THE SOUNDINGS

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Unless I Wash You

Listen for the deeper invitation beneath the Great Turning

Reading the signs of July to September 2026



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"You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times."

Matthew 16:3, NIV

AN OPENING WORD

Casting the Line

Why I am writing The Soundings

Outwardly there is chaos.
Inwardly there is a new world stirring.
Listen to the heartbeat of the new.

I don't know about you, but when I listen to the news I am easily overwhelmed. The stream of death, destruction, and chaos does not let up. It sounds as if we are all going to hell in a handbasket. Warnings about ecological destruction and the growing power of artificial intelligence can make the future sound like a calamity we are merely waiting for. On days like that I can lose my sense of agency, the belief that who I am and what I have to offer makes any difference. All of it flies in the face of my deeper faith, in humanity and in God.

And yet something else is happening at the same time. What is dying makes a lot of noise. What is being born is usually quieter. It is hard to hear the heartbeat of the new beneath all that noise, and harder still to find my own place in the story that may be emerging.

I suspect I am not alone in this. A teacher wonders whether the vocation she chose still fits the world her students are inheriting. Parents raise children and wonder what future they are preparing anyone for. A seeker who left religion behind, or never had one, still wants a life that answers to something larger than getting through the week.

Religious communities, where much of my work has been, carry their own versions. In much of the Global North, communities are aging and letting go of ministries they built. In parts of Africa and Asia, many communities are welcoming new members and asking how to form and support them well. In both, the demands of care and institutional responsibility can absorb nearly every available resource. In those circumstances a private story can become the entire story. "We're fading" is one version. "We can't keep up" is another.

Beneath all of these circumstances the human questions are much the same. Who am I becoming? What gives my life meaning and purpose? What is mine to contribute to the people I love and to the world we share?

A sounding is what sailors take when they cannot see the bottom. A weighted line measures depths hidden beneath the surface, helping them navigate waters their charts cannot fully explain. As the familiar maps of our lives become less reliable, we need

ways to attend to the deeper currents shaping our world, and to consider what they are asking of us.

That is what this quarterly attempts. It has three purposes. To see: to look past the flotsam and jetsam that muddy the waters and cloud our vision, read the signals on the surface, and detect the deep currents beneath them. To listen: to discern the heartbeat of the new within all that is ending. And to find our place: to ask what new story may be emerging, and how each of us might take part in shaping it.

Four times a year I will gather what has actually happened across our world in the past three months and ask what may be moving beneath it. Reading the signs of our times is a discipline of attention. It means making room for the world to interrupt our routines and allowing reality to correct our private narratives. A wider view lets us see what our private story is missing. It lets us recognize life beyond the forms through which we have known it.

In *Graced Crossroads*, published in 2020, I described a Great Turning: changes in climate, technology, migration, global power, and our growing interconnection, any one of which would remake our world. I also argued that change and transformation are different things. Change is what happens around us and to us. Transformation asks something of us, and there is inner work, personal and communal, that we can actually do. I have lived that work and witnessed it my entire professional life. It does not guarantee an outcome. It does change how we take part, and that changes what becomes possible within and between us.

I am a person of faith. I believe the Spirit is still moving in all of this. For me, the heartbeat of the new is the lure and love of God, beckoning us to take part in the ongoing story of creation. When I say grace, I mean it. You do not need to share my language to do this work. If you would name the source of new life differently, or not name it at all, there is room for you here. Vowed and lay, believer and seeker, each carries wisdom the others need.

These readings cannot remove the uncertainty. They can help us find our bearings within the Great Turning, and invite us to reflect on who we are becoming as we shape what comes next. Everything here is offered as a reading, open to correction. I will tell you where I am guessing.

Three questions run beneath every issue. I would ask you to carry them as you read:

What is stirring beneath the noise?

What new story is trying to be born?

And what is my place in it?

Ted Dunn, Ph.D.

A guide to this issue

You can read this issue straight through or begin with the section that speaks to your present concerns.

At a Glance. The quarter and this issue's reading of it, on one page.

Signals. What moved across our world in the past three months, dated and sourced.

Currents. The pattern I see beneath those signals, and where the connections have limits.

The Deeper Invitation. What that movement may be asking of us.

Counter-Sounding. The strongest honest case against my own reading, including what might change it.

The Gift We Carry. How our gifts might find fresh expression as our circumstances change, in an individual life or a shared tradition.

The Practice. A situation to reflect on, personally or with a community, a leadership team, or a circle of friends.

