

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

Well, these past months have been something! So many of my meetings and travel obligations have been cancelled or held on-line. As in all things, we need to see what good God is drawing from all this and how we can cooperate. Two lessons seem clear to me: technology and making connections.

Certainly, this has been a time of increased isolation. We have all been using technology far more than before. We have participated in Zoom meetings. Folks have been communicating with loved ones in hospitals through their phones and computers. It is fascinating, however, that even these modern aids to our communications can themselves become tiring or even further isolating. We really want to be with one another face to face. Still, we should grab these experiences and use them for the glory of God, even if always in a balanced way. The angel, Gabriel, went to meet Mary and the message got through. Face to face is always better but sometimes it is really important that the Word of God be expressed. Let us continue to use these modern means well in service of Jesus.

Secondly, making connections. We have become more aware of the great value of our lives in being connected. Too often we can be consumed by what we do or have to do. If we start to see our lives more as being in service to the building up of one another and building up the Body of Christ, that will infuse our duties with a noble and divine flavor. In these times we have seen much which divides. You, virgins consecrated to the Lord Jesus, can be the great instruments to further the unity of the children of God. Thus, like Mary, our first task must be to seek out our kinswoman, Elizabeth, to be of assistance to her in whatever way we can.

Perhaps Mary, Gabriel, and Elizabeth can all help us to cooperate with whatever God wants to draw from these times for our good and his glory.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Earl Boyea

Most Reverend Earl Boyea, Bishop of Lansing

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Something Ancient, Something New—Happy Birthday Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother & Queen!

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

In Hebrew the word Mary means “worshiper”—Mary’s mother vowed that her daughter would worship in Jerusalem. According to statistics, the name Mary has the highest usage among women’s names in the world. Mary (the Blessed Virgin Mary), mother of Jesus Christ, has been venerated by Christians since apostolic times. The Gospels give only a fragmentary account of Mary’s life, but strong evidence of her life, lived in the will of the Eternal Father as she accepted at the Annunciation, is given by her being the mother of Jesus Christ and present at His Passion, Death and Resurrection.

There is evidence of Christians celebrating the feast of Mary’s birth in the sixth century and of Christians celebrating the conception of Mary in the seventh century. The fact that many of the Eastern Orthodox also celebrate the feast of Mary’s birth on September 8 supports the probability that the date is of ancient origin, though the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox celebrate it on May 9.

It is also interesting to note that originally the feast of the conception of Mary did not reference the Immaculate Conception; it was simply a feast of her conception. Not until Pope Pius IX’s dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception, on December 8, 1854, was the name and focus of the feast changed. There is a tradition that on September 8 in the year A.D. 430, St. Maurilius in France had a vision of angels singing. When he asked why they were singing, they replied that they were singing because this was the day that the Blessed Virgin was born. This tradition is not considered historically reliable.

The feast of the conception of Mary appears to have been celebrated originally in monasteries on December 9, and later made its way into the cathedral and local celebrations. Some medieval scholars, referring to a tradition that Mary was born after seven months, claimed that her conception took place in February. We don’t know why the dates of September 8 and December 8 were chosen for their respective feast days, though the historical evidence does seem to imply that the feast of Mary’s birth was first celebrated

on September 8, and that fact then dated the feast of her Immaculate Conception. (See Wikipedia, “The Nativity of Mary”).

Mary’s father, Joachim, is described in the “Protoevangelium of James,” from the early second century, as a wealthy man from one of the twelve tribes of Israel. “Joachim and his wife Anne were deeply grieved by their childlessness. Pious accounts place the birthplace of the Virgin Mary in Sepphoris, Israel, where a fifth century basilica is excavated at the site. Some accounts speak of Nazareth and others say it was in a house near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. It is possible that a wealthy man such as Joachim had a home in both Judea and Galilee.” (See Wikipedia, “The Nativity of Mary,” and the *Apocryphal Gospel of James*, 3rd Ed. (Madrid, Spain: BAC, 1975) 247-258).

The Roman catacombs likewise depict Mary as the mother of Jesus, with paintings as early as the first half of the second century showing her holding the Christ Child. Excavations in the crypt of St Peter’s Basilica uncovered a very early fresco of Mary together with Saint Peter, and the Roman catacombs of Priscilla include the oldest Marian paintings from the second century, with Mary shown holding Jesus on her lap. “They are next to a man in a tunic, his left hand holding a book and his right hand pointing to a star over his head, the latter being an Old Testament symbol of messiahs and/or *the* Messiah.” (see Wikipedia).

The Edict of Milan (AD 313) had allowed Christians to worship openly, and this new freedom also permitted literary development of the veneration of Mary. Perhaps of most significance to consecrated virgins is Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan, who venerated Mary as an example of Christian life and encouraged the practice of virginity, following Mary, in the fourth century. He wrote to the virgins of the ancient Church, including his sister Saint Marcelina, who was consecrated by Pope Liberius in the Basilica of Saint Peter.

The Church gave the title *Theotokos* (Mother of God) to Mary at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Churches dedicated to Mary began to be built shortly thereafter, including the Church of the Seat of Mary (*Kathisma*)

near Mar Elias Monastery, located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Marian churches in Rome date from the fifth and sixth centuries, and include Santa Maria in Trastevere, Santa Maria Antiqua and Santa Maria Maggiore. The very earliest church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, however, dates back to the late fourth century in Syria, where an inscription to the *Theotokos* was found. (see Wikipedia).

