

The Lamp



United States Association of
Consecrated Virgins

September 8, 2014
The Birthday of Mary

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES ASSOCIATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINS:

Volume 19, Issue 3

September 8, 2014 The Birthday of Mary

A year for consecrated life! Of course, it is really a lifetime for consecrated life. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has issued a letter called, "Rejoice." In the first article, it states:

In their finite humanity, on the margins, in their everyday struggles, consecrated men and women live out their fidelity, giving a reason for the joy that lives in them. So they become splendid witnesses, effective proclaimers, companions and neighbors for the women and men with whom they share a common history and who want to find their Father's house in the Church.

"Joy!" That is the calling card of a consecrated person. Pope Francis said this: "This is the beauty of consecration: it is joy, joy" (#3). It is due to our calling by Christ and our being with Christ and our being faithful to Christ.

As a result of this inner joy, we are then able to bring "God's embrace" and comfort to all we meet. This joy enables us to be messengers of hope as we seek out, love, and walk with all our neighbors and with our culture. Pope Francis then asks us:

Do we feel the restlessness of love? Do we believe in love for God and for others? Or are we unconcerned by this. Not in an abstract manner, not only in words, but the real brother we come across, the sister who is beside us! Are we moved by their needs or do we remain closed in on ourselves..?

Mary, of course, is then presented to us as the model, and how appropriate that is, especially on her birthday:

At the foot of the cross, Mary is at the same time the woman of sorrow and of watchful expectation of a mystery far greater than sorrow, which is about to be fulfilled. It seemed that everything had come to an end; every hope could be said to have been extinguished. She too, at that moment, remembering the promises of the Annunciation could have said: they did not come true, I was deceived. But she did not say this. And so she who was blessed because she believed, sees blossom from her faith a new future and awaits God's tomorrow with expectation.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl Boyea
Bishop of Lansing

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Special Points of Interest:

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"The world as we see it, disfigured by sin, is passing away. But we are sure that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth. In this new earth righteousness is to make its home, and happiness will satisfy, and more than satisfy, all the yearnings for peace that arise in human hearts" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 39, par 1). "We are warned indeed that a man gains nothing if he wins the whole world at the cost of himself" (GS 39, par 2).

The consecrated virgin as an icon of the Church shares in the Church's mission to announce to this world the meaning of Eternity. The Queen of Virgins, Mary of Nazareth, is our icon; if she had not said "yes," we would not exist in the Church as an icon of her virginal motherhood. Therefore, in order to live as an icon of the Church, we must contemplate our Blessed Mother and Queen Mary as the true icon of the Church. An icon is a sacred image that draws us into the mystery of God and his love. To speak of Mary as an icon is to begin to live the spirituality of her life. The spirituality of her life as a virgin is integral: she lived her virginal spirituality in this mortal world as well as in eternity, that is, as Saint Ambrose taught, "in the deepest place of the divine secrets."

The consecrated virgin is called to live in the midst of this world as our Mother herself lived: in a life integrated in her physical, spiritual, and divine being. Saint Ambrose distinguishes among the degrees of chastity: one proper to the married woman, another to the widow, and the third to the virgin. Saint Ambrose personifies the first in the innocent married woman Susanna in the Book of Daniel; the second in the widow Anna in Saint Luke's Gospel, and the third in the Blessed Virgin Mother of God. He said that the first, the married, is presented in a comfortable garden; the second, the widow, in the temple; the third, the virgin, in the deepest place of the divine secrets (*De viduis*, c.4, n.23: PL16,241 as quoted in *Las Virgenes cristianas de la Iglesia Primitiva*, Francisco de B. Vizmanos, SJ, 1947 and re-edited by Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid Spain, 2009).

What is our vocation? To be a light in midst of this world that is passing away. It is a vocation illuminated through the mystery of the real presence of Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead, and will be completed in His second coming when He appears as "clothed in light as in a garment" (Ps. 104:2).

Our vocation is to be lived out in the context of our daily working routine, and yet always within the meaning of our life as a consecrated virgin. We witness to Him with our being as an icon of the Church whatever our workplace might be, whether in our remunerated work, or our retired work, or our work as students. In any situation we present to all our co-workers who it is that we are. We are not to hide our virginal being, nor to dress or behave as other women in our work settings by directly or indirectly calling the attention of others. Rather, we are to live in midst of others with the same peace and serenity that our Blessed Mother shows in her passage through this world: Bethlehem, Nazareth, Egypt, Cana, the Way of the Cross, the Crucifixion of her Divine Son, His death on a Cross, the Sepulcher, the Upper Room, the time of prayerful intercession and help to His Church without His physical presence in this world, her Assumption and her ongoing intercession for us.

In order to live this spirituality we are called to live in intimate relationship with our Divine Spouse, an intimate relationship that is ascendant as well as linear in time, space, and eternity. The virginal vocation is ascendant because it is lived as a sacred image of the Eternal Wedding, and it is linear because it comes from our Blessed Mother who was chosen as the Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ; it is she who was the model of virginal life for the first virgins in the ancient Church and continues as the model for consecrated virgins like us, throughout the centuries and to this present time.

Let us pray, quoting something that is both ancient and new, from Saint Paul the Apostle: The time is growing short, so we must rejoice as though we were not rejoicing; we must work in the world yet without becoming immersed in it, for the world as we know it is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:29, 30, 31).

