

February 22, 2024 — Chair of Saint Peter

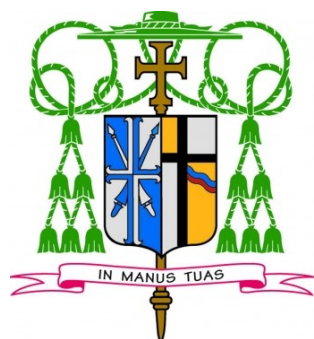
To the Members of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins,

As we celebrate the Chair of St. Peter, it would be good for us to read and reflect on the First Letter of St. Peter in the New Testament. It is probably certain that few of us spend much time on this letter. It was written from Rome to the suffering Christians in north central Turkey. Basically, it is a letter which calls on the readers to celebrate the solid foundation of their Baptism even as they live in a difficult world. The readers are not wealthy or powerful. In fact, they are the opposite. Perhaps, we can find ourselves in the verses of this letter and appreciate the encouragement which St. Peter gives us. Each of us was consecrated to the Lord in our Baptism and the subsequent consecration of virginity builds on that. Let us make sure the foundation is solid. Blessings on all of you.

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Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Earl Boyea

Most Reverend Earl Boyea
Bishop of Lansing

By Dr. Magalis Aguilera, Psy.D.
edited by Dr. Judith M. Stegman, JCD

Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter,
Apostle and First Pope of the Church.

Five feasts or festivals in the calendar of the Roman Catholic Church involve honors paid to Peter, and in each the name of Paul is also associated. Chronologically, on January 18 in Rome (later transferred to February 22), and on February 22 in Antioch, is celebrated the festival of the Cathedra Petri (Latin: “Chair of Peter”). June 29 marks the festival of Peter and Paul, ranking among the 12 most important celebrations of the Roman Catholic Church. The escape of Peter from his chains is celebrated on August 1, and lastly, the dedications of the basilicas of Peter and Paul, commemorating their construction by the emperor Constantine, are celebrated in the festival of November 18.

The Church commemorates the Chair of Saint Peter with a feast day because Peter is said to have been raised on this day to the seat of honor in Antioch.

There are three kinds of “chairs”: the *royal* chair, or throne, 2 Sam. 23:8: “David sitting in the chair”; the *priestly* chair, I Kings 1:9: “Now Eli the priest was sitting on a stool before the door of the temple of the Lord”; and the *magisterial* or professional chair, Mt.23:2: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on the chair of Moses.” Saint Peter sat on the *royal* chair because he was first among all kings—his dignity coming from His Master the King of Heaven and Earth; on the *priestly* chair because he was the shepherd of all clerics as his Master was the priest among all the priests, and on the *magisterial* chair because he was the teacher of all Christians following the triple command of His Master: Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.” “Feed my lambs,” He told him. A second time He asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord,” he said to Him, “you know that I love you.” “Shepherd my sheep,” He told him. He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

“Feed my sheep,” Jesus said. “Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don’t want to go.” He said this to indicate by

what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, “Follow me.” Peter followed his Master and Lord to the same cross where he gave up his life for the Spouse of the Church, His Master and Friend.

Our Lord Jesus Christ began to preach about the Kingdom of God when he was 30 years old, “Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Mt. 4:13–17).

At that same time, Simon, Son of John, was about 28 years of age, and married. He was later named by Jesus Christ as the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church. He was Patriarch of Antioch after the persecution, and served as head of the apostles. He died AD 64–68. We find him named as Peter the Apostle, Simon Peter, Simeon, Simon, or Cephas. When Jesus asked “who do you say that I am?” Peter replied, “you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” (Mt. 16: 15–18). The election of Peter was by the Eternal Father, and Jesus confirmed this after praying the complete night, asking His Eternal Father to reveal His will in the election of one among the 12 apostles.

There are ancient historical accounts and modern explorations of the Village of Capernaum (Kefar Nahum) and of Peter, the fisherman. Bethsaida is an ancient fishing village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where both Peter and his brother Andrew were born, as well as Philip the Apostle.

Jesus Christ’s mission was to announce the Kingdom of His Eternal Father. When he called Simon, Peter changed his natural family to become an extension of Jesus’ mission. Jesus called Peter to be the rock upon which He would found the Church as the visible sign of His salvation for all human beings called to conversion and entrance to the Eternal Kingdom. To know the exact age when Peter was called we have to consider that Jesus Christ was born c. 6 to 4 BC in the Herodian kingdom, under the Roman Empire, and He died AD (Anno Domini) 30 or 33 (aged 33–38) in Jerusalem, Judea, under

the Roman Empire. Probably Peter was the eldest of the apostles and his age ranged from 28–30 years (not exactly thirty, because the “teacher or rabbi” could never be younger than the disciples.)

The power of Peter was not in Peter himself, but was granted to Him by the Eternal Father when he recognized that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. The resurrected Lord confirmed Peter’s election as He guided him to the total donation of himself to the Eternal Father’s will: on the ROCK of Jesus, who is the way, the life, and the truth He will build His Church as the Sacrament of Salvation.

Given the information supplied by the Gospel it is not unexpected that Peter should emerge immediately after Jesus’ death as the head of the earliest church. For approximately 15 years after the Resurrection, the figure of Peter dominated the community. He presided over the appointment of St Mathias as an apostle (Acts 1:23–26) to take the place of Judas, who had betrayed Christ and later died. It was Peter who first “raised his voice” and preached at Pentecost, the day when the Church began its mission to the world (Acts 1:14–39). It was Peter who served as an advocate for the apostles before the Jewish religious court in Jerusalem (Acts 4:5–22), and it was he who exercised the role of judge in the discipline of those who erred within the church (Acts 5:1–10).