In his work, *Mary, Mother and Disciple*, author Joseph Grassi discusses the fact that the Gospels give only a fragmentary account of Mary's life, mentioning her chiefly in connection with the beginning and the end of Jesus' life. Her life was part of the mystery of Salvation and she is present in this mystery: the author notes seven moments of the Lord's mission in the Gospel of Saint John in which these "fragmentary" accounts, even when she is not directly mentioned, assert and perpetuate our Blessed Mother's maternal care for the Church: 1) the wedding feast at Cana (Jn. 2: 1-12); 2) the restoration of the dying son (Jn. 4: 46-54); 3) the sabbath healing at Bethesda (Jn. 5: 1-16); 4) the multiplication of loaves (Jn. 6: 1-7); 5) the sabbath healing of the blind man (Jn. 9: 1-41); 6) the restoration of Lazarus to life (Jn. 11: 1-44); 7) the great hour of Jesus: His mother, the cross, the mystery of blood and water from Jesus' side (Jn. 19: 25-37). (See Joseph A. Grassi, *Mary, Mother and Disciple, from The Scriptures to the Council of Ephesus* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988).



The first and the seventh of these accounts (Jn. 2:4; Jn. 19:27) are linked in Jesus' mother: there is the Cana wine and the bitter wine on the cross (Jn. 19: 29, 30), as well as the imperfect Cana water and the water/

blood/Spirit from the side of our Divine Lord Jesus Christ.

In today's birthday celebration of our Blessed Mother, we rejoice in her life and her presence in her Divine Son's Church through her constant maternal intercession for us. The passages from the Gospel of John might be meditated upon as part of our spirituality coming from our Blessed Mother, who was present in the Eternal Father's plan of Salvation for us and who was chosen by Him to be the Virgin Mother and Queen of the Church. The virginal spirituality we have received is due to her having been chosen to be the Virgin Mother, and has its end in Eternity.

The study of Mary and her place in the Catholic Church has been undertaken from a number of perspectives and within a number of contexts. In his address to the 2012 Mariological congress, Pope Benedict XVI stated that this study must be "understood and deeply examined from different and complementary viewpoints." Benedict also emphasized that the study of Mary cannot be performed in isolation from other disciplines and that Mariology is inherently related to the study of Christ and of the Church, and expresses the inner coherence of these disciplines. (See Benedict XVI, Adrian Walker, and Hans Urs Van Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, (Ignatius Press, 2005) 30).

Pope Benedict XVI noted that Marian studies have three separate characteristics: "first, personalizing the Church so it is not seen just as a structure but as a person, secondly the incarnational aspect and the relation to God, and third Marian piety which involves the heart and the emotional component" (Wikipedia "Catholic Mariology," referencing Benedict XVI, *et al*, 34).

Mary's position in Church can be compared to the role of the Petrine office in a dual sense, highlighting the subjective holiness of the heart and the holiness of the Church's structure itself (Ibid., 35). "The Petrine office logically examines the charisms for their theological soundness, while the Marian dual provides a balance in the spiritual and emotional sense via the service of love that the office can never encompass. Mariology and the doctrine of office are thus not "side chapels" in

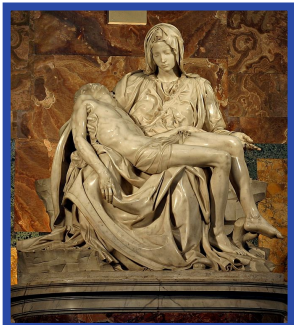
Catholic teachings, but are central and integrating elements of it” (ibid., 173-174).

In his 1943 encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ, Pius XII referred to Mary’s *fiat* as giving “consent for a spiritual marriage between the Son of God and human nature, thus giving humanity the means to salvation. Mary’s rights (wedding feast at Cana), and Mary’s love (her *fiat*) are essential to salvation” (see Wikipedia, “Catholic Mariology”).

Our Vocation is a wedded vocation; it is a wedding that in its external aspect is as the wedding in Cana of Galilee where our Lord Jesus Christ in His real presence converted water into wine on behalf of the spouses. It is thus a vocation that is blessed in the spirituality of our Virgin Mother. Our Blessed Mother’s intercession in the Cana miracle of temporary wine is a sign of the power of intercession given Her in plenitude before the Cross, when the Church was born from the pierced side of our Divine Redeemer.

He gave temporal wine to the couple in Cana as a sign of the sacrament of temporal marriage given to His Church in his blood after the culmination of his Passion. He drank the bitter wine of the Cross when He espoused the Church, and in His passion He experienced thirst for those not loving Him. The “bitter wine” given to Him in His thirst was transformed into the sacrament of the birth of the Church from his pierced side—an eternal sign of the eternal covenant established by His Eternal Father. This is part of the mystery hidden in the meaning of the pierced side of Adam, when the Eternal Father created the woman who was named “Eve” by Adam, meaning “life.” Adam did not fulfill the will of the Eternal Father, and we can infer that he was given bitter wine from the devil, for he did not experience thirst for the Eternal Father’s will upon him.

Our Blessed Mother’s spirituality involves partaking in the suffering of her Son to redeem us from the snares of the devil and the darkness of this world. The Cross is symbolic of the Eucharistic Celebration and will culminate when Jesus Christ comes in glory to take His Church to the eternal wedding feast. As we await His coming, the Church



is a sign of His spousal love for us. In the Eucharistic celebration, we stand before the Cross of Jesus as did our Blessed Mother. In her *fiat*, her “yes,” the Blessed Mother embraced the motherhood of the Church as the Holy Spirit overshadowed her and she conceived Jesus Christ, the Spouse of the Church. As consecrated virgins, we belong to that mystery of our Divine Lord Jesus Christ’s nuptial bond with the Church.

