

Religious Life Now and Moving Forward



Watawa wa Taa





Religious Life Now and Moving Forward

What are we being called to at this moment as religious?

African religious women are called to be deeply rooted in prayer, service, and justice. They are invited to embody Christ's love, serve the marginalized, advocate for peace, and renew their commitment to their religious vocation while adapting to the challenges of a changing world. Specifically, Sisters identified:

Spiritual Renewal and Deepened Relationship with God

Sisters believe they are called to focus on their spiritual growth through prayer, humility, and simplicity, which includes a deeper connection with God and reflection on their mission. They are encouraged to live with passion for Christ and cultivate a life of service and self-sacrifice, staying true to their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Witnessing to the Gospel

They are urged to live out the Gospel authentically, being joyful witnesses and sharing Christ's love with others through words and actions. In a world filled with confusion and distractions, they must remain steadfast, authentic, and focused on Christ.

Advocacy for Justice and Service

Religious women are called to advocate for the marginalized, address social injustices, and care for creation. They are urged to stand against oppression, promote peace, and offer solutions to the social, economic, and environmental issues facing society today. This includes standing with the voiceless and working for systemic change.

“Sisters are being called to deepen their spiritual life, live in authentic community, and be prophetic witnesses in the world.”

“Religious are called to be a ‘sign of contradiction’ in the world, living out their vows and charism radically as a witness.”

“We are called to witness to Jesus Christ by our lives.”



Community Life and Interfaith Dialogue

Building inclusive, supportive communities that foster unity and reconciliation is another key aspect. Religious women are encouraged to engage in interfaith dialogue and break down divisions, promoting peace and understanding in a polarized world.

Discernment and Adaptation

As the world changes rapidly, religious women are encouraged to remain open to new forms of ministry that respond to emerging needs, particularly by reaching out to youth and fostering a new generation of committed followers.

“We are called to bear witness to the next generation.”



Living the Evangelical Counsels

A simple life of radical witness is emphasized, with an emphasis on living out the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience in a way that attracts others to religious life and the Gospel message.

Sacrificial Service

Sisters feel a call to be instruments of compassion and care for those in need, whether through education, health care, social work, or missionary efforts. Service to the Church and society is seen as central to their vocation.

Witnessing through Action and Prayer

Religious women are called to show their faith through action and service, prioritizing prayer, sacrifice, and commitment to God's work. They are urged to be visible witnesses of holiness, living out their faith with integrity and compassion.





To be effective in our witness and leadership, what do we need to embrace and what do we need to let go?

We must embrace

- **Gospel and Christ-Centered Life:** Embrace and live out Gospel principles, aligning actions and words with Christ's example of humility, courage, and service.
- **Personal and Professional Development:** Develop expertise in various areas and engage in continuous learning to improve leadership effectiveness.
- **Integrity and Witness:** Ensure credibility by avoiding actions or behaviors that compromise the religious life. Maintain strong moral values and witness to the truth.
- **Community and Collaboration:** Focus on communal living, cooperation, and empathy. Build a strong, supportive network for personal and spiritual growth.
- **Humility and Service:** Embrace a spirit of humility, obedience, and self-discipline. Serve others selflessly and be open to learning from others.
- **Adaptability and Courage:** Stay flexible and courageous in responding to changing times, while remaining firm in one's commitment to religious values.
- **Spiritual Commitment:** Foster a deep spiritual life through prayer, meditation, and Scripture reading. Strive for authenticity, integrity, and faithfulness.
- **Compassion and Empathy:** Act with genuine care and concern for others, especially those in need.
- **Faithfulness and Accountability:** Remain steadfast in religious commitments and take responsibility for one's actions and decisions.
- **Collaboration and Unity:** Work together in unity, embrace diversity, and create spaces for others to thrive.
- **Transformation and Service:** Be agents of transformation, continually adapting to new contexts while holding firm to the core values of faith.

Sisters agreed that effective religious leadership requires adopting a life centered in Christ, marked by humility, service, and integrity, while letting go of worldly distractions, ego, and fear.

We must let go of

- **Worldly Attachments:** Let go of the pursuit of material wealth, power, and pleasure, which can distract from the mission and commitment to the religious life.
- **Fear and Timidity:** Overcome fear of failure and fear of change. Let go of doubts, self-doubt, and hesitation in proclaiming faith and standing for justice.
- **Negative Attitudes:** Avoid pride, judgmental behavior, jealousy, gossip, and unhealthy competition. Let go of individualism and personalism, focusing instead on the communal good.
- **Secular Influence:** Let go of secularism, false ideologies, and unnecessary distractions, such as social media pressures, and stay grounded in the charism and mission of the religious vocation.
- **Selfishness and Egoism:** Release the ego, individual desires, and the need for control or superiority. Let go of the desire for recognition or titles.
- **Materialism and Comfort Zones:** Relinquish attachment to comfort, material wealth, and unnecessary things that can hinder the spiritual journey and mission.



What are key components of our ongoing formation to support us in the present and coming days?

Spiritual Formation

- **Deepening Spiritual Life:** Continual growth in prayer, contemplation, and participation in sacraments. Spiritual practices, such as retreats and spiritual direction, are essential for maintaining a strong connection with God and ensuring lasting commitment to the religious vocation.
- **Sacramental Life:** Regular engagement with sacraments, particularly reconciliation, is emphasized as a means of renewal and spiritual strength.
- **Spiritual Growth and Discernment:** Ongoing discernment of one's vocation and response to God's call is central. This includes understanding one's mission, reflecting on the signs of the times, and maintaining a life rooted in spiritual practices.

