



United States Association of Consecrated Virgins

June 29, 2008
Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul

Volume 13, Issue 4

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

June 29, 2008 – Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

Dear sisters in Christ,

As I write to you on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, the Apostles, I reflect on the intimate relationship of your vocation and mission with the apostolic vocation and mission which we celebrate today with great solemnity in the lives of the Prince of the Apostles and of the Apostle to the Nations.

The relationship was manifested in a most wonderful way in the grace-filled encounter of Pope Benedict XVI, Successor of Saint Peter, with the participants in the International Congress-Pilgrimage of the Order of Virgins, on this past May 15th.

Your charism must reflect the intensity but also the freshness of its origins. It is founded on the simple Gospel invitation: "He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (Mt 19:12), and on St. Paul's recommendation of virginity for the Kingdom (1 Cor 7:25-35).

Truly, your vocation is a gift for the whole Church, inviting all to a life of pure and selfless love, and praying daily for that intention, in a special way, before our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

I write to you, for the last time, as the Episcopal Moderator of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins. Two days ago, Pope Benedict XVI appointed me to the office of Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura.

As I conclude my service as Episcopal Moderator, I thank you for all of the inspiration you have given to me and for all of the prayers and sacrifices which you have offered for my intentions. I only wish that I could have done more to assist you in promoting the knowledge of your vocation and in serving those hearing the call to consecrated virginity lived in the world.

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Something Ancient . . . Something New after Rome 2008 *Magalis Aguilera and Judith Stegman*

What a joy it is to write this article after gathering with 500 consecrated virgins from 52 different countries during our May 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage in Rome. Rome is privileged to be known as the Eternal City and its ancient history includes as its own the infancy of the Order of Virgins, boasting many of our sisters who remained faithful to their virginal call until death. These virgins suffered martyrdom to keep the integrity of their virginity, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Let us recall the names of our sisters: First century Rome gave us Flavia, Domitila, Petronila, and Felicula. The second century: Teodora, Balbina, Prudencia, Gliceria, Praxedes. The third: Taciana, Martina, Cecilia, Digna and Emerita, Victoria, Anastasia, Basila, Rufina and Segunda, Eugenia, Agripina, Benita, Prisca, Restituta, Susanna. The fourth: Firmina, Ines, Emerenciana, Maria, Paulina, Romana, Demetria, Bibiana, Irene, Marcelina, Crescenciana, Filomena. The fifth: Asela, Demetriades, Eusebia. And the sixth: Emiliana, Romula and Redenta, Tarsila, Benita, Gregoria.

“Take as your example the holy virgins who have enriched the Church’s life in every age.” (John Paul II address to international gathering of consecrated virgins, Friday, June 2, 1995, Rome, Italy). Meditating upon the lives of these holy virgins, we deepen in an understanding of the meaning of a vocation to Christian virginity, an essentially Spousal vocation, an inherently fruitful vocation; and we come to understand that a vocation to Christian virginity is a *gift* from God the Eternal Father to the Church, the Spouse of His only begotten Son.

The spiritual fecundity of the gift of Christian virginity has profoundly enriched the life of the Church throughout the centuries, beginning with the fiat of the Blessed Virgin Mary and continuing with the peaceful embrace of trials and sufferings by our sisters throughout the centuries. Characterized by the donation of a complete gift of self to her Divine Spouse, Christian virginity is essentially a dialogue of “Fiat,” of responding with a resounding “Yes” to Jesus the King. It is a personal act of love with an ecclesial character. In fact, “Christian virginity is never a uniquely private and personal decision, but a gift received within the Church from the hands of God, a consecration within which one’s own will, accepted by God, is transformed in His will.” (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 25 March 1988).

Christian virginity is a gift! Mary’s virginity as well as our virginity depends not so much upon our own will or personal virtue, as it depends upon the fiat, the “yes” to the will of the Father, who has Himself created the gift of virginity and given it to those He has chosen. The response of the one given this gift echoes the response of Mary, who did not say to the angel, “I will do it,” but rather, “Be it done unto me.”