We close with notes on this topic from Judith Stegman’s dissertation: “The consecrated virgin belongs to the mystery of Christ’s nuptials with the Church. We recall the canonical identification of those who are consecrated to God in the *Ordo virginum*, ‘[they] are mystically espoused to Christ, the Son of God.’ How is the Church to understand this concept of ‘mystical espousal’? The eschatological meaning of virginal espousal is discovered through the self-revelation of God in the Most Holy Trinity, and through the virginal, nuptial relationship God has chosen to have with His people, revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. The state of consecrated virginity singularly images this nuptial bond between the Bridegroom Jesus and His Bride, the Church, as the virgin lives on earth under the title ‘bride of Christ.’ Pope Pius XII in *Sacra Virginitas* notes that Saint Ambrose simply calls the virgin ‘married to God’ and Saint Anthanasius refers to virgins as ‘spouses of Christ.’ The theological understanding of this vocation of virginal espousal to Christ is perhaps most concisely articulated in lines from the prayer of consecration itself:

While they highly esteem the sacrament [of holy matrimony], they do not imitate what is wrought in marriage, but ardently aspire to that divine union which is symbolized by earthly espousal. Holy Virginity has recognized its Author, and striving to emulate the purity of the angels, pledges itself to the bridal chamber and couch of Him who is at once the Spouse of perpetual virginity and the Son of a perpetual Virgin.”

(Judith M Stegman, “Mystically Espoused to Christ the Son of God (c. 604 §1)”: The Basis for Proposing Juridic Principles to Guide the Development of Norms for the *Ordo virginum* (Washington D.C., 2019 and Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest LLC, 2019) 59-60.)

Happy Birthday Virgin Mary, MOST Blessed Mother and Queen!

By Dr. Judith M. Stegman, JCD
Archdiocese of Miami (FL)

We continue to live in a world marked by the ever-uncertainty of pandemic, economics, and politics. As consecrated virgins, let us pray that our lives courageously reflect the hope we have in Jesus Christ as Spouse. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; He is the Rock in the midst of the storm-blown sea. As we share the identity “bride of Christ” with the Church herself, it is our distinct privilege to be able to witness to the love of Jesus Christ *as Spouse* to our world, and within our Church.

In the last issue of “The Lamp,” I mentioned the weeks I spent in Cincinnati helping to care for my mom. I returned to Michigan to prepare my home for sale, and my mother, Suzanne Therese Santel Stegman, died on July 3rd. How grateful I am for the time I was able to share with her in the final months and weeks of her life! After her funeral Mass on July 8, I returned once again to Michigan, packed the moving truck, and closed on the sale of my East Lansing home on July 13. The Lord’s providence has been evident in every detail as I re-located to the Archdiocese of Miami to share a home with consecrated virgin Magalis Aguilera, and to begin in earnest the work of the online International Resource Center for the *Ordo Virginum*.

The physical home for the records and operations of the USACV-IRC, and the shared residence of consecrated virgins Magalis Aguilera and Judith Stegman, is 9415 SW 8th Terrace, Miami, Florida. As was noted in a recent issue of *Monday Morning Mail*, it is our intention to put the home into a legal trust committing its use in perpetuity for the benefit of the



Ordo virginum. We believe that Our Divine Spouse will inspire virgins to continue new phases of this work, for His glory!

An important project for the USACV-IRC is the 2020 Virtual Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity, planned for November 6 to 7, 2020. See page 10 for more details. English-speaking inquirers, candidates, consecrated virgins, and diocesan personnel, from many parts of the globe, have already registered for the conference. We ask your prayers, and your donations, for all of our efforts to follow the call of our Lord to encourage this life of consecrated virginity among all who have been given this precious gift and call.

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 2018, 2019, and 2020 to send these so that she can update our albums. The "family" albums travel each year to our convocation and information conference, and always bring smiles and memories.

Upcoming Events

Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World

Sponsored by the USACV-IRC

November 6 to November 7, 2020

Live Virtual Conference

See article, page 10.

Save the Date

United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins

Sponsored by the USACV

July 2 to July 6, 2021

Enders Island, Connecticut

More Information to Follow.

Announcements

Upcoming Issues of The Lamp:

December 12, 2020 Feast of Our Lady of
Guadalupe

February 2, 2021 Feast of the Presentation and
World Day for Consecrated Life

May 31, 2021 Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

September 8, 2021 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin

Available:

Please check out our online USACV store for the following hot items at secure.consecratedvirgins.org:

- Recordings from the 2019 United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins (DVD and CD) on *Ecclesia sponsae imago*.
- Recordings from the 2019 Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World.
- Vocation Tree materials.

USACV-IRC Leadership Team

Nominations

Francescan Riddick and the USACV Leadership team will soon be forming a nominating committee to help facilitate the selection of a consecrated virgin to serve as treasurer of the USACV-IRC, as well as to fill a possible vacancy on the USACV Leadership Team. Both positions would begin in January 2020. If you are a consecrated virgin and have the gifts and feel called to serve our vocation in one of these roles, or would like to nominate someone, please contact Francescan at usacvmembership@gmail.com.

Membership Reminder:

From [Francesca Riddick](#), membership chair of the USACV: 2020 Member and Friend registration forms are available now on the USACV website. Invitations to 2020 new membership and membership renewals will be sent soon. Thank you for showing your support for the ongoing work of the USACV-IRC.