At a Glance

The quarter in brief. Between July and September 2026, shipping lanes and aid budgets came under strain, while reports earlier in the year described water and public trust under similar pressure. These pressures exposed how much depends on passages that a few governments or companies can restrict. At the same time, in Nairobi, Bengaluru, and a prairie in South Dakota, people were building networks, sharing authority, handing on work they had carried for generations and, in some cases, choosing how to end.

The reading this issue offers. These changes are exposing the limits of self-sufficiency. Our dependence on others has always been there; it is becoming harder to overlook, and in some places harder to sustain. For people whose identity has been built around giving, one deeper invitation is to learn to receive.

Why that matters. Many of us have learned to belong by being capable, useful, and dependable: the parent, the teacher, the caregiver, the one others lean on. Those gifts are real. But there is an old story in the Gospel of John in which Peter refuses to let Jesus wash his feet, and it names a resistance many of us recognize. “Unless I wash you,” Jesus says, “you have no part with me” (John 13:8, NIV). What happens to our sense of worth when we need the care we have long given others? What might become possible if we could receive it freely?

A note on where I am looking. Much of this quarter’s evidence comes from Catholic religious communities, because that is the world I know best. I offer it as one vivid case of something wider. If that world is not yours, read it for what it shows about being human in a time like this.

Signals: what moved this quarter

These are the signals I found most telling this quarter. They are offered as signs to be read, with no claim that they make up a complete map. Each ends with what it may mean, offered as a hypothesis, and what it asks.

The narrow passages

On September 21, Reuters reported only seventeen trackable commodity vessels crossing the Strait of Hormuz over the weekend, against about 125 large commercial vessels a day before the US-Israeli war with Iran began in February. By late September, renewed fighting in Yemen had displaced more than 130,000 people, and thousands had crossed to Djibouti, including many women, children, and older people. In Sudan, funding cuts were forcing the World Food Programme to reduce food assistance in one of the world's largest hunger crises. The aid system still exists. Its capacity to carry what is asked of it is shrinking.

The narrowing reaches past the shipping lanes. In January, UN University scientists described an era of global water bankruptcy: many rivers and aquifers can no longer return to their historical normal, and four billion people face severe scarcity at least one month a year. The UN's briefing for its September 23 climate summit described a new phase of the climate crisis in which "overshoot is now inevitable," meaning the world will pass the warming limit set in the Paris Agreement, at least for a time. In Nepal, floods in late August brought those vulnerabilities into terrible focus. By September 25, WFP reported more than 1,400 deaths and thousands still missing, with roads and bridges destroyed and villages cut off from help.

There were efforts to protect life amid these pressures. UNICEF was expanding temporary learning spaces in Gaza, where its September appeal described disrupted access to education for 658,000 children. The effort to restore learning should not be mistaken for the return of all those children to school. There were also warnings: the World Meteorological Organization warned in September of a very strong, potentially exceptional El Niño expected to peak near the end of 2026. A forecast offers time to prepare; what happens next depends on whether that warning reaches people with the means to act.

What it may mean. The systems we built to carry one another may be less dependable than we assumed, and the test ahead may be whether institutions can convert warning into protection.

What it asks. Who near us lives downstream of a warning that has already been given?

The question of control

A July 30 webinar hosted by the World Institute for Science, Religion and Culture on artificial intelligence and Pope Leo XIV's encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* gathered scholars who disagreed sharply. One argued that the advance of AI is nearly inevitable; another insisted that "there's a lot that we can still direct and control." The most searching contribution traced what Pope Francis called the "technocratic paradigm": the habit of treating everything, including people, as objects to be mastered for efficiency. A participant warned that knowledge workers may become "passive approvers of results they cannot evaluate." In September, a poll reported that nearly three in four American adults worried that AI companies had not done enough to prevent serious harm.

In September, Jacob Coxon resigned from Anthropic and warned that people building AI believed it "could kill us all by the end of the decade." He described a risk of losing control of increasingly capable systems. That warning remains contested; it gives urgency to the question of who can slow development when safety is uncertain.

What it may mean. The deepest question about these tools may concern the kind of people we become in using them.

What it asks. Who decides how far AI should go, and who has the power to say no?

