

[News](#)

[News](#)

[Religious Life](#)



Sisters dance at the closing fiesta of the LCWR assembly Aug. 14 in Orlando.
(GSR/Dan Stockman)



by Dan Stockman

[View Author Profile](#)

Join the Conversation

Orlando, Florida — August 18, 2026

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Hundreds of Catholic sisters closed out their annual gathering Aug. 14 with prayer, a change of officers, and a party to celebrate the group's 70th anniversary.

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious, which represents about two-thirds of the nearly 35,000 sisters in the United States, held its annual assembly Aug. 11-14, drawing more than 1,300 leaders of religious congregations and their guests.

Continuing and building on a move that began at last year's assembly, much of the gathering was dedicated to discernment through synodality, or walking together.

"It's about listening," said Xavière Missionary Sr. Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican, who provided a framework for the sisters' synodal discussions. "It's about seeking the truth."

Each day, the sisters spent time deeply listening to each other, an effort organizers took so seriously that events were held simultaneously in two separate rooms so that each table could have six sisters rather than nine to keep the dialogue moving. Huge screens in each room showed what was happening in the other.

Related: [LCWR presidential address: Religious life must find harmony amid change](#)

Becquart told the sisters that while the aim of synodal discussions is consensus, decisions should not be watered down to make everyone happy.

"Consensus doesn't mean everyone thinks exactly the same," she said. "The synodal process is not about suppressing opinions or finding a very smooth consensus that is about nothing. It's about the work of the Holy Spirit."

The morning of Aug. 14, the sisters held a [Jericho Walk](#), addressing issues such as racism and climate change, and later held the annual transfer of officers. LCWR has a triumvirate presidency, so president-elect [Sr. Debra Sciano](#), of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, became president; [Sr. Vicky Larson](#), of the Presentation Sisters of South Dakota, moved from president to past-president; and past-president [Sr. Kathy](#)

[Brazda](#), a Sister of St. Joseph, finished her three-year term.

The group then welcomed the new president-elect, Sinsinawa Dominican Sr. Betsy Pawlicki.

[Read this next: Meet Sr. Debra Sciano, new president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious](#)



The three-person LCWR presidential team welcomed new president-elect Sr. Betsy Pawlicki [left], a Sinsinawa Dominican Friday, Aug. 14, 2026, at the group's annual assembly in Orlando. With her were President Sr. Debra Sciano [center] and Past-President Sr. Vicky Larson. (GSR/Dan Stockman)

Brazda, who learned she has cancer two months into her presidency and spoke movingly in her [presidential address last year](#) about how the vulnerability that came with the disease had shaped her view of leadership, joined the event via live stream, because she was unable to attend in person due to her treatments. She messaged the group her thanks for the privilege of serving.

The group also thanked, with multiple standing ovations, Sr. Annmarie Sanders, who recently left her post of communications director after 23 years at LCWR when she was elected president of her congregation, the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," LCWR Executive Director Sr. Carol Zinn told Sanders. "And we're not too mad at the IHMs in Scranton for electing you."

One of Sanders' last projects was a video marking LCWR's 70 years since its founding in 1956 at the request of the Vatican.

"What emerged was more than an organization — it was a community of leaders," the narration said over photos of hundreds of sisters in full habits. It was "leadership grounded not in power, but in presence. ...And through their love and presence, countless lives were transformed."

The assembly closed Friday night with a fiesta to celebrate the anniversary, which included a roving Mariachi band, followed by spirited dancing.



Sisters wrapped the LCWR assembly with a fiesta August 14. (GSR/Dan Stockman)



Sisters wrapped the LCWR assembly with a fiesta August 14. (GSR/Dan Stockman)



Sisters wrap the LCWR assembly with a fiesta Aug. 14, 2026. (GSR photo/Dan Stockman)

Advertisement

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