

Many religious communities stand at a threshold. This is a sacred time for listening carefully to God's call and—despite risk and uncertainty—daring to cross over in hope.

Inviting thresholds: how communities might respond to shifting times

BY SISTER MARIA CIMPERMAN, OSU

IT IS A GIFT AND PRIVILEGE to be with you, to ponder, engage and learn from and with one another. Thank you for this invitation.¹ This conference theme, “Called by One, Invited by Many” is apt, for your ministry is to walk with people who are hearing an invitation from the One. As members, leaders, formation ministers and associates, but most particularly as vocation ministers, you represent some of the many people inviting women and men to discern the call to religious life, in your congregation, for the church, world and all of creation. As vocation ministers you journey with women and men discerning a call, walking with them to and across significant thresholds in their lives. You also walk to and across thresholds with your congregations. Yours is a noteworthy, creative and poignant worldview. You see some of what it is that men and women in discernment will be part of. You see it through their eyes, with their promise and energy, as well as with your lens as a member of your congregation. You are at the threshold of who we are and who we are becoming in religious life. This perspective is not limited to you, but it is particular to you. You have an opportunity to see and hear keenly. Thank you for this.

Today I would like to name our space in religious life more particularly as a *threshold space*, a very sacred space even in its seeming ordinariness. I invite us to ponder together the invitation of thresholds. Thresholds today invite all of us,

Sister Maria Cimperman, OSU is an Ursuline Sister from Cleveland, OH and assistant professor of moral theology at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX. She is the author of When God's People Have HIV/AIDS: An Approach to Ethics (Orbis, 2005) and writes and lectures on topics connected to social ethics as well as religious life and the post-Vatican II generation.

members and inquirers, indeed all of religious life. Thresholds are also sacred spaces in our Christian tradition.

This presentation is offered in three movements. First we consider what a threshold is and what brings us to a threshold in religious life. In the second movement we spend some time at the threshold and ponder the questions that meet us there, as well as the gifts present there. In the third movement I suggest some of what we might find across that threshold.

In the midst of this presentation we will have conversations and a few stops along the way. A longing for meaningful conversation is a call we hear from a number of our younger and newer members, and so I look forward to our conversations and ponderings.

Movement 1: Inviting thresholds

The genesis of “threshold” as a central metaphor for conversation about religious life today came from an experience I had in Ireland while working with a congregation on the call of religious life today. As it was my first visit to Ireland, the group wanted me to see some of the beauty of the land. So on a free day some of us embarked on a few adventures. Toward dusk, we came across an outdoor space that included an threshold, a sacred circle and a holy well.² I found myself “caught” at the threshold. Even before it was named as such, I felt I knew the space and that it held infinite and vast layers of meaning.

I find “threshold” to be an apt description of our times, and particularly of our time in religious life. This is a threshold time. Religious life is at a threshold moment. In the quiet I think we sense this; and the invitation to be attentive, reverent and responsive to these moments is real. Something is shifting in “the life,” and while I think we were at impasses some time ago, something is moving again.³ My hope is

that during our time together engaging inviting thresholds, together we can attend to some of the movements and moments and see, hear and sense where the Spirit leads us.

In addition, although we come to thresholds always as individuals, this is a particular time for communally attending the thresholds and their invitations. (In the second and third movements I will focus most particularly on the communal threshold invitations and experiences.)

We begin by opening up the word and concept of threshold. There is so much to a threshold! A threshold can be a doorway, an entrance from which you can enter or leave a building or room. It is a doorsill. It can be a brink, a region marking a boundary. A threshold can also be a starting point for a new experience or state of life.⁴ It is all of this; yet there is so much more to a threshold! Within our tradition it is a sacred space. Our Scriptures speak of thresholds in terms of pathways, entrances, doorways, crossings and more.⁵

A particularly beautiful and rich description comes from the late spiritual writer John O'Donohue.

It remains the dream of every life to realize itself, to reach out and lift itself up to greater heights. A life that continues to remain on the safe side of its own habits and repetitions, that never engages with risk of its own possibility, remains an unlived life. There is within each heart a hidden voice that calls out for freedom and creativity. We often linger for years in spaces that are too small and shabby for the grandeur of our spirit. Yet experience always remains faithful to us. If lived truthfully and generously, it will always guide us toward the real pastures.

Looking back along a life's journey, you come to see how each of the central phases of your life began at a decisive threshold where you left one way of being

and entered another. A threshold is not simply an accidental line that happens to separate one region from another. It is an intense frontier that divides a world of



Sister Maria Cimperman, OSU

feeling from another. Often a threshold becomes clearly visible only once you have crossed it. Crossing can often mean the total loss of all you enjoyed while on the other side; it becomes a dividing line between the past and the future. More often than not, the reason you cannot return to where you were is that you have changed; you are no longer the one who crossed over. It is interesting that when Jesus cured the blind man, he instructed him not to go back into the village. Having crossed the threshold into vision, his life was no longer to be lived in the constricted mode of blindness; new vision meant new pastures.⁶

We know this experience. Once we see differently, we cannot *not* see. The vision moves us to the next place. It is good to take a few moments to remember and name those moments when something within us shifted, when we found ourselves in a new place, when we left one way of being and entered another. We have all experienced this, and we share this with each person who inquires about religious life.

We share this with each person who hears God's call, God's invitation to know oneself as beloved and loving. This is an exceedingly wide community!

I invite you now to take a few moments to remember one such moment. This moment may be in religious life. It may have been an encounter in nature or with particular people. Take a few minutes to remember and name those moments when something within you shifted, when you found yourself in a new place, when you left one way of being and entered another. Ponder and remember this....

These are the tender moments when we hear God's voice, encounter God's love. Once we hear it and respond, something changes. We never can get enough of it. We thirst, for we've had a taste. We come to see all as connected. We have a sense that, "You, O God, are in this place. Your Presence fills it."⁷ We do not forget these moments. They remind us where we most deeply belong and how we most deeply belong.

Called to be hopeful

Each age also has its own way of naming this call. Each epoch teaches us more about God in yet more ways. In her recent book, *Quest For The Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, Sister Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ writes that Christian faith today does not believe in a new God, but in finding in new situations the presence of God that is there.⁸ Each time teaches us more about God. This does not mean we ask God to be present in our new situations. It means we ask to be present, to be present to God, in these new situations, in these our times. In this way of being we find God in all.