The missing first rung

In an August update to a 2025 study, Stanford researchers reported that employment for U.S. workers aged 22 to 25 in occupations exposed to artificial intelligence was about 19 percent below the level expected had it kept pace with employment among their less-exposed peers. Experienced workers showed no comparable gap, and the researchers found no evidence of widespread displacement across the economy. The findings raise a question about the routine work through which young people gain experience and judgment. Earlier research adds another concern: the World Health Organization's 2025 report found the highest loneliness rates among adolescents, and a U.S. study published that year found that about one in eight respondents aged 12 to 21 had used AI chatbots for mental-health advice. These findings describe different populations and cannot establish a single cause. Together, they ask us to attend to how young people find work, guidance, and human connection.

What it may mean. The first job, a trusted mentor, and a place at the shared table help young people grow into capable and connected adults. These opportunities may be becoming less available just when they are most needed.

What it asks. Who once formed us, and who is forming the young among us?

Trust drawing inward

This year's large surveys describe people pulling back. In Edelman's global trust survey, released in January, an average of seven in ten respondents across 28 countries were hesitant or unwilling to trust anyone with different values, background, or sources of information. Asked how major events over the past five years had affected their trust, respondents more often described losing trust in national leaders and gaining it in neighbors, family, friends, and coworkers. In June, the Reuters Institute found trust in news at its lowest point since it began measuring.

What it may mean. When large structures fail, the first instinct may be to shrink the circle of trust rather than widen it.

What it asks. Whom have we quietly stopped trusting?

Authority moving south and outward

Leadership moved this quarter in ways large and small. Six sisters were named advisers to the Vatican office that oversees religious communities, among them Sr. Maria Nirmalini, who leads India's more than 103,000 women religious, and Sr. Maria do Disterro Rocha Santos of Brazil's conference of religious. Sr. Marie Pierre Ndiaye of Senegal was elected this year to lead the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, the first African to do so. And a member of one international congregation, the Daughters of St. Paul, observed that it now has no new members in formation in Europe, that Africa is its anchor, and that it must "rethink our geography." The wider numbers point the same way. About seven in ten of the world's Christians now live in the Global South, against fewer than one in five in 1900.

In Guinea-Bissau, the daughter of an imam made first vows as a Catholic sister in August. When online hatred followed, the country's national confederation of Islamic youth defended her publicly, insisting that "respecting someone's choice does not necessarily mean agreeing with it."

What it may mean. Leadership and membership are shifting in ways that inherited arrangements of authority and funding may not yet reflect. Growth in one region and aging in another bring different needs; mutuality requires taking both seriously.

What it asks. What decisions and resources are we willing to place in the hands of leaders from other parts of the world?

Networks that carry something

The quarter shows communities building shared capacity. Kenya's Association of Sisterhoods, representing some 190 congregations, is combining shared decision-making with legal skill and a plan for income-producing property. More than two hundred sisters trained in canon or civil law, from thirteen African countries, met in

Nairobi on July 30–31 to strengthen legal networks and protect vulnerable people. Earlier, in June, a Talitha Kum anti-trafficking leadership course in Thailand gathered sisters and partners from twenty-three countries. In Bengaluru, retired Augustinian sisters now share their home and daily life with elderly lay residents.

What it may mean. These networks are more than responses to diminishment. The Kenyan examples show communities developing legal knowledge and resources to shape their own future. Shared capacity may help them exercise greater agency, provided the people carrying the work also share in decisions and support.

What it asks. What do we still insist on carrying alone?

Endings, chosen and imposed

Vicky Larson, a Presentation sister, told a gathering of religious from across the Americas in August that her congregation in rural South Dakota held its last Chapter, the assembly that elects its leaders, in March 2026 and will move toward an appointed leader by 2028. Its college closed and became public housing; its motherhouse was taken down; native prairie and a peace circle are growing where it stood. An August documentary highlighted the Sisters of Charity of New York, who had earlier stopped accepting new members and continue their public advocacy for migrants. In Spotorno, Italy, sisters faced new public bidding for a beach concession that helped fund their charitable work. In Los Angeles, a closed Catholic hospital is being redeveloped as a campus for housing, addiction, and mental-health care.

In a report published on September 8, a Synod study group addressed communities approaching "historical completion" and asked bishops to accompany them with listening, prayer, and practical help. These recommendations are proposals, rather than binding decisions.

What it may mean. An ending may be something people discern together or something imposed on them. Looking early can preserve choices, but law, money, and decisions made elsewhere also shape what remains possible.

What it asks. If an ending came to something we love, would we be choosing it or receiving a notice?

Currents: the limits of self-sufficiency

Read one at a time, these signals look like separate stories: a shipping crisis, an argument about machines, a community of sisters taking down its motherhouse. They do not all have the same cause or ask for the same response. Yet I see a recurring question beneath them: how do we live with dependencies we can no longer overlook, especially when the relationships and systems carrying them are under strain?