Peter led the twelve apostles in extending the Church “here and there among them all” (Acts 9:32). He went first to the Samaritans (Acts 8:4–17), “who received the Holy Spirit”; in Samaria, he encountered the magician and fake healer Simon Magus (see Acts 8:9–24). Then he went to Lydda in the Plain (Acts 9:32–35), where he healed the paralyzed Aeneas. Then, at the Mediterranean coastal town of Joppa (Acts 9:36–43), he effected the cure of Tabitha (Dorcas) in the name of Christ.

He went farther north on the Mediterranean coast to Caesarea (Acts 10:1–11:18), where, through the conversion of Cornelius, “a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort” (Acts 10:1), Peter introduced Gentiles into the church. According to Jewish requirements, a Gentile convert must first become a Jew through the rite of circumcision and be acceptable as a proselyte. In accepting Cornelius and the others—who may have had some informal connection with the synagogue (Acts 10:1)—and ordering “them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48) without submission to the prior rite of circumcision, Peter introduced an innovation that ensured the opposition of the Jewish Christians and others. This independent course,

set by Peter with the blessing of “the Spirit” (Acts 10:10–15), was possibly a factor in Herod’s beheading of St. James (the brother of John) and in the arrest of Peter (Acts 12:2, 3). In prison (c. 44 AD) Peter was visited by an “angel of the Lord...and the chains fell off his hands,” and he made his escape (Acts 12:1–8). He went immediately to “the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark” (Acts 12:12). After asking them to report his escape “to James and to the brethren,” he “went to another place” (Acts 12:17).

At this point the unchallenged leadership of Peter in Jerusalem came to an end. It is not at all clear where Peter went, but it is probable that the words “to another place” referred to his family house that was being used to serve the Lord’s Church. On August 24, 2022, when a team of archeologists uncovered evidence when excavating a fifth-sixth century Byzantine basilica at the Araj archeological site located on the shores of the Sea of Galilee in Israel, the team discovered a large Greek mosaic that seems to bolster the theory that the church was built over the home of Saints Peter and Andrew. The mosaic is inscribed with a petition that asks for the intercession of St. Peter, who is referred to as “the chief and commander of the heavenly apostles.” The mosaic is over 1500 years old and they found compelling evidence that the el Araj site is the lost city of Bethsaida, what Dr. Steven Notley calls “The last lost city of the Gospels” (See Edie Heipel, “St. Peter’s house believed to have been found on shore of Sea of Galilee”, Catholic News Agency, Washington, D.C. August 24, 2022). The finding that Peter’s house was in Bethsaida, rather than Capernaum, is supported by the Gospel passage mentioning that Peter and his brother Andrew were from Bethsaida.

The excavators found that during ensuing centuries, the plastered room from the original house had been renovated and converted into the central hall of a rudimentary church. The room’s old stone walls were buttressed by a newly built two-story arch that, in turn, supported a new stone roof. The room was even replastered and painted over with floral and geometric designs of various colors. The building’s key role in understanding how Christianity began was confirmed by more than a hundred graffiti scratched into the church’s walls. Most of the inscriptions say things like “Lord Jesus Christ help thy servant” or “Christ have mercy.” They are written in Greek, Syriac or Hebrew and are sometimes accompanied by etchings of small crosses or, in one case, a boat. The excavators claim that the name of Peter is mentioned in several graffiti.

This simple church building, helpful in determining how Christianity began, survived for more than 300 years

before it was finally replaced in the fifth century by a well-built octagonal martyrium church. Octagonal martyria were built to commemorate an important site, such as the original house of Peter that once stood here. The inner sanctum of the octagonal building was built directly above the remains of the very room of the first-century house that had formed the central hall of the earlier church. Peter was persecuted in Jerusalem. The synagogue was not the place to keep his cathedra, and his own house was used as the first “Vatican” for this first pope.

Peter was the most prominent figure in the Jerusalem church up to the time of his departure from Jerusalem after his imprisonment by King Herod and his subsequent release in the New Testament account (Acts 12:1–17). For example, Paul went up to Jerusalem to consult with Peter three years after he was converted, and he remained with Peter for two weeks (Galatians 1:18, 19).

When Peter left Jerusalem, however, it appears clear to many New Testament scholars that he assumed a new missionary role from James, the Apostle. This sequence of authority is suggested by Peter’s obedience to the wishes that came from James and hence his ceasing to eat with Gentile Christians at Antioch (Galatians 2:11–14); by a final summing up of decisions made in the apostolic Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:7) by James; and later, when Peter made his departure from the home of the mother of John Mark, by the report of his whereabouts left primarily for James (Acts 12:17).

Paul first met with Peter in Jerusalem three years after his conversation. In the record of this meeting the name of Cephas (Peter) precedes that of James, although in another meeting 14 years later the name of James precedes that of Cephas (Gal. 2:9). Paul also emphasizes an incident involving himself and Peter at Antioch. Apparently, Paul had achieved some success in the difficult matter of welding the Jewish and Gentile Christians of Antioch into one congregation.

The Jewish Christians saw the sharing of food with Gentiles as quite alien to their tradition. In the absence of Paul, Peter, perhaps in his capacity as missionary, visited Antioch and ate with the united group. Later, “certain persons came from James” and opposed the united congregation’s custom of eating together. In apparent deference to James, Peter drew back and began to hold aloof, and the Jewish Christians did likewise.

