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Catholic nuns walk through downtown Atlanta for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious' "Outdoor Pilgrimage of Hope," Aug. 14, 2025. (Photo courtesy of Sr. Annmarie Sanders/LCWR)

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As the sun rose Thursday morning (Aug. 14), hundreds of Catholic sisters walked through downtown Atlanta as part of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious' "Outdoor Pilgrimage of Hope." From 7 to 8 a.m., approximately 470 participants prayed in unison along a 1.2-mile route, guided by readings, music and periods of contemplative silence.

The walkers paused at three locations, each dedicated to one of the key issues they prayed to heal — forced migration, climate change and racism.

Another 75 people joined virtually on Facebook Live from the assembly hall of the Hyatt Regency Atlanta, where the four-day conference of the association of leaders of American Catholic women's congregations is being held this year.

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With an Atlanta Police Department escort, as pilgrims paused the three times, their prayers echoed LCWR's resolution and commitment to live out the challenges of the late Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*' environmental justice encyclical.

"This is an initiative that is happening throughout the United States as a means of welcoming a variety of people to engage in this year of Jubilee," said Bridget Bearss, co-chair of the pilgrimage and LCWR's associate director for transformative justice. "We are committed to deeply investing ourselves in being pilgrims on the journey on behalf of *Laudato Si*', the themes of *Laudato Si*'."

Pope Francis declared 2025 a Jubilee, or Holy Year, a Catholic observance held every 25 years for prayer, reconciliation and pilgrimage. The tradition traces its roots to

the Hebrew Jubilee in the Book of Leviticus and has developed over centuries in the Catholic Church. This Jubilee Year's theme, "Pilgrims of Hope," calls on Catholics around the world to renew their faith and share hope through prayer, reconciliation and public witness.

Sr. Susan Francois of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace in New York has participated in the LCWR assembly since 2015. On Thursday morning in Georgia, she posted two TikTok videos on the account @sistersusanfrancoiscsjp, showing the overcast walk featuring "hundreds of Catholic sisters and friends" praying in unison.

One TikTok user commented "This is true Christianity" on the video, and another wrote "I'm not religious in anyway but this moved me with such faith for humanity."

For Francois, the walk felt personal. In recent months, Francois and a few other Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace have been gathering at a privately run immigrant detention center in Newark, New Jersey, to stand alongside families who face harassment and other obstacles while trying to visit detained loved ones.

"I met a 7-year-old girl last Saturday who was trying to visit her dad before he was deported to Ecuador," Francois said. "Their faces were in front of me, and I was just holding them especially in prayer and sending them love."

Participants also prayed in Spanish to the Virgin of Guadelupe.



Catholic sisters participating in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious' "Outdoor Pilgrimage of Hope" walk through downtown Atlanta, Aug. 14, 2025. (Photo courtesy of Sr. Annmarie Sanders/LCWR)

"It was a very powerful experience," said Annmarie Sanders, a member of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and communication director for LCWR, who participated in the walk. "There's lots of great poverty here in downtown Atlanta, so it felt like a wonderful opportunity for us to make public our commitment to work, particularly for those three issues, forced migration, climate change and racial equality."

LCWR's annual assembly this year gathered 860 people, including 570 leaders of women's religious congregations, among them sisters from 18 countries. And for the first time this year, chief administrative officers, communicators and justice promoters who serve congregations attended.

The LCWR represents 294 congregations and about 35,000 women religious in the U.S. Running annually since the organization was founded in 1956, the conference began Tuesday and runs through Friday, with major addresses by Jesuit priest James Martin; Sr. Simona Brambilla, prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; and LCWR President Kathy Brazda.

"I think the belief that the power of our prayer could really make a difference — to just see nearly 500 people coming together in that sense of faith to put more positive energy into the atmosphere — will hopefully influence the course of the world to create a more peaceful place," Sanders said.