“It is essential for consecrated virginity that it not be only and simply a private decision - it could become in this way an obstacle to the divine will, my will opposing His Will. It is essential that my will comes to be offered, abandoned, handed over into the hands of God; that virginity become complete availability to the Lord, letting ourselves be guided by Him, in the organism of His mystical Body, for the good of the entire Church. It is deduced from this that consecrated virginity is a state in the Church, a Marian state, not less necessary for the fecundity of the Church than the ministerial state of the Priesthood in the succession of the Apostles. The Church must always be Marian and Petrine in order to correspond to her original vocation.” (Cardinal Ratzinger, March 25, 1988).

Yes, sisters, our vocation of consecrated virginity is rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation, in the “Fiat”, the “Yes” of our Blessed Mother, who bore in her virginal womb the Savior of the world. Servant of God Pope John Paul spoke of the fecundity of Christian virginity in today’s Church during his 1995 address to the Order of Virgins in Rome: “Dear sisters, you also belong to that mystery through the gift of the Spirit and by virtue of a *new spiritual anointing*. According to the teaching of the Fathers, virgins receive from the Lord the *consecration of virginity* and become a visible sign of the Church’s virginity, a means of her fruitfulness, a witness of her fidelity to Christ. Virgins are also a reminder that the Church is oriented toward the good things to come and a warning to keep the eschatological tension alive.”

It is in the daily circumstances of our own lives that we are privileged to be a means of fruitfulness for the Church, as we respond daily with our own fiat to the will of the Father, following the Lamb wherever He goes.

Archbishop Burke’s letter continued

Please continue to pray for me! As you know, the greater the responsibilities become in the Church, the more furiously Satan is at work. Please pray that I may be a faithful, generous and true shepherd of the flock, and a loyal and tireless servant of our beloved Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Virgin of Virgins, and of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles, may Christ, your Bridegroom, fill your hearts with new enthusiasm and new energy in living your consecration in which, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “the whole of the Christian mystery shines out.”

Invoking God’s blessing upon you and your consecration, I remain

Yours in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary,



Most Rev.) Raymond L. Burke

Episcopal Moderator of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins

Council News

Current council members and officers are:

Judith M. Stegman, President, 2007 – 2009; Diocese of Lansing

Magalis Aguilera, 2007 – 2009 (appointed **Vice-President** thru 2009); Archdiocese of Miami

Louise Pare, Treasurer, 2008 – 2010; Diocese of Lansing

Twanna Bolling, Member-at-large, 2008-2010 ; Archdiocese of Chicago.

Aliceanne Sawyer, 2006-2008 (appointed **Secretary** thru 2008), Diocese of Trenton.

2008 National Information

Conference Team

Registrations are due July 10, 2008 for the August 6 to 8 national informational conference about the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world. A good number of registrations have been received, but there is still room. Attached with this newsletter is the brochure about the conference, which we encourage you to give to interested persons. We look forward to the gathering with one another and with those inquiring about the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world..

You may contact Theresa Marshall for more information about the 2008 national information conference at

marshall@wash.k12.mi.us.

Other Upcoming events:

National Information Conference
August 6 to 8, 2008

The Cenacle
Chicago, Illinois

**National Convocation
of Consecrated Virgins**
tentatively scheduled for

July 22 to 26, 2009

Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows
Belleville, IL
(near St. Louis, MO)

Team Announcements:

Formation Resource Development Team: *Please pray for a very important upcoming Formation Resource Development Planning Symposium to be held at the Cenacle in Chicago, August 2-5. Mary Kay Lacke, leader of the Formation Resource Development Team, in consultation with Judith Stegman, has invited a group of six consecrated virgins with particular interest and expertise on the spirituality and identity of the consecrated virgin to a three day thinking/writing/discussion symposium on the vocation. Our hope is to pull together formation resources to address four areas: discernment of the vocation, preparation for the candidate, formation in the early years after the consecration and on-going life formation.*