When Paul returned, he upbraided Peter for what he

considered Peter’s hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11–14). This incident may have occasioned the Jerusalem Council (49 or 50 AD), in which it was settled that hereafter Paul should be “entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised” (Gal. 2:7) and Peter “for the mission to the circumcised” (Gal. 2:8).

In passing, Paul refers to a party of Cephas (1 Cor. 1:12) suggesting that a group in the church of Corinth was especially devoted to Peter, and he refers to Peter in 1 Cor. 9:5 as carrying on missionary activity accompanied by his wife. A missionary journey to Asia Minor may be suggested in the First Letter of Peter 1:1.



Tradition of Peter in Rome

Saint Peter was martyred as His Lord and Master, on the cross. The word “martyr” derives from a Greek word meaning witness. The Catholic faith proclaims that the shedding of one’s blood in fidelity to Jesus Christ is the final witness to the Faith. Peter was confirmed by our Divine Lord Jesus Christ after his resurrection and the last words in that confirmation were: “But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don’t want to go.” He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God.” (Jn. 21:18–19). Saint Peter is a witness to our Lord’s death and resurrection.

Herod Agrippa first persecuted the early Church in Jerusalem. Amidst the Pascal festivities of the year 42 AD the Jerusalemites and pilgrims who had to come to Jerusalem from other places suddenly learned that Peter had been placed under arrest. From St. Luke we know that “prayers were made without ceasing by the Church unto God for Peter.” The apostles were dispersed in that year to announce the Word. Saint Peter resisted the persecution but around A.D. 44 went to Antioch and directed the life of the church there for seven years before going to Rome (see Gal. 2:11).

Thus we see that Saint Peter headed the ancient Church hidden from the authority of Jerusalem and given strength to announce the Kingdom of His Lord from the sanctity of His resurrected Lord's command to him: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Feed my lambs," . . . "Shepherd my sheep," . . . "Feed my sheep."

The problems surrounding the residence, martyrdom, and burial of Peter are among the most complicated of all those encountered in the study of the New Testament and the early Church. This was a time of persecution and the apostolic mission of Peter was carried out in hidden places, as was the testimony of the mother of Constantine. Tradition is a stronghold for that time when Rome was the place of purification in the formal establishment of the Church, suffering both persecution and martyrdom. The absence of any reference in Acts or Romans to a residence of Peter in Rome may give pause, but what is conclusive is the holy tradition.

In a logical inference the same Peter protected his residency in Rome because he was touched by Jesus Christ to keep announcing, teaching and guiding His flock. Peter was the author of the first epistle that bears his name, in which the mention of "Babylon" in 5:13 is fairly reliable evidence that he resided at some time in the capital city. The presence of this cryptic reference witnesses at least to a tradition of the late 1st or early 2nd century with "Babylon" being a cryptic term indicating Rome. It is the understanding utilized in Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5, 6 and in the works of various Christian seers.

It follows that by the end of the 1st century there existed a tradition that Peter had lived in Rome. Further early evidence for the tradition is found in the *Letter to the Romans* by St Ignatius, the early 2nd-century bishop of Antioch. There is a tradition of a 25-year episcopate of Peter in Rome, though this is not expressed before the beginning or middle of the 3rd century. The claims that the Church of Rome was founded by Peter or that he served as its first bishop rest on evidence that is not earlier than the middle or late 2nd century. Yet the tradition establishes Peter's time there as earlier. For example, John 21:18–19 clearly refers to the death of Peter and is stated prophetically. The author of this chapter is aware of a tradition concerning the martyrdom of Peter when the apostle was an old man, with a suggested reference to crucifixion as the manner of his death. At the present time there is evidence of his death and burial in Rome.

Saint Peter's Basilica is said to have been built on the site of Peter's grave in Rome. In Roman Catholicism he is regarded as the first in the unbroken succession of popes, and Jesus' promise to give him the "keys of the kingdom"

have led to the popular perception of Peter as the gatekeeper of heaven.

The tomb of Peter can be visited in Rome! In the early 4th century the emperor Constantine (died 337 AD) with considerable difficulty erected a basilica on the Vatican Hill. The difficulty of the task, combined with the comparative ease with which this great church might have been built on level ground only a slight distance to the south, may support the contention that the emperor was convinced that the relics of Peter rested beneath the small aedicula (shrine for a small statue) over which he had erected the basilica. The task before the excavators was to determine whether or not the belief of Constantine accorded with the facts or was based merely upon a misunderstanding.

In the summer of 1968, Pope Paul VI announced that the bones of Saint Peter had at last been found and satisfactorily identified. The announcement culminated a search that had begun in February of 1939, after the burial of Pope Pius X. The high altar in Saint Peter's Basilica, consecrated by Pope Clement VIII in 1594, was built upon three earlier altars: that of Pope Callixtus in the twelfth century, Gregory the Great c 600 AD, and the original altar of Constantine, begun c. 330 AD. It was understood that all the altars were built upon the remains of Saint Peter, and there was no reason to doubt this, but no pope until Pius XII (1939 to 1958) allowed excavations, especially under the high altar.

The story of the excavations is a story of intrigue and archeological feats. For a full account, see *The Bones of St. Peter*, by John Walsh, published in 1982. Walsh summarizes eight findings that led to the 1968 declaration by Paul VI:

A "sumptuous marble housing erected by Constantine" was found, "intended to preserve forever both the true original grave of Peter and his earthly remains."

A low wall containing a marble-lined repository was constructed at the time of Constantine, with no evidence that it had ever afterward been opened.