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Consecration Announcements

Consecration Announcements:

The USACV invites dioceses and candidates for consecration to send announcements of upcoming consecrations, so that we can publish these in *The Lamp* and in a bi-weekly e-newsletter that is circulated among the consecrated virgin members of the USACV. Of course, after a consecration, we are also pleased to publish the announcement and photo(s) in *The Lamp*.

June 27, 2020 — Judy Kvasnicka, Diocese of Salina (KA), at the hands of The Most Reverend Gerald Vincke.

July 31, 2020 — Renee Doll, Diocese of Saint Cloud (MN), at the hands of The Most Reverend Donald Kettler.

August 2, 2020 — Margaret Gisburne, Diocese of Joliet (IL), at the hands of The Most Reverend Daniel Conlon.

August 22, 2020 — Claire Halbur and Kimberly Zeeman, Diocese of Phoenix (AZ), at the hands of The Most Reverend Thomas Olmsted.



Photos of the consecration of Claire Halbur and Kimberly Zeeman by the Diocese of Phoenix.



Upcoming Consecrations

United States:

October 24, 2020 — Michelle Piccolo, at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish, Diocese of Detroit (MI), at the hands of The Most Reverend Allen Vigneron.

All are warmly invited to attend. The event will also be live-streamed on the OLGC YouTube and Facebook pages.

November 21, 2020 — Angela McCormick, at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Diocese of Portland (ME), at the hands of The Most Reverend Robert Deeley. Attendance is limited to 50 and no reception is planned due to the coronavirus. If anyone would like an invitation to attend, please contact Angela.

December 8, 2020 — Ruella Ricaza, at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Dublin, Diocese of Savannah (GA), at the hands of The Most Reverend Gregory J. Hartmayer. All are warmly invited to attend.

February 11, 2021 — Simi Sahu, at Emmanuel Catholic Church in Delray Beach, Diocese of Palm Beach (FL), at the hands of The Most Reverend Gerald M. Barbarito. All are warmly invited to attend.

A Holy Icon of the Church as Bride

By Diane Christine Farr
Diocese of Rochester (NY)

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the reinstatement of the rite of the consecration of virgins for women living in the world, we rejoice that there are still women seeking the consecration in spite of our troubled society. It is a sign that God's Holy Will and the power of his grace are working to form and sanctify souls in our world today. God has chosen to manifest the spousal love of the Church for Christ in this vocation at this time in history. It is seen as a glorious light in the Church set against a rapid decline in sexual morality. It is extremely important that women inquiring about consecrated virginity receive good formation regarding the sacred and serious nature of our vocation. While it seemed obvious to me, I remember our group being told at the Informational Conference that there are some places consecrated virgins shouldn't frequent, including bars. Modesty in dress should also be an obvious requirement.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul urges all Christians to make a total and absolute commitment to Christ. He was trying to convey that our commitment to Jesus Christ must embrace every aspect of our lives. St Paul uses the image of the Church as the bride of Christ in his statement, saying, "I feel a divine jealousy for you, I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband." In pondering this verse of sacred scripture what can we discover about our holy vocation as brides of Christ and icons of the Church? How can we deepen our awareness of this bridal communion we have with our beloved Jesus? Saint Padre Pio also speaks of this divine jealousy that he feels in his own heart

for one of his spiritual daughters who had made a private promise of virginity. He conveyed this sentiment in one of his letters to her. The Holy Spirit reveals to our understanding the infinite holiness and purity of our bridegroom and the preeminent place he must occupy in our souls. Our entire being must be completely occupied in loving Him and glorifying Him throughout our lives. The virginity of our whole being is Jesus' exclusive domain where He manifests His loving presence. He is constantly at work in our souls imparting the gift of His own sanctity and the splendor of His own beauty. The beauty of our virginal state is a reflection of the radiant beauty of our holy Spouse. The creative action of the Divine Will is ever expanding our capacity to receive grace and transforming us into the image of our Bridegroom. We have received from God the precious gift of virginity. The Holy Spirit gives us the knowledge of its value as we joyfully offer this gift to our Lord and gratefully embrace the gift of Himself that He gives to us. We will spend our entire lives listening to the Eternal Word and Son of the Father and acquiring knowledge of His most Sacred Heart. We know that throughout all eternity we will never fathom the depths of the riches found in this Heart. The virgin bride of Christ makes His Heart her perpetual dwelling. She will be associated in some way with His redemptive mission.

The consecrated virgin represents and celebrates the Church's wedded love for Christ. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the perfect image of the Church and she will prepare her daughters for consecration if they are attentive to her counsel. She wishes to clothe us in the bridal dress of her own virginal purity that we might reflect the

By Florence Sundberg
Diocese of Hartford (CT)

radiance of our holy mother. If we place our will in her hands, she will offer it to her Divine Son. His will must become our life and the source of our perennial peace. Our souls should always be immersed in divine love and prayerful communion with the most Holy Trinity. In this way we will be much more open and available to the needs of others.

One of the benefits of the reinstatement of the consecration for virgins living in the world is that many beautiful and holy friendships have developed among consecrated virgins. We must enrich each other's lives by support and spiritual sharing. The consecrated virgin must live in the light of the Divine Will. As brides of Christ we are to remain untainted by the world and faithful to Jesus in every detail of our lives. Let us strive to live out this mandate taken from the rite of the consecration of virgins.

“Receive the ring that marks you as a bride of Christ. Keep unstained your fidelity to your Bridegroom, that you may one day be admitted to the wedding feast of everlasting joy.”