Council News

Current council members and officers are:

Judith M. Stegman, President, 2013 – 2015; Diocese of Lansing

Magalis Aguilera, Member-at-large, 2013 – 2015 (appointed **Vice-President** thru 2015); Archdiocese of Miami

Margaret Flipp, Treasurer, 2014–2016, Archdiocese of San Francisco

Mary Kay Lacke, Member-at-large, 2014–2016 (appointed **Secretary** through 2015) Diocese of Steubenville

Florence Sundberg, Member-at-large, 2012–2014, Archdiocese of Hartford

Upcoming events:

2015 National Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins

August 12—August 16, 2015

Mundelein Retreat and Conference Center

Archdiocese of Chicago

2015 National Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity

August 4–August 7, 2015

St. Francis Retreat Center

DeWitt, Michigan

Diocese of Lansing



Announcements

USACV website update: Elizabeth Lam reminds us that we are always happy to consider ideas to improve the USACV website. If anyone wants to lend a helping hand to keeping the site current, please let us know. We are always in need of this assistance.

Symposium for Consecrated Virgins Living in the World, *Preparing for the Year of Consecrated Life*, October 18, 2014. Sponsored by the Diocese of La Crosse, to be held in Milwaukee. For registration forms and more information, please contact Barbara Swieciak, 608-788-7700 ext. 2271, bswieciak@diolc.org.

Upcoming issues of The Lamp:

December 12, 2014 Our Lady of Guadalupe

February 2, 2015 Feast of the Presentation and World Day of Consecrated Life

May 31, 2015 Trinity Sunday

September 8, 2015 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

USACV Elections Fall 2014

One USACV Leadership Council position, **At-Large Representative**, will open January 1, 2015. *We encourage qualified members to consider running for this leadership position in the association.* Details of our governing structure can be found in the organizational statutes and bylaws of the USACV, which are available upon request. A detailed description of the term, duties, and responsibilities of the At-Large Representative position can be found in the May 31, 2014 issue of *The Lamp*.

Election Process

Written notification of a member's desire to run for the open Council position must be received by the USACV President by midnight on Friday, October 24, 2014. We encourage each candidate to also submit a biographical statement (approx 500 words) including remarks about why she desires to serve in the position and some information about her background and life as a consecrated virgin.

Ballots (and candidate biographies) will be mailed to all USACV members in early November 2014. A member is eligible to vote in an election if she has a consecration certificate on file with the USACV archivist and if she is registered as a USACV member in 2014. *If you have not yet registered as a member in 2014, now would be a good time to do so!*

Ballots will be due back to our Elections Team leader by Friday, December 5, 2014. Ballots will be opened and counted in the presence of an independent party and notification of the results will be made to the USACV President, the newly elected, and all candidates. Results of the election will be announced in the December 12, 2014 issue of *The Lamp*.

Please Consider Running for Office

Please do consider running for office, and encourage other members to run – sometimes all it takes is a personal word!

Report on 2014 Information Conference – Mary Kay Lacke:

The 2014 USACV Information Conference was held in the Assumption Hall of the Malvern Retreat House. This setting was very conducive to the purpose of the conference. The main sessions were held in a central area flanked by small breakout rooms for individual conferences. The beautiful Marian chapel along with smaller adoration chapels created a very prayerful atmosphere.

Fifteen women inquiring about the vocation of consecrated virginity attended the Information Conference. The group was diversified in the parts of the United States and Canada which were represented, the age-range and the levels of interest in the vocation. Three spiritual directors and two representatives of diocesan offices, also attending the conference, added a very rich component to the discussions that took place in response to the presentations given.

There was a great desire among the participants to understand how the vocation of consecrated virginity is lived out. This gave an opportunity for the consecrated virgins to share their personal experience on such topics as a spousal relationship with the Lord and spiritual motherhood. Two consecrated virgins, **Mitzi Smith** and **Ann Stitt**, who attended the Conference as supportive participants, added a great deal to these discussions by sharing their experience along with the team members.

Bishop Earl Boyea gave generously of his time, once again, to spend a day and a half at the Information Conference. His insight into the vocation is extremely important in this conference. He, along with **Bishop Thomas** and Father Dennis Gill from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, celebrated the Holy Mass for the three days of the Conference. As they had done during the USACV Convocation, personnel from the liturgical office of the Archdiocese generously served the Conference by leading the music during the Mass and providing the Liturgy of the Hours booklets for the participants.

An added feature of the Conference, this year, was special gathering of the spiritual directors and diocesan representatives for a dinner meeting on Thursday evening of the Conference. This was a great opportunity for discussion and clarification of the various dimensions of the discernment, preparation and formation processes. Everyone present was very grateful to have this session. Praise God for His Merciful Providence!

I would personally like to thank the other Information Conference team members who served so well those who attended the Conference: **Bishop Boyea**, **Theresa Marshall**, **Judith Stegman** and **Magalis Aguilera**. We are all grateful to the staff at Malvern Retreat House for their great service and to Father Dennis Gill and the Archdiocesan staff whose hospitality was outstanding.