The Planning Symposium is an initial step that will require follow-up by the FDRT in program development that can serve the vocation at various levels. Please pray, through the intercession of our Lady, that the Holy Spirit may anoint and fructify this time together. Thank You. Mary Kay Lacke

Website Team: Fr. Aresenius, USACV webmaster, and Katie Gesto, team leader for our newly formed website team, are working on revising the look and content of the USACV website. If there are any of you willing to share your website-design talents and ideas, we are most eager to hear from you! Even if you don't have time but have the expertise and are willing to be consulted via email or phone call, we would appreciate it! If you have any decorative pictures of any sort that you think would at some point look good on the site, please forward them and any ideas to me at: kgallforhim@gmail.com. Thanks, Katie

Kateri Team: this is our newest team, with team leader Florence Sundberg. The Kateri Team exists to help put consecrated virgins in touch with one another in times of need. Here's the description Florence gives: "My dear sisters in Christ, Judith

has asked me to develop a team dedicated to helping our sisters in the USACV when they are in need of support of some kind. We hope to create heart-to-heart networks, rooted and founded in His Heart to which we all belong. We will reach out where and when we are called to do so: someone may just need a hand to hold or a word of encouragement when going through a time of darkness, or temporary financial assistance because of a sudden crisis, or support after surgery or during illness.

The help we'll give one another is reflective of our relationships in the Order of Virgins – rather than being assistance given and directed by the USACV, the Kateri Team will coordinate individual virgins who want to voluntarily offer help to their sisters who may be going through a rough time.

We hope to have team members in different areas of the country to help facilitate and/or to offer support to those living in their area. Please let me know if you are interested in being part of the team, or if you find yourself or another sister in need of some assistance.. You can contact me at SundFls2957@aol.com. Your sister in Christ, Florence Sundberg, Woodbury, Ct.

Candidate Care Team: If any of the recently consecrated virgins have invitations, programs, or mementos that they would like to share with others who are preparing to receive the consecration, I would welcome them. We have already received two requests for the information from a candidate in Pennsylvania and another from Canada, so the aids have been helpful. Thank you to all who have sent me copies. Mary Therese Wyant and I are considering another format for the sample. More on this after some experimentation. From Team Leader Barb Swieczak,; mysisterbarb@hotmail.com.

Membership Team: Shalina Stilley writes to Judith from her cabin in Arizona: "Maybe we could just put a little blurb in *The Lamp* reminding people to renew their 2008 registration if they haven't already done so." And she adds, "There is a little lizard that hangs out on my windowsill every day (undoubtedly looking for delicious dead bugs to eat). I told him about you and that you once had a pet iguana. He really wants to meet you!" (That's our Shalina, who knows well the members of the USACV.)

Reflections on Rome 2008

Editor's note: Over the next few months, we'll publish personal reflections from those who participated in the Rome 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage for Consecrated Virgins. Please send in your stories! Here is our first batch:

Katie Gesto, Diocese of Steubenville: What touched me most was feeling so embraced and affirmed in our vocation by Holy Mother Church-- particularly through our Holy Father Benedict, Cardinal Rodé, Archbishop Burke and the other Cardinals and Bishops present. So many of us also felt a strong presence of Catherine of Sienna's embrace at her tomb after celebrating Mass with Archbishop Burke on the Eve of Holy Trinity. I also really felt united with all of you unable to go and experienced our union in the Order of Virgins-- which means you were there spiritually with us sharing in the graces!! I pray a double portion for all you not able to go physically!

Elizabeth Lee, Diocese of Fall River: I would like to thank Judith and all my other sisters for their hard work in making the International Congress in Rome possible. I drew strength from seeing so many virgins of Christ come together from 52 countries, and sharing how they live out their vocations in the world. It was a great joy for me to witness the many bishops and cardinals who participated in the congress and who powerfully affirmed the gift of our vocation within the Church and on behalf of the Church. I was also affected by the priests, bishops and cardinals who were themselves deeply moved by the presence of so many consecrated virgins seeking to draw ever closer to Christ. They, along with Pope Benedict, encouraged us to faithfully and vigorously continue our mission of being brides of Christ in order to give love and hope to the world. "We are one body in Christ," rang true in our hearts.