In the repository were found parts of a human skeleton from the body of an elderly man.

Soil found on the bones in the repository showed that the bones were originally interred in the earth. Chemical analysis matched this soil to the soil in the original grave under the monument.

The bones had been wrapped in cloth of royal purple with threads of gold, reserved for a man of high dignity.

An inscription within the repository stated in Greek,

“Peter is buried in here.”

The repository was lodged in a wall, enclosing it on all sides and guarding it from flood and moisture damage known to be an issue in the area since the fourth century.

The off-center location of the repository was a concern to some, but the distance off-center was less than two feet, insignificant when compared to the size of the final basilica.

Walsh notes, “All the working materials on which the theory was based had been submitted separately to five disinterested scholars. Three were respected archeologists, two were language experts. All five, independently, gave their judgment that the procedures, and the conclusions from the evidence, were impeccable.” (Walsh, p. 127)

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Saint Peter Preaching the Gospel in the Catacombs by Jan Styka

Submissions Accepted

If you would like to submit an article or artwork for consideration in a future edition of *The Lamp*, please email it to [Amanda Schrauth](mailto:info@consecratedvirgins.org) at info@consecratedvirgins.org. We accept articles and artwork from consecrated virgins related to our vocation or related to Our Lady and the virgin saints. If you would like to write and submit a remembrance or memorial for a deceased consecrated virgin to be published in a future edition of *The Lamp*, please email it to info@consecratedvirgins.org.

Rome in 2025?

Pope Francis has chosen the motto “Pilgrims of Hope” for the 2025 Jubilee Year. The Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has announced a Jubilee of Consecrated Life to be held October 8-9, 2025, in Rome, with the title, “Pilgrims of hope, on the path to peace.” Preparatory stages are taking place now. A Jubilee Celebration for consecrated persons, by country, is also planned for February 2, 2025. Please see a letter discussing the Jubilee year plans from the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, addressed to all members of consecrated life: [DICALSAL to all members of consecrated life](#). More details to come!

Volume III of the Ordo Virginum series

Shalina Stilley, Diocese of San Diego

“Volume III, about virgin saints, continues to come along nicely and is in the editing stage at this point. If you have volunteered to write about a Saint but haven’t yet submitted it, please contact Shalina at catherinestilley@gmail.com. Artists, too, are invited to contact Shalina if you haven’t yet been in touch.

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On this celebration of the Chair of Saint Peter, this issue of *The Lamp* draws attention to the man first chosen by our Lord to lead his Church (see especially Dr. Aguilera's "Something Ancient, Something New"). As a young adult, I committed to memory a passage from Saint Peter's first Epistle. The inspired verses have guided my hope in Christ over the years as I live the vocation of consecrated virginity:

Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he who in his great mercy gave us new birth; a birth which draws its life from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; a birth to an imperishable inheritance, incapable of fading or defilement, which is kept in heaven for you who are guarded with God's power through faith; a birth to a salvation which stands ready to be revealed in the last days.

There is cause for rejoicing here. You may for a time have to suffer the distress of many trials; but this is so that your faith, which is more precious than the passing splendor of fire-tried gold, may by its genuineness lead to praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ appears. Although you have never seen him, you love him, and without seeing you now believe in him, and rejoice with inexpressible joy touched with glory because you are achieving faith's goal, your salvation. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

The words are so familiar that perhaps we pass over them with little thought. As consecrated virgins, in a particular way we are given the privilege of witnessing to the hope we have in Christ and in the life to come, where there will be no giving or taking in marriage (see Mt. 22:30, and Archbishop Schnurr's homily). In the midst of the trials of this age, we rejoice for we are guarded with God's power through faith as we await the imperishable inheritance that is in store for us in heaven. We live now in a spousal relationship with Christ that images the marriage between Jesus the Bridegroom and His Bride, the Church, a marriage from

which new Christians are born, who themselves will draw life from the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be guided by faith to the goal of salvation. Without having ever seen Christ with physical eyes, we love him and are invited to be spiritual mothers, guiding others to this faith in Christ.

Bishop Boyea reminds us that the consecration of our virginity builds on the consecration to the Lord that we have received in Baptism. It is through baptism with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that men and women are reborn as sons and daughters of God and begin the journey of faith towards their heavenly inheritance. The Church is united to Christ as Body to Head and as Bride to Bridegroom; the Church is the very fullness of Christ, in whom dwells the fullness of God (Col. 1:19) and from whose fullness all graces are bestowed (Jn. 1:16). Only through the Church are human beings able to unite themselves to Christ and in the Spirit have access to the Father, and the sacrament of baptism marks the visible and corporeal entry of a person into the Church. The waters of baptism remove all sin as the person is baptized into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3). Baptism consecrates a person as a son of God, one enabled by grace to participate in the divine nature, and one enabled by grace to receive the other sacraments. It is in this light that the consecration of our virginity to Christ builds on the consecration we have received in baptism – as a daughter of God we are able to respond to his invitation to give our virginity to him and be mystically espoused to his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Over the past days and weeks, I have been in touch with a number of consecrated virgins who are currently suffering from various physical afflictions. Each one is responding with a joy-filled trust in her Divine Spouse, and bearing her cross with a prayer for our suffering Church. Let us keep these sisters close in prayer during this Lenten season of grace.

Pray With Us! Virtual Vespers

Consecrated virgins, candidates, and friends continue to join for Virtual Vespers on various feast days and memorials of our Blessed Virgin Mother and of virgin saints. Here are the next dates – mark your calendars! A link will be sent out a few days before each session.

