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Sr. Vicky Larson, president of LCWR, gives the presidential address Aug. 12 at the group's assembly in Orlando, Florida. (GSR photo/Dan Stockman)



by Dan Stockman

[View Author Profile](#)

dstockman@ncronline.org

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The future of religious life depends on different congregations, with different charisms, working together like a symphony, the president of the United States' largest leadership conference for Catholic sisters told the group's members.

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious, which represents about two-thirds of the nation's nearly 35,000 sisters, is holding its annual assembly Aug. 11-14 in Orlando, Florida. More than 1,300 congregational leaders and their guests are attending.

[LCWR President Sr. Vicky Larson](#), of the Presentation Sisters of South Dakota, told attendees in her Aug. 12 presidential address that the assembly's theme, "Many charisms, one spirit, one call" can best be seen through a musical lens. Good music requires the group to listen to each other.

"The Holy Spirit is asking us to lead by listening," Larson said. "Not indifferent listening. Not surface listening. But deep, contemplative, Spirit-led synodal listening — the kind that changes us."

A song with only one note on one instrument would be "flat, lifeless and unrecognizable," she said.

"Yet when we weave many different notes together — when melody meets harmony, something far more beautiful emerges," Larson said. "Something layered, textured and alive."

The suffering world needs the melody and harmony of religious life, she said.

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"Look for bridges and connections with one another. Listen for harmony," Larson said. "Just as a choir or symphony brings together many diverse voices or instruments, each taking its turn to carry the melody — we need all charisms in religious life, as well as all people in all vocations around the world, to come together to create the integrated music of humanity."

Even dissonance — when notes seem to clash against each other — is part of music, forcing patience as your ear waits for resolution, she said. Dissonance can be a

problem or it can be part of the story the music tells.

"We live in a world filled with dissonance between people, political parties and nations," Larson said. "I believe that we can help the world learn to either create space to hold dissonance or else help the world move through it toward resolution."

Music also has context, and the context of religious life in the United States right now is one of change, especially demographically. Larson talked about how her own congregation has had to let go of many of its sponsored ministries, closing its college and deconstructing their motherhouse. At its Chapter in March, the congregation discerned it would be their final one, as they will not have enough members with capacity for another in 2030. They will move toward an appointed leader, or [commissary](#), by 2028.

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"This is not a sad song. This is a courageous act of listening to the future," Larson said before being interrupted by applause. "This is a courageous act of recognizing that we are part of a bigger picture of God's call to the world and the Spirit's unity."

And all of it is part of how God uses religious life.

"The profound transformation of religious life is part of a continual cycle — growing in some places, merging in others and coming to fulfillment in still others," she said. "This is not a sign of decline. This is a natural sign of evolution."

And religious life, just as music is meant to be shared, is not about serving itself.

"The call we hear is not for ourselves alone. Religious life has never existed for its own sake. It exists for the transformation of the world," Larson said. "We are called to listen to the cries of the Earth and the cries of those made poor. We are called to stand with migrants, survivors of violence and those who are marginalized."

Religious life, she said, has always shaped itself to the needs of the time, and the needs of this time require unity and harmony.

"We have the opportunity to create music together none of us could compose alone," Larson said. "The Spirit is drawing us into a shared rhythm — not a uniform

sound, but a courageous weaving of our distinct charisms into a living, evolving symphony. Harmony gathers our differences into something more beautiful and whole."

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Earlier in the day, attendees heard an address from Xavière Missionary [Sr. Nathalie Becquart](#), undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican, on synodality and religious life.

"As consecrated women and men coming from so many different places and congregations across the Americas, you are not on the margins of the synodal journey. You are at its heart," Becquart said.

She also thanked the religious men and women of the United States she met while studying at the Chicago Theological Union and Boston College.

"I come to this conversation not as an outsider explaining synodality to you, but as a sister among sisters and brothers who shares the same vocation, and who has had the extraordinary privilege of accompanying the synodal journey of the whole church from the inside, doing so aware of how much I have received from many women and men religious in the United States," Becquart said.

"I would not be the woman religious I am today, serving at the Vatican, without the support, the formation and the accompaniment I received from so many U.S. sisters and other religious. And I am here to listen to what you carry — because the exchange of gifts is not a metaphor. It is what this assembly is actually for."

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