Renée Schmitt, Luxemburg: *note: Renée gave permission to publish this spontaneous email she sent recently:* Thank you so much, Judith, for your unexpected mail. I feel so much more in communion with the virgins over the world since our Congress in Rome. These days have been a great grace for us and an important moment for our local churches, concerning consecrated life. By sharing our experiences, studying together the roots of consecrated virginity lived in the world, and by receiving testimonies from all over the world, we made a real experience of Catholic Life. (By the way, I think for Western Europe our American sisters have been a particular encouragement. I showed your DVD these days to a Jesuit-father in Luxemburg. Pictures can be so helpful. Thanks also so much to Archbishop R. Burke. His presence was so encouraging.) I think you share my joy and you understand that all this is wonderful and fantastic for a small country like ours to be in contact with others. Naturally I will share information with my 2 other sisters of Luxemburg and I will remain in contact with my French-speaking sisters and my good German neighbors. United "over the ocean" in Christ, our Beloved, Renée M. Schmit renee.schmit@cathol.lu

Barb Sweciak, Diocese of LaCrosse: You asked for reflections on the congress in Rome and I was considering that the theme of this June issue of "The Lamp" is the Sacred Heart: One thought I had was on the presentation by Fr. Landry on the year of St. Paul. St. Paul calls us to "imitate him as he imitates Christ," the great love and drive St. Paul had for the love of Jesus. Fr. Landry called us to reflect upon the life of St. Paul, and his conversion from a false sense of holiness to a true sense of holiness. He also asked us to reflect on the Marian aspect of our lives, our receptivity. This truly is a great grace to ponder as we try to cooperate with His great gift of consecration as virgins in the world. May we ponder so deeply these truths of His love and self-emptying that we truly become the beacons of light Our Holy Father challenged us to be.

from the President's journal

My dear sisters in Christ,

I am full of emotions of every sort as I write today, emotions of both joy and sadness at the news of Archbishop Burke's appointment to Rome. His depth of love for our vocation has been evident over these twelve or so years that he has served as Episcopal Moderator of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins. But a new dimension of this love appeared during our Congress in Rome, in the heart of the Church. There we witnessed not only his profound love for the Order of Virgins, but also the love of the Order of Virgins for him. There in Rome consecrated virgins from countries throughout the world adopted him as a spiritual father.

And so, my sisters, to myself and to you I find myself saying, "Rejoice in the love of the Lord!" This change is a good thing, and all good things involve the pain of transition. As the Archbishop notes in his letter to us, and as he has personally assured me, he won't forget the Order of Virgins, nor will he forget the consecrated virgins of the United States. I believe and trust in the providential love of our Divine Spouse that this transition will bear much fruit for the Church and for the Order of Virgins in both the worldwide Church and the United States.

I can't answer all of your questions now about what this will mean for us, but I can say that there will be an orderly transition in our Episcopal Moderator, that we will keep you informed as we know more, and that all the work and initiatives our Association has in place will continue, God-willing. Jesus Himself has laid a firm foundation for this vocation in the Church of the United States, and we rest in Him.

This June newsletter is full of important information. As you read and begin to digest it, don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions.

We rely upon your prayers as we strive to follow our Divine Spouse and carry out the objectives He's entrusted to our Association: to foster communion among consecrated virgins living in the United States; to promote an accurate understanding of the vocation of consecrated virginity; and to encourage ongoing study of the vocation of consecrated virginity, in conjunction with consecrated virgins throughout the world.

Trusting in Jesus, our Bridegroom,

Judith Stegman

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* **Special notice and prayer request:** Aliceanne Sawyer is recovering from Quadruple Bypass Surgery. She sends her sincere thanks for all who have expressed their concern and especially for those who have offered prayers on her behalf. Please continue to pray for her recovery. Please contact Florence Sundberg (SundFls2957@aol.com) for current updates and news on contacting Aliceanne..
* **Recent Consecration:** Diane Zervos, June 28, 2008, Archdiocese of Chicago, His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, OMI.