August 2014 Retreat for Consecrated Virgins held in the Archdiocese of Portland – **Loretta Matulich** and **Regina Dibb**

Seven consecrated virgins representing five different dioceses in the United States gathered for a weekend retreat at Our Lady of Peace Retreat House, August 15-17. Portland **Archbishop Alexander Sample** and Fr. Jose Ortega, MSPS, gave presentations at the retreat. Most of the consecrated virgin retreatants were able to visit with each other after the retreat, getting caught up on news, while others just were getting acquainted since they were either newly consecrated or had not met some of us in person before the retreat days together. The retreatants also appreciated and enjoyed the time of silence, prayer and Eucharistic adoration, especially with the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows in their chapel.

Archbishop Sample emphasized particularly that the consecrated virgin's mission is to pray for priests and for the spiritual fruitfulness of their ministry. The sanctity of priests and bishops will foster the growth in holiness among the people in their care. He also noted that the very living of this vocation is the essential value of consecrated virginity in the Church; the good deeds that a consecrated virgin performs throughout her life are the not primary value of her vocation, but only an overflowing of her bond of love with God. In other words, "doing flows from being."

Next year, 2015, Portland consecrated virgins are hoping to host another retreat, but with an added day of silence. That is, the retreatants would arrive on a Thursday afternoon, have Friday and Saturday as full days of retreat silence with conferences presented and Confessions available, and then the good-byes on Sunday after a hearty brunch. Final arrangements won't be finalized until autumn, *Portland continued on page 16.*



Reflections on the 2014 Convocation

The 2014 Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins was held July 28 to August 1 at the Malvern Retreat House in Pennsylvania. This was the first time in many years that the convocation was held outside of the Midwest, and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia most warmly welcomed the forty-two virgins who attended. Nineteen different states and three countries were represented in the group. The days centered around our prayer together and included presentations and discussions on the theme, "Who is the Consecrated Virgin Living in the World? How does she witness to chaste and fruitful love in the world?", as well as times to engage in personal conversations with one another.

A highlight of the time together was the afternoon reception for consecrated virgins hosted by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. It surprised us to learn that many of those in attendance were representatives of the local press who came with curiosity about this vocation of consecrated virginity. Be sure to visit our website to see copies of some of the published articles, one of which was entitled, "Chaste for Jesus!"

At the reception, consecrated virgins presented display tables on aspects of the vocation of consecrated virginity, including history, international presence, the life of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, and distinguishing features of the vocation. **Judith Stegman** gave a powerpoint presentation on the vocation of consecrated virginity, briefly introducing the history of the vocation, the renewal of the Rite of Consecration after the Second Vatican Council, how the vocation fits into the Church today, and the Rite of Consecration as the identity of the vocation of consecrated virginity. Following this was a vibrant time of questions and answers featuring eight different consecrated virgins responding both to prepared questions and to those asked by the press. It was a most inspiring time together and a positive Catholic witness that was greatly appreciated by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

It was our distinct honor to welcome **The Most Reverend Charles Chaput**, Archbishop of Philadelphia, as celebrant for a Mass, as well as **Bishop Earl Boyea**, Bishop of Lansing and Episcopal Moderator of the USACV, and **Bishop Daniel E. Thomas**, Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia.



A word of gratitude is owed to each of the consecrated virgins who was so involved in the planning for the 2014 convocation: to **Anne Gishpert**, our convocation coordinator who handled all manner of details before and during our days together; to **Carolyn Blaszczyk**, who first proposed the site and handled much upfront legwork; to **Florence Sundberg** for

coordinating with **Anne** and **Carolyn** on behalf of the council and working with **Mitzi Smith** in the planning of evening socials; to **Magalis Aguilera** for her faithful work once again with recordings and for her presentation on integral virginity and chastity; to **Mary Kay Lacke** for her leadership in preparing guides for spiritual reflection and discussion on our theme; and to all the virgins who participated in preparing display tables and responding to questions during the reception.

We hope readers of *The Lamp* enjoy reading the following personal reflections from our days together.

Maria Almeida

I participated in the 2014 Convocation after quite some time away, and as I pen these few lines, my joy knows no bounds over what it is to be together and share dreams, values and difficulties as consecrated virgins living in the world. I met Bishop Boyea for the first time and we had a lively and interesting chat. His presentation on Mary, Mother of God, appealed to me tremendously and I devoured it all. Recalling past convocations and sharing with friends brought comfort and encouragement to my very being, and I praise and thank the Lord Our Divine Spouse.

I am most delighted to catch up with my friends – the Committee members, each of whom I cherish personally. From the 1990's to date much has been accomplished, not only in the issuance of a rich variety in material on our vocation, but also in the increasing number of consecrated virgins. No doubt all this takes concerted effort, deep concentration, timeless effort, and above all staying close to our Divine Spouse. I most sincerely applaud all that has been achieved. My thoughts and prayers are with you.



Carolyn Blaszczyk, Diocese of Harrisburg:

Having proposed the location, I was gratified by the reaction of so many attendees to the physical location of our 2014 Convocation and to the visits we were able to make to the Shrine of St. Rita and Daylesford Abbey. The Family Life Center and the grounds of Malvern Retreat Center did provide a beautiful - and easily accessible, venue for our gathering. The warm welcome we received from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and the excellent articles on our vocation, generated by the local press, were an added blessing, especially to those who are "alone" in their dioceses and may not be receiving the support and encouragement of their Bishops. *Continued page 11*

Margaret Flipp, Archdiocese of San Francisco:

The Convocation at the Malvern Retreat Center was once again a memorable event. The setting was so very beautiful and self-contained. I especially loved the bronze Stations of the Cross in the woods near our building. I met many new virgins and had the opportunity to have some good sharings, especially at the evening socials, which were mostly unstructured, and were conducive to getting to know each other better.