We come to this space, this sense of God in all, with great hope. It is with hope that we see the world. People joining us usually see the world with great hope, too. We want to be part of God's new creation. We see the joy in God's creation and revel in our interconnections with all. There is great hope in this space of deep connection. We also see the pain present in the world, and as we seek to respond to the pain around us, we see in hope a virtue we need ever more deeply.⁹ The call here is not to optimism but to hope.

Father Anthony Gittins, CSSp, offers helpful distinctions:

Often confused with optimism, hope needs to be clearly distinguished from it. Optimism (and its shadow, pessimism) is a disposition toward or judgment

of a view of reality that is partial. Strictly, the optimist chooses to acknowledge only the evidence that supports a positive view; more informally, optimists weigh the evidence and judge that the positive is preponderant. But optimism (and pessimism) is essentially a quality or predisposition that depends on human reason. It is a rational virtue or quality.

Hope is very different. Though not irrational, it is essentially a theological virtue, a sibling of faith and love. It is focused, not on external reality or hard facts but on God, God's justice, and God's faithfulness. Hope endures, not because life seems good or is the way we would have chosen it, but because we are committed to the God who...calls us to believe, even against prevailing evidence, and all appearances notwithstanding.... Gustavo [Gutierrez] once said that there are two kinds of people. First, those who go into a situation and then carefully assess the evidence, on the basis of which they then declare whether or not there is any hope (and perhaps whether or not they are optimistic). By contrast, said Gutierrez, there are Christians! Christians are different because they do not look for or conclude that there is any hope: they are themselves bearers of hope. Therefore, wherever there is a believer, there is hope. And wherever a Christian encounters a situation without hope, the very presence of the believer transforms it now into a situation of hope!¹⁰

Further on, Gittins writes, "Hope, for Christians, is simply non-negotiable: it is a basic requirement of the person of faith, of the person who claims to believe in God's promises."¹¹

Rooted in God's love and seeing God's call among those with great needs, our founders and foundresses are certainly men and women of hope, not optimism. Deep hope. Hope moves us to the places where hope is desperately needed. As women and men religious we find our calling in the places where hope is seemingly absent. We know we cannot do this alone. Everything in creation reminds us of our interconnection, and so we seek others with whom to share this life of seeking, creating, being part of God's creation. This brings individuals, communities and congregations together.

The women and men who find us are looking for a way to be this life in the world, and community naturally makes sense to them. As one new member recently shared at a gathering, "I see community as a manifestation of the reign of God. This is what I came to be part of. Not community for

its own sake but as part of God's reign." How hopeful this is! I wonder if we dare say the same about our communities? This new member's statement was not a conclusion but a commencement.

People joining religious life today are aware, to varying extents, of the challenges of religious life. At the same time they see in congregational religious life and in community life not impasse but an invitation in this moment, at this time, at the threshold of religious life—and they seek to give all, risk all, for God's mission. They offer and open themselves in love.

Is this different from the early days of probably all of our congregations? Probably not. Most congregations didn't begin with even as much as we have at this moment. Women and men joining today are responding to the same God who called each of us. They come to us and with us to this threshold time in religious life, cognizant of numbers, sponsorships and finances, but these are not their issues. This is where hope comes in. We only lean into what we believe is possible. Our newer members see so much as possible.

We also offer many stories and realities of where in mission, what was once impossible, we have "possibilitized"—a term the liberation theologians have coined so powerfully. People entering religious life come with us to be community and to witness to God's mission now. They see in religious life a particular way to be community, which Father Richard Gula, S.S. describes beautifully as: "a way of discipleship involving a personal relationship with Jesus under the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through the community of believers to bring about a world marked by justice and peace."¹²

We, too, seek to participate in God's mission. Our congregations were and are continually formed by this desire. So, too, now new members cross a threshold and join us on the journey. The journey for them is now a communal one, a congregational one.

In fact the communal aspect is important for both new members and vowed members. Those of us already in religious life may go about our personal and communal lives quite well for some time, and then slowly or suddenly find that new thresholds beckon. Though thresholds can invite both personally and communally, the emphasis here is on us. It is essential to note that the inviting thresholds in religious life today are not only individual but also communal.

We find ourselves at moments that begin to ask more of us, that beckon. As we are attentive we find ourselves at thresholds (not impasses). Something is calling us to see and be in yet another way and to seek to be present to God here too, even if it's unfamiliar territory.

Movement 2, At the threshold

We are invited to the thresholds today—by the One who called us and by the many we are within God's creation. If we are in religious life for any time at all, we begin to ask questions; and each time has particular questions.

O'Donohue reminds us that, "A threshold is a significant frontier where experience banks up; there is intense concrescence. It is a place of great transformation."¹³

We will find both our restlessness and our energy here. We also hear that the word threshold "was related to the word thresh, which was the separation of the grain from the husk or straw when oats were flailed.... To cross a threshold is to leave behind the husks and arrive at the grain."¹⁴

We find ourselves at threshold moments when the questions arise and we know it is time to answer them with our lives. Sometimes thresholds are thrust upon us out of crises. In my own congregation the 1980 murder in El Salvador of Sister Dorothy Kazel, OSU¹⁵ (as well as Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke and lay missionary Jean Donovan) and then Sister Joanne Marie Mascha's 1995 murder were such thresholds. Likewise Sister Dorothy Stang's death in 2005 offers a threshold moment for her congregation, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.¹⁶ I am certain you can name many other thresholds.

Other times thresholds come out of living a reflective life. In an interview before the General Congregation Chapter in which he was named Father General of the Jesuits, Adolfo Nicolás mentioned among his hopes for the Chapter:

I have a feeling, still imprecise and difficult to define, that there is something important in our religious life that needs attention and is not getting it. We have certainly been diligent in addressing our problems whenever we have seen them.... But the uneasiness in the Society and in the Church has not disappeared. The question for us is: Is it enough that we are happy with our life and are improving our service and ministry? Isn't there also an important factor in the perception

People joining religious life today are aware, to varying extents, of the challenges of religious life. At the same time they see ... not impasse but an invitation.

of people (*vox populi*) that should drive us to some deeper reflection on religious life today? How come we elicit so much admiration and so little following? Thus, one of my hopes is that in GC35 we begin a process of dynamic and open reflection on our religious life that might begin a process of re-creation of the Society for our times, not only in the quality of our services, but also and mostly in the quality of our personal and community witness to the Church and the World.¹⁷

The questions continue. Sister Mary Whited, Precious Blood Sister and current president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), asked at the recent LCWR conference:

How do we attend to this moment in the life of our congregations and our leadership conference? How do we “midwife” religious life into a future that is unfolding even as we assemble? How do we encourage our members to hold on to what is needed and to let go of what is not essential so that we are freer to climb? Can we risk conversing about the hopes and fears that stir in our hearts? Are there other mountains we need to be climbing? Are the mountains we are scaling even worth the climb?¹⁸

At the thresholds, when we finally arrive, we find ourselves asking lots of questions. It is in the silence, in the quiet, that the most powerful questions emerge. We hear from David Whyte in one of his poems.