Special Notice Following is the text of an important letter distributed to all those who attended the Rome 2008 Congress-Pilgrimage, concerning the publication of the proceedings of the Rome 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage for Consecrated Virgins:

JUNE 2008

To: Participants in the Rome 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins
Re: Publication of Congress Proceedings

Dear sisters in Christ:

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ! Just one month ago we were together in Rome celebrating love for our Bridegroom in union with the universal Church, celebrating even as we struggled with travel and communication challenges. The time together was precious as we deepened in understanding and appreciating the distinct identity of the ecclesial vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world.

Many of you have asked how and when you will be able to obtain printed copies of the proceedings of the Congress, including the address of our Holy Father and our introduction to him, the conferences, homilies, country reports, testimonies, address on the Pauline year, and closing remarks by Cardinal Franc Rodé.

With gratitude to Cardinal Rodé and the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, we are happy to report that the Congress proceedings will be published by the Congregation and will be available at a future date through the Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Cardinal Rodé has asked Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, the Congregation's delegate for the Congress-Pilgrimage, to supervise the publication, and he has asked Judith Stegman to collect all of the texts for submission to the Congregation.

This official publication of Congress proceedings by the Vatican is a tangible sign of ecclesial encouragement for the authentic renewal of the Order of Virgins in today's Church. Details are still being arranged, but we anticipate that the publication will be available in at least the five languages spoken at the Congress. The publication of such an important volume, in multiple languages, will take time, and we will post periodic publication progress reports on the Rome 2008 Congress-Pilgrimage website: www.ordovirginum.info.

At the direction of the Congregation, no publication of Congress texts will be permitted by any other source before the official publication by the Vatican.

We hope that your return to daily life has been spiritually enriched by your experience in Rome and we expect that each of us looks forward to nurturing new friendships in Christ.

Your sisters in Christ,

Gloria Irene Álvaro Sanz (gialva47@yahoo.es)

Elena Bolchi (elenabolchi@yahoo.com)

Maria Luisa Öfele (moeefe.ord@bistum-regensburg.de)

Yolande Salmon (yolande.salmon@free.fr)

Judith Stegman (jstegman@voyager.net)

See page 6 for the English translation of the Holy Father's address on May 15, 2008 at the Special Audience for the Consecrated Virgins attending the Congress!

And a long p.s.:

I can't help but also speak a word of gratitude and praise for the consecrated virgins of the United States who attended and worked so hard for the success of our international Congress-Pilgrimage to Rome. Risking the probability that I'll forget to name someone individually, I still want to mention some names: Isabel Bettwy, who worked tirelessly to arrange the travel and many practical details for U.S. pilgrims, and extended herself to even design and layout the conference program in all languages; Magalis Aguilera, who prepared our U.S. table which made available to worldwide attendees many English-language resources (DVD, audiotapes, Information packets, etc.); Mary Kay Lacke, who spent untold hours in advance of the Congress preparing French to English translations and prepared and delivered the report on the state of the vocation in the United States; Barb Swieciak, who stepped in and organized from start to finish the registration process for consecrated virgins as they arrived at the Congress; Therese Ivers (candidate in Rome) who gathered supplies, transported items via taxi, and otherwise showed up to help as needed; Elizabeth Lee who knowledgeably and prudently represented the U.S. at a round-table discussion; Florence Sundberg, who stood ready to assist in any possible way, often negotiating for us medical and practical assistance; Sabina Boet, who spent many hours and late evenings working at my computer on schedules and negotiating languages for participants needing help; Nicole Bettini, also for her late night help at my computer; Shalina Stilley and Katie Gesto for their solid assistance to Magalis as U.S. ambassadors at our table with English-language materials; Julie Taube, for her valiant work in stepping in last minute to plan English-language liturgies; and Susan Munroe who graciously served at the registration table at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum. None of these tasks was an easy effort! And, honestly, to each and every U.S. virgin I haven't mentioned, for the prayerful, joyful, patient witness you gave as brides of Christ. These were memorable days!