I missed having outside speakers, but understand it was because of the symposium at the Philadelphia Pastoral Center, which was a unique experience in itself. I felt there was a real effort to come up with constructive ideas for the USACV in the future, and I hope these bear good fruit in the Spirit. I am already beginning to budget for next year's convocation.

Theresa Anne Jordan, candidate, Archdiocese of Detroit:

I feel extremely blessed to have been able to attend the 2014 Convocation in Malvern, PA. It was my first time attending. I am not yet consecrated so I found it to be extremely edifying, uplifting, and inspirational to be in the presence of and share Mass, daily prayer, meals and conversations with already consecrated virgins from around the world. It confirmed over and over again Jesus' call for me to follow through with espousing Him. We shared laughter, our individual stories, our struggles and our hopes and visions for the vocation of consecrated virginity.

Bishop Earl Boyea gave a wonderful talk about the Blessed Virgin Mary which not only increased my knowledge about Mary, as well as the vocation itself, but it brought me to a closer and deeper relationship with the Blessed Mother. It was also a wonderful experience to be able to meet face to face with other candidates and to talk about our journey in faith and love. I met so many wonderful women – the Lord brought me many new friends! The grounds of the St. Joseph in the Hills retreat house were beautiful, peaceful and serene for praying and meditating. I thank all those involved for putting together this convocation. It was a real blessing and privilege to be able to attend and I excitedly look forward to the day that I am consecrated!"

Mary Kay Lacke, Diocese of Steubenville:

In June, **Theresa Marshall** and I travelled to the Malvern Retreat House in Pennsylvania because we wanted to check it out for the August USACV Information Conference, which the two of us help to direct. Since the Convocation was being held in Malvern, the week before the Information Conference, the Council of the Association had decided to move the 2014 Information Conference there as well. That June visit built anticipation in my heart for attending the Convocation. It would have been enough for me just to attend the Convocation in that beautiful, prayerful setting.

The atmosphere of the retreat house complex, however, only facilitated the rich experience of sharing with other consecrated virgins and with the Bishops and priests who served us so well through the beautiful liturgies and talks. **Bishop Boyea's** four-part talk on Our Lady was stunning in its insight into the life of Mary as a model for consecrated virgins living in the world!

The hospitality shown to us by the Archdiocesan staff of Philadelphia was truly a highlight of the Convocation for me. I am especially grateful to Father Dennis Gill for all the ways he served us through the liturgies, the reception at the Diocesan Center to provide a forum for presenta-

tion of our vocation and his continuing outreach during the following week at the Information Conference. That generosity of spirit is contagious!

Having said all this, I must admit that the most precious part of the Convocation was the opportunity to share in depth with two of my sisters in Christ about the interior life that Our Beloved Spouse is calling us to. All three of us are at an age when the complete surrender to Him, called forth from depths of our being, is becoming more radically clear and all-consuming. The distractions in the past that may have turned our eyes away from His gaze are now being stripped away, not forcefully but by way of illumination of the "One Thing Necessary." These kinds of encounters in conversation and shared prayer with virgins who are living out our vocation in such rich and beautiful ways show me the purposefulness of the Convocation. I am deeply grateful.

Jeanne McNulty, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston:

What a joy it was to reconnect with our sisters in this vocation of Consecration! Besides the wonderful liturgies and homilies given by our three bishops, it was a delight to sit around the dining tables and share with each other from all over the USA, England and Australia. Where else does one find such enriching conversation with others engaged in so many different walks in life – all conjoined in a unity with the Love of our life?

Another aspect that was very encouraging was the presence of new and younger women embracing the life of consecrated virginity and to see the joy in the Lord that emanated from them. And lastly, I so loved the space at Malvern where we could go outside and walk in the silence of nature and be in a space where for so many years, thousands of prayers ascended to our God from prayerful hearts.

Ginnie Meyer, Archdiocese of Chicago:

My Beloved called and so I followed. A year ago, I never would have dreamed that I would be able to make the trip to the Convocation of 2014. It was truly a blessed and rewarding experience for me. Five days of heavenly bliss for me. Morning and Evening and Night prayers with my sisters in Christ. Daily Mass and Celebration of the Eucharist. **Bishop Boyea's** talks on Mary and how we as consecrated virgins should be Mary, model of virgins, living in the world. Mary gave Jesus her human nature, and we are to give our bodies to Christ. How can the world see him, except, then, from me?

