



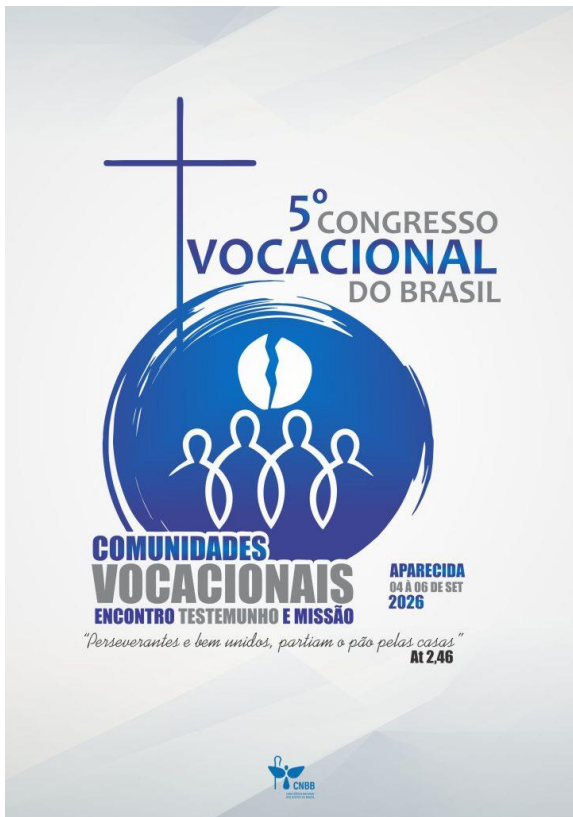
Esperança

NEWSLETTER

Nº 4 - 2026

REFLECTION!

What kind of religious life are we called to live today?



In Brazil, the month of August invites us to look closely at vocations. However, rather than asking, “**How many vocations do we have?**” perhaps the essential question is: “**What kind of life are we proposing to the younger generations?**”

The Second Vatican Council paved the way for a profound renewal of consecrated life. Through the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, men and women religious were invited to return to the sources of the Gospel and to the dynamism of their own charism, while seeking to respond to the signs of the times. This means that religious life cannot remain closed in on itself. It is constantly called to be attentive to reality, to the transformations of society, and, above all, to the cries of the poor and the excluded.

Within this context of renewal, the Pact of the Catacombs, adopted on November 16, 1965, and for which Bishop Hélder Câmara was one of its great leaders and architects, expressed the radical commitment of a group of bishops to live simply, reject privileges, and place the impoverished at

the center of their ministries. More than a personal document, the pact outlined a Church marked by collegiality, shared responsibility, and openness to the world, as professed in its central points:

1. **Housing and lifestyle:** “We will seek to live in harmony with the ordinary way of life of our people, with regard to housing, food, means of transportation, and everything that follows from these.”
2. **Renunciation of wealth:** “We renounce forever the appearance and reality of wealth, especially in clothing (rich fabrics, garish colors) and in insignia made of precious materials...”
3. **Rejection of Titles and Privileges:** “We refuse to be addressed, either verbally or in writing, by names and titles that signify greatness and power (Eminence, Excellency, Monsignor...). We prefer to be addressed by the Gospel name of Father or Bishop.”

4. **Transformation of structures:** *“We will entrust everything necessary for the governance and pastoral care of our dioceses to committees of competent laypeople... We will avoid anything that might appear to grant privileges or priority to the rich and powerful...”*
5. **Commitment to the Impoverished:** *“We will dedicate all our time, reflection, heart, resources, etc., to the apostolic and pastoral service of disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals and groups...”*

In light of this legacy, a highly relevant question arises for our communities: Do our way of life, our structures, and our choices reveal a religious life that is genuinely close to the poor and at their service?

Dom Hélder and the Pedagogy of Inclusion

Dom Hélder Câmara firmly believed that the renewal of religious life should begin with personal witness. His own life, unadorned and rooted in the reality of the people, lent moral authority to what he proposed. Inspired by the conciliar guidelines, he urged religious women to step out from behind their protective walls and come into direct contact with the cruelty of exclusion, leading them to gain an in-depth understanding of the favelas and floodplains of Recife.