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS
IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS-PILGRIMAGE
OF THE ORDO VIRGINUM (THE ORDER OF VIRGINS)**

Clementine Hall
Thursday, 15 May 2008

Very Dear Sisters,

I greet and welcome with joy each one of you, consecrated with the "*solemn consecration as a bride of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (*Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity for Women Living in the World [RCV]*, n. 17), on the occasion of the International Pilgrimage and Congress of the *Ordo Virginum*, for which you are gathered in Rome during these days. In particular, I greet and thank Cardinal Franc Rodé for his cordial greeting and his dedication to this initiative, while I address my heartfelt thanks to the Organizing Committee. In choosing the theme for these days you were inspired by one of my affirmations which sums up what I have already had the opportunity to say concerning your state as women who live consecrated virginity in the world: *A gift in the Church and for the Church*. In this light I would like to strengthen you in your vocation and invite you to develop, from day to day, your understanding of a charism that is as luminous and fruitful in the eyes of the faith as it is obscure and futile in those of the world.

Imitate the Mother of God; desire to be called and to be handmaids of the Lord" (*RCV*, n. 16). The Order of Virgins is a special expression of consecrated life that blossomed anew in the Church after the Second Vatican Council (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 7). Its roots, however, are ancient; they date back to the dawn of apostolic times when, with unheard of daring, certain women began to open their hearts to the desire for consecrated virginity, in other words, to the desire to give the whole of their being to God, which had had its first extraordinary fulfilment in the Virgin of Nazareth and her "yes". In the thought of the Fathers Mary was the prototype of Christian virgins and their perception highlighted the newness of this new state of life, to which a free choice of love gave access.

"They have chosen you [Lord] above all things; may they find all things in possessing you" (cf. *RCV*, n. 24). Your charism must reflect the intensity but also the freshness of its origins. It is founded on the simple Gospel invitation: "He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (Mt 19: 12), and on St Paul's recommendations of virginity for the Kingdom (I Cor 7: 25-35). Yet the whole of the Christian mystery shines out in it. When your charism came into being it did not take shape in accordance with specific ways of life. Rather, it was institutionalized little by little until it became a true and proper solemn, public consecration, conferred by the Bishop in an evocative liturgical rite which made the consecrated woman the *sponsa Christi*, an image of the Church as Bride.

Dearest friends, your vocation is deeply rooted in the particular Church to which you belong: it is your Bishops' task to recognize the charism of virginity in you, to consecrate you and, possibly, to encourage you on your way, in order *to teach you fear of the Lord*, as they commit themselves to do during the solemn liturgy of consecration. From the sphere of the Diocese with its traditions, its Saints, its values, its limits and its problems you broaden your horizons to the universal Church, sharing above all in her liturgical prayer, which is also entrusted to you so that "*the praise of our heavenly Father be always on your lips; pray without ceasing*", (*RCV*, n. 28). In this way your prayerful "I" will gradually be enlarged, until there is no longer anything except a great "we" in the prayer. This is ecclesial prayer and the true liturgy. May you open yourselves in your dialogue with God to a dialogue with all creatures, for whom you will find you are mothers, mothers of the children of God (cf. *RCV*, n. 28).

However, your ideal, truly lofty in itself, demands no special external change. Each consecrated person normally remains in her own life context. It is a way that seems to lack the specific characteristics of religious life, and above all that of obedience. For you, however, love becomes the *sequela*: your charism entails a total gift to Christ, an assimilation of the Bridegroom who implicitly asks for the observance of the evangelical counsels in order to keep your fidelity to him unstained (cf. *RCV*, n. 26). Being with Christ demands interiority, but at the same time opens a person to communicating with the brethren: your mission is grafted on this. An essential "rule of life" defines the commitment that each one of you assumes, with the Bishop's consent, at both the spiritual and existential levels. These are personal journeys. There are among you different approaches and different ways of living the gift of consecrated virginity and this becomes much more obvious in the course of an international meeting such as this, which has gathered you together during these days. I urge you to go beyond external appearances, experiencing the mystery of God's tenderness which each one of you bears in herself and recognizing one another as sisters, even in your diversity.