If we would preserve, protect and defend life then we must preserve, protect and defend all those who are allies of life, those who believe in the sacredness of all life from conception until natural death. There are many in positions of power who stand against life, who stand against religion, against faith, against God and too often good people are afraid to speak up . . . but if we stand with God and with each other then we will have courage and we will be strong enough to face whatever comes against us because we will not submit to the anti-life, anti-God agenda of the evil one. Evil generates evil so we must stand up and we must speak out. Let us be the voice of those who have no voice, those who are oppressed, persecuted, trafficked, abandoned. And let us offer the hand and the Heart of Christ to all those we encounter that they may know His love, His mercy, His compassion, His very Presence—through us.



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

USACV Leadership Team

Emily Byers (2018)-2020; **Secretary of the USACV-IRC**; Diocese of Lafayette (LA). (*USACV Online Presence*).
Francesca Riddick 2019-2021; Diocese of Joliet (IL). (*USACV Membership and eTapestry*).
Amanda Schrauth 2019-2021; Diocese of Great Falls-Billings (MT). (*Publication of "The Lamp"*).
Joani McCann 2019-2021; Archdiocese of Boston (MA). (*Convocation Liaison*).
Elizabeth Lam 2020-2022; Diocese of Oakland (CA). (*Member at Large*).

IRC Leadership Team

Magalis Aguilera; USA, Archdiocese of Miami (FL).
Judith Stegman, **President of the USACV-IRC** 2019-2025,
Treasurer 2019-2020; USA, Archdiocese of Miami (FL).
Maria Luisa Meza; EL SALVADOR, Diocese of Santa Ana/San Miguel.
Maria Luisa Oefe; GERMANY, Diocese of Regensburg.
Renu Rita Silvano; INDIA, Archdiocese of Bombay.

Other USACV-IRC Services, among others

Mary Kay Lacke; Information Conference director.
Theresa Marshall; Information Conference coordinator.
Margaret Flipp; assistant treasurer.
Anne Gishpert; archivist.
Florence Sundberg; prayer chain coordinator.

2020 Information Conference

2020 Virtual Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World

November 6-7, 2020

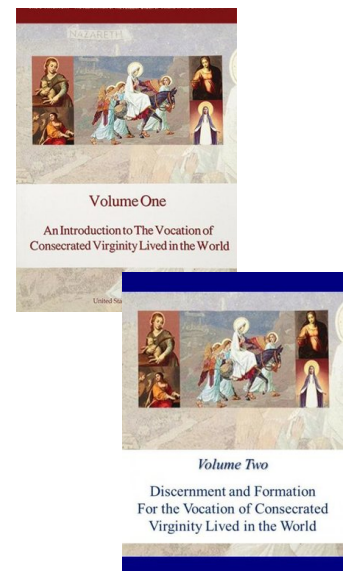
Introduction: As announced previously, due to pandemic restrictions, it was not possible for the USACV-IRC to sponsor our annual in-person Information Conference during the summer of 2020. We do plan to hold an in-person conference during the summer of 2021. Rather than miss a year, however, and due to many requests to learn about the life of the virgin bride of Christ, we have planned an intensive two-day live virtual information conference.

The live 2020 Virtual Information Conference on the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World, Nov. 6-7, 2020, is organized into two webinars: Day One - Webinar 1 of 2 on Friday, Nov. 6, and Day Two - Webinar 2 of 2 on Saturday, Nov. 7. Participants must register for both webinars. The conference fee of \$60 covers both days and is payable with your registration for Day One.

Each day begins at 11am ET (10am CT; 9am MT; 8am PT) and includes five sessions scheduled two hours apart. Each day ends with an optional evening session (9-10pm ET; 8-9pm CT; 7-8pm MT; 6-7pm PT). Each session includes a presentation followed by Q&A with the speaker, and then an approximate half hour break before the next session.

Presentation topics include:

- Overview of Vocations in the Catholic Church – how the *Ordo virginum* fits in
- Historical Aspects of the Consecration of Virgins; virgin saints
- Ecclesial identification of the *Ordo virginum*
- The Liturgical Rite of Consecration and the Marian Dimension of the Vocation
- Praying the Liturgy of the Hours
- Mystically Espoused to Christ, the Son of God
- Living in the World and in the Local Church
- Prerequisites for Admission to Consecration; Stages of Preparation
- Psychological Maturity for Living the Virginal Vocation
- Practical Next Steps for Discerners, Applicants, Candidates



Detailed program information and online registration forms are available at the following links. Remember to register for both webinars!

[Webinar 1 of 2 \(Friday, Nov. 6\) Registration Link \(http://bit.ly/2020Web1\)](http://bit.ly/2020Web1)

[Webinar 2 of 2 \(Saturday, Nov. 7\) Registration Link \(http://bit.ly/2020Web2\)](http://bit.ly/2020Web2)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation emails containing information about joining the webinar.

Questions?

Please contact the Information Conference Director, Mary Kay Lacke, at info@consecratedvirgins.org.

Anniversary Reflections

Consecrated virgins who celebrate significant anniversaries during 2020 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*.

Anniversary Reflections: 25 Years

Submitted by Linda Ann Long
Archdiocese of Saint Paul (MN)
(consecrated June 3, 1995)

Twenty five years have passed so quickly. It seems not long ago that I was in Rome nervously preparing for my consecration. It had originally been scheduled for June 2 but had to be moved to June 3. The reason was that the cardinal, who was the bishop consecrating me at the delegation of my archbishop, was now scheduled to say Mass at St. Mary Major for the International Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins. I attended that Mass and saw for the first time other women who had done this. Before that I had not even heard of any woman who had actually received the consecration much less seen anyone.

