

Responding as Communities of Faith

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I strongly believe that we must name ourselves in these times, not only individually but also communally. Because of that belief, I spoke with a number of sisters from my community to gather wisdom from their lived experience as well.

Theologian Frederick Buechner defines vocation as that place where our deepest gladness and the world's deep hunger meet. As I reflect on religious life today, it occurs to me that our charism is that place where our deepest *communal* gladness meets the deepest hunger of the world.

Such an understanding of charism requires two things. First we must be in dialogue with one another as we discern as congregations what is our deepest gladness. For those of us who are Dominican, it has something to do with truth, with contemplation, and with sharing with others the fruits of our contemplation. How that is lived out in the midst of the struggles today is our challenge.

Second, we need to know what the deepest hunger of the world is today. That requires a deep listening to the people with whom we are "embedded," to the seventh generation that depends on us to make wise choices today, to the Earth herself. It also requires that we share with one another what we are learning from our deep listening since the subject of our listening determines what we hear.

As I read the accounts of the meeting of the International Union of Superiors General, I was struck by their theme this

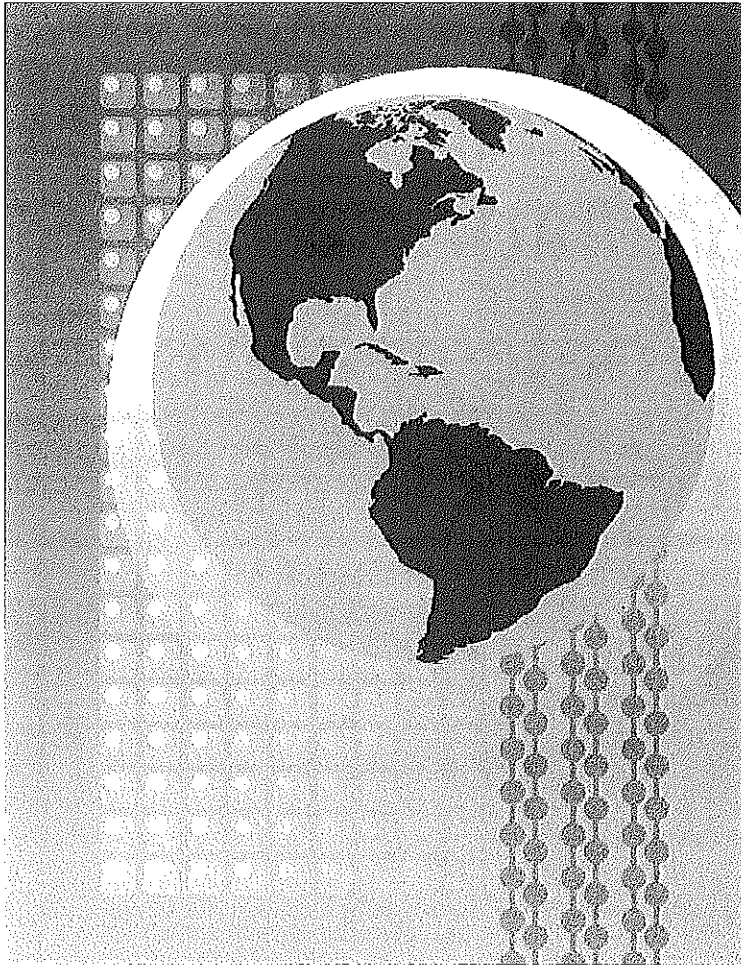
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year: mysticism and prophecy. The Earth community seems to be hungering for mysticism, for that spiritual connection. Joan Chittister, OSB names it this way: "There is a new question in the spiritual life; it is that spirituality of the spiritual life itself. Life here, and how we relate to it, rather than life to come and how we guarantee it for ourselves, has become the spiritual conundrum of our age."

As ministerial religious, our role is to enter into that conundrum, to relate to life here, and to name where we find God and where we sense an "absence" of God in the choices we make as nations, as peoples, as communities. That naming is the role of the prophet. That naming occurs in word and action.

Again, many of us have responded to that call as individuals. Religious life today demands that we respond *communally*, that we contemplate *together* and share with others the fruit of our *communal* contemplation.

As I consulted my sisters for this reflection, the words "attention" and



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"intention" were highlighted. We will become what we intend. What we intend determines to what we attend. If we intend to be women of faith who point out the presence of God in troubled times and situations, we will attend to our relationship with God and our relationship to the hungers of the world. And we will do it together, as communities of faith.

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