The quarter's news describes a world in which too much life must pass through too few narrow places. Food, fuel, and medicine move through straits that a handful of actors can close. Aid depends on budgets that a few governments can cut. Powerful technologies are being developed by a small number of companies. These dependencies are not new, but their concentration leaves people exposed to decisions far beyond their reach. That is one face of the Great Turning. The challenge is to build relationships and institutions capable of sharing responsibility without concentrating still more power.

Closer to home, dependence is often felt through the ordinary work of care. A family can spend an entire evening arranging support for an aging parent without finding a moment to speak about what this season is doing to them. This is a different kind of vulnerability from a shipping crisis or a cut in aid. Yet it too can expose the distance between the ideal of managing alone and the relationships on which life actually rests.

This is where a psychologist and a person of faith may see the same thing from two sides. In serious illness, the move from caregiver to cared-for can be one of the hardest passages. People who have been strong and generous may struggle when their sense of worth has been bound up with being needed. Receiving can feel like failure or exposure. A family business, a parish, or a congregation that has always served may experience a similar struggle when it must ask for help. Shame, anger, or a stubborn insistence on doing it alone can arise alongside very practical concerns about whether help will be reliable and respectful. Both the inner resistance and the quality of the help deserve attention.

Religious communities are living this passage in an unusually visible way. For more than a century, many congregations in the Global North built schools, hospitals, colleges, and motherhouses. These institutions depended on many people, but the capacity to found and lead them could foster a strong sense of self-sufficiency. They were acts of extraordinary generosity. They also formed an identity: a community came to know itself as the one who gives.

Sr. Nathalie Becquart, a French Xavière sister and undersecretary of the Vatican's General Secretariat of the Synod, named this directly in August, speaking to women and men religious gathered from across the Americas. She described the change now asked of them as "a process of cultural migration," away from "institutional self-sufficiency" and toward "a culture of listening, co-responsibility, discernment and genuine

exchange." She did not soften the cost. "One does not migrate by decree," she said. "The first generation always pays the highest price," and "what is lost in the crossing is real and must be mourned rather than denied." Then she said the sentence that sits at the center of this issue: "We have no future without others."

That sentence can be heard as a grim admission, and the grief is real. A community that has carried responsibility for its future for a hundred and fifty years does not begin sharing it differently without loss. But Becquart also named a possibility within the vulnerability: "This vulnerability, though often difficult to embrace, is itself a gift," she said. Dependence need not cancel our contribution. It can open us to gifts we could not receive while we understood ourselves chiefly as the ones who gave.

There is another way to answer the limits of self-sufficiency, and this year's trust surveys show it. When large institutions fail, many people pull back toward those who think and look like them. That too admits that no one can stand alone. It simply shrinks the circle of those we will lean on. Becquart's sentence points the other way. "We have no future without others" becomes a grace only when the others include people we did not choose.

The question is how we will live our dependence on others, and whether those relationships allow each person a voice.

The new arrangements arriving in so many lives (shared leadership, care at home, mergers, partnerships, networks) can meet practical needs and create room for a deeper passage. A well-planned process does not by itself bring transformation. Help can be accepted with resentment or with grace. A partnership can preserve familiar control or allow people to be changed by one another. Inner work matters, and so do the arrangements through which people meet. Who sets the agenda? Who controls the money? Who can question a decision without losing their place? Structures can support the freedom to receive, or make receiving feel like forfeiting the right to speak.

Aging communities often need to downsize their property and responsibilities as membership declines. I have also encouraged them to consider "upsizing" their mission through partnerships. By sharing authority, resources, and responsibility, they may widen the circle of people carrying the mission without asking fewer members to carry more.

The Deeper Invitation: learning to receive



> *"'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.'"*
> John 13:8, NIV

Peter's refusal is easy to understand. He is the disciple, Jesus is the teacher, and the order of things seems clear. Peter wants to give and to follow, and he will not let himself be served. Jesus does not argue the point. He says that without receiving there is no belonging at all.

The scene does not ask Peter to stop serving. Later, Jesus tells the disciples to wash one another's feet. It asks him to let the movement run both ways. The lesson learned, perhaps, is one of mutuality: communities are formed through the gifts they receive as well as those they offer. We do not have to become less generous to become more receptive.

This reaches into what forms us. Repeated practices school our desires and our defenses more effectively than our stated ideals. A parent or a leader can come to experience constant availability as love, even as it erodes the capacity for presence. People accustomed to forming others have to remain formable themselves. The question is whether receiving another person's gift can change how we understand our own.