- Monday, **April 8**, transferred Solemnity of the Annunciation at 9pm ET (8pm CT, 7pm MT, 6pm PT).
- Friday, May 31, Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary at 8pm ET (7pm CT, 6pm MT, 7 5pm PT).

Virginity and the Kingdom of Heaven

Today we recognize and celebrate a vocation that is relatively unknown. It is the vocation of a consecrated virgin. After much prayer and spiritual direction, Ashley Roberts has discerned that this is indeed the vocation to which God is calling her. As a consecrated person, she will live in the world; she does not flee the world. Her life will be a public witness in the Church and in society. By her very life of virginity, she is witnessing her total love for her Spouse, Jesus Christ. However, it must be remembered that her life of virginity is a gift of grace. God Himself was the author of that gift, which she has kept intact and offers back to Him in total love on this day of her consecration when she states her resolve to remain a virgin forever.

The Second Vatican Council summarizes the evangelical counsel of chastity in the following words:

Chastity “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 19:12) . . . must be esteemed as an exceptional gift of grace. It uniquely frees the hearts of men and women (1 Cor. 7:32–35), so that they become more fervent in love for God and for all humanity. For this reason it is a special symbol of heavenly benefits, and for [those who consecrate themselves to perfect chastity] it is a most effective way of dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to the divine service and the works of the apostolate. (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 12)

To understand the inner logic for this new state of life, we need to start with the motive presented by Jesus: “Chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt. 19:11). In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins His public ministry with the proclamation: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand.” Thus, Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of Heaven is already in our midst. Yet, in another sense, the Kingdom of Heaven has not yet come. It is still on its way. It is for this reason that Jesus teaches us to pray in the Our Father, “Thy kingdom come.”

Now, since the Kingdom of heaven has already come and in Christ ultimate salvation is already at work in the world, it is possible that some people, having been called by God, may choose to live, here and now, as people will live in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus describes life in the Kingdom of Heaven:

The children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are deemed worthy of a place in the world to come in the resurrection from the dead, do not marry because they can no longer die, for they are like angels, and being

children of the resurrection, they are sons and daughters of God (Lk. 20: 34–36.)

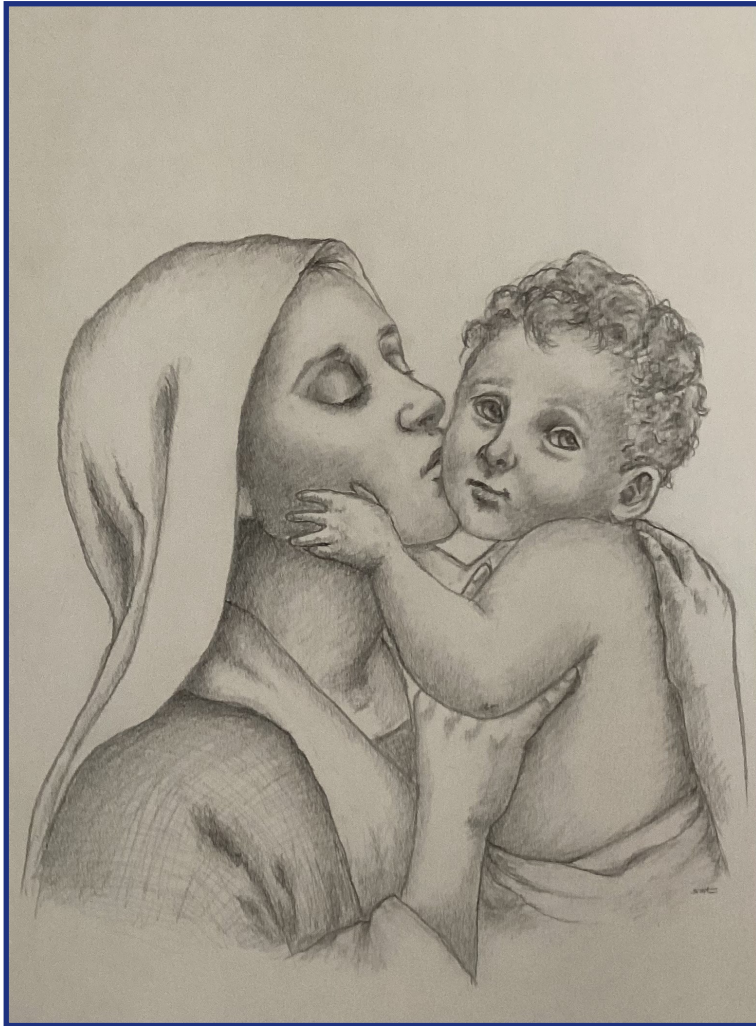
Thus, the prophetic message of virginity for the sake of the Kingdom can be stated as follows: This state of life witnesses to what the ultimate state of human beings will be, how we are destined to live in heaven. This prophetic state of life, far from being opposed to married people, is instead to their advantage. It reminds us that marriage is holy, beautiful, created by God, and redeemed by Christ. It is an image of the marriage between Christ and the Church. But that is not the whole story. Jesus tells us that in heaven, individuals neither marry nor are they given in marriage. In other words, marriage—as holy and as beautiful as it is—is a structure tied to this world and is therefore transitory. When people can no longer die, they no longer need to marry. There will be no need to “complete oneself” with another human being at the time when “God [will] be everything to everyone.” (1 Cor. 15:28)

In light of this prophetic character of virginity, we see how misleading and false is the theory that this state of life is contrary to nature and hinders men and women from being fully themselves, that is, from being a real man or woman. Rather, according to the Bible, an individual is not only what he or she is determined to be through birth, but also what he or she is called to become through the exercise of freedom in obedience to God. God creates every human being for a purpose, and to be fully human each individual must discover and embrace that vocation. To be a human being is a vocation!