Beyond pastoral work, Dom Hélder invested heavily in the theological formation of the nuns, promoting their active participation in the Recife Institute of Theology (ITER) and ensuring an unprecedented role for women in the Church at that time. Under his encouragement, the concept of “community insertion” gained momentum: without necessarily abandoning their existing ministries, the nuns began to form small communities in the heart of the peripheries, sharing in people’s daily lives and working in popular education, community health, and the uncompromising defense of human rights.

It is important to remember that insertion is not limited to living in a vulnerable area or carrying out welfare-oriented social work. To insert oneself means to share life, to listen with empathy, to interpret reality through the eyes of those who suffer, and to allow oneself to be transformed by this shared experience. For religious life today, this movement may require the courage to step out of overly sheltered structures in order to rediscover closeness, simplicity, and the mystique of presence.

Women’s Leadership and the Future of the Vocation

Women have always been on the front lines of the mission of evangelization and the care of life, whether in education, health care, or community organizing. Women’s religious life is one of the most vigorous expressions of this prophetic presence. Therefore, speaking of women’s religious vocations today also requires asking: How can we build ecclesial spaces where women are truly protagonists, with an active voice, institutional responsibility, effective participation in decision-making, and full freedom to offer their gifts to the Church and to society? Contemporary magisterial reflection itself recognizes that women’s contribution is indispensable for the mission, for renewal, and for the humanization of ecclesial and social structures.

The religious vocation the world needs today may not be one concerned primarily with preserving what was inherited from the past, but rather a bold consecrated life, capable of continually returning to the Gospel, listening to the signs of the times, embracing prophetic engagement, and valuing women’s leadership.

As Dom Hélder rightly reminded us, it is not enough to talk about the poor; we must draw near to them, allow ourselves to be touched by their pain, and transform that sensitivity into a concrete commitment. As we look ahead to this Month of Vocations, the question that challenges us and calls us toward the future remains alive: **If a young woman looks at our religious life today, will she find in it a way to follow Jesus that is truly worth choosing?**

Source: domheldercamara.org.br

BRAZIL

The Annual Retreat | July 19–24, 2026

“True silence is the rest of the mind; it is to the spirit what sleep is to the body: nourishment and refreshment.”

Our annual retreat was held at the retreat house of the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence in São José de Mipibu (RN). Inspired by the theme **“Return to Our Essence,”** we were guided by Brother Claudemir (Missionaries of the Countryside). Each day was deeply marked by prayer exercises, texts of spiritual enlightenment, personal reflection, and fruitful silence; at the end of each day, we gathered for our communal sharing.



The retreat reminded us of the vital need to return to attitudes of love, charity, mercy, and service with dedication and joy, moving beyond the mindset of mere obligation. As highlighted in the reflections, the essence of religious life does not lie in activism, work, or institutional tasks, but rather in sincerity, kindness, mercy, fraternal fellowship, and genuine love.

We were called not only to act as good professionals, but truly as sisters who, even while recognizing one another’s limitations, are capable of loving one another simply because we have been called to Love. In light of this, we renew our commitment to keep the flame in our hearts burning, remaining vigilant so that the distractions, discord, and minor misunderstandings of daily life do not extinguish the love of God that dwells within us.



The General Council's Visit to Brazil



We welcomed with joy and a warm reception the sisters from our General Council, Sr. Elisângela and Sr. Miranda, who arrived at João Pessoa Airport at noon on July 29. They conducted a working visit to the International Province in Brazil from July 29 to August 13.

The day after their arrival, we all traveled to the Ibó district in Pernambuco, a journey of approximately ten hours by car. Ibó was a former mission area for the sisters, where they served from 2012 to 2019. Although the sisters are no longer present there, we continue to visit the area because of the Movement of Mercy.

Ibó is one of the places where the Movement of Mercy remains active, living out the charism and mission of the Congregation. The Movement is also present in Santa Rita, Heitel Santiago, Várzea Nova, Bayeux, and Cabedelo.

In Ibó, we were welcomed with great hospitality, warmth, and kindness by the members of the Movement. We gathered for a time of prayer and introduced Sr. Miranda, who was visiting Brazil for the first time. The next day, we visited the elderly and some neighboring communities, strengthening the bonds built over the years.