SOMETIMES

Sometimes
if you move carefully
through the forest,

breathing
like the ones
In the old stories,

who could cross
a shimmering bed of leaves
without a sound,

you come
to a place
whose only task

is to trouble you
with tiny
but frightening requests,

conceived out of nowhere
but in this place
beginning to lead everywhere.

Requests to stop what
you are doing right now,
and

to stop what you
are becoming
while you do it,

questions
that can make
or unmake
a life,

questions
that have patiently
waited for you,

questions
that have no right
to go away.¹⁹

Questions for Reflection

1. What questions have patiently waited for you?
2. What are the questions, those tiny but frightening requests, that have no right to go away?
3. In religious life, what are these questions?
4. In your congregation, what are these requests?

(A suggestion: I encourage you to take some minutes to ponder and write down your thoughts. After quiet time, in small groups, share your questions by simply reading them aloud. Do not comment or in any way try to answer the questions. Allow a moment of silence after each person has spoken. If there is a desire to hear each person's questions again, please do so. Listen deeply. Then begin the discussion.)

Threshold invitations: calls and cries

At the thresholds we find many questions to sift and sort,

like chaff from husk. We bring who we are and who we are becoming to these questions at the threshold.

Our newer members join us at the thresholds. They come, with their humanity, to religious life with fresh eyes. Having recently crossed a threshold of their own with desire and freedom and hopes, they come to our congregations because they see a common vision and hope, and they desire to join their hopes with ours. Threshold questions are familiar and even welcome for them.

Together we find ourselves at these thresholds, these sacred moments, and they require both awareness and reverence.

If a threshold is a significant frontier where experience banks up, where there is intense concrescence, what do we find at the thresholds? (Note: each of us and our congregations are different, so I invite you to see where you and your congregation fit here. I particularly invite you to consider these questions as a congregation.)

At thresholds we find the following gifts: invitations from the many; communal discernment; *disponibilidad*; tests or temptations. First, let's look at the invitations—the calls and cries from the many. Here we must be attentive and listen deeply. In the Millennium Development Goals put forth by the United Nations, we can hear the people who embody these efforts—the hungry, those without education or health care, women and children. Our creation cries out in the midst of pollution and misuse. In this nation immigrant communities cry out, our cities and rural areas cry out. Our world cries out in disease, and at the dis-ease with which governments legislate and care for the common good and particularly for the increasingly common poor and marginalized. Our spiritual hungers cry out—hungers for meaning, for belonging, for tables of welcome and full participation. We hear cries for justice, for peace, for a way of living and believing that makes a difference for good in this world and universe. I acknowledge that some will find these calls overwhelming, but there are always some, and often newer members, who will find these calls an opportunity to love more deeply, who will see possibility and hope where others will not.

Among the invitations from the many we must also listen for the cries that may be within our own houses, communities, and even congregations. Within communities we may hear the cry for deeper meaning, for deeper and life-generating living. From our newer members, we may hear: How can I live more deeply than I did before joining religious life? How do I live more deeply when the world seeks separation and isolation and the call I hear from God

in community is communion and depth and breadth? How might we come to know each other at the depths of our hearts to more transparently bring the presence of God to the marketplace, barrio, hospital or school? To our homes and our communities? Our newer members may not respond to these cries any better than anyone else, but their longing is great. How do we attend to “the life” as we do the necessary reconfiguring for mission? There is a reason that this year's Giving Voice national conference in Milwaukee will explore the topic of community for mission.²⁰ It is a deep cry from some of the newer and younger members as they seek to live more deeply the life to which God calls all of us. Do you hear these questions too?

Invitations from the many call us, so let us come together and respond.²¹ At the threshold we realize that what has been is not enough anymore. At the threshold we realize that we cannot respond alone; indeed we find ourselves now together at the threshold.

Remember, too, that the threshold is not the vision but the invitation to the wider vision. For example, reconfiguration or merging provinces is not the vision; it is, rather, an initial response to what calls us beyond the threshold. These efforts may help us clear out some debris, to let go of what we may have accumulated but which is no longer needed to respond to God and God's creation, for God's “new creation.”

Remember that the threshold is not the vision but the invitation to the wider vision. For example, reconfiguration or merging provinces is not the vision; it is rather, an initial response to what calls us beyond the threshold.

Communally discerning our response

This brings us to the second gift at the threshold —communal discernment. The invitations to us today are communal. How we respond must come most deeply from who we are as women and men religious.

In **communal discernment** we consider our identity and role, the signs of the times, what we may offer and what it would take to respond well. We must make choices and even sacrifices. Communal discernment asks for our time, communal contemplation/prayer, awakened creativity,



Guest House

The Doorway to Healing

As a family member you know that when one member of a family is sick or troubled, all the family is affected.

As a Leader in a religious community, you know when a member of your “family” is afflicted with **ADDICTION** it affects the entire community.

Guest House assists by providing a pathway to healing and recovery. Since 1956, Guest House has treated more than 7,000 religious Sisters, Deacons, Brothers and Priests suffering from Addiction.



The **KEY** to helping an individual with an addiction problem is to take action - and soon. The bottom line is this: Unless the dependent person gets help, he or she will fail in ministry, fail in health and die prematurely.

Doing nothing does not help. Waiting is too dangerous. If someone you know has an addiction issue, please give us a call.

Call 877-545-0557

Guest House We know what works.

possibilitizing, prioritizing and decision-making.

At the threshold communal discernment is necessary. Yet how do we discern together? The answer lies beyond Chapters, though Chapters are essential. In discernment our deepest values, hopes, priorities, identities are named, and what is no longer the deepest value or priority or keenest identity is gently let go. Remember that a threshold is a powerful time, a transformative time, and only what is most essential is to stay. The rest, held lightly or even let go, frees us to deeply hear and respond. We certainly do this individually. We must also do this communally. Sister Christine Vladimiroff, OSB reminds us of the importance of the communal: “When we can clearly articulate who we are in our world and how we are gift to our Church, then we can move with confidence into that future that is hope-filled. This will also suggest to us the areas of our lives, as individuals and as community, that must change, that must be transformed for us to become a declaration of God’s Reign.”²² She further reminds us that “Life in community and our sense of mission as service for others come out of our discipleship, following the Christ. Together they are our essential witness to the Church and to the world.”²³

Communal discernment at this moment also offers potential for powerful creativity. I will touch on this a bit more in our next movement, but for now I offer an insight from Peter Senge, author and founding chair of the Society for Organizational Learning: “Only the creating mode leads to a genuine sense of individual and collective power, because only in the creating mode do people orient themselves to their intrinsic desires.”²⁴ There is much potential here, and again, it comes from a sense of deep listening to what is in the world, in the church and within our congregational lives.

