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Three local women become consecrated virgins this year. What does that mean?

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Susan Spiegelberg holds a candle she received during her consecration Mass June 8 at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul. Dave Hrbacek / The Catholic Spirit

Going on dates in her late 20s, Susan Spiegelberg, 42, recalls sitting at restaurants and instead wishing she could be at her parish chapel, adoring in front of the Lord's eucharistic presence. It wasn't until her mid-30s that she learned she could be the bride she always wanted to be — a bride of Christ.

Now a member of the Order of Virgins, Spiegelberg, a parishioner of St. Agnes in St. Paul, is one of 12 consecrated virgins in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. She's joined by the two newest consecrated virgins: Jackie Hintze, 39, an optician who was consecrated Sept. 14 at her parish, St. Hubert in Chanhassen; and Patty-Jo Mantel, 45, a nurse practitioner who was consecrated Oct. 7 at St. Agnes and who attends All Saints in Minneapolis.

According to the Code of Canon Law, women who pursue this vocation are betrothed mystically to Christ and are dedicated to service, prayer and penance while remaining in a public state of life. Consecrated virgins were common early in the history of the Church; however, it wasn't until the Second Vatican Council that the vocation was reestablished.



Patty-Jo Mantel, who was consecrated Oct. 7 at St. Agnes in St. Paul, listens during the consecration Mass of Jackie Hintze Sept. 14 at St. Hubert in Chanhassen. Dave Hrbacek / The Catholic Spirit

In July, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life issued new norms on the vocation to clarify the role and mission of consecrated virgins. According to the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins, there are more than 250 consecrated virgins in the United States. There are about 4,000 worldwide, with the most living in France and Italy.

Nicole Bettini, 40, who was consecrated in 2007 and helped define the formation process within the archdiocese, described the primary charism of the vocation as “bridal.”

“As our wonderful priests witness the love of Christ for his bride, the Church, a consecrated virgin complements that and witnesses the love of the Church for her spouse, the Lord himself,” said Bettini, a parishioner of Annunciation in Minneapolis. “It’s rooted in the local Church, and it really upholds the gift of our purity, of our chastity, in whatever vocation we’re called to live it.”

Ahead of National Vocation Awareness Week Nov. 4-10, Spiegelberg and Hintze shared their stories with The Catholic Spirit.

Spiegelberg, who works as the director of faith formation at All Saints in Lakeville, grew up Catholic in Honolulu, Hawaii, and moved to Minnesota to serve with NET Ministries. She intentionally dedicated a year to discern her vocation and visited several religious communities, but she felt a call to marriage. Discerning marriage ultimately prepared her heart for her vocation as a consecrated virgin.

“I love the complementarity of sacramental matrimony. The sacrificial love between the husband and wife puts into flesh what my life should look like for my beloved Jesus,” Spiegelberg said. “I show married couples the priority of where their love is directed — that all of that love should be directed toward God.”

As she attended a retreat while studying for her master’s degree in theology, Spiegelberg felt she should join the Dominicans of St. Cecilia in Nashville. She entered the community as a postulant in 2010. But sitting in their chapel, she admittedly felt miserable. Six months and 11 days later, she left the community and discovered, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit via the Internet, she said, that there was, indeed, a vocation where she could marry Jesus and be his alone. Spiegelberg attended the USACV’s information conference in 2011, and she felt her vocation was clear — she was meant to be his bride in the world.



Jackie Hintze, center, leads the procession at the start of her consecration Mass Sept. 14 at St. Hubert in Chanhassen. Dave Hrbacek / The Catholic Spirit

A self-professed “studier,” Spiegelberg began reading various encyclicals and religious texts while starting to live the life of a consecrated virgin by praying the Liturgy of the Hours. She later met with Archbishop Bernard Hebda on her path to her June 8 consecration, held on the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul.