Back in Paraíba, the General Council took the opportunity to visit some historic sites in Pernambuco, including Olinda, where Dom Helder Câmara is buried, as well as the museum and some of the region's historic churches.



The working visit continued to the sisters' communities in Heitel Santiago, Cabedelo, and Bayeux.



In **Heitel Santiago**, the sisters were welcomed by Sr. Dalva, Sr. Lusinete, and Sr. Joérica; the formation house is also located there. It was an opportunity for the General Council to get a close look at community life, observe the formation process, and learn about the activities carried out by the sisters.

In **Cabedelo**, Sr. Kardenea and Sr. Graça welcomed the visitors to the community, where the Congregation also maintains a retreat house. During the visit, there was a meeting with members of the Cabedelo Movement of Mercy, providing a moment of sharing, fellowship, and joy.



The visit continued in **Bayeux**, where Sisters Paula and Jessica carry out their mission through the Congregation's social projects. Among these initiatives is the Dom Helder Câmara Foundation, which

brings together various initiatives focused on education, care, and the promotion of life, including schools, a community center for the elderly, and other social projects.



The visit was a meaningful opportunity to meet, listen, and share with the sisters, members of the Movement of Mercy, associates, and those involved in the Congregation's various works and projects in Brazil. It also allowed the General Council to gain a closer understanding of the reality of the International Province, its communities, its mission, and the challenges and hopes that are part of its journey.



Meeting of the Small Inserted Communities (PCIs)

Theme: Political Context



Living among the people means walking with them, sharing their joys and challenges, and allowing oneself to be touched by their reality. It is from this experience that the Sisters of the Small Inserted Communities (PCIs), from different Congregations, meet three times a year to share life, reflect, study, evaluate their journey, and seek together ways to strengthen their mission.

In the context of Vocations Month and the celebration of the Vocation to Consecrated Religious Life this weekend (August 15), our

time of prayer was dedicated to remembering all those who have been true witnesses for us, people capable of giving their very lives to the very end out of love for God and his Kingdom, and who continue to inspire us to this day. We recalled names such as Sister Úrsula, Sister Marianne, Sister Laerta, Sister Dorothy Stang, Sister Marlene, Sister Albertina, and Margarida Maria Alves, among others who, through their witness and commitment, continue to inspire our journey.

From this perspective, we reflected on the **political context**, a topic of particular relevance in light of the upcoming presidential elections in Brazil. The meeting was facilitated by sociologist Matheus Firmimo and included the participation of 24 religious sisters from 13 congregations.

The session highlighted the importance of understanding how institutions function, the role of government officials, political parties, and social movements, as well as the impacts of political decisions on people's daily lives.

Before deciding how to vote, it is necessary to study each candidate's platform in detail. After all, an informed vote requires preparation. Politics is intrinsically present in every aspect of our lives.

Today, politics has gained new visibility in everyday life due to hyperconnectivity and social media. Terms such as polarization, ideology, feminism, and patriotism have become part of daily conversations both online and offline. However, a lack of depth and genuine understanding of these concepts often leads to unnecessary friction. Therefore, studying the political landscape is essential, as it leads us to:



- **An informed decision:** it helps us evaluate candidates' actual proposals, preventing our vote from being guided solely by emotions or empty promises.
- **A better understanding of reality:** it shows how crises, inflation, and public policies are directly related to those in power or those running for office.
- **Combating misinformation:** It makes it easier to identify fake news and manipulation, which tend to intensify during election campaigns.
- **Citizen oversight:** It prepares society to demand effective improvements in vital areas such as health care, education, and transportation, even after the elections are over.

This gathering strengthened our mission and provided us with practical tools to guide the people in exercising conscious citizenship. Faced with the challenge of combating the lies that distort reality, our response must be political education and engagement with the grassroots. We are committed to being a voice that clarifies, supports, and encourages citizen leadership in building a more just society.



Biodanza Gathering



In addition to participating in the annual Intercongregational Meetings, the Sisters in Brazil conduct internal training sessions. On August 29 and 30, we experienced a session dedicated to Biodanza, led by facilitator Brother Luiz Barros (Missionaries of the Countryside), who coordinated the group activities. Created in the 1960s by Chilean psychologist Rolando Toro Araneda, Biodanza is a system for human integration and personal development.