Self-awareness and Personal Development

- **Self-awareness:** Encouraging self-examination, introspection, and psychological well-being to strengthen individual resilience and mental health. Formation involves recognizing personal weaknesses and cultivating a life of humility and gratitude.
- **Personal Growth:** Continuous education, the development of leadership skills, and mentoring are critical to form well-rounded individuals capable of adapting to societal changes and challenges.
- **Ongoing Education:** Active participation in seminars, courses, and theological studies helps deepen understanding of Scripture, doctrine, and Church teachings, equipping individuals to respond to modern issues.

Community and Collaborative Life

- **Community Life:** Building strong, supportive relationships within the religious community is a cornerstone of formation. Active participation, mutual support, and fostering unity within the community are emphasized.
- **Collaborative Practices:** Formation encourages collaboration, networking, and teamwork within and outside the religious community. Sharing experiences, learning from one another, and responding to the needs of others are key aspects.
- **Fraternal Correction:** Regular evaluation, fraternal correction, and transparent communication help maintain accountability and foster personal and communal growth.

Adaptability and Relevance to Modern Life

- **Adaptation to Change:** Formation must address contemporary issues, including globalization, technology, and societal shifts. It encourages flexibility and creativity, helping individuals remain faithful to their vows while effectively engaging with the modern world.
- **Intercultural Competence:** Understanding and embracing cultural diversity is integral for religious communities that serve globally. Ongoing formation should include training in intercultural sensitivity and digital literacy.

- **Social Justice and Advocacy:** Engaging in social justice work and addressing issues like migration, gender, and sexuality are important for fulfilling the mission of religious life in the modern world.

Mission and Service

- **Evangelical Mission:** Deepening the commitment to witness the Gospel through service, humility, and charity. The goal is to serve beyond oneself, responding to the needs of society and bringing hope and encouragement to others.
- **Apostolic Engagement:** Focusing on ministries, including education, health care, and advocacy, while integrating the values of justice, peace, and creation care into the daily life of the religious community.

Ongoing Discernment and Renewal

- **Regular Reflection and Renewal:** Formation should include regular opportunities for renewal through spiritual retreats, recollections, and periods of rest (e.g., sabbaticals), allowing Sisters to reconnect with their calling and the charism of their Congregation.
- **Encouraging Openness:** Being receptive to the needs of others, listening deeply, and discerning God's will in every situation, particularly in the face of challenges, helps ensure a relevant and prophetic response to the world.

Ethical Living and Fidelity to Vows

- **Fidelity to Vows:** Ongoing formation should focus on maintaining the integrity of vows — poverty, chastity, and obedience — through self-discipline, ethics, and personal accountability.
- **Witnessing in Daily Life:** Living authentically in accordance with the vows and values of the religious life is crucial. This includes maintaining daily practices of prayer, simplicity, humility, and service.

Challenges and Hopes for the Future

- **Hope for the Future:** A strong faith in God's presence and grace leads to hope for the flourishing of consecrated life despite challenges. Belief in the power of prayer, service, and the Holy Spirit provides optimism for the future.
- **Fear for the Future:** Concerns about the degradation of religious life, financial instability, and the challenges posed by societal changes are acknowledged, but Sisters emphasize trust in God's guidance and the enduring power of consecrated life.

These key components of ongoing formation ensure that religious life remains vibrant, relevant, and faithful to its mission. By deepening spiritual life, fostering self-awareness, and adapting to the needs of the modern world, religious communities can continue to thrive and offer hope in an ever-changing world.

What is your hope for the future? What is your fear for the future?

Sisters expressed a shared hope that religious life will remain vibrant, grounded in holiness, unity, and collaboration, with a return to its core values, charism, and prophetic witness. Many express optimism that religious communities will grow through strong leadership, continued vocations, effective formation, technological integration for mission, and increased collaboration both within and beyond Congregations. Others hope for a deeper spiritual life, greater social impact, and adaptability to new challenges, including environmental and societal changes. There is also a strong desire for a renewed and relevant African expression of religious life, enriched by cultural diversity, youth engagement, and ongoing education and formation.

However, there are also deep fears. Many worry that secularism, materialism, and individualism are eroding the spiritual foundations and communal values of religious life. Concerns include declining vocations, weakened prayer and community life, and the loss of the spirit of sacrifice. Others fear the negative impact of technology on relationships and vocation interest, as well as the increasing disconnection among members. Some highlight fears about the aging of communities, burnout, financial instability, and a loss of ethical leadership and authenticity. There are also anxieties about the degradation of the image of religious life due to counter-witness, compromise with worldly values, and the fear of irrelevance or extinction.

Yet amid these concerns, many Sisters maintain faith in God's providence and the belief that, despite challenges, religious life can and will endure with renewed purpose.

**“
My hope is that
Congregations will
empower Sisters for
leadership and consider
spiritual, mental and
financial wellness and
empowerment.
”**

**“
I have concerns about
the relationship
between religious
Congregations and
dioceses/priests,
including issues of
control, finances, and
lack of collaboration.
”**

**“
I hope that God will
continue to touch
the hearts of young
people to become
religious.
”**



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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