I was a busy, often exhausted, cardiologist but had been able to find a white dress and a plain gold wedding band. The ring was blessed by my archbishop before I left for Rome. The Consecration Mass was in Latin so that the few people who could attend, German, Italian, and American, could all participate in it. Soon I was back home in Minnesota and back to work. One of my elderly female patients was so pleased when she noticed my wedding band. Her face fell when I gently explained what it meant. My colleagues were perplexed but respectful.

This vocation as the Bride of Christ has been fulling in so many ways. It has given depth and

strength to my calling of spiritual maternity of many seminarians and young priests. It has provided me with so many sisters with the same vocation. Retirement has provided me the opportunity to deepen my prayer life and time to serve my local Church—and even our national organization.

Let us continue to support each other with prayer and thoughtful concern.

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Submitted by Elizabeth Lee
Diocese of Fall River (MA)
(consecrated July 1, 1995)

The smile behind the mask

Twenty five years living the life of consecrated virginity in the world—how swiftly time passes on this journey towards the Heavenly homeland! I remember imagining what 25 years later might look and feel like, but Jesus had other plans. He knows best and I continue to grow each day deeper in love with Him and in greater trust of His Divine plan.

Since we are continuing to live “Covid days” my anniversary celebration plans had to be changed, but for the better!! Priests and friends couldn’t attend an anniversary Mass, yet God multiplied it 10- or 100-fold. Letters, emails and cards came flowing in, announcing Mass offerings and intentions in various dioceses, near and far. Priests called down countless blessings in the Great Thanksgiving to God in Holy Mass. Friends crafted spiritual bouquets of rosaries, chaplets, hours of adoration, spiritual reading, and Liturgy of the Hours. Isn’t God so astonishing??

The anniversary day itself was one of prayerful gratitude and resting on His Heart in contemplation. I also spent time in intercession for the sick, the elderly, and the challenges of so many

newly unemployed. I reflected on our new face coverings, and the apparent veiling of ourselves from one another. Is this how many lives in the world are lived in relation to God as well, hiding a part of ourselves from Him?

Yet as we've "isolated" and "sequestered" and "quarantined," becoming yet more alone, it paradoxically seems we uncover our deeper need for connection to God that we may have taken for granted as our parishes closed down. Our humanity experiences this isolation from each other as well. In grocery shopping, at the bank, in pumping gas it seems eyes search for each other. I could see the yearning for contact, glances of hope, the creases in the face showing a smile and a recognition of the other behind the mask. There's a shared sense of being in this odd situation together, alongside one another. Previously so many in the world moved past each other, hardly acknowledging one another in the haste, while now a nod or a greeting or a smile or an elbow bump jostles us upward. We who belong to Jesus, continue to carry Him and share him in a thousand different little ways. Through our smile, with all of its subtleties peering around our masks and with the brightness of His life in our eyes, we can offer love and concern for each other. Beyond the isolation, the face of God, hidden, becomes manifest through us, as we gently draw each other toward union with Jesus – so that all may become one in Him.

On my first USACV retreat, then-Bishop Raymond Burke, said to all of us consecrated virgins, "Your life is in imitation of Mary. You bring the broken world to Christ and then bring Christ to the broken world." That has stayed with me throughout these 25 years. More than ever I see clearly my vocation—to be with Jesus and give

myself fully to Him, then to bring that love, joy and assistance to those around me in my ordinary daily life . . . with that smile, even under the mask, that knows and manifests His Love.

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Submitted by Judith A. (Hildegard) Varga
Diocese of Little Rock (AR)
(consecrated September 22, 1995)

Consecration is the choice of God over more tangible sources of security. Commitment of life and hope to God is at the heart of consecration. "Receive me O God, according to your promise, and I shall live." For me, consecrated virginity has the face of Divine Providence and Benedictine balance. I was taught by the Sisters of the Congregation of Divine Providence in San Antonio, Texas from first grade through college graduation. Abandonment to Divine Providence means living with God in the depth of one's heart, attentive to God's presence, in the interior call of grace and the external happenings of one's life. I am currently on Oblate of Subiaco Abbey, Subiaco, Arkansas. My Benedictine life is built on

Obedience—I listen to God. I hear and respond. God has many ways of speaking.

Stability—I accept the present and do not run to run away.

Conversatio Morum—I live open to the new and ready to journey on. I commit to follow the Gospel and resist behavior contrary to it.

Consecration imbues me /equips me with the "tools of my trade":

Strength against temptation

Perseverance in service and chastity

Watchfulness in prayer

Mindfulness of God's word

Compassion

Kindness and humility
Gentleness and patience
Love of neighbor
Innocence and humility

Holiness of heart and Single-mindedness /
Simplicity (term of Blessed John Martin Moye,
Founder of the Congregation of Divine
Providence) / Purity of Heart (St. Benedict's term)

I will close with two quotes from the Rule of
"Benedict":

"Listen carefully, my daughter, to the
master's instructions, and attend to them with the
ear of your heart. This advice is from a father who
loves you; welcome it and, faithfully put it into
practice. The labor of obedience will bring you
back to him from whom you have drifted through
the sloth of disobedience. This message of mine is
for you, then, if you are ready to give up your own
will, once and for all, and armed with the strong and
noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true
King, Christ the Lord. (RB/Rule of Benedict,
Prologue:1 – 3)

"And, finally, never lose hope in God's
mercy" (RB / Rule of Benedict 4:74.).

