

Diocesan woman becomes consecrated virgin

BY [HANNAH HEIL](#)

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Diocesan seminarian Christopher Dixon lights a lamp held by Diane LeMay as part of the Rite of a Consecrated Virgin on July 26 at New Albany Church of the Resurrection. Photo courtesy Abigail Pitones

Diane LeMay, garbed in a white dress, walked down the aisle at New Albany Church of the Resurrection on July 26. The groom who awaited her at the end of the aisle was Jesus Christ.

That day, LeMay professed vows before the congregation and was consecrated as a virgin. Similar to vows recited in the sacrament of matrimony or holy orders for the priesthood, LeMay made a lifelong vow to God. Hers was a vow of perpetual virginity, committing herself entirely to the Lord as a bride of Christ.

“I’ve always felt open to the Lord, and now I’m His,” she said. “He’s going to direct me like a spouse would direct me, and I will trust that.”

Bishop Earl Fernandes served as the celebrant of the liturgy. Father Paul Keller, director of divine worship for the Diocese of Columbus, served as the master of ceremonies. The Mass was concelebrated by priests of the diocese including Father Denis Kigozi, pastor of Church of the Resurrection.

The Rite of Consecration of a Virgin is a sacramental. Sacramentals are sacred signs that bear resemblance to the sacraments, in that they signify effects of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.



Diane LeMay prostrates herself before the altar at New Albany Church of the Resurrection. Photo courtesy Abigail Pitones

The Rite of Consecration of a Virgin is one of the oldest sacramentals in the Catholic Church. Sts. Agatha, Agnes, Cecilia and Lucy are among the saints in the early Church who are recognized as consecrated virgins.

The rite was restored in 1970 by Pope Paul VI as a result of the Second Vatican Council. The pope recognized the order of virgins as a form of consecrated life.

Women who are consecrated as virgins living in the world support themselves by earning a living and are responsible for praying for their diocese and the clergy.

“The primary responsibility for consecrated virgins is prayer and prayer for the diocese, prayer for religious, prayer for the priests, the pope – all of the called, all of the people God has chosen to lead the Church – and to pray for the body of Christ, to pray for the Church and her role in people’s lives, the way that she leads us to salvation,” LeMay said.

Consecrated virgins are a living image of the Church's love for her Spouse, Jesus.

“I don't belong to the world,” LeMay said. “And so, my role as ‘bride of Christ’ is to – like any other spouse would talk about their spouse to other people – part of my role is to evangelize what Jesus means to me, what He's done in my life. I'm no different than anybody else.

“I'm fully committed to the Lord. There's nobody else I love, but as far as the Liturgy of the Hours, going to daily Mass, going to frequent confession, all of those things, I have already integrated. So, the day-to-day life with the Lord isn't going to change, but my ministries will change as the Lord directs me.”



Diane LeMay receives a blessing from Bishop Earl Fernandes. Photo courtesy Abigail Pitones

Consecrated virgins imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, the spouse of the Holy Spirit, in that they follow her model of giving her “yes” to God.

“As a consecrated virgin, Mary is our model,” LeMay said. “She is our patroness of the vocation.”

As a consecrated virgin in the Diocese of Columbus, LeMay will continue to meet with Bishop Fernandes, who serves as her guide.

“They call for at least once a year with the bishop to discern where there might be a need that he sees that I may not see or not know of that I can help in the diocese with, but I’ll be dedicated to the diocese,” she said. “As far as where my ministry will be, it will be in the Diocese of Columbus.”

LeMay’s path to consecrated virginity was spent, for many years, discerning her vocation and included significant moments of forgiveness and surrender to the Lord before finding it.

LeMay was raised in a Catholic family and grew up in Lancaster. She was baptized as an infant and attended Catholic schools from elementary through high school. LeMay thought she might be called to consecrated religious life, she said, as she was greatly influenced by the Dominican order, with many of her grade-school teachers being Dominican sisters.

“I knew that I wanted to be a doctor, but I had a feeling that I was being called to live a religious life,” LeMay said.

After earning a bachelor’s degree and graduating from Ohio State University, LeMay attended medical school at Wright State University and had a 26-year career in medicine.

“I left medicine because I had to discern this call,” she said. “It never left me. I have always been immersed in the faith, immersed with life-sustaining Holy Eucharist, and I knew I had to discern it. The field of medicine was too chaotic and too busy to really give the time to the Lord that I knew it would take for discernment.”



Consecrated virgin Diane LeMay

In 2014, LeMay left her work as a pediatrician. She returned to school and earned a master's degree in theology from Ohio Dominican University. She began teaching the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults classes and began training to become a spiritual director, which she completed two years ago. She was also involved with prison ministry.