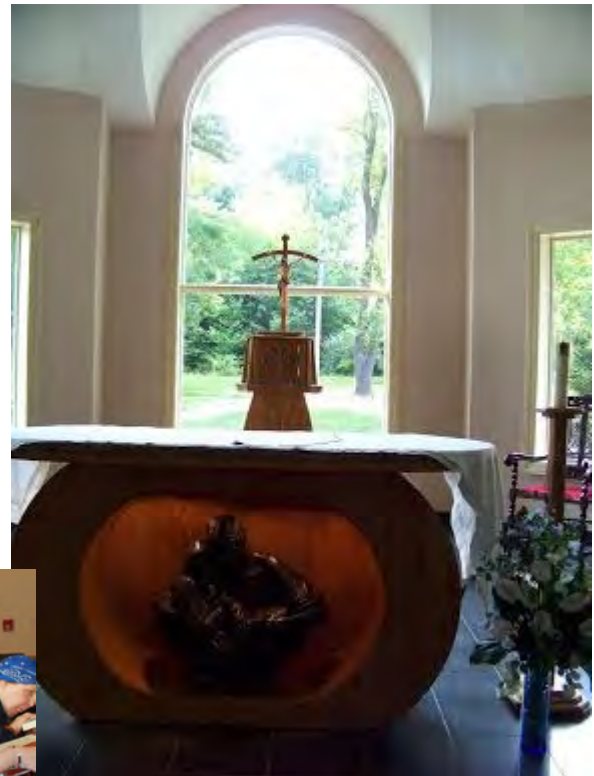
Magalis Aguilera explained the growth of our spirituality and its stages throughout our lives. She emphasized our receiving of our vocation at conception and its growth through graces received in the Sacraments, that it might bear spiritual fruit. Her talk touched me in a profound way. It gave me a better understanding of my calling to Christ.

The day trips to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia Pastoral Center and Daylesford Abbey added to the excitement of the week. The best time spent, though, was the time together in the evening, led by **Mitzi**. All my sisters in Christ gathered together singing their favorite hymns and dancing with joy for the love of the Lord!



2014 CONVOCATION PHOTOS









Carolyn Blaszyk continued

We've offered the gift we've received to the Church and it is difficult to see that offering misunderstood and the gift that originates from God ignored or rejected.

The most powerful blessing for me, personally, is the spirit of solidarity that should and does exist among so many of my sister consecrated virgins and which gives witness to the power of love that flows from our Spouse. In a world filled with so much division, conflict, and violence, it is the peace and joy we evidence, especially when we gather together, that touches lives and gives hope. My thanks to all of you who respond with so much faith and trust to the "love of God [that] has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Sara Navarro, Archdiocese of Chicago:

I am very grateful to God, our beloved Spouse for giving us experiences to grow together as a family. The annual Convocation for me is an opportunity to grow in that love. We need each other; we cannot live our lives isolated from the ones who are sharing the same call and vocation. This year as usual, I enjoyed my time together with other virgins who love Jesus and Mary more than anybody.

I give thanks to Him, who provides the means for being able to assist and participate in this week of love and grace. I have many moments and memories of this wonderful week in my heart, but I would like always to remember how one day in the chapel, two sisters and one brother cleaned the blood of Jesus with such love and passion. (As it should be!) Suddenly, I had the image of the movie the passion of the Christ. We as brides of Christ are also disciples of Mary, and we are learning from Her how to love with all reverence our Divine Spouse. His Blood is the prize of our Salvation!

May God bless all the sisters that worked too hard preparing this beautiful week and may our Lord give us the gift of many more moments together walking and growing as a family.

Mitzi Smith, Diocese of Austin:

I was deeply struck by the immense joy of being together shared by the virgins. I am convinced that it was a gift given by our Father and Spouse as a foretaste of Home (Heaven). There, please God, we will stand with the Great Company of Virgins around the throne of our Divine Spouse and sing, "Glory to God in the highest and to the Lamb our dear Beloved!! We are His FOREVER!!!!"

How I miss you all and long for that day! The Spirit and the Bride say, "Maranatha! Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus!!" Let us be in constant prayer for one another, that no one in our company be lost! I love you all!

Florence Sundberg, Archdiocese of Hartford:

Having the Convocation on the East Coast this year was wonderful; it was good to share with those of our sisters who are not able to travel to Chicago each year. We took walks and enjoyed meals together; we shared prayer times and music and song; the Liturgy, thanks to Father Gill, was magnificent. It is always, for me, a great joy and blessing to look upon the faces of my sisters in consecration, to hear from them about their lives and their struggles, to offer words and prayers of encouragement and to receive so much in return. It was also a joy to hear

enthusiastic participation at our general meetings. Many asked if we could have a convocation at Malvern again. May it be so.



Pauline Garland, Archdiocese of Sydney (Australia)

After traveling half way around the world to experience the special grace of being with my sisters in the Lord, I have experienced a time of renewal and refreshment in our special vocation in the Church. The convocation is a distinctive time of sharing our grace of being spouses of Christ, spending this spiritual time together where we pray, meditate, listen to sermons, and also have social time together.

Insight into the working of the physical, psychological and living the life of grace in responding to the call of integral virginity as integrated persons was for me a special grace of enlightenment and understanding this year. We live in a world where we as virgins are seen as people who are missing out on something that is seen as a part of life today. As most of us live alone it is a special time living together as sisters in the Lord; it is special to live this intense time of spiritual renewal and dedication together.



from the President's journal . . .

How encouraging it has been to compile this issue of The Lamp with its reminders of the inspirational days consecrated virgins had as we gathered together this summer in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Holding the Convocation in the eastern part of the country permitted the participation of some virgins who have been unable to attend in recent years. As well, it allowed the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to be introduced more fully to the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world. The convocation reflections and photos in this newsletter illustrate the joy that virgins so naturally share at being able to be together with one another.

What is the meaning of this vocation of consecrated virginity? You will read a succinct answer in Something Ancient, Something New: the consecrated virgin is to be a light in the midst of this world that is passing away. The anniversary reflections in this issue display some of the many-colored rays of this light: Ann's description of the fertile ground in which seed is sown, and the fertility and fruitfulness of consecrated women who are espoused to God; Therésita's intense awareness at all times of the Presence of God ever closer to her in the person of Jesus as her Spouse; and the reflection of Trish about accepting with joy the spousal love of God in every circumstance of life.