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Submitted by Jeanne McNulty
Diocese of Pittsburgh (PA)
(consecrated October 4, 1995)

Twenty five years ago on the Feast of St.
Francis of Assisi, Bishop Bernard Schmitt and our
diocesan delegate for Consecrated Life found their
way down into a West Virginia Holler in Spencer,
WV to the house where I lived. It was a beautiful
fall day in late afternoon. My consecration was to
take place in a small chapel deep in the woods: the
Chapel of St. Clare. Our procession with about 25
folks and lighted candles wound up a path through

elm and maple trees. Their leaves bore the first
yellowish hues of the autumn season before bursting
into a brilliant gold. My heart thrilled with joy at the
thought of at last being "chosen" as one of Jesus
brides in His church forever.

Our bishop was what was known as a well
beloved "native son." He was born in WV and
ministered to folks in the mountain state all his life.
He was well acquainted with Appalachian people
and their ways. I was feeling no trepidation but only
a sense of joy and gratitude as the consecration took
place and I knelt placing my hands in his giving my
life to Jesus and His Church forever.

Sisters in Christ, this has been quite a ride.
In these years of the journey there were moments of
deep joy and moments of being "tried by fire." We
all know that every life has such experiences if we
live long enough. I have found that with Jesus, our
Spouse, and in our union with Him there is no
reason to be filled with fear no matter what may
befall us. Jesus can and will bring us through
ANYTHING and nothing is "luck" or
"coincidence." He has a plan and if it takes us over
an awfully bumpy road, if He hides Himself, it is
only to make us call out to Him more so He can
increase the depth of our trusting union with Him.

How many times over the years have I called
out: "Lord what are you doing?! – only to find out
later that it was all consistent with a pathway toward
my greater good and his glory. His providence
never failed no matter what the hardship. Just when
I thought: I can't take anymore sorrow His
comforting spirit came into the pain and filled me
with a tender joy and spirit of acceptance.

Even when I was in material want the needs
were met by the most unforeseen circumstances and
gratuitous provisions. He wants us to rely on Him

and He actually delights in caring for us. My only response, welling up from a grateful heart could be...Thank You Lord and I love You!

I am sure many of you who read this have had the same experiences, but for those of you who are young in the vocation I say: "Trust Him. His love endures forever."

Anniversary Reflections: 15 Years

Submitted by Betsy Lillis
Diocese of Arlington (VA)
(consecrated October 18, 2005)

I can hardly believe it has been 15 years, Jesus Christ has truly blessed my life.

October 18, 2005, Archbishop Charles J Chaput officiated at my consecration in Aurora, Colorado in Queen of Peace Catholic Church. I picked this date because it was the feast day of St. Luke. St Luke had influenced my life so much that I wanted to honor him.

Since my consecration, I have been involved in the Lector ministry in every parish in which I have lived. I truly love to proclaim the Word of God.

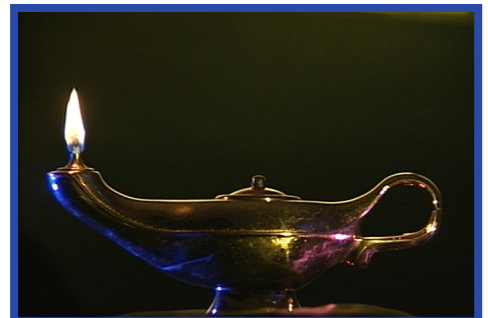
In 1972 I moved to Colorado from Virginia for my health. Since my 2005 consecration I have had and beaten breast cancer, gall bladder surgery and several blood clots. And in 2015, to my surprise God asked me to leave a job I loved and move back to Winchester, Virginia from Aurora, Colorado to help my sister. It has not been easy, as I had lived by myself for over 20 years. To live with someone else has been an adjustment for me, but it has worked out for the best (as God only knows). Finding employment at my age has led me to part-time positions and then a business for myself with LegalShield. For those who do not know of

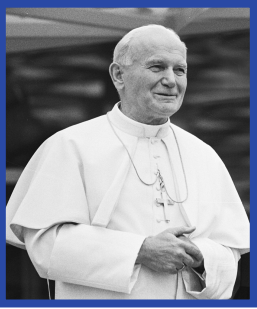
LegalShield, it offers individuals, families and small business owners affordable legal assistance through a monthly membership fee. It is a great product and a good Christian-run company. Helping others, after all, is what I am all about. Making a difference in other people's lives in a positive way is very uplifting and gives honor to God.

Working with other people can be frustrating though. My prayer each morning is to make a positive difference in someone's life. Doing God's will as a spouse of Jesus Christ keeps me persevering during the day; I recall from Jeremiah: "For I have plans for you says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for your woe."

I am not saying since my consecration it has been an easy road, as it has not. Doubts, sure I have had them—the devil is always around putting obstacles in the path and tempting us to think negatively. But Jesus is always available when a person seeks Him. I try to keep a sense of humor and pray for strength through the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She is my help. Spending time before the Blessed Sacrament in adoration is one of the most peaceful remedies I know. I have signed up to study Scripture offered in my parish through the Biblical School which began in Denver, Colorado many years ago. Hopefully it will refresh my memory of God's written Word and His many blessings,

I look forward to many more years of service. God's blessings upon each of you and God Bless America. Praise be Jesus Christ, King of endless glory.