If learning to receive is the deeper invitation, this quarter suggests where it may be waiting.

From the people we are used to helping. Many of us know how to be useful more readily than we know how to receive. A parent accustomed to solving problems may struggle when an adult child offers help. We may discover that we wanted guests, while they wanted a place to belong. A February 2025 report described associates in several

U.S. congregations preparing to lead themselves. Their gifts include judgment and leadership, as well as practical help. Receiving what they know means letting it change decisions.

From other parts of the world. The Kenyan sisters developing legal networks bring gifts the wider Church needs to receive. Who will recognize and support the priorities they are setting for themselves? Growing communities may need formation, resources, and partnerships that respect their own leadership. Aging communities may need to learn from people whose future takes a different shape. Neither can stand in for the other's experience. Authority and resources need to travel with responsibility, so that growth elsewhere does not become new work carried without new power.

From the young who are choosing other paths. Many young people share the commitments religious communities have helped nurture: education, justice, and a serious spiritual life. Yet they are choosing to live them elsewhere. What draws them toward those other forms of life? Listening does not require us to abandon our calling. It asks us to hear their experience without treating it chiefly as a rejection of what we cherish.

From elders. We can speak warmly of our elders' wisdom while organizing life as though their contribution ended when their work did. Receiving care does not cancel a calling. That conviction matters when it shapes schedules, resources, and whether the person receiving care still has a say in daily life. An elder's contribution may be a truth spoken inside a relationship, with no further assignment attached.

From the earth. Larson's congregation took down its motherhouse and is restoring native prairie where it stood. Whatever else that choice means, it gives back to the earth the ground the community once built upon. Land is part of a living system before it is an asset, whether it holds a family home, an apartment building, or a monastery. What kind of neighbor are we becoming here?

From endings themselves. Larson told her peers, "This is not a sad song. This is a courageous act of listening to the future." She did not deny the pain; she said the hardest part was "letting go of our congregation's chapel where Sisters had faithfully prayed for over 70 years." An ending can be suffered, chosen, and gradually received, with grief moving through all three. We may need time before we can ask what it offers, and some losses will remain losses. Completion cannot promise a replacement for everything lost. It can open the question of what remains to be lived.

The future may depend less on what we can still give than on what we can let ourselves receive.

Many of us are being asked to receive what we would never have chosen: dependence, unfamiliar partners, questions that unsettle our sense of who we are. We need time to discern what serves life, what evokes resistance, and what can be welcomed. Receiving is not agreement with everything that arrives. It is a willingness to listen and to let that encounter change our response. The Great Turning does not require everyone to become busier.

Counter-Sounding: what this reading may get wrong

There are honest objections to the reading offered here. Let me offer a few.

The first is that it may ask too much of people who are already exhausted. A caregiver may need relief, and a tired community may need others to carry more. To tell them that their diminishment is a spiritual invitation can feel like another demand when what they need is rest and practical help. No one grieving the loss of work, health, or a way of life owes the rest of us an uplifting account of what comes next. A reading that adds weight to the weary has failed, however true it sounds.

The second is that talk of transformation can make suffering sound useful. Displacement is no spiritual exercise imposed on families so that humanity can learn interdependence. Hunger in Sudan is an injury, and it calls for prevention and repair. When people find meaning inside such harm, that meaning belongs to them. It is not mine, or anyone else's, to assign.

The third is that "learning to receive" can hide unequal power. People who lack power have sometimes been told that accepting their place is holy. Women religious have been receiving instructions from others for centuries. Receiving is a grace only between people who are free. If one party inherits the work while the other keeps every decision, or a younger region inherits responsibility without resources, the language of mutual gift covers an arrangement that is not mutual at all.

The fourth is that some gifts do not survive a handoff. A vowed life, a marriage, a craft learned over decades: each is more than a set of functions that can be transferred to a network or a new sponsor. Openness without depth can empty a gift of what made it one. That concern belongs inside any honest discernment.

The fifth concerns my own lens. I went looking with my own frameworks in mind. A reading that finds the field needing exactly what its author offers deserves some suspicion, and a discernment that finds its thesis confirmed should be suspicious of itself.

What would change this reading? Accounts from people who found that new partnerships added demands without useful support, from younger or lay partners who

remained unheard, or from people receiving care who ended up with less say despite generous language about dignity. I will need to hear those accounts.