In the midst of discerning her vocation, LeMay said, she had two significant experiences of surrender to God, the latter occurring in 2017 while participating in the Escape from Alcatraz Triathlon. For the triathlon, LeMay had to swim from Alcatraz Island to the San Francisco Bay. She almost drowned while being caught in a rip tide during practice.

“I thought I was dying, I really did,” she said. “I sort of fell asleep or became unconscious, and I heard a voice, and it was the voice of a man on a wakeboard. He was on a white wakeboard, and he was coming toward me, and he had a kilt on, and I thought to myself, ‘Am I meeting Jesus because this is insane.’”

“I didn't know where I was or what was happening to me, but he was a man that does this. He goes and saves people that are drowning in the San Francisco Bay, and I really did give myself to the Lord that night. That was real – that was really real – and I never took it back.”

After her near-death experience, LeMay began doing spiritual exercises to more seriously discern her vocation. However, before she found her vocation as a consecrated virgin, LeMay learned the power of forgiveness.

“I thought I was still discerning becoming a sister – a religious sister – and so, being so close to the Dominicans, that was the place that I was discerning whether or not that was truly my call,” LeMay said. “I started to spend time with the Dominicans. I spent some time in Connecticut at their House of Welcome, and I realized that I wasn't created to live in community.

“I've lived alone all my life, and I felt like I could adapt if that's what the Lord was asking of me, and He would give me the graces to do that, but I wasn't real sure, and so, God knows I need a ‘shazam’ moment.”

LeMay's "shazam" moment came in the form of her older brother, who LeMay said she did not know well because of a significant age difference, and he had estranged himself from her family. LeMay's brother had a drug addiction when he was young, and she had memories of the pain that came from living with an addict.

In 2017, LeMay's brother suffered a stroke, which left him unable to speak or process anything. Around that time, LeMay, who is active in prison ministry, met with a man who was on death row.

"I knew when I left meeting Tony Apanovitch, who was on death row, that I was being called to forgive my brother, and I had held him in a prison for all of these years of my life – my brother – in a prison in my heart that he wasn't guilty of anymore," she said.

"He was a nurse; he was a medic. He lived a respectful life, and I didn't really know that. And so, God gave me my brother, gave me the graces to forgive him and bring him into my home, and he lived with me until he died two years ago, and that was the barrier. He was the barrier that prevented me from joining the Dominican Sisters of Peace."

LeMay said having her brother as a dependent prevented her from joining the Dominican community, which she thought, at the time, God might be calling her to.

"I was so angry at God," she said. "It was like, 'Here I am, Lord. I'm ready to give myself to You, and now I've got a dependent? Now I've got my brother living here? What's going on?'"



Bishop Earl Fernandes congratulates Diane LeMay. Photo courtesy Abigail Pitones

LeMay spoke with her spiritual director and several priests about her situation. She was then introduced to the vocation of consecrated virginity living in the world.

“When I read the Rite of Consecration, it was like reading my life,” she said. “It was a feeling of, ‘I’m home. This is it. There’s nothing more. This is it.’”

LeMay petitioned Bishop Robert Brennan to become a consecrated virgin. The then-bishop of Columbus accepted her petition, and LeMay began the formation process for her vocation.

“I had also been involved with the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins, and they were instrumental in educating me about the vocation,” she said.

“I attended three information conferences over three years with them, and in the past three years, I’ve attended their annual convocation and have gotten to meet women who are consecrated virgins in their dioceses throughout the

country and now throughout the world. And so, that really solidified to me that, no, that's really it. I have no doubt by seeing people integrated in their lives."

LeMay worked with several individuals for her formation: Father Stash Dailey, the vicar for religious in the Diocese of Columbus; Katherine Murphy, her spiritual director; and Molly McCarrick, a consecrated virgin in the diocese.

"Right before Bishop Brennan left, he assigned Molly McCarrick to be my mentor to meet with me, and we met sometimes weekly, sometimes every other week during the past year-and-a-half to two years, really studied the Rite of Consecration," LeMay said.

"Her sharing stories of how she's integrated this in her life has helped me understand how it would integrate into my life, and so I really began living the life of a consecrated virgin when I first petitioned Bishop Brennan."

Now that she is a consecrated virgin, and her vocation might look different than others, LeMay said it is important people know that there is not a vocation better than the other.

"We're all doing the work of God," she said. "We work together, and for some people, community life is not what they're called to, and I'm an example of that, but yet there's something more that you want. ...

"We have different ministries we're called to, and I think that's what people need to remember. ... There's something for everyone out there. If the Lord is calling you to something, don't put it off."