Allow me to make this a bit more concrete and offer an example of a communal threshold moment entered into by the Carmelite Nuns in Baltimore through communal discernment.²⁵ Some years ago the Carmelite community looked at itself and saw that what they were doing and being was good. They looked at who they were and were satisfied. They also saw that no one had entered for some years, or at least if women were entering, they were not staying.

Sister Connie FitzGerald, OCD, their prioress at that time, reflected that the community knew they would remain alive for some years and decades; and while not an immediate issue, they knew that given their picture then, their time would eventually end. She knew that they had only a window of five to 10 years, and if they didn’t profit by them, they would die. Looking back at this time, FitzGerald reflected:

We looked at ourselves and saw we have been around in Baltimore for 214 years and that our Carmelite heritage dates back to John of the Cross, Therese of Lisieux and Teresa of Avila.... We also looked at our world today and [saw] that what we offer is still very important, a contemplative way of looking and being in the world. In fact, it is ever more important. We found ourselves realizing a need to offer a contemporary experience of the contemplative life.²⁶

This Carmelite community recognized that there was a value to continuing their life—not for their own sake but because the life had so much to offer the world and church. They sensed the Spirit speaking to them in all of this, through a number of discussions over the course of many months.

One of the practices cherished by the Carmelite community is its “habit of dreaming”—communally dreaming. The women asked, “I wonder what it would be like if....”²⁷ And dream they did! They also realized dreams through hard work.²⁸ None of this was easy, but the dreaming together was necessary so that they could then see how dreams might be realized. Sister Colette Ackerman, OCD, current prioress, adds that, “You really have to think in very large terms, because things like feasibility and money and all will catch up with you soon enough, but you have to inject the magic into what you hope for. I think religious women have to do that to continue their traditions. The people who can do that will go on.”²⁹

As they dreamed, the nuns again saw that their identity and way of life still had something crucial to offer the church and world. And then each sister was asked what she felt she could offer a newer member. To a person, regardless of age or health, each had something to offer, from the sisters in their 80s to the newest members. Ownership was happening.

FitzGerald reflects: “In that process, each person sharing what she can offer a woman coming in, the community went through a profound conversion. It set us up to do and to give what had to be done and what had to be given to help women come to the monastery and also to remain.”

Examining the signs of their times, this community saw that women discerning a call to religious life were looking for a deep community and prayer life. FitzGerald offers:

Women coming to religious life today want above all communities of prayer who are truly communities. They are, by and large, talented, educated women who have had a career before they come to us. They can live a ministerial life without entering a community.

They can even serve the poor; they can be in social work; they can be a lawyer who is looking out for the immigrant and the oppressed. They can do all of these as lay women....

There has to be a reason to enter religious life. And one of those reasons, I have discovered, is community. And I think all our communities of religious women, religious men as well, actually, are going to have to provide a very deep community life.³⁰ And the crux of this is that this is going to call for sacrifices. And sacrificing things that we may legitimately have.... We are going to have to be on call, to mentor these women, to provide a model for them of how the life needs to be lived. And unless communities can offer this, they are not going to have and keep new women.³¹

The realization came that if they were to welcome women today to the Carmelite life, they would themselves have to adapt and shift some of their lives. They crossed more than one threshold here.

At some point a realization came that if they were to welcome women today to the Carmelite life, they would themselves have to adapt and shift some of their lives. They crossed more than one threshold here, but important to note is that the key factor was their life in God and what God’s call was to them. The rest of the pieces could shift.

At one point FitzGerald notes interesting and perhaps provocative lacunae about the cost of new membership:

I think that many communities have not yet calculated the cost of new membership. It’s my belief that the time of renewal after Vatican II is over. It is completed, and we are in a new era and a new time of renewal and this time of renewal calls for different gifts and different sacrifices even than the previous epoch following Vatican II called for. After Vatican II, we moved into a very vigorous time and it was a time of the development of our sisters. There was a concentration on self-development, on education, even in a certain way on self-realization which was prevalent in the whole society. And religious life needed this. There needed to be a shift to a person centered kind of

life, away from something that was strictly structure centered.

And that whole time for renewal called for new things in that time, and life has developed out of what we did at that time... They were good things that were necessary. I think that this time we are in now is calling for different gifts. It is my belief that we have to come to new terms with this new time and with what it asks of

What emerges at the threshold in communal discernment includes the whole of religious life, which can be inter-congregational.

us, because if we are to have new people in our community, it will demand of us real self sacrifice.³²

These Carmelite sisters took ownership for this movement and responded, aware of some of the sacrifices, yet likely unaware

of others. FitzGerald reflects that in this process the nuns became the very best each could be. At a profession she told the entire community: "You have become at this stage of your life, the very best you can be."

New awarenesses emerge

The nuns were clearly aware of the challenges for new members in a community that has had great stability, and they sought ways to address the challenges. FitzGerald explains:

I think it's very difficult in a community like ours, which remains together for a lifetime, to integrate new women into the community. There's not a lack of willingness. It's a lack of awareness, of how hard it is to break into a group that has lived together for 25 years, 30 years, 40 years, and some of us even 50 years. There is so much give that has to happen if newer people are to find their place.

I think that the community became willing to give whatever it took in order to provide new spaces for younger women. Now it's one thing to think you are going to do this and to want to do this, and it's quite another thing to do this.

This has been costly to do this for the community because...when you bring six new women into the community, things change very much. The community is much more boisterous, the community is, for a time

at least, much less solitary. These newer women have emotional needs and even immaturities that the older sisters really don't have in the same way.

There are kinds of self-concern that occupy people who are coming initially to the community. There is an enormous amount of personal investment that has to be provided in order for these people to succeed, to feel that they belong, to feel that they they're in their own place. And what is remarkable is that everybody has done this.³³

This brief example of one community's commitment and process is not intended to imply that the process was clear and quick. The discernment into action took place over the course of years, and now the Baltimore Carmelites are again an intergenerational community with a lively multicultural/intercultural mix. Six women have been incorporated into their life since the communal discernment process began.

