

Leadership



Watawa wa Taa





Leadership

When you think of leadership in the context of a religious Congregation, what comes to mind?

Across the continent, Sisters see leadership in religious Congregations as a call to serve rather than to exert authority. Leaders should be characterized by humility, spiritual depth, and the ability to inspire, motivate and guide others toward a shared mission.

The ideal leader is described as a person of integrity, strong faith, and moral authority, one who embodies the principles of servant leadership by placing the needs of others above her own. Leaders are expected to be visionaries and pastoral caregivers who foster unity, dialogue, and community life, and who guide others through consultation and discernment.

Challenges do persist: Sisters report that they have observed misuse of power and lack of inclusivity in congregational leadership. Those experiences have prompted Sisters' call for collaborative, transparent, and spiritually grounded leadership.

Respondents indicated that effective leadership involves spiritual guidance, administrative competence, openness to new ideas, and a commitment to the Congregation's charism and mission. Leaders must be approachable, patient, and flexible, serving as mentors and role models while preparing others for future leadership.



In your opinion, does the existing model of leadership within your Congregation suffice, or does it need to evolve? If you believe it needs to evolve — how?

The current leadership models in religious Congregations are generally based on structures of consultation, participation, and delegated authority, with decision-making often resting with elected leaders.

While many Sisters recognize the value and functionality of these models, there is a shared call for evolution toward more inclusive, collaborative, and transparent leadership practices. Challenges include favoritism, authoritarianism, lack of youth involvement, and resistance to change.

There is a need for better training, clearer roles, shared responsibility, and a shift from power-centered leadership to servant leadership rooted in justice, humility, and prayer. Adaptability to changing societal and cultural contexts, involvement of younger members, elimination of discrimination, and greater emphasis on listening and mutual respect are also highlighted as areas needing improvement.

Overall, while foundational structures are often deemed sound, their practical application requires renewal to meet the evolving needs of Congregations and to foster trust, unity, and growth.

The current model of leadership may need to evolve to be more relevant to the African context and to better prepare and mentor younger members.

How do non-elected/non-appointed Sisters exercise their authority as members within the Congregation?

Non-elected and non-appointed Sisters exercise their authority within Congregations primarily through active participation in community life, leadership in apostolates, and involvement in decision-making processes, often informally. They contribute by serving on committees, mentoring younger members, sharing expertise, and taking initiative in their roles.

Many Congregations encourage all members to see themselves as leaders, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, spiritual influence, and shared responsibility. Some Sisters express their views through suggestion boxes or community meetings, while others use their talents and creativity to support the mission. Despite these opportunities, challenges remain — such as lack of recognition for outspoken or gifted members, limited receptiveness to advice, and issues of favoritism — which can hinder meaningful participation. Nonetheless, Sisters are encouraged to lead by example, support one another, and uphold the values and responsibilities of religious life, regardless of formal leadership status.

How can all Sisters share in the leadership and ownership of the Congregation?

Sisters agreed that leadership and ownership within a Congregation should be shared by all members. Every Sister is called to lead in her own capacity, whether through official appointments or everyday actions that support the mission and values of the Congregation. Active participation, offering ideas, and contributing individual talents are essential ways members can support leadership and take ownership of community life.

A deep sense of maturity, discernment, and mutual respect is necessary for healthy leadership. Members are encouraged to respectfully challenge and support leadership while maintaining trust and unity. Dialogue, forgiveness, and a spirit of collaboration are central to fostering a cohesive and vibrant community.



Tradition and the Congregation's foundational values are viewed as vital, especially as they guide current and future leaders. At the same time, there is a strong call for adaptability in response to evolving contexts, with a focus on ongoing formation and mentoring younger or newer members. Participation in spiritual life, community duties, and apostolates is seen as a key form of leadership and engagement.

Transparency, accountability, and emotional support are repeatedly highlighted as critical for building trust. A culture of shared governance, where decisions are made together and everyone's voice is heard, reinforces the sense of belonging and collective responsibility. Furthermore, leaders are urged to model Christ-like service and to focus on the common good rather than personal interests or internal politics.

Ultimately, leadership within the Congregation is understood not just as a role but as a shared journey marked by love, responsibility, faithfulness to vows, and a deep commitment to building a unified, mission-driven community.

Challenges Identified

Leadership Models and Structures

- Leadership sometimes lapses into authoritarianism rather than collaboration.
- Outdated leadership models fail to address modern realities and younger generations' needs.
- Stagnation in leadership where older members cling to positions, limiting opportunities for younger Sisters.
- Power dynamics and perceptions of leaders as oppressors undermine trust and respect.
- Over-centralization or lack of decentralization prevents shared leadership and local autonomy.

Cultural and Contextual Barriers

- Cultural traditions of deference to authority or age can conflict with Christ-centered servant leadership.
- Tribalism, favoritism, and discrimination affect inclusion and equitable participation.
- Resistance to change from tradition to more participatory, transparent models.

Leadership Formation and Skills

- Insufficient training in conflict management, emotional intelligence, and modern leadership practices.
- Lack of mentorship and preparation for younger Sisters to assume leadership roles.
- Mission drift occurs when leaders prioritize administration or personal interests over spirituality and charisma.

Participation and Inclusion

- Non-elected Sisters often lack voice or recognition, especially when leadership disregards their contributions.
- Outspoken or gifted Sisters may be “blacklisted” or marginalized, leading to lost opportunities for growth.
- Some Sisters expect leaders to “decide for them,” creating a tension between autonomy and authority.
- Political behaviors and competition hinder collaboration and communal discernment.

Communication and Transparency

- Lack of openness in decision-making processes leads to mistrust.
- Limited opportunities for dialogue, feedback, and shared decision-making prevent a sense of ownership.
- Conflict resolution gaps reduce unity and harmony in communities.

Practical and Structural Challenges

- Resource constraints affect leadership formation, training, and technology integration.
- Administrative burdens and loneliness of leadership roles strain leaders emotionally and spiritually.
- Difficulty balancing spiritual guidance with managerial responsibilities.



Watawa wa Taa Consecrated Women of Light

Watawa wa Taa can be loosely translated as “Consecrated Women of Light” in Kiswahili. The name was chosen as an ode to the remarkable presence and works of women religious in Africa.

Whether as members of international, missionary or local Congregations, holding pontifical or diocesan status, African Catholic Sisters can be found at the forefront of society, working for sustained and systemic change in the areas of health care, education, social work, pastoral care, agriculture, and many more.

Watawa wa Taa acts as an incubator of ideas, thoughts, and inspirations of African Catholic Sisters from around the continent as they reflect on this shared and unique way of life and together seeking the Holy Spirit’s invitation as to how to move forward together.



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