message to the sisters and guests.

More than 1,300 leaders of U.S. congregations, their justice promoters and communicators, guests and vendors will gather Aug. 11-14 in Orlando, Florida, with the theme, "Many Charisms, One Spirit, One Call" as the organization celebrates its 70th anniversary. LCWR represents about two-thirds of the nearly 35,000 sisters in the United States.

To ensure there are no technical issues with a live connection, Leo has recorded a video message that will be played in the morning session of Aug. 12. Attendees will also see a recorded message from Consolata Missionary Sr. Simona Brambilla.

Brambilla was appointed by Pope Francis in January 2025 as prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, making her the first woman religious to oversee religious in the history of the Catholic Church. She gave an [in-person keynote address](#) at last year's assembly.

"What a gift to have those recordings," said LCWR President [Sr. Vicky Larson](#).

That morning will also see a keynote address by Xavière Missionary [Sr. Nathalie Becquart](#), undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican. Becquart, Larson said, will set the framework for the assembly's focus on synodality, or "walking together." Becquart will also take part in a dialogue with Franciscan Sr. Maria Elena Martinez.

Larson said that just as women religious helped move along the reforms of Vatican II, Catholic sisters can "deepen the church's experience of synodality."

"The heart of this gathering is certainly not listening to me, but listening to each other," she said.

Attendees will, however, listen to Larson as she gives the presidential address, one of her last public duties before her term as president ends.

LCWR has a three-person presidency: current president-elect Sr. Debra Sciano, of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, will become president; [Larson](#), of the Presentation Sisters of South Dakota, will move from president to past-president; and past-

president [Sr. Kathy Brazda](#), a Sister of St. Joseph, will finish her three-year term. The team will welcome the new president-elect, Sinsinawa Dominican Sr. Betsy Pawlicki.

Larson said her address draws from Pope Francis' statement that we are not in an era of change, but in a change of era. It also will draw from her experience as a musician, she said.

Last year's assembly put much more focus on communal discernment and letting the Holy Spirit move conversations among the members, and LCWR Executive Director Carol Zinn said this year's gathering will do the same.

Larson noted that when you build a campfire, you have to leave room in the wood for air to get in and feed the fire; Zinn added that there must also be kindling — the many "Conversations in the Spirit" sessions will provide the space for the Spirit to move, while reflections by Becquart and others will be the kindling that gets things started.

"Synodality is about encounter, listening and discernment," Zinn said. "What is God saying to each of us and all of us together?"

Like last year, LCWR has invited the justice promoters and communicators of its member congregations to join their leadership at the assembly, in what officials say is a recognition that all three groups must work closely together to achieve the social justice the Catholic faith calls them to.

In addition, LCWR has again invited representatives from the Association of Latin American Missionary Sisters in the U.S., the Confederation of Latin American Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, the Religious Brothers Conference, the Canadian Religious Conference and the National Black Sisters Conference.

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For a decade, LCWR has worked to promote the idea that racism, forced migration and the climate crisis are all interrelated and must be addressed as such. Closer ties to our neighbors in the Americas makes sense because none of those issues stop at the border, Zinn said.

"The migration of people is a continental issue. The climate crisis is a continental issue," she said.

To that end, the assembly will again feature a justice event. Last year sisters walked through the streets of downtown Atlanta, stopping three times to pray for the issues of racism, the climate crisis and forced migration. This year will see a "Jericho Walk," named for the biblical story of Joshua, who led the Israelites in a march around Jericho seven times, after which the walls of the fortified city fell down.

Zinn said the ritual comes from the Maryknoll missionary community, and is a form of lament.

She said the walk will "identify the pains and the suffering — detention centers and places of deportation, issues around climate, issues around racism. It will be a collective experience like [last year's] pilgrimage was."

Larson said the walk fits in perfectly with the rest of the assembly.

"In my mind and my heart, there is a linkage between listening together and walking together and having space for the Holy Spirit to move among us," she said. "There is something that happens when there is ritual and prayer, and I think something deep and rich is going to come from that."

Ordinarily, the assembly ends with a banquet honoring that year's winner of LCWR's Outstanding Leadership Award, but instead of the award, this year will see a celebratory dinner as the group marks its 70 years of ministry.

This story appears in the **LCWR 2026** feature series. [View the full series.](#)