The priority that emerged is perhaps best reflected by FitzGerald: "I feel very proud of what our sisters have really been able to do, and I think it speaks really of the depth of their own inner life, that in the end they have known what is really important, and they want people to live this life in the church and in the world. And the contemplative life they know and we know, all of us, is very, very important for the church and for the world."

We see in the Carmelite nuns an example of communal discernment on "the life" in our age. Theirs is not necessarily a formula to follow³⁴ but an example of what happens at the thresholds when we come to them in hope and with all that we are. What emerges at the threshold in communal discernment includes the whole of religious life, and it can even be inter-congregational. For example, after a long civil war in Sudan the bishops of the Southern Sudan region invited the Union of Superiors General and International Union of Superiors General to work in solidarity on human capacity building. In response, a number of religious congregations discerned to collaborate in the "Support for Southern Sudan" project, with resources and/or with personnel. As a result, several religious are now collaborating and working in this much needed arena.³⁵ We have here a communal call flowing out of mission. Possibilities abound.

Priorities and identities are shaped at this threshold of communal discernment. As we communally discern—in the midst of ministry, community, prayer—listening to the cries around us with a contemplative spirit, we are met with our third gift at the threshold.

Disponibilidad: radical availability

At the thresholds the virtue of *disponibilidad* invites.³⁶ While I have found no adequate English translation for this Spanish word, the best understanding of it is that it connotes radical availability. This is more than *disponible*, or available, as in “I am available to come to the meeting.” The meaning here is much greater and deeper. Disponibilidad refers to radical or root availability, complete availability to God’s mission, God’s call. Our newer members have much to teach us here, for somewhere in their “yes” to God’s call to religious life they experienced that gift and response. Didn’t you? Didn’t we? The invitation continues today.

One of my Ursuline sisters, at a table discussion about a congregational direction we once considered and which was now clearly not the direction we were called to, reflected, “That’s fine. This frees us to deeply listen anew. Over 25 years ago I let all go and responded to God’s call. I can continue to do so, in freedom.” The hope was palpable as we realized one direction was not the Spirit’s call and that we were being called anew. The listening continues for us—in active engagement. The threshold beckons to us again.

Disponibilidad is our *Suscipe*. “Accept me O God, according to your word, and let me not be confounded in my expectations.” It is this stance that helps us cross the threshold and respond to the “more” we sense calling us.

Put to the test

We now move to our fourth threshold gift, **tests**. At the threshold we must be aware of something else that will greet us and ask for attention: tests, biblically also known as temptations. Early in Luke’s Gospel we read that Jesus prays, the Spirit comes, and he is made ready for mission.³⁷ This theme is repeated in Acts 1-2: the community is at prayer, the Spirit comes, and the early believers are made ready (bold) for mission as Peter rises to preach. So it is with us.

Yet there is more, for Luke’s account does not end with Jesus’ prayer and the response of, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). Instead, Jesus, “full of the Holy Spirit,” (4:1), returns from the Jordan and then is led by the Spirit into the desert where he is tempted. Scholars remind us that the “temptation” signals the beginning of the eschatological struggle with evil (anything or anyone who attempts to obstruct Jesus’ movement forward in mission in response to God’s plan).³⁸ At the end of this time of testing, Luke clearly says in 4:13 that the struggle is not

yet over: “When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.”

This is our experience too. Thresholds evoke voices that remind us of the cost of community, of discipleship, of obedient listening to the Spirit among us.

What comes forth at the thresholds are the tests of our inclinations and discernments. Yes, something new calls us forth, a new energy emerges. So does fear. So does a desire for more security. Doubts emerge. Questions come forth, and as a community we must discern the spirits here. In the midst of hope also comes fear.

What! We can’t do that. What about what we are already doing—that must be our stable commitment. This would ask so much of me. I don’t think I can do it. I don’t know where this is going, and I can’t go until I see it all. I need a blueprint and the ink needs to be dry! What will this cost us—financially, people-wise, in environmental responsibility, in terms of the energy we have at this time? We’ve never done it this way. This is asking too much of me. It’s just too hard to change.

We’ve all found ourselves here at one time or another. The list continues. My entire schedule would have to shift. How we live local community would require change. I don’t have time for this. This is for the next generation to figure out—I don’t want to go here. I can’t be still—there is too much to be done. The associates will carry us on. (A word of caution: Do not put the associates in this position. Theirs is not a call to religious life but to live the charism in their various life commitments and ministries.)

The list goes on. Aren’t we already doing good works? I don’t want to be uprooted. We don’t have time. We don’t have money. We don’t have energy. I don’t have.... Gosh, have you ever found yourself or your congregation going down many roads, feeling like a spinning top or a computer frozen because you tried to keep too many things open and running at the same time?

Disponibilidad does not go down easily, though it offers us great freedom for response-ability. What are we to do in this moment? Where do we go? We have been praying! We go to our stories, our deep stories, ones that speak of who we

Disponibilidad refers to radical or root availability, complete availability to God’s mission, God’s call.... It is this stance that helps us cross the threshold.

are. We go to what Johann Baptist Metz calls our “dangerous memories of Jesus.” We remember the dangerous memories of Scripture. To this we bring our narratives, our communal stories. In our founders and foundresses and the history of our congregations we have dangerous narratives to share with one another, not as a way of going back, but as a way of sensing the communion of saints with whom we travel.

This reminds us of where we put our trust. We see our salvation history, and in it all a God who is faithful to us. This assists us in pulling chaff from wheat and crossing thresholds (with some direction), though we will probably not see very clearly across the horizon until we reach the other side.

Not everyone may see at the same time; not everyone may be able to cross a threshold at the same time. A crossing may last several days, weeks or months.

But just before we cross the threshold, allow me to say that not everyone may see at the same time; not everyone may be able to cross at the same time. A crossing may last several days, weeks or months. There is, however, a dynamic of movement. Must all cross it? We hope that at some point all will, but

initially you simply need a critical mass to cross over. I don’t know what that is for any of our congregations. You will get a sense of that. Of course the more, the better and the further the movement. Someone just completing a leadership role recently shared that for the 10 years she was in leadership the team was cultivating not only new membership but also leadership within the membership. This year she saw some of the fruits of this in the voices of the newer and younger women, and she saw the energy also connecting with the rest of the generations when they assembled.

What can we do here at the crossing? We must remember that hope, too, is communal.³⁹ Once we have crossed we cannot go back. However, we can invite others at the threshold to cross. We can encourage and help one another, because the vision needs and beckons the ones on the threshold too—in freedom. All are in this community.