On the one hand—and in a certain sense—we could say that the most “fulfilled” state of a human being is precisely to be “single for the sake of the Kingdom,” because people are not “called” to live in eternity as married couples, but rather to live in eternal relationship with God.

On the other hand, when the apostles inquired of Jesus whether virginity was a more perfect state than marriage, and Jesus made it clear that virginity in itself is not more perfect. Each of the two states of life is perfect for the person who is called to it. Both virginity and married life are God-given vocations, and those who are faithful to their vocation achieve holiness. Virginity, however, is a state of life that perhaps could be called more advanced in the sense that it more clearly approximates the definitive state toward which we are all journeying: life as it is lived in the Kingdom of Heaven. As St. Cyprian, a married man, wrote to the first Christian virgins, “What we shall be, already you have begun to be.”

Ashley Roberts, may God who has begun this good work in you bring it to fulfillment.



Artwork by
Marion Biestek

Upcoming Issues of the Lamp

May 31, 2024 Visitation of the Blessed Virgin
September 8, 2024 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin
December 12, 2024 Our Lady of Guadalupe
February 2, 2025 Feast of the Presentation
 and World Day for Consecrated Life

2024 Membership Drive Update

Due to unforeseen delays, the membership drive is off to a late start but you should see something coming in your emails relatively soon. Thanks to all for your patience.

Francesca Riddick, usacvmembership@gmail.com

USACV and International Resource Center for the *Ordo Virginum* Leadership Team Members and Officers

USACV Leadership Team

Jenna Cooper 2022-2024; Archdiocese of New York (NY).

Claire Halbur 2024-2026; Diocese of Phoenix (AZ).
(*Secretary of the USACV-IRC and USACV Online Presence*).

Elizabeth Lam 2023-2025; Diocese of Oakland (CA).
(*USACV Website*).

Joani McCann 2022-2024; Archdiocese of Boston (MA). (*Convocation Liaison*).

Francesca Riddick 2022-2024; Diocese of Joliet (IL).
(*USACV Membership and eTapestry*).

IRC Leadership Team

Magalis Aguilera; USA, Archdiocese of Miami (FL).
(*Chairperson IRC*).

Judith Stegman, President of the USACV-IRC 2019-2025; USA, Archdiocese of Miami (FL).

Maria Luisa Meza; EL SALVADOR, Diocese of Santa Ana/San Miguel.

Renu Rita Silvano; INDIA, Archdiocese of Bombay.
Two Unfilled Positions

Other USACV-IRC Services, among others

Karen Webb 2024-2026; Treasurer of the USACV-IRC, Diocese of Rochester (NY)

Mary Kay Lacke; Coordinator of the Information Conference in English, Diocese of Steubenville (OH).

Anne Gishpert; Archivist, Diocese of Pueblo (CO).

Florence Sundberg; Prayer Chain Coordinator, Archdiocese of Hartford (CT).

Amanda Schrauth; Publication of *The Lamp*, Diocese of Great Falls-Billings (MT).

Consecration Announcements

April 16, 2023 — Rebecca Sastre, at the hands of the Most Reverend David Walkowiak, Bishop of Grand Rapids (MI).

December 16, 2023 — Trimiko “Miko” Melancon, at the hands of the Most Reverend Gregory M. Aymond, Archbishop of New Orleans (LA).

December 22, 2023 — Theresa Klinkhammer, at the hands of the Most Reverend Donald Hying, Bishop of Madison (WI).

January 13, 2024 — Ashley Roberts, at the hands of the Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr, Archbishop of Cincinnati (OH).



Ashley Roberts



Rebecca Sastre, photo credit to Nico Angelys





Aubrey Coulter



Maggie Hartman, photo credit to Tessa Tillett Robbins Photography



Theresa Klinkhammer



The USACV plans to sponsor a modified convocation of consecrated virgins in 2024 as we focus on serving at the National Eucharistic Congress. Consecrated virgins are already participating in areas of the Eucharistic Revival in their own dioceses and parishes. By participating together at the Congress next July, we will give expression to the consecrated virgin's innate love for her Eucharistic Spouse.

About the National Eucharistic Congress:

<https://www.eucharisticcongress.org/>

WHEN: July 17-21, 2024

WHERE: Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, IN

WHAT:

- † A historic gathering of the Church in America
- † Five powerful days of worship, formation, and fellowship
- † A world-class lineup of speakers
- † Dynamic participation tracks



NATIONAL
**Eucharistic
Congress**

About Our Participation as Consecrated Virgins (and candidates for consecration*):

REGISTRATION:

Each of us needs to secure our own passes to the Congress, and we've been offered a discounted rate. **Please register for the Congress at this discounted rate of \$200** (usually \$299 - \$375). You may register here: www.eucharisticcongress.org/register-standard. Notes on registration questions:

- Page 1: "I am registering as" Answer: General Attendee or Group
- Page 3: "If you are attending with an organization, apostolate, or religious order, what is the name of your group?" Answer: United States Association of Consecrated Virgins.
- Page 3 or 4: "What general sessions do you plan to attend?" Answer: sign up for all the general sessions, unless you know you will not be present on a particular day.
- Page 5: choose: Individual Congress Pass \$375.
- Page 7: enter the group code: *contact Lorraine Manlolo for the group code*. The price will then change to the reduced rate plus a \$6 service charge and you'll be prompted to enter credit card information.