The Holy Father's Address continues on page 7

May 15, 2008 Address of the Holy Father continued:

Our Holy Father

That your whole life may be a faithful witness of God's love and a convincing sign of the kingdom of heaven" (RCV, n. 17). Take care always to radiate the dignity of being a bride of Christ, expressing the newness of Christian existence and the serene expectation of future life. Thus, with your own upright life you will be stars to guide the world on its journey. The choice of virginal life, in fact, is a reference to the transient nature of earthly things and an anticipation of future rewards. Be witnesses of attentive and lively expectation, of joy and of the peace that characterizes those who abandon themselves to God's love. May you be present in the world, yet pilgrims bound for the Kingdom. Indeed, the consecrated virgin is identified with that bride who, in unison with the Spirit, invokes the coming of the Lord: "The Spirit and the Bride say "Come" (Rv 22: 17).

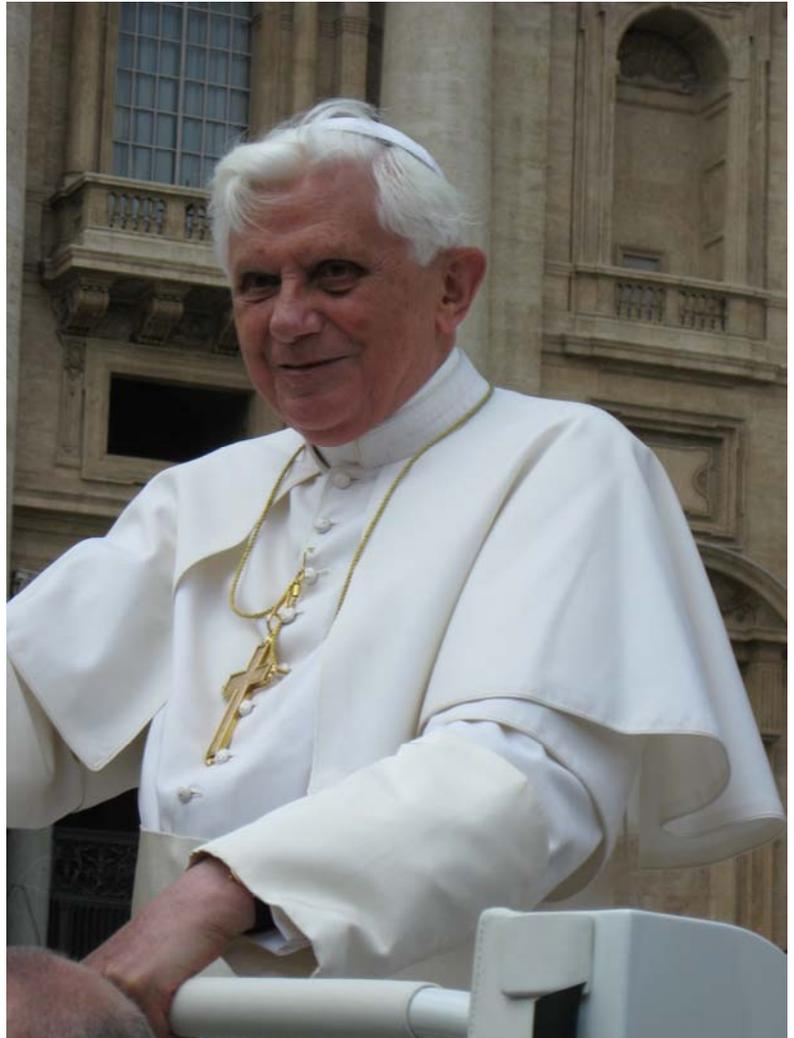
As I take my leave of you I entrust you to Mary; and I make my own the words of St Ambrose, who sung the praises of Christian virginity, addressing them to you: "May there be in each one the soul of Mary to magnify the Lord; may there be in each one the Spirit of Mary to exult in God. If there is only one Mother of Christ according to the flesh, Christ on the other hand, according to the faith, is the fruit of all, since every soul receives the Word of God so that, immaculate and immune to vice, she may preserve her chastity with irreproachable modesty" (*Comment on St Luke*, 2, 26: PL 15, 1642).

