

Explore the Theme — AT A CROSSROAD

Joan Chittister asks, "Is religious life dying or coming to new life in some parts of the world?"
Nuns & Nones create a new covenant community together

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WHAT ARE WE SEEKING? . . . CARA, the [American Catholic] Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, tells us that **there were 160,931 sisters in the United States in 1970. And today? Today CARA tells us there are 41,357 sisters left** of the 160,931 of them in the United States. What happened?.... The question, then, is clearly a major one and will, indeed, affect us all: Is religious life for women over [in some parts of the world]?

.... One thing important to remember is this. **The loss of large numbers of sisters in the last 50 years is not unique.** In the 19th century, in fact, in the early 1800s, governments declared monasteries "useless." Yet, as monasteries were eventually permitted to reopen, women gathered around them again, and began ... to give themselves to a life of spiritual depth and the social care that Gospel life implied. **What had died had risen again!** And out of that death, came another Resurrection.

It was an entirely new form of religious life as women's orders re-formed and relocated in great numbers to follow the various nationalities and serve the spiritual needs of each ethnic kind of emigrés to the New World **We are at a crossroad.** Is the Resurrection of religious life for women possible here in a secular culture where the world is largely open to adult women, adult women leaders, adult women spiritual leaders, adult women in almost every aspect of society? from "What Are We Seeking? Old Orders or New? Or Not At All?" by Joan Chittister, OSB in *National Catholic Reporter*, March 31, 2022 (1st of 3 articles)



Like an old seed bursting to new life, we see this emerging community as one among many flowers beginning to sprout in this moment of profound evolution and transformation in spiritual and religious life.



We hope that our experimentation can be of benefit to the whole garden. N&N

AN 18 MONTH EXPERIMENT . . . "Dear friends, As we round the corner into this last stretch of winter, our eyes are already on springtime. And as the planting season approaches, we, too, are preparing to place some seeds into fertile soil. After five years of building bridges between sisters and seekers, **we are heeding the call to create an intergenerational, interspiritual community.**

Encouraged and inspired by the spiritual depth, steadfast commitment, and prophetic action modeled by religious communities, many of us who walk the borderlands of religious belonging have been asking: **What does this way of life have to say to our own dreams and yearnings?**

In reverent continuation of this question, a group of 27 mystic hearts have embarked upon an **18-month experiment in covenantal community—the seed, we hope, of a longer-term commitment and community.** We are seekers and sisters; artists and land stewards; a rabbi and a reverend; organizers and educators; healers and leaders. Ranging from our twenties to our eighties, we draw from an array of prophetic traditions and lineages, and claim many different cultural, racial, and gender identities; but **we unite in our search for a way of life and structure of community centered around spirit and the work of repair."** from a communication from the **Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and Nuns and Nones,*** an intergenerational, spiritual community who share an alliance with the RSM, March 3, 2022

***WHAT ARE NONES?** the name given to persons in the US who do not identify with any religion; one-fifth of the US public — and a third of adults under 30 — are religiously unaffiliated today.