Please be in touch with Lorraine Manlolo when you register for the conference, or if you have registered through another organization. Let Lorraine know if you are interested in housing at the retreat center (see below). [PLEASE REGISTER SOON FOR THE NEC](#).

HOUSING:

Housing for the Congress is very limited, and the USACV is fortunate to have secured 40 rooms at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, where the cost for four nights, including breakfast and dinner, is \$450. Thanks be to God that we have received offers of financial help for consecrated virgins who may need assistance in order to attend, so, with this in mind, virgins who wish to attend should register for the Congress and reserve retreat center housing, even if unable to afford the full cost. Just let us know that you have need of some financial assistance. **After you register for the Congress at the discounted rate, please email Lorraine to let her know your intention regarding housing (Lorraine.manlolo@gmail.com)**. We need to have your reservations soon. We currently have 26 reservations for housing. If you have emailed Lorraine about housing and have not received a confirmed RSVP email, please email her again and cc Judith.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

The general Congress schedule can be found at: <https://www.eucharisticcongress.org/schedule>. For consecrated virgins staying at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, we plan each day to have Lauds, breakfast, and Mass at the retreat center, head to the stadium for the Impact Sessions, Expo, and Breakout Sessions, go back to the retreat center for dinner, and then arrange transportation for anyone who desires to go back to the Congress for the evening revival sessions. A more detailed schedule will be available as our plans become firmer.

Keynote speakers for the Congress have been scheduled and the organizers are still working on volunteering opportunities, which we hope to learn more about soon. We are also exploring the possibility of having adoration/holy hour during the times the adoration chapel is available, and of leading daily Vespers.

The Serra Club has graciously paid for the USACV (*Ordo Virginum*) to be a NEC Sponsor, entitling us to a 10x10 booth space, our sponsor name listed in the official program, and other benefits. Please be in touch with Lorraine or Jenna Chang if you would like to assist with our booth!

NEXT STEPS:

- † Obtain your Congress Pass (do this now; see “Registration” above for instructions).
- † Let Lorraine know your housing plans, and especially if you plan to join at the retreat center. (Do this after obtaining your Congress Pass; see “Housing” above).
- † Register for the convocation and service opportunities (we will open this step as soon as possible, as more details are arranged with the Congress planners).
- † Plan for the cost. The total cost of this 2024 modified convocation is likely higher than other convocations (\$200 pass + \$450 housing + transportation + misc). If you anticipate needing financial assistance, please let Lorraine (or Judith) know as soon as possible. Likewise, if you are able to donate to help others, please let us know. (We also understand that scholarships are available through The Solidarity Fund <https://www.eucharisticcongress.org/solidarity-fund>)
- † One more note: please let Lorraine know if you will attending the NEC with your parish, diocese, or another group, and would like to be updated on USACV plans with the thought of possibly participating in service opportunities or our prayer together.

NOTES:

- * Who is invited to this 2024 United States Convocation of Consecrated virgins?
All consecrated virgins are warmly invited, as are candidates for consecration who are referred by their dioceses.

Questions? Please contact one of our convocation 2024 planning team members: Lorraine Manlolo (lorraine.manlolo@gmail.com); Carolyn Blaszczyk (pacv2008@gmail.com), Jenna Chang (jgchang1@gmail.com), or Joani McCann (joani.mccann@gmail.com).



Grounds of Our Lady of Fatima Retreat Center.



Lucas Oil Stadium



Photos from the recent Eucharistic Congress in Auriesville, New York (October 20–22, 2023). Photos courtesy of Jeffrey Bruno.



Consecrated virgins who celebrate significant anniversaries during 2024 are invited to submit an anniversary reflection for *The Lamp*. These anniversary reflections are popular among our readers as they convey a personal look at life lived as a bride of Christ in the *Ordo virginum*.

5 Years

Mary Seguin
consecrated March 25, 2019
Diocese of Gaylord (MI)

"I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word." (Mary's words to the Angel Gabriel.) For the past 5 years, since my consecration on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 2019, I have tried to incorporate Our Lady's words as my own. In this Marriage Covenant everything is offered to Jesus who transforms what is offered making it more beautiful, purifying all that is not worthy of Him. I have gratitude to God for my vocation which fills my heart to overflowing.

Being a formator in our Carmelite community, I find that the Holy Spirit is giving me everything I need to fulfill this task and also as moderator of our community. He has stretched me beyond what I thought possible and in this I find joy! Saint Therese said that she wanted to be love in the heart of the Church and in being love, she was to be everything. As bride of Jesus, my Spouse, I seek to be love in the heart of the Church drawing others to Christ.

Deborah Sucich
consecrated July 13, 2019
Diocese of Brooklyn (NY)

As I approach the 5th anniversary of my consecration this year, I am so grateful for all of the graces and blessings of which our Divine Spouse has generously blessed me and my apostolates. My life in the world has been blessed with so many new friendships as a Catholic Worker in New York City and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. My deep gratitude extends to my long-time friendships with those who have continued to support and inspire me on this



journey. My new mission to bring Catholic Worker to Staten Island has been abundantly blessed and I look forward to the many miracles God will grant through the Servant of God, Dorothy Day as her cause for canonization progresses. The Goretti Group New York Chapter has been blessed with increased membership and several young adults have stepped up into leadership positions. Please pray with me for generous support as we fundraise with several major events for both of these apostolates.