As we prepare to cross, we must do so with blessing. O’Donohue reminds us that, “This is where we need to retrieve and reawaken our capacity for blessing. If we approach our decisive thresholds with reverence and attention, the crossing will bring us more than we could ever have hoped for. This is where blessing invokes and

awakens every gift the crossing has to offer.”⁴⁰

We bring all we have to this moment—and then move, walk, journey beyond what we can exactly see but which we know is deep and true. Thresholds ask much of us, more than we even imagine; and they offer much more than we even imagine. The threshold invites, and with both trepidation and eagerness we respond.

Questions for Reflection

1. What threshold beckons your congregation now?
2. What is your participation at this congregational threshold?
3. What gifts are present at this threshold moment?
4. What threshold beckons you now?

Movement 3, Across the threshold: promises and possibilities

What do we find when we cross the threshold? Across the threshold we find four gifts:⁴¹ a greater sense of belonging and identity; creativity and imagination; community and communion; and globalizing solidarity. I briefly offer a few points on each.

First, across the threshold we find a greater sense of **belonging and identity**. We sense that we belong across this threshold, even as we may still not know exactly where it will lead. We have a sense of our deeper belonging to all of creation. There is a deeper sense of identity, knowing what we offer the church and world because of who we are and where we are. The Carmelites had this experience, and they worked hard to cross their threshold. Identity is forged, both in what we hold and what we let go of, in order to cross the threshold to the horizons that invite. In the midst of this our presence is more intentional.

As our identity is deepened, so is our public witness. Again, Vladimiroff reminds us that, “Life in community and our sense of mission as service for others comes out of our discipleship, following the Christ. Together they are our essential witness to the Church and to the world.”⁴² This public witness invites us to a transparency that our society struggles against,⁴³ yet our profession of vows, a public ecclesial moment in the church, commit us to a public witness—in all.

A particularly poignant and powerful example of this comes from one of my Ursuline sisters and friend, Sister Anita Whitely, OSU, who for years worked in formation ministry and with the Religious Formation Conference, on its

board and as a conference facilitator. After a battery of tests in July, in August she was told she had cancer throughout her system. In her 60s and just completing her term on our congregational leadership team, she made a decision for palliative chemotherapy. Anita also made a decision to share the news with people publicly (it was on our chain call to the entire congregation), and she is very open and welcoming to others, allowing others to minister to her instead of pulling away from people. I commented on this when I saw her in September, and she simply said, “We are called to be public witnesses in all. This is part of that all. To the last breath.” Anita is teaching all who know her how to live and how to walk across yet another threshold. It is to her that I dedicate this presentation, because of her life and the thresholds she crossed all her life and now continues to cross, communally as much as individually.

Second, across the threshold we find both **imagination and creativity** further galvanized. Creativity flows out of our deepest desires. We were earlier reminded by Senge that, “Only the creating mode leads to a genuine sense of individual and collective power, because only in the creating mode do people orient themselves to their intrinsic desires.”⁴⁴ We know from our own experiences that creativity is a deeply contemplative act, and it moves us to integrate our lives (prayer, community and ministry—in essence, mission), again bringing forth our active contemplative dimensions.

The religious imagination is a less utilized resource of our tradition than one might think, yet our own founders and foundresses were exceedingly creative and persistent! They found their own resonance with Jesus’ proclamation of Isaiah in Luke 4:18-19. We don’t necessarily know how we will do this, but that we must do this is key. We don’t do this alone, either. Our imagination and creativity come forth as we respond to the longings of our world. Our creative resources are galvanized as we attend to the calls we hear.

We find our imagination engages persons, structures and systems. That is one of the gifts of our times. We do see the systems at work even as we respond to the individuals in our world. God’s mission invites a vision beyond our own. All is drenched with possibility. If we can find medicines that can bring people living with HIV and AIDS back from near death so directly that we call it the “Lazarus effect,” we can surely bring our 1 million-plus religious worldwide—and our collaboration with so many—to the front of mission efforts. And much happens beyond our expectations.

All of this is intimately connected to integration, which this age craves and our newer members desire.

Third, across the threshold we find deeper **experiences and understandings of community**. Here phrases such as “spirituality of communion” or “community as a living spirituality of communion” take on more visible flesh. We are hearing this call all over, in both the church and the world, so something clearly is stirring. The 2004 “Passion for Christ and Passion for Humanity Conference” synthesis document noted the longing for such community and communion.⁴⁵

We also found a desire for communion spirituality in “Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium,”⁴⁶ a document produced by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. The document reminds us that communion and contemplation are necessary for one another, beginning with the communion of friendship with God.⁴⁷ Furthermore, communion is indispensable in religious life, and a spirituality of communion is “necessary to establish the dialogue of charity needed in today’s world.”⁴⁸ Commentator Charles M. Mangan, writes that “Attempts to spread communion by consecrated men and women are to encompass all people, but especially those who reside in locations oppressed by ethnic hatred or violence.”⁴⁹ The community mandate is certainly expansive.

What do we find when we cross the threshold? Across the threshold we find four gifts: a greater sense of belonging and identity; creativity and imagination; community and communion; and globalizing solidarity.

Fourth, we find across the threshold a greater realization of **globalizing solidarity**. Once we risk crossing over, how we see the local and the global has implications. While we have no one definition of globalization, Father Robert Schreier’s description is helpful: It is the “increasingly interconnected character of the political, economic, and social life of the peoples of this planet.”⁵⁰ Much good has emerged for many as a result of globalization. Yet, our current economic crisis is one example of where globalization can also harm. We see what happens when the common good, when God’s mission, is not on the radar screen of decision-makers. Globalization, however, is here to stay; it is the air we breathe. At the same time we have some choices in it. Globalization is not an engine that runs without human intervention.

Across the thresholds we also find the wonderful gifts of our brothers and sisters in religious life around the world. They daily remind us of the interconnectedness of our efforts to live the mission of God. Whether more locally based or internationally based, the real question is how we connect globally in vision, mission and intent.

Crossing thresholds will necessarily, and I do mean necessarily, call us to engage our increasingly globalized

Religious life is indeed at significant threshold moments. The more familiar and even comfortable we can become with them, the better we will be able to fruitfully respond to the Spirit's calls.

world and create solidarity in the midst of it. We are called to speak out against all that dehumanizes persons and desecrates creation. Solidarity moves us to what John Paul II described as "globalization without marginalization" or "a globalization of solidarity."⁵¹ Solidarity, walking alongside another, taking the

other's cause as one's own, is our call. Knowing God's mission to be to a globalized world, we respond accordingly, and what happens is often beyond our imagination.