With this heartfelt wish, I bless you.

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May 28, 2008, English edition of the L'Osservatore Romano.

This edition contains an article about the private audience the consecrated virgins had with Pope Benedict XVI while attending the Rome 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins. The edition also contains the full text of the address he gave to the consecrated virgins during that audience. These papers will be made available to you through the Association for \$2.50 each, plus mailing costs. More details about how to order your copy of this edition will be in the next newsletter, or send an email to info@consecratedvirgins.org

United States Association of Consecrated Virgins

300 West Ottawa Street
Lansing, Michigan 48933-1577
USA

Fax: 253-270-5507

E-mail:
info@consecratedvirgins.org
President@consecratedvirgins.org

● www.consecratedvirgins.org

Characteristics of the Call to Consecrated Virginity By Diane Christine Farr

It is important for us to realize that if we have recognized the call to consecrated virginity, it is because Christ has specifically revealed Himself to us as our Bridegroom. It is not something that we have dreamed up or figured out on our own. We truly find in the Sacred Heart of Jesus the heart of our Bridegroom who has drawn us in divine love to a more perfect union with Himself. This is a very serious transformation that God wishes to bring about in our lives. Our heart must be patterned after the Sacred Heart of our beloved Jesus so that as His brides we may respond with generosity of spirit to the words of others.

It is vital that we consider the fact that we have been consecrated as sacred persons belonging entirely to Jesus. We value and treasure the sacredness of holy virginity for we perceive its beauty reflected in the divine gaze of our Spouse. We find a supernatural joy in this special life of virginity that we share with our beloved Jesus. We cherish and cultivate our love for this precious gift as a secret garden where we receive and embrace our divine Spouse.

The beauty of Our Lady's life of perpetual virginity centered in God is made present in the world through the solemn consecration of our own virginity. Thus our love for the mother of God will be unique.

Given its nature and the scope of its consciousness the consecration of virgins is uniquely distinct and greater than other commitments many of us have made in the Church; such as third orders. This supreme grace is the umbrella under which everything else is undertaken.

USACV Elections Fall 2008

One Council position, At-Large Representative, will open January 1, 2009. We encourage 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. In summary, what you need to know for these elections:

Election Process

Written notification of a member's desire to run for an open Council position must be received by midnight on Friday, October 24, 2008. Details of the election process will be announced in the next newsletter.

Position Terms, Descriptions and Responsibilities

At Large Representative

Term: January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2011

Eligibility to run for office (Article III Section D3): Open to any current voting member who has been a member or actively involved in the Association for the two previous years.

Duties (Article V Section A):

To collaborate with other Council members in the governance of the USACV in accord with the provisions of the organizational statutes, with particular focus on the ecclesial objectives (Article II) of the Association.

To make every effort to attend the annual membership meeting and the annual Council meeting held with the Episcopal Moderator. To participate in other Council meetings or discussions as needed.

If serving as the Council representative on a standing committee, to facilitate ongoing communication between the Council and the committee.

If elected as an At-Large Representative, to make every effort to accept an appointment as Vice President (Article V Section C) or Secretary (Article V, Section D), recognizing that some responsibilities of the offices may be delegated to others (Article IV, Section A).

Other Notes :

Council members rely heavily on email to facilitate communication, since we are geographically in all parts of the United States.

The Association's travel budget currently covers accommodations and meals for Council members during the annual Council meeting with our Episcopal Moderator.

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!

Our vocation is lived in the world so we must take care to nourish our love for Jesus with set times of silence and contemplative prayer, especially before the Blessed Sacrament. The Holy Spirit, working in our souls, forms us in true holiness leading us ever more deeply into mystical union with God.

The bride of Christ aspires to great intimacy with the Heart of Jesus that she may come to love and know Him more deeply and always listen for the inspiration of His divine Heart