Known as the “Dance of Life,” the practice uses music and spontaneous movements to

promote self-awareness, stress reduction, and integrated well-being between body and emotion. The activities always take place in groups, with free-form dancing without choreography, focusing on empathy, connection, and the genuine expression of each participant.



The methodology is based on five areas of experience:

- **Vitality:** the drive for action and the energy to live.
- **Sexuality:** pleasure, physical joy, and self-esteem.
- **Creativity:** the ability to innovate and express individuality.
- **Affection:** the capacity to love, embrace, and form deep bonds.
- **Transcendence:** connection with nature, with the group, and with the universe.

For us, this experience was incredibly enriching. It allowed us to set aside our daily worries and move with lightness, keeping in mind the facilitator's premise that self-care is the first step toward caring for others. The gathering was filled with group activities and specific songs that renewed us from the inside out. It is inspiring to see how dance unites different cultures and backgrounds, bringing us together as one people guided by the same melody.



The closing reflections confirmed that the gathering restored the beauty of fraternal life through mutual gaze, warmth, and welcome. Amid the hustle and bustle of work, which often leaves us barely breathing just to survive, this experience brought us back to body awareness. It was like revisiting Mount Tabor to recharge our energies, allowing us to look at ourselves and the group from a new perspective and return home transformed, filled with calm and peace.

PHILIPPINES

Strengthening the Protection of Children and Vulnerable People



Caring for the most vulnerable requires responsibility, preparation, and healing. From August 7 to 9, at the Formation House in Marikina, Philippines, our community participated in an essential training program organized by **the DSWD** (Department of Social Welfare and Development) on the Protection of Children and Vulnerable People, alongside representatives from 43 other congregations.

For us, protection is not just a duty; it is a mission of love that demands excellence.

The gathering also served as the setting for a beautiful celebration: Sister Cathy's birthday. In an atmosphere of deep sisterhood, all the sisters and participants joined together as one voice to celebrate her life. It was a moment filled with relaxation, smiles, and gratitude, where the joy of sharing Sister Cathy's journey and the gift of her life overflowed, further strengthening the bonds of our group.



From August 17 to 20, we participated in a workshop on Trauma-Informed Care, held at the Retreat House of the Daughters of Charity in the city of Tagaytay. This transformative experience taught us that, in order to truly care for traumatized children and youth in our mission, we must first learn to address and heal the traumas within ourselves and within our community.

This impactful training went beyond our external mission; it taught us to recognize, accept, and heal our own wounds, while also strengthening our community. Equipped with a deeper sense of empathy, we are now better prepared to guide, support, and care for the traumatized children and youth entrusted to us in our ministry, while continuing to nurture our own well-being.



This impactful training has reshaped our perspective and strengthened our support network. Now, equipped with much deeper and more technical empathy, we are even better prepared and qualified to ensure a safe, protective, and welcoming environment for every vulnerable life in the care of our ministry, while continuing to safeguard the well-being of those who care for them.

WALKING TOGETHER: THE INTERNATIONAL PROVINCE'S ONLINE GATHERING

On August 29, we gathered once again for our online meeting with the goal of strengthening our bonds as a single province. It was a precious opportunity to share our lives, celebrate our joys, and embrace our challenges.

To deepen our reflection, we were divided into small groups to discuss four key guiding questions:

1. What has brought joy, hope, and meaning to your life? What has been difficult or a cause for concern?
2. What are we grateful for, and what do we celebrate in these two years of the International Province's journey?
3. What needs to be strengthened, changed, or rethought?
4. What kind of International Province do we want to build in the coming years, looking ahead to the 2028 Chapter?

This process gave rise to profound and very meaningful exchanges. The most beautiful fruit of this dialogue was the certainty that all members feel the joy of walking together and a mutual desire to help one another.

A practical example of this enriching collaboration will take place in late September, when Sister Graça will travel to the Philippines to study English. This partnership demonstrates just how important the unification of the province is and how mutual support is possible. Although this is still a very new experience and we are learning to walk together, the steps taken so far have been immensely positive.

This online meeting has already shed some initial light on our reflections and discussions. The next step on this journey will be the in-person meeting in **the Philippines**, scheduled for **February 26–28, 2027**,

which will focus on strengthening our bonds and assessing our progress toward the 2028 Provincial Chapter.