Bridging nations and congregations

Across the threshold, globalizing solidarity has both international and inter-congregational dimensions. A few years ago at Oblate School of Theology we had a conference on the environment, and Brian Swimme offered three lectures. Beginning one of his talks to an audience of about 400, he thanked women religious for their pioneer efforts in taking care of the environment.

A facilitator about a year ago shared with me that she was working with a group of Dominicans for whom the earth has been a focus for over 20 years. She said she could understand if the Franciscans were doing this for a long time, but the Dominicans? So she asked a few of them about it. The response was quick. "Veritas, truth, is a great value to us and we seek truth in all. Of course that would bring us to the environment," they told her. The writing of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI resonates with the global solidarity necessary in the midst of our environmental crisis.⁵²

Globalizing solidarity occurs when we gather together

internationally. Every congregation, from the local to the international, is called to be global today, and each is to name as fully as possible what that means. To simply have members from around the globe is not enough. How is that membership globalizing solidarity within us and around us and through us? I experienced a powerful example of the potential for this in early September in Ireland with the Presentation Sisters (PBVM). As an inaugural program, they invited 15 sisters from the entire PBVM family (not one branch but the entire tree) to come together for a "Horizon program." The group included sisters from India, Ireland, Pakistan, Australia, Zimbabwe, the Philippines and the U.S. During my time with them we spent a week on the vowed life, leaning into it, together seeking to hear and see what the Spirit in the midst of all was inviting and opening. Their entire time together was a threshold time, and I could see some of the fruits emerging just at the end of their third week together. They had three more weeks in Ireland, followed by a month in a country and culture other than their own. From there they would all meet in India for theological reflection on their experiences through an Asian context. After this, they would travel to another part of India for a retreat that would conclude the program but continue so much that was happening to them.⁵³

Such movement is happening in many congregations. During a recent Chapter, the Christian Brothers in Ireland invited some of their members to gather and together read the signs of the times and discern the Spirit's call to the way of life for a Christian Brother. The Oblates in the U.S. also recently invited three of their members to see the needs of the secular world around them and discern what way of life and presence is needed today. The limits are only to our creativity, and that is quite boundless.⁵⁴

Globalizing solidarity is also inter-congregational. It is interesting that "Starting Afresh From Christ" calls us to not only start or continue dialogues, particularly among peoples in conflict, but also to attend to the "intra" dimension of religious life, and even to create and sustain communion among the various institutes. The document calls for a "joint search for common ways of serving the church."⁵⁵ The acknowledgement of this need and efforts to do more are publicly witnessed today.⁵⁶

A recent example comes from Father Frank Monks, former superior general of the Camillians. He states: "For us religious lots of challenges remain in areas like justice, ministry, ethics and education; this is why we are asked to overcome the fragmentary approach among us, so we can speak with one voice and establish a new culture of

communion and cooperation.”⁵⁷ He saw this as critical, not only for the work of religious but because these efforts have implications for others as well. He says further, “There are poor nations where Christians offer up to 40 percent of health services, but have no voice and are left to fight their battles alone, with poor results.”⁵⁸ This reality has local and international implications, for this article explains that superiors-general of religious communities are calling for better teamwork among their congregations to make their voices heard in international forums that allot funds to AIDS projects .

The communion we all seek in God and in all is present now, here and at the thresholds and beyond. Religious life is indeed at significant threshold moments. The more familiar and even comfortable we can become with them, the better we will be able to fruitfully respond to the Spirit’s calls for the church and world.

The sacredness of thresholds is clear. We begin as we conclude, with our friend John O’Donohue, who reminds us that, “If we approach our decisive thresholds with reverence and attention, the crossing will bring us more than we could ever have hoped for. This is where blessing invokes and awakens every gift the crossing has to offer.”⁵⁹ Come, my brothers and sisters, let us attend to these inviting thresholds. Amen!⁶⁰ ■

Questions for Reflection

1. What threshold has your congregation crossed?
2. What did or do you find across the threshold?
3. To what does your congregation witness? How is this visible?
4. To what do you witness? How is this visible?

Younger sisters respond to this article

To read reflections by several younger women religious on this presentation, see the 2008 second issue of the newsletter *Giving Voice: The Voices of Younger Women Religious*, available online at www.giving-voice.org.

1. I also gratefully acknowledge Sister Kristin Matthes, SNDdeN and Sister Lisa Buscher, RSCJ, two dear friends and colleagues in the Giving Voice organization of women religious under age 50. Both offered helpful feedback on drafts of the writing as the time of the NRVC presentation drew near. Community and collaboration are indeed gifts and calls of religious life today, and I am grateful for both.
2. The actual location was St. Gobneit’s grave.
3. I do not mean that there are no impasses remaining or to come. I do think that in different ways religious have attended to some of the impasses in recent times and that the generations who have come most recently to religious life do not necessarily have the same experiences of impasse as those who precede them. Each time finds its own invitations and challenges, and this also becomes the dynamic of congregational and religious life.
4. See, for example, the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, found at: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/threshold> (accessed November 7, 2008).
5. See, for example, John 14:1-6a; John 16:12-13; Matthew 6:25-34; Mark 4: 26-29; Mark 14: 32-36.
6. John O’Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 192-193. I am deeply grateful to my Irish friend, Sister Regina Daly, PBVM, for conversations on threshold and for connecting me to this source in O’Donohue’s writing.
7. These words are from the song “You, Lord, Are In This Place,” on the CD *Sacred Weave*. CD information may be found online at http://www.kevinmayhew.com/Shop/Categories/5557/Kevin_Mayhew_Publishers/Other_Resources/CDS/Celtic.aspx (accessed October 22, 2008). At this point in the presentation the song was played, followed by a few moments of silence.
8. More exactly, she writes, “Christian faith today does not believe in a novel God but, finding itself in strange situations, seeks the active presence of divine Spirit precisely there, in their midst.” Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, (New York: Continuum, 2007), 1.
9. Virtue here is defined as both a disposition and practice toward becoming a particular (moral) kind of person. More on virtues can be found in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and also in more recent writings by virtue ethicists.
10. Father Anthony Gittins, CSSp, “The Future of Religious Life,” *InFormation*, 14, no.2, (2006): 9.
11. Ibid.

