

A different assumption for today

By [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

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August 15 is the Feast of the [Assumption](#). The Catholic Church teaches that at the end of Mary's life, she was assumed into heaven, body and soul.

You might assume, if you knew I was an [Associate Missionary of the Assumption](#), that I had something to say about today's feast. But here's the truth about how I started my AMA year in France.

I came to Compiègne, jet-lagged and jumpy to start this post-graduate service stint, with just a wee bit of cradle Catholic baggage stuffed inside my giant backpack. Fresh from college graduation, ink barely dry on the diploma, I felt shaky-sure about faith but full of questions about church. What was the role of women? What was Catholicism's hang-up with sexuality? Where was my place in the whirling middle of it all?

When I showed up in the pebbled courtyard of 3 Square Eglise Saint-Germain, I wasn't even sure what I was seeking. Clarity? Conviction? Christ-in-others? Maybe all of the above.

But what I found the moment that big front door swung open was one single certain truth: these Sisters of the Assumption knew how to welcome. They were all wide smiles and warm embraces and let-us-take-your-bags and can-we-make-you-a-cup-of-tea and we-are-so-delighted-you-are-here!

Until that moment I had known few French people and even fewer religious sisters. But suddenly these five women buzzing around me in long burgundy skirts and pale violet veils were bursting apart all of my stereotypes.

They were loving and laughter and compassion and generosity. They were a [Mary-and-Elizabeth](#) welcome every time I stepped over their old stone doorstep, before Mass or after work or any time they invited us volunteers over for dinner, which was so often I still hear Sister Anne's wise words echo every time I set an extra plate at my table for an unexpected guest: if there's food enough for five,

there's food enough for six. And if there's food enough for six, there's food enough for seven. You see?

Every year I think of the sisters on this feast day. The women I knew who gave their lives to the Assumption. They taught me a different way of being in relationship with others: the women praying and working beside them in their community, the children running around the pews in the parish, the adults with disabilities whom they served in [L'Arche](#) homes. They taught me how truth and love are embodied—in laughter, in dancing, in dessert, in daily prayer.

And they helped me change my mind about Assumption. They helped me come to see that embodied love is what today is about.

I think back to a time when I tripped on Marian feasts like today, when I stumbled on my own assumptions of what dogma and doctrine meant. Then a year spent in community with women whose love for Christ and the church hummed in their every breath, who gave the length of their years and the strength of their bodies in quiet service to all who needed welcome—that year changed everything.

Did I know then that the sisters' faces—wizened and youthful and pale and dark—might be the closest I could glimpse to Mary's own? Over time my assumptions shifted, slowly like the soft rub on stone over a well-worn step. I weigh what I believe now—about women and sexuality and Christ and the church—with what I thought I understood then. And I realize that I see a feast like today in different light: shades of mystery and possibility. And above all love and relationship, which is the essence of who God is and what we are called to be.

Assumptions. Do we grip tight to them? Or are we willing to let ourselves be lifted above them? Beyond the way we think things should be, beyond what we think bodies are capable of, beyond what our beliefs think possible?

What do we assume today? About the world, relationships, religion, church, God, each other? How might God's embrace of us—our whole lives, body and soul—begin to soften our hard edges?

Today's feast is about welcoming the unexpected and celebrating the goodness of love, in flesh and faith. What Mary did all her life. May it be for us today as well.

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