International Conference of Consecrated Virgins, Rome, in an audience with Pope John Paul II on June 2, 1995, sections 3-6.

On this meaningful occasion, I am happy to stress some fundamental directives that can guide your special vocation in the Church and in the world.

Love Christ, the meaning of your life.

For the consecrated virgin, as St. Leander of Seville affirms, Christ is everything: “spouse, brother, friend, inheritance, reward, God and Lord.”

The mystery of the Incarnation was seen by the Holy Fathers in a spousal light, following the interpretation given by the Apostle Paul on the Lord’s death: “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). The event of the resurrection was also seen as a nuptial encounter between the Risen Lord and the new messianic community, for which reason the Easter Vigil was celebrated as the “nuptial night of the Church” (St. Asterio Amaseno).

The entire life of Christ was therefore placed under the sign of the mystery of His nuptials with the Church. You, too, dear Sisters, belong to that mystery through the gift of the Holy Spirit and in virtue of a “new spiritual anointing” (*Ordo consecrationis virginum*).

Answer Christ’s infinite love with your total and exclusive love.

Love Him as He desires to be loved in the concrete circumstances of life: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (Jn 14:15). Love Him as is fitting to your spousal condition: assuming His same sentiments; sharing His way of life consisting in humility and meekness, love and

mercy, service and joyful availability, untiring zeal for the glory of the Father and the salvation of the human race.

The state of consecrated virginity makes the praise of Christ more spontaneous, listening to His word easier, service to Him more joyful, and the occasion of offering Him the homage of your love more frequent. Yet *consecrated virginity is not a privilege, but rather a gift of God*, which implies a strong commitment in following Him and being His disciple.

The following of the Lamb in heaven begins on earth, by taking the narrow path. Your *sequela Christi* will be all the more radical, the more you love Christ and the more clearly you grasp the meaning of virginal consecration. In the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, dealing with the “Gospel ideal of virginity,” I recalled that “in (consecrated) virginity is expressed ... the radical nature of the Gospel, which consists in leaving everything and following Christ” (n. 20).

Your being *disciples of Christ* will be more intense, the more you are convinced that Jesus is the one Teacher, whose words are “spirit and life.” Dear Sisters, remember that your place, like Mary of Bethany’s, is at the feet of Jesus, listening to the gracious words that come forth from His mouth.

Love the Church, your Mother.

Through the solemn rite presided over by the diocesan bishop, you have received from the Church the gift of consecration. You are dedicated to her service. You must always feel closely bound to the Church.

According to the teachings of the Fathers, in receiving from the Lord the “Consecration of virginity,” virgins become a visible sign of the virginity for the Church, the instrument of her

fruitfulness and witness of her fidelity to Christ. Virgins are also a reminder of the orientation of the Church towards the future goods and a warning to keep this eschatological tension alive.

It is also the task of virgins to be the hard-working hands of the generosity of the local Church, the voice of her prayer, the expression of her mercy, the relief of her poor, the comfort of her suffering sons and daughters, and the support of her orphans and widows.. We could say that at the time of the Fathers, the *pietas* and *caritas* of the Church were expressed to a great part through the heart and hands of consecrated virgins.

These are the lines of commitment that still remain valid today. I myself underlined the anthropological value of choosing virginity in the Church. It is a path on which the consecrated virgin “realizes her womanhood.” “By freely choosing virginity, women confirm themselves as persons, as beings whom the Creator from the beginning has willed for their own sake. At the same time they realize the personal value of their own femininity” (*Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 20).

No less than the woman who follows the path of matrimony, the consecrated virgin is capable of living and expressing spousal love. “In this kind of love” she becomes in the Church a gift for God, for Christ the Redeemer, and for every brother and sister.

Love the children of God.

Your total and exclusive love for Christ does not exempt you from love towards all men and women, your brothers and sisters, because the horizons of your charity—precisely because you belong to the Lord—are the same as the horizons of Christ.

According to the Apostle, the virgin “gives her mind to the Lord's affairs and to being holy in

body and spirit” (1 Cor 7:34). She seeks “the things that are above, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand” (Col 3:1). And yet this does not estrange you from the great values of creation and from the longings of humanity, nor from the suffering of the earthly city, from its conflicts and from the sorrows caused by war, famine, disease, and the wide-spread “culture of death.” Have a merciful heart and share in the sufferings of the brethren. Commit yourselves to the defense of life, the promotion of women and respect for their liberty and dignity.

You are well aware: “You who are virgins for Christ” become “mothers in the spirit” (*Ordo consecrationum virginum*, n. 16), cooperating with love in the evangelization of man and his promotion.

Love Mary of Nazareth, the first fruits of Christian virginity. Humble and poor, “betrothed to Joseph” (Mt 1:18), a just man “of the house of David” (Lk 1:27), Mary became by a singular privilege and by her fidelity to the Lord's call, the Virgin Mother of the Son of God.

Mary is thus the perfect icon of the Church as a mystery of communion and love, an icon of her being *Virgin, Spouse and Mother*.

As St. Leander of Seville observes, Mary is also “the culminating point and prototype of virginity.” In body and soul she was fully what you desire to be with all your strength: virgins in body and soul, spouses through total and exclusive adherence to the love of Christ, mothers through the gift of the Spirit.

My dear Sisters, Mary is your Mother, Sister and Teacher. Learn from her to fulfill God's will and to accept His salvific plan, to keep His word and to bring all events of life to it, to sing His praises for His “great works” in favor of humanity, to share in the mystery of suffering, to bring Christ to all men and to intercede for those in need.