I hope that readers enjoy reading, as much as I enjoyed compiling, the many spiritual and personal insights expressed by virgins in this issue of The Lamp. I would also like to add a word of encouragement to all virgins to consider running for the open council position or offering your time and ideas in other ways, for example, by offering to assist to keep our website fresh and up-to-date. Your ideas and help are always valued in a volunteer organization such as the USACV.

May our Divine Spouse be praised!

Judith Stegman

Life Corner – Florence Sundberg

Writing from Life Corner I want to address the tragedy of so much violence against human beings erupting across our planet, not just in the Middle East but, in more subtle ways, in our own country. Although there are many who witness to the sanctity of all human life, there are also many who continue to push for unlimited access to abortion, bringing harm to the mother and death to her baby. Violence generates more violence so we see terrorist groups slaughtering innocent men, women and children in the Middle East; we are aware of the magnitude of human trafficking across the world; the kidnapping of Christian girls in Nigeria and selling them into prostitution.

We, consecrated virgins, spouses of Jesus Christ, are called to witness to the sacredness and beauty and goodness of each and every human life created by God. We are also called to participate in any and every way we can to help make God's world a healthier and holier place to live for everyone. Elie Wiesel said that the opposite of faith is not heresy but indifference. For me the opposite of love isn't hatred but indifference. Recently, I posted a prayer request from a Christian missionary in Iraq who let it be known that the terrorist group ISIS was only 10 minutes away. He did not ask for weapons or food or a way of escape. He let us know that he and his team would not run but would stand fast.

His cry for help was only for 'prayer cover'... this we can surely offer. Let us cover our world with our prayers and our love and if and when we are called upon to take action, let us do so with courage and with absolute trust in the Lord's Presence knowing that we are, in a very special and unique way, His Presence in the world we are called to love and to serve in His Name.



Consecration Anniversary Reflections

Consecrated virgins celebrating significant anniversaries are invited to offer a reflection on their years of living as a consecrated virgin. We're pleased to offer a few stories in this issue of "The Lamp," and will offer more in future issues.

40 years:

Ann Stitt, Archdiocese of Boston, consecrated June 2, 1974.

The Seed is the Word of God

Jesus begins His story: A sower went out to sow some seed (Mt. 13:1-25, Mk. 4:1-20), describes where it lands, and how it grows, then He explains that Parable. I think He is talking about Himself, His mission, and that of His followers. I imagine the growth and the fruit of this seed depending on global conditions, societal milieus, receptivity in my own soul – or lack, reluctance, responsibility, results. St. Catherine of Siena describes Our Lady as fertile ground in whom the Word was sown. Let it be done to me according to Your Word.

Looking back on my childhood, now some 60 years ago, I can see what God did plant within me Himself, and through my good parents and teachers, even without explicit teaching, of the Faith, with no attendance at church. He showed me Himself through His creation – the loveliness of flowers, songs of birds, sky – beauty, the animals we kept, the gardens we grew: all silently speaking to me of Him. Later on, in reading books, I began searching for Him but did not find Him – only His traces! Then, when I began to sit/kneel in the Chapel of St. Jerome, reading Saint Francis de Sales and Thomas Merton, and pondering the phrases of the Creed, the phrases of the Our Father, I learned to pray. No longer was God an idea, a “frame of reference.” I was coming to know Jesus as the Person He is, coming down the road to meet me, and I dropped that measuring tape I was holding in my hand, feeling a little silly for having it.

My parents being deceased, I invited to the Ceremony and Mass of Consecration a teacher who knew my mother; a person who every day wore a sign, walking the sidewalks in downtown, ABORTION IS MURDER; a Cenacle Sister who recited the Magnificat for the Communion meditation; a flutist who later entered the Carmel of the Pater Noster on the Mount of Olives; and my two attendants who had received the consecration in 1971 (they have since gone on before us). After the Mass His Eminence provided breakfast for us, in the dining room at the other end of the hall from the Chapel in his residence. Friends knocked on the door to pick me up for a reception elsewhere. I wore a crown of white roses, seven of them, for the sevenfold Gifting of the Holy Spirit, for it was Pentecost Sunday, June 2, 1974.

Before there was the USACV, with easily-available information and counsel, the pioneers had to build the road! There was very little communication until the 1990's. There was even a certain policy in my diocese, that each of us would mature in the vocation without input from other consecrated virgins - this, at that time, was wise, for it eliminated undue influence from strong personalities and perhaps mistaken notions about our vocation. After these years of isolation, it was a lovely experience for me to meet others, beginning with my first USACV gathering in 1997. In 1999 three of us celebrated 25 years – Ann Fox and Loretta Matulich and myself, with corsages, speeches, and photos, at our annual national meeting. Also in that year our own Cardinal Archbishop in Boston began yearly get-togethers for Mass and a meal together.

If you have ever grown a plant from its seed, you know the wonder of sprouting, blooming, fruition. Pope Francis spoke to consecrated women about the fertility, the fruitfulness of being espoused to God. This is important, he said. This fruit – fruit that will last – comes from God, is sown by Him, with Him, through Him, and grows in the spirit, bearing fruit of Peace and Joy and Love and all the other fruits by which we know one another to be His, belonging to Him, doing His Will, Living in His Love.