May God continue to keep us always under His loving gaze and unite us under the mantle of our loving mother, Mary, all for His glory. Thank you for your prayers for me at this special time.

The below picture was used in a recent article about the Staten Island Catholic Worker: <https://catholicworker.org/the-catholic-worker-returns-to-staten-island/>. In the picture, some local students and their families collected winter apparel that we distributed at our first community meal on New Year's Day.



A Note from the Archivist

Anne Gishpert, USACV-IRC archivist, reminds consecrated virgins who have not done so to please send her a copy of your consecration certificate (providing this copy also enables United States virgins to be full voting members of the USACV). Anne also keeps the USACV "family" albums, which include mementos from consecrations. You are warmly invited to send Anne the program, invitation, holy cards, photos, or other items from your consecration. Anne especially asks those consecrated in recent years to send these so that she can update our albums. The "family" albums travel each year to our convocation, and always bring smiles and memories. You can email Anne at anne.gishpert@gmail.com.

Background:

After much prayer and planning, at the request of consecrated virgins and diocesan representatives, the USACV began hosting a quarterly virtual candidate discussion group. The purpose of the discussion group is to facilitate an opportunity where aspirants and candidates for our beautiful vocation are able to meet regularly to learn more deeply about different tenets of the life and charism of consecrated virginity as a way of life. We have also found that many consecrated virgins were interested in participating, to deepen their own understanding of the vocation and to foster community within the *Ordo virginum*!

Using the USACV's GoTo platform, we have held two discussions to date. On November 6, 2023, consecrated virgin Elizabeth Black of the Diocese of Grand Rapids (MI) presented on "Following the Lamb": a History of the Vocation, and on February 5, 2024, consecrated virgin Taryn Watkins presented on "Union with the Lamb": Eucharistic and Ecclesial Dimension of the Vocation. The presentations and discussions have been well received by attendees.

Invitation:

This message is meant particularly for diocesan personnel who work with candidates for the *Ordo virginum*, and for those who are accepted by their dioceses as aspirants or candidates for the vocation of consecrated virginity lived *in saeculo*, that is, in the ordinary circumstances of life.

The United States Association of Consecrated Virgins sponsors a quarterly opportunity for candidates for the *Ordo virginum*, who are referred by a diocesan representative, to participate in a virtual candidate discussion group on topics relevant to the vocation of consecrated virginity. This discussion group is limited to those who are referred by their dioceses, and is intended for those who have already attended an Information Conference sponsored by the USACV. It is meant to be a supplement, and not a substitute, for diocesan-based formation. Consecrated virgins are also welcome to participate.

2023–2024 Dates, Times, and Topics: 6:30pm to 7:30 pm MT

- † May 6, 2024 "Bride within the Flock": Communal Dimension and Spiritual Maternity. Presenter: Claire Halbur.
- † August 12, 2024 "Living for the Lamb *in saeculo*". Presenter: Dr. Judith Stegman, JCD.

2024—2025 Cycle, Dates, Topics, Presenters, TBA. Ideas? Please contact info@consecratedvirgins.org.

Registration:

Registration information and online registration forms are available here: [OV Candidate Discussion Group Registration](#).

Questions? Please contact info@consecratedvirgins.org.



The Apostle Saint Peter by Peter Paul Rubens

The USACV-IRC is pleased to announce the 2024 Information Conference on the *Ordo Virginum*, which will be held in a virtual format once again. The conference includes prayer together. Testimonials from consecrated virgins, presentations on significant aspects of the vocation of consecrated virginity lived *in saeculo*, and times for questions and answers.

This conference is a valuable resource for anyone with a serious interest in discovering more about the vocation of consecrated virginity, including those who are pursuing the consecration as aspirants or candidates; diocesan delegates for consecrated life; diocesan vocation directors; other diocesan representatives responsible for discernment and formation for this vocation; and consecrated virgins themselves.

The Information Conference is a prerequisite for participation in Candidate Discussion Groups (see page 15).

2024 Virtual Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity

Dates: Friday to Sunday, September 6 to 8, 2024

Time: 1:00-6:00pm ET each day

Format: Webinar

Coordinators: Judith Stegman and Leadership Teams of the USACV and IRC

Presentation topics:

- † Overview of Vocations in the Catholic Church, and the Ecclesial Identification of the *Ordo virginum*
- † The Liturgical Rite of Consecration and the Marian Dimension of the Vocation
- † The Liturgy of the Hours and Prayer Life of the Consecrated Virgin
- † Historical Aspects of the Consecration of Virgins; Virgin Saints
- † Sacred Scripture and the Witness of the *Ordo Virginum*, in *Ecclesiae sponsae imago*
- † Mystical Espousal to Christ, the Son of God
- † Living *in saeculo* and in the Local Church
- † Personal Testimonies of Consecrated Virgins Serving on the Team
- † Psychological Maturity for Living the Virginal Vocation
- † Prerequisites for Admission to the Virginal Consecration
- † Stages of Preparation for Admission to the *Ordo virginum*
- † About Associations, the *Ordo virginum*, and Next Steps

Online registration is not yet open. To pre-register, please email: info@consecratedvirgins.org.

Recordings Available!

Links to recordings from the virtual sessions of the 2022 United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins (held in La Crosse) and the 2022 Virtual Information Conference on the *Ordo virginum*, are now available. If you attended a particular conference in person or virtually, and would like to receive a link to the conference you attended, at no charge, please email info@consecratedvirgins.org with your request. If you did not attend the conference, links to the recordings are available for purchase through our online store at consecratedvirgins.org.

