Two summers ago the four newest members of my community and I went on what I have since dubbed the “Epic Young Nun Road Trip.” The five of us spent sixteen days together driving from our motherhouse in Iowa to San Francisco to attend the Giving Voice conference for younger women religious. We were from Honduras, Mexico, and the United States. Only one of us was truly bilingual, which made communication creative and sometimes humorous. Religious life today is multicultural and multilingual. Those who are entering communities in the United States in the past ten years are much more likely to be racially and culturally diverse than the communities they are joining. The Emmaus narrative (Luke 24:13-35) provides a helpful example of journeying “on the road” together. I will consider this passage from feminist and Latina perspectives. However, as a young Caucasian woman religious in my thirties, I cannot represent the experiences of my Latina Sisters, but I can express my desire to share the journey with my Sisters and offer questions that may also be helpful for others.


The explicit actions within the Emmaus narrative taken by the two disciples on the road together in this second narrative are all journeying words: “going” (v. 13), “drew near” (v. 28), “rose and returned,” and “found (v. 33).” The other actions include “talking” and “discussing” (v. 14-15), their direct speech with Jesus (vv. 18-24, 29) and recognizing (v. 31) Jesus. In this pericope sadness and grief (v. 17) cloud the disciples’ vision (v. 16) as they journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus (v. 13). Clearly they do not yet understand the experience of the women at the empty tomb (vv. 1-12). It is worth noting that the Jesus becomes present to the disciples (v. 15) in the midst of their grappling and attempts to understand the resurrection. They may be “slow of heart” (v. 25) due to grief (v. 17) and the extraordinariness of what has taken place (vv. 1-12), but they are not completely closed hearted. Their lack of recognition (v. 16) simultaneously serves as a metaphor for their lack of understanding about the meaning of Jesus’ death and the empty tomb (v. 26). When Jesus walks with them and questions them, the disciple who is named, Cleopas (v. 18), has a lengthy response about what is on their hearts and minds (vv. 18-24). Clearly they cannot

1 Giving Voice is a network that creates spaces for younger women religious in the United States.

2 Mary Gautier, Jonathan Wiggins, and Jonathan Holland, Incorporating Cultural Diversity in Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2014), 8, 14. Those entering religious life in the United States are 57% white/Caucasian, 17% Hispanic/Latino/a, 16% Asian/Pacific Islander, 8% African American/black/African, 5% Native American, and 1% other. These younger religious are entering communities that are 89% white/Caucasian, 3% Hispanic/Latino/a, 8% African American/black/African, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5% other.

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fathom a messiah who suffered and died (v. 26). Even though these disciples learned previously of the risen Jesus from the women (vv. 22-23), now they are continuing to attempt to grasp what they have heard even as they walk with Jesus (v. 15). They benefit from Jesus’ assistance in understanding the meaning of the scriptures (v. 27). As the two stop their journey they offer hospitality to Jesus (v. 29). Finally, in the breaking of the bread the disciples recognize Jesus, who then vanishes (v. 31). They turn back to the community with their new understanding (v. 33).

It is also interesting that it is not the disciples who are the most well-known or who have the greatest status who experience this longer narrated interaction with Jesus. It’s not Mary Magdalene. It’s not Peter. It’s not Mary, Jesus’ mother. It’s not any of “the twelve (Luke 6:14-16).” One of the disciples engaged in this encounter is not even named. The one called Cleopas (v. 18) is a disciple who is not named anywhere else in the Scriptures. The telling of this story with otherwise unknown protagonists creates a sense of ordinariness in the experience of discipleship, in that the most important encounter between disciples and the risen Jesus is experienced by otherwise unknown disciples, and makes it easier for readers to imagine themselves in the narrative.

**Feminist and Latina Perspectives**

Popular imagination has frequently depicted the pair on the road to Emmaus as a married couple; this interpretation is fruitful from a feminist, Latina perspective, due to the *machismo* Latina women experience from Latino men. Using a hermeneutics of creative actualization at this point allows women to be read into the text in order to offer a more liberating perspective for women, particularly Latinas. This type of hermeneutical lens allows for a bit more creativity in dismantling patriarchal systems. Because patriarchy can also exist in relationships between women, I will imagine that the pair of disciples are both women. The key points in the Emmaus narrative from feminist and Latina perspectives are that the disciples along the road are ordinary disciples and that they are equals.