15 years:

Theresita Polzin, Archdiocese of Denver, consecrated February 11, 1999 (celebrated her 99th birthday in August 2014)

The climax of my Consecration was the sacred resolution of ultimate total and eternal giving of all I am and have to my Beloved Jesus as His, and His only, Bride forever, on February 11, 1999. From the moment of my birth I was perceived as dying, and baptized by a layman with the emergency formula on Thursday afternoon, the day I was born, and had the ceremony completed by a priest on Sunday, the Feast of the Assumption. I lived!

When I was five, my sister was planning to marry and I heard discussions about being in love and that's when I concluded for myself that I could never get married because I could never fall in love with my whole heart with a man because I had to love God with my whole heart. And what about my sister and others who married? They would have to figure that for themselves. I could never love two men with my one “whole heart.” I somehow knew this without anyone explaining it to me. It came to my head and heart.

*Consecration Reflections
continued page 14.*



Consecration Reflections continued

At the end of the eighth grade (age 13), the Lord arranged that the Sisters would take me into their High School Academy in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and our poverty and train fares for visiting home forbade visits either from me home or from family to me. I was isolated in the Wisconsin convent, from my relatives in Denver, and from the rest of the world. During summer we (other girls of my age did as I chose to do) took courses and thus completed high school, while I decided to join the Religious Order and became a teaching Sister until Vatican II, when the Congregation I had belonged to (like numerous other Women's Congregations) was changed beyond recognition and a Dispensation was the only road ahead. I began from the day of dispensation (July 1, 1970) every year to renew my precious vow of chastity before a priest, usually in the confessional.

That was from 1970 to 1999, when I read the shocking news (for me) that the Church was again making it possible for virgins to serve God in the world in perpetual vowed virginity, as in the days of Saints Agnes, Lucy, etc., without considering age. I was 83 when I learned of this new Opening and was consecrated on February 11, 1999, at age 84, after 29 years of annual renewal of my Vow of Chastity, privately before a priest.

I know that this is not what I was asked to write, but I doubt that I would ever be at peace and not know at what point to begin if I didn't trace the roots for Holy Chastity in my soul from their very beginning. Now I shall try my best to tell the changes I perceive as possibly related to my Consecration as an influence in change for the better.

I think the most recognizable spiritual growth in the last fifteen years is my greater awareness at all times of the Presence of God ever closer to me as of Jesus as my Spouse! Resulting in frequent snatches of meditation of thanksgiving, of Spiritual Communions,

growth in an understanding of my total unworthiness, His humility and my longing for heaven, and to be united to Jesus, blotting out everything else.

5 years:

Trish Sanford, Diocese of Savannah, consecrated April 28, 2009

Five years ago, I chose a perfect spouse. He accepted a very flawed one. I hate to shatter any illusions of those who assume I am in constant prayer and joyfully offering up my sufferings. Each day is a new struggle to figure out what God is doing in me, to me and hopefully through me in my vocation.

At my consecration ceremony there was a moment when I felt the love of God come upon me in a very real way and my reaction was actually to recoil and say, "I'm not worthy to receive You Lord." And God gave me a word that has helped me accept my walk on a road I know I do not "deserve" to be on. He said, "Accepting My spousal love for you is accepting the cross I want you to bear."

There is no doubt in my mind or heart that given the choice between the life I have and a life that included marriage and children, but not the miracles and intimacies with God I have experienced, I would have chosen this life. Contentment – like that which Paul spoke of in Philippians – true contentment, comes in knowing you have chosen the best part for yourself and not asking why you couldn't have it all.

When circumstances of my life are truly difficult, I claim Romans 8:28. I will give a slight paraphrase here for all of us doing hard things in our daily life: "And we know that in all things, *[including loneliness, broken down cars, ...and facing old age without spouse or children]*, God works for the good of those who love Him." And isn't this consecrated life we have chosen, our constant choice to say, "I love you Lord"?

Consecration Announcements:

United States:

June 28, 2014, **Michelle A. Black**, Archdiocese of Denver, at the hand of The Most Reverend Samuel Aquila.

August 15, 2014, **Stacy Megan Cretzmeyer**, Diocese of Charleston, at the hands of The Most Reverend Robert E. Guglielmone.



France:

January 18, 2014, **Marie-Jeannine Malebigue**, Archdiocese of Besancon, at the hands of The Most Reverend Bouilleret.

April 21, 2014, **Marie-Agnes Michot**, in the church of St. Paul, Poitiers, at the hands of The Most Reverend Wintzer.

April 26, 2014, **Tamara Andrucovici**, Archdiocese of Paris, at the hands of The Most Reverend Aupetit.

May 11, 2014, **Severine Courtois**, Diocese of l'Aude, at the hands of The Most Reverend Planet.

May 31, 2014, **Madeleine Beltjens**, Diocese of Autun, at the hands of The Most Reverend Benoit Riviere.

“Our Bridal Bouquet” **Diane Christine Farr**

In Revelation Ch. 19 verse 7, we read, “The wedding feast of the Lamb has begun, and his bride is prepared to welcome him.” We will consider a mystical bridal bouquet that we may carry composed of flowers dedicated to the honor of the mother of our Lord. Each flower signifies a different aspect of the welcoming heart of the bride of the Devine Lamb. The consecrated virgin through cooperation with the grace of her consecration must always be ready to welcome Jesus her Bridegroom in the many ways in which He invites her to receive Him.