These objections narrow the claim. Learning to receive is an invitation that can only be accepted freely, at a person's or a community's own pace, and it must come with real authority, resources, and care for those who are tired. Where those are missing, the faithful response may be to say so plainly.

The Gift We Carry

What happens to our gifts when their familiar forms change?

Religious communities use the word charism for a gift of the Spirit that gives a founding tradition its particular life and purpose. A reader outside religious life may recognize a related question in the impulse that drew them toward teaching, raising a family, making art, or serving others. The experiences differ, but each can face a painful separation between a gift and the form through which it has been lived. If the school closes, the children leave, or the congregation relinquishes a ministry, what happens to what was given through that life?

For a couple whose children have left home, the quiet can expose how much of their shared life was organized around raising a family. Their love has not disappeared, but they may need to discover how to live it together in a new way. A community welcoming no new members can face a related question about its identity and purpose, though its future may include completion rather than another generation within the congregation. In both, the task is to grieve what has changed and discern what the gift still makes possible.

A ministry continuing under new sponsorship does not by itself demonstrate that a charism continues. Property can change hands while serving a useful purpose. Work can be transferred. The depth of a founding gift requires people and practices through which it can be received, questioned, and lived. Yet a community can also protect familiar forms so closely that it leaves little room for an expression it has not imagined. The people sharing the gift may recognize a need the congregation has overlooked, or challenge habits of unequal power within its history. Receiving that challenge may itself become an act of fidelity.

In my earlier writing, I put the challenge this way: "Honoring the past cannot mean living in the past. Honoring our ancestors cannot mean living as they lived. If we truly honor those who have brought us to today, we must do for the next generation what our ancestors did for us: We must make room for the new." The question is what fidelity asks now, in a world our founders did not inhabit. Their courage may be more instructive than their arrangements.

The depth of a gift becomes visible in the freedom it makes possible for others. Who can stand with dignity in the presence of our authority? Who can speak without first calculating the cost? Our good intentions cannot answer those questions for the people who live with the consequences. We have to ask them, listen to what they say, and be willing to change how we exercise our responsibility.

Consider a person whose life is touched by yours. What might that person reasonably hope to receive through your presence? What might they wish you would stop doing? Let their experience disturb your description of yourself if necessary. For a religious community, the question can reach into how a charism is lived and shared. For an individual, it can expose the distance between being needed and giving what another person can actually use. Something of our next becoming may come into focus there.



The Practice: learning to receive

Choose one real situation where you are being asked to receive: help with leadership, a new partner, care for a parent or for aging members, the handing on of work you have long carried, the voices of the young or of another culture. Begin in silence. Read John 13:6–15 aloud, slowly. Then reflect on the following questions.

Personal. Where in my life do I find it hardest to receive? What does that resistance protect in me?

Communal. In our family, community, or leadership team, whose gifts are we not yet able to receive? What are we still holding onto as though it were the gift itself?

Wider. Where does our household, our community, or our region depend on narrow passages, and what relationships would widen them?



Sources and Further Reading

A word about sources. This issue reads the signs of July–September 2026. Earlier research and events are identified as background. Links in "Signals" lead to the individual reports; the principal readings are listed below. The interpretations and reflection questions are my own.

Principal readings. Vicky Larson, PBVM, *Harmony for a New Era*, LCWR presidential address (August 2026). Nathalie Becquart, xmcj, *Synodality and Consecrated Religious Life: A Journey of Mutual Gift-Giving for the Church and the World* (August 12, 2026). World Institute for Science, Religion and Culture, *AI and the Pope: Who Has the Last Word?* (July 30, 2026; transcript used). Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026).

Research and surveys. Brynjolfsson, Chandar, and Chen, *Canaries in the Coal Mine?* (Stanford, 2025; revised August 2026). WHO, *Social connection* (2025). McBain et al., *Use of Generative AI for Mental Health Advice Among US Adolescents and Young Adults* (JAMA Network Open, November 2025). *Edelman Trust Barometer 2026*. Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2026*. *Status of Global Christianity 2026*, Center for the Study of Global Christianity.

Church and communal discernment. Synod Study Group 6, *Final Report* (published September 8, 2026), especially its section on "historical completion."

Ted Dunn. *Graced Crossroads: Pathways to Deep Change and Transformation* (2020). *Embracing Our Vulnerability: A Gesture of Humility or a Call to Transformation?* (UISG, Deepening the Plenary, May 2023). Further reflections and resources: gracedcrossroads.com.

Scripture. Matthew 16:3 and John 13:6–15, New International Version. These passages are offered here for reflection.