A feminist, and in this case, a Latina reading of the text must begin with the lived experience of Latinas. Therefore, I turn to a number of Latina theologians who can assist with this perspective. Isasi-Díaz situates this experience of *lo cotidiano*, or the everyday life and cultural experiences of Latina women, as a source of authority. Unfortunately the everyday life experience of many Latina women, in the parish setting, for example, is described by Isasi-Díaz as the exploitation of Latina women who work hard, bring their families to church, but do not make the decisions, which creates a situation where “as powerless persons, Latinas lack status, are not considered respectable. Latinas cannot presume, as others in the society do, that they will be trusted and respected unless they do something to forfeit that trust or respect. Latinas know that we have to earn trust, that we have to earn respect, and that we have to keep earning it or we will not have it.” This silencing of Latinas, which is undoubtedly not limited the parish setting, can be depicted in our Emmaus narrative by imagining the named disciple as Caucasian and the unnamed disciple as Latina.

Fortunately, the Emmaus story also contains a built-in corrective to this injustice. The verbs describing the conversation of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (v. 15) can also assist in providing a liberating perspective. In Greek ὁμιλεῖν means “to converse or speak” and συζητεῖν means “to discuss,” “to dispute,” or even “to examine together.”

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In verse 14, the Greek ὡμίλουν πρὸς ἀλλήλους or “they were speaking to one another” indicates that the speaking is reciprocal action. Also, ὡμίλουν is another imperfect verb, suggesting continuous action. Therefore, this relationship between two disciples has continually involved speaking with one another as equals and can provide an encouraging example for Caucasian and Latina women sharing the journey to discovering the resurrection together.

Pineda-Madrid states the feminist perspective of first-world woman cannot speak for all women. In fact, it “rings hollow” insofar as it silences women of color or fails to acknowledge the need for change in systems that do not treat women of color as equals. Yet, liberation theologian Carlos Mesters observes that women “want to be partners and to struggle together for the greater liberation of everyone. They want to have their place in the liberation process.”

One person is named, and the other is not; one person’s words are remembered, and the other’s are presumed. Reading this from a feminist, Latina perspective simultaneously points to the injustice and to the solution—journeying together and encountering Christ together as equals.

**Walking With My Sisters—Religious Life Perspectives**

Sharing, discussing, and grappling together in the presence of the risen Christ, breaking open the word and breaking the bread side by side as equals without the need of one party asserting authority over another is a freeing idea—for all women in church, not only Sisters and not only Latinas. Schottroff points out that we all participate in patriarchy and oppressive systems. The liberation of everyone and all creation is tied together. All structures that support domination must be challenged.

Even well-meaning, usually sensitized Sisters can be blind and must be attentive to how we are among ourselves. Trevino candidly shares his research about the racism that historically has existed in religious life. To summarize, Sisters have been individually and systemically racist in their practices. They have mirrored the racism in the larger population in the United States, though they were a little quicker than the population to identify their problematic practices and work toward change. More specifically these practices in the early twentieth century included placing Latina women in unjustly low-paying jobs and placing Latina Sisters in housekeeping ministries instead of sending them to study in higher education.

While communities today are far more attentive to working against injustice and racism, given the makeup of most religious communities in the United States (89% Caucasian), it is important for religious to engage in self-reflection about ways in which Latina Sisters may be silenced simply by being an extreme minority. It is easy to have cultural blind spots when religious life has typically been largely homogeneous. For example, the CARA study cited above was completed by the leaders of religious communities rather than the more diverse people entering religious communities. How might the responses received from this study differ if those entering had completed it instead?

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12 Gautier, Incorporating Cultural Diversity, 1.
Are we asking these newer people to conform to the larger culture? If so, are we actually walking together as equals? It is one thing to invite and to listen to our Latina Sisters speak, but will their words receive a privileged place among us? To what degree will we allow ourselves to be shaped by them? Will we recognize Christ's presence as our hearts burn within us?

By continuing to discuss our experiences and sharing with one another in mutual dialogue, women religious will continue to recognize one another and Christ in our midst. The sixteen-day “Epic Young Nun Road Trip” was not without its breakdowns in communication and bumps in the road. However, it was the journey itself that helped to transform us.