Symbolizing the virginity of holy Mary the Madonna lily will be the foundation of our bouquet. The venerable Bede tells that the white petals signify her bodily purity and the golden anthers the glowing light of her soul. We have welcomed Jesus into the exclusive intimacy of our virginal love. The stately elegance and rich fragrance of the lily evokes the sublime beauty of virginity transformed and completely invested with the presence of our Divine Spouse. Entering into the purity of this holy union with Christ is to breathe in the perfume of heaven.

The rose symbolizes love brought to perfection in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As consecrated virgins we are always striving to give ourselves more completely to God in perfect love. We desire to continue growing in the knowledge of the most gentle heart of Jesus ever mindful of Jesus’ total gift of His Heart to us. Our hearts should never be closed and always expanding in perfect charity and availability to others.

The iris denotes the royal kingship of our Bridegroom as well as the queen ship of his mother. Its sword-like leaves remind us of the sword of sorrow that pierced Mary’s heart.

The violet symbolizes Mary’s humility. Let us remember that every grace is pure gift and by ourselves we can accomplish nothing. A spirit of gratitude must begin in our hearts.

The lily of the valley stands for Mary’s purity and her Immaculate Conception. Through a careful examination of conscience we hope to maintain purity of intension doing all for the greater glory and honor of God.

The botanical name for the carnation is dianthus, which means divine flower. Carnations symbolize Mary’s love and joy in the mystery of the Incarnation. We stand in awesome reverence at having

received the grace of being espoused to Jesus the Word Incarnate.

The daisy signifies the radiant simplicity, which must characterize the virgin’s entire life. The snowdrop is a sign of our hope in the splendor of the eternal light of Christ. The crocus represents the divine wisdom of the virgin mother, which she shares with us. The tulip reminds us that we strive to imitate our Lady’s openness to God in prayer. The sweet scented hyacinth tells of the fullness of God’s grace that was at work in Our Lady’s entire life. Through the grace of our consecration may we true daughters of Mary. As the daffodil signifies the beauty of Mary, may our presence in the world reflect the beauty of our heavenly Bridegroom.

The scarlet anemone reminds the virgin that it was through the blood of Christ that she received the joy of being made his bride. The columbine being the flower of the Holy Spirit reveals to the virgin the majesty and love of her Bridegroom. Jasmine helps us remember that in everything we must always be wise and prudent virgins. Forget-me-nots symbolize our constant fidelity to Jesus even in small things. Veronica with its blue spikes of cross shaped flowers reminds us of the faith Mary had even while standing under the cross of her divine Son. We carry our cross in union with our Lord who strengthens us and brings us to perfection. Rosemary stands for Mary’s remembrance and her pondering heart. As consecrated virgins we must treasure the riches and wisdom of Christ in our hearts. The clean fresh scent of lavender reminds us that we wish to imitate the purity and holiness of life of our mother. The morning glory shows that we desire to live in Christ’s peace under the mantle of Mary. The chrysanthemum is another symbol of her virginity as well as all the saints who intercede for us. The marigold symbolizes the heavenly glory Mary now enjoys in union with her divine Son.

It is with great tenderness that Jesus presents this symbolic bouquet of flowers to his virgin bride that she may respond more fully to infinite love. In her service to Christ, she recognizes the value and dignity of each person as she prays and works for the salvation and sanctification of all people. May our lives give continual praise to our beloved Jesus for He continuously draws us to Himself in his infinite mercy preparing us for eternal life.

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Portland Conference continued but **Regina** would appreciate knowing now what preferences any consecrated virgin might have between a possible early June weekend or a late July weekend. Please phone **Regina** at: 503-327-5164, or email to: firstjn416@gmail.com.



**Reflection on the Birth of Mary -
Mary Kay Lacke:**

Every time I reflect on Immaculate Conception and the birth of Our Lady, I find myself overwhelmed by the infinite mercy of God, too incredible for the mind to grasp, but not really too incredible for God. I reflect with St. Paul (1 Cor. 2: 12), Now, the Spirit we have received is not the spirit of the world but God's own Spirit, so that we may understand the lavish gifts God has given us. The ultimate "lavish gift" God has given us in His Son, He carefully prepared for in the creation Our Lady. Through her immaculate conception, He enabled her, in union with her Son, to say with her life as she came into the world, Here I am, I am coming to do your will. What a wonder! Where would we be without Our Lady, without her continuous Yes! to the Father, without her total cooperation with the Holy Spirit? William Wordsworth (1770-1850) wrote a poem about our Lady that contains a line which is often quoted. Here I give you the entire text of the poem for your edification:

The Virgin

*Mother! whose virgin bosom was uncrosth
With the least shade of thought to sin allied;
Woman! above all women glorified,
Our tainted nature's solitary boast;
Purer than foam on central ocean tost;
Brighter than eastern skies at daybreak
strewn
With fancied roses, than the unblemished
moon
Before her wane begins on heaven's blue coast;
Thy Image falls to earth. Yet some, I ween,
Not unforgiven the suppliant knee might
bend,
As to a visible Power, in which did blend
All that was mixed and reconciled in Thee
Of mother's love with maiden purity,
Of high with low, celestial with terrene!*