News
Religious Life



The 2022-2023 presidential team of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious includes, from left, Sr. Jane Herb, past president, a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; Sr. Rebecca Ann Gemma, president, of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois; and Sr. Maureen Geary, president-elect, of the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, Michigan. (GSR photo/Gail DeGeorge)



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When scientists released the first images from the James Webb Space Telescope in July 2022, many were overwhelmed.

"The vastness of [the universe], there's something very humbling and vulnerable about it," said Sr. Carol Zinn, a Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia and executive director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, or LCWR. "Everything going on in the universe is in the process of dying and destroying and being reborn."



The first full-color image from NASA's James Webb Space Telescope, a revolutionary apparatus designed to peer through the cosmos to the dawn of the universe, shows the galaxy cluster SMACS 0723. Known as Webb's First Deep Field, the cluster is seen in a composite made from images at different wavelengths taken with a near-infrared camera and released July 11, 2022. (OSV News photo/NASA, ESA, CSA, STScI, Webb ERO Production Team, Handout via Reuters)

That reflection of the paschal mystery will be the theme as LCWR holds its annual assembly Tuesday through Friday (Aug. 8-11) in Dallas. Attendees will examine how, from the vastness of the universe to the space within ourselves, God creates life, even out of what appears to be destruction and death.

Assembly planners hope that while attendees gain from the resources offered in workshops and breakout sessions, the Holy Spirit will lead them on “A Journey into Hope." Zinn said images from the Webb telescope will be shown, and participants will see how processes operating on a cosmic scale can also be witnessed in local towns and parishes, individuals and consecrated life.

Keynote speaker Brian Thomas Swimme will reflect on that connection Wednesday morning (Aug. 9); current LCWR President Sr. Rebecca Ann Gemma, a Springfield Dominican, will give the presidential address that afternoon. Swimme is a professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies, where he teaches evolutionary cosmology to graduate students in the philosophy, cosmology, and consciousness program.

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Thursday (Aug. 10) will feature a conversation with Grand Rapids Dominican Sr. Barbara Reid and Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary Sr. Jung Eun Sophia Park. Reid, president of Catholic Theological Union, will talk about resurrection stories, while Park, a professor at Holy Names University in California, will share the history of consecrated life. There will be sessions on intercultural leadership, institute reorganization, collaborative management and rethinking congregational chapters, all topics suggested by members, Zinn said.

On Friday (Aug. 11), Grand Rapids Dominican Sr. Maureen Geary will move from her year as president-elect to president of the leadership organization that represents

about two-thirds of the nearly 40,000 sisters in the United States.

Read this next: With 'heart for justice,' Sr. Maureen Geary starts year as president of LCWR

Past-President Sr. Jane Herb, of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Monroe, will end her term on the triumvirate presidency, and Gemma will become past-president. Sr. Sue Ernster, of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, will become president-elect after being elected earlier this summer.

The assembly wraps up Friday night when the Outstanding Leadership Award will be presented to Adrian Dominican Sr. Donna Markham, who recently retired from running Catholic Charities USA.

LCWR Annual Assembly events

Some of the assembly events will be live streamed for those who cannot attend:

- Keynote presentation by Brian Swimme, approximately 9:30 a.m. Central Wednesday, Aug. 9;
- Presidential address by Sr. Rebecca Gemma, approximately 2 p.m. Central Wednesday, Aug. 9;
- Keynote presentation by Sr. Barbara Reid and Sr. Sophia Park, approximately 11:20 a.m. Central Thursday, Aug. 10;
- Presentation of LCWR Outstanding Leadership Award to Sr. Donna Markham, approximately 8 p.m. Central Friday, Aug. 11.

Zinn said the assembly is much like a retreat for those in leadership — the experience is about revelation and realization.

"This is not about strategic plans. We need a discernment process, then maybe a little bit of strategy," she said. "We've got to be listening to what God has to say to us."

There are also eight breakout sessions designed to help leaders as they discern plans for their congregations. Topics include intercultural leadership; the unique challenges of international congregations; leaders as agents of change and an intergenerational dialogue. Others include "rethinking institute assemblies and

chapters" and a session on the LCWR Collaborative Administration/Management Initiative, an emerging network that encourages congregations to share resources.

Zinn said the assembly will be less about connecting the dots between what is happening in the universe and what is happening in our lives than it will be about putting participants in position to receive what God is revealing to us.

"If God is always creating and remaking, even out of what appears to be destruction, then what does that mean when we look at things in the world right now, where things seem to be falling apart?" she said. "As we look at institutes of consecrated life coming to their historical end, what does it mean if we hold fast to the truth that God brings life, even out of what appears to be death? It really is a matter of being open and vulnerable, of being drawn into sacred mystery, both to unlearn and learn anew."

This story appears in the **LCWR 2023** feature series. View the full series.