12. Father Richard M. Gula, SS, *The Call to Holiness: Embracing a Fully Christian Life* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2003), 21. While Gula here is describing Christian spirituality, he is also offering the integral dimensions of community.
13. O'Donohue, 193.
14. Ibid.
15. See Sister Cynthia Glavac, OSU, *In the Fullness of Life: A Biography of Dorothy Kazel, OSU*. (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1996).
16. Sister Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN, was murdered in the Brazilian rainforest on February 12, 2005. Her life story can be found in Roseanne Murphy's *Martyr of the Amazon: The Life of Sister Dorothy Stang*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007).
17. Interview by Father Michael Kelly SJ, Australian Province Communications Delegate. "What should GC35 do?" *Province Express: A Newsletter of the Australian Jesuits*, December 12, 2007.
18. Sister Mary Whited, CPPS. Her address may be found online at: <http://lcwr.org/lcwrannualassembly/Presidential%20Address%20-%20Mary%20Whited%20CPPS.pdf> (accessed November 8, 2008).
19. David Whyte, "Sometimes," *River Flow: New and Selected Poems 1984-2007* (Langley, Washington: Many Rivers Press, 2007), 52-53. © David Whyte. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Many Rivers Press, Langley, WA. www.davidwhyte.com
20. Information about Giving Voice and its conference may be found online at: <http://www.giving-voice.org/> (accessed November 8, 2008).
21. We have been responding individually to these questions, and at some point something asks the deeper question about who we are as we read the signs of the times ... and who we will become as we seek to respond to these signs and times. This is indeed the life of virtue, and virtues are personal and communal.
22. Sister Christine Vladimiroff, OSB, "Beyond Exile: A Journey of Hope," Part 2 of a day-long presentation on "Ecclesial Women: Claiming Visibility and Life" held in Cincinnati, OH at Mt. St. Joseph, May 10, 2008, page 8, (unpublished text of presentation). Thank you to Sister Christine for this.
23. Ibid.
24. Peter Senge, "Personal Transformation." This is a pre-publication online draft of an article that appeared in the *Sloan Management Review*. Found online at: http://www.solonline.org/repository/download/transform.html?item_id=505852 (accessed November 8, 2008).
25. The following anecdote comes from the DVD *A Future Full of Hope*, from the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO), coordinated by Sister Janice Bader, CPPS. Information about the DVD may be found online at: <http://www.usccb.org/nrro/NRRO%20Planning%20Materials%20Order%20Form.pdf> (accessed November 8, 2008).
26. FitzGerald, interviewed in the DVD, *A Future Full of Hope*, further explained that they knew that the people who would be most qualified to do formation of the women entering would, after that window, be beyond the age when that would be most possible.
27. Sister Constance FitzGerald, OCD.
28. However, not all dreams were realized. Prioritizing is an important part of working with dreams and possibilities.
29. Interview, Sister Colette Ackerman, OCD, *A Future Full of Hope*.
30. Note that this does not need to become a tension between ministry and community. All is integrated. We apostolic communities must learn from this.
31. Sister Constance FitzGerald, OCD.
32. Sister Constance FitzGerald, OCD.
33. Sister Constance FitzGerald, OCD.
34. However, Sister Janice Bader's office at the NRRO, the initiator of the DVD, does have some suggestions. They can be found in the booklet that accompanies the DVD.
35. See "Solidarity with Southern Sudan" project report, found online at: http://vidimusdominum.info/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=303&Itemid=82 (accessed November 8, 2008).
36. I am grateful to theologian and friend Sister Meg Guider, OSF for this insight. She shared this during the 2007 national Giving Voice Conference in Boston.
37. I am deeply grateful to Sister Sarah Sharkey, OP, New Testament scholar, friend and colleague at Oblate School of Theology, for assistance with insights and resources on Luke and Acts.
38. I thank Sarah Sharkey for this insight.
39. For further elements of hope, see the Chapter on virtues and hope in Sister Maria Cimperman, OSU, *When God's People Have HIV/AIDS: An Approach to Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005).
40. O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 194.
41. Note that some of these gifts may be found on both sides of the threshold. Much depends on the congregation and the threshold preparation. There are also more than four gifts to be found at the threshold and across the threshold. I simply

offer four to begin the reflection on gifts.

42. Vladimiroff, 7.

43. Note our current economic crisis and our church's sexual abuse crisis.

44. Peter Senge, "Personal Transformation."

45. "Final Document: What the Spirit Says Today to Consecrated Life—Convictions and Perspectives," International Congress on Consecrated Life, *Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity* (New York: Pauline Books and Media, 2005), 243-255.

46. "Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium," document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL), May 19, 2002.

47. *Ibid.*, #25.

48. *Ibid.*, #26.

49. Charles M. Mangan, "The Spirituality of CICLSAL's 'Starting Afresh,'" *Review for Religious*, 62, no.1 (2003): 23-24.

50. See Father Robert J. Schreiter, CPPS, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 4-5.

51. John Paul II, "Ecclesia in America" (January 22, 1999): #55, found online at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_22011999_ecclesia-in-america_en.html (accessed November 8, 2008).

52. See, for example, John Paul II, "The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility," (World Day of Peace, 1990): found online at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html (accessed November 8, 2008). A very fine analysis of Pope Benedict XVI's writings related to creation and the environment is found in Lucia Silecchia, "Discerning the Environmental Perspectives of Pope Benedict XVI," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, 4, no.2 (2007): 227-269.

53. Now when people hear about this they are duly impressed with the program and then ask—how did they pay for this!? And how did the women get the time away from ministry to do this? Practical questions, yes, but I hope this is because the idea of it so clearly makes sense that that part was already accepted. They did find funding to assist them with this, and some of the sisters spoke of their reticence to be gone from ministry for so long. In fact, one of the women from India shared that she thought of saying no after her application was accepted, and she went to one of the busy wise women in her

province and shared her concern that she could not be gone for that amount of time. The older sister listened to her and said, "When will there ever really be a 'good' time to go? This time in this program will change everything for you. Then you will return and we will see what emerges for you." Wise woman.

54. The current work of the UISG and USG on human trafficking is another example of the world working together on behalf of the dignity of all.

55. "Starting Afresh From Christ," #30.

56. Interestingly, on local levels we have been doing increasingly more inter-congregational formation in the past 20 years. This bodes well for further inter-congregational collaboration among our members and congregations.

57. "Religious Seek More Funding in AIDS Fight: Superiors-General Call for Teamwork to Get Voices Heard," from Zenit, May 9, 2008.

58. *Ibid.*

59. O'Donohue, 194.

60. I thank Sister Joanne Gross, OSU, a friend who, among many gifts, has a keen editing eye and great heart and who perused this paper as it was prepared for print. Many thanks also to *HORIZON* Editor Carol Schuck Scheiber, who is always a gift to work with on these topics related to "the life."