Spiegelberg lives out her call by remaining available and responsive to whatever the Lord puts in her path — such as taking up an offer to babysit children at her parish so the parents can enjoy a date night — while maintaining the discipline of a day rooted in the liturgy, the rosary and continual prayer.

At the recommendation of a priest friend, she brings her consecration to everything she does, ranging from her work at All Saints to checking her email and washing dishes. It's the realization of how to live that out intentionally through the simplest daily tasks by offering the work to her Spouse that has become a gift, she said.

"I've been sharing that with others who are married and saying you can do the same thing," Spiegelberg said. "Bring your marriage to everything you do — changing that diaper or whatever it might be."

Only months into her consecrated life, Spiegelberg remains focused on her ultimate goal: to be a faithful and fruitful bride that draws many souls closer to her husband, Christ.

"There is no doubt in my mind that I was born for this," she said.

Since an early age, Hintze recalls feeling an incredible love and friendship with Christ as she grew up in Watertown and later Chaska, even as she began dealing with the complications of Type 1 diabetes. Diagnosed at 15 months, Hintze spent decades dealing with symptoms ranging from short spurts of lost vision to severe headaches, leading up to kidney failure at age 25. She underwent dialysis before receiving a donated kidney from her twin sister. A year later, a pancreas transplant and multiple kidney surgeries followed.

"One of the greatest things we can do on this earth is to say yes to God and accept our crosses in any form they come in," she said. "Suffering can be a beautiful thing for every one of us if we can share it with Christ, if we offer it all to him and unite it to his."

She began working at a local retail optical store and completed her two-year degree in health information technology, but knew she wanted to dedicate her life formally to Christ. With her complicated health status, Hintze feared that option would be out of reach.

It was at a meeting with her priest, Father Rolf Tollefson, St. Hubert's pastor, when she was in her mid-30s where she first heard about the vocation of consecrated virginity. She immediately felt an immense amount of joy and an all-consuming desire for the Lord that brought her to her knees. Hintze began meeting monthly with a consecrated virgin mentor and dove into spiritual readings and Scripture.

As she strove to do prior to her formation, she brings the Lord with her wherever she goes. She starts her day with prayer or Mass. Through her interactions with customers and co-workers, Hintze strives to bring a godly view by either talking about her beliefs or simply offering positive encouragement to counter any negativity. Her personal prayers uniting her to her beloved weave through every aspect of her day.

"Even as I'm working, I bring him with me and always have him there, praying and talking to him, and just discussing my day with him. How should I handle this or look at this?" she said.

Since her consecration in September, Hintze has felt an incredible peace and joy, even as she continues to battle daily health complications. She hopes to use her experience to help others who may be suffering to show how trials can ultimately lead to happiness when one says yes to the Lord.

And just like the hundreds of consecrated virgins nationwide and across the world, she commits to saying yes every day by living in the present alongside her faithful, loving husband — Christ.

“The only thing I want to do is serve him, completely abandon myself to him and have him lead the way,” Hintze said.



Archbishop Bernard Hebda prays a blessing over Jackie Hintze during her consecration Mass Sept. 14 at St. Hubert in Chanhassen. Dave Hrbacek / The Catholic Spirit

A unique vocation

Although prevalent in the early Church, the vocation of virgins living in the world disappeared after the 11th century as women living a life of chastity came together in communities. By the time of the Second Vatican Council, the consecration of women existed entirely in conjunction with religious life.

“The rite of consecration of virgins in the world dropped off over the centuries as monastic community life for women developed,” explained Mary Kantor, who studied the vocation extensively for her doctoral dissertation at Harvard Divinity School, where she earned her doctorate in theology/religion and society.

“The rite for women living in the world was brought back with Vatican II. It is specifically noted in the liturgy document, ‘Sacrosanctum Concilium,’” Kantor, a theology professor at Merrimack College, a Catholic college in North Andover, Massachusetts, and a Catholic chaplain, told Catholic News Service in 2017.

The renewed rite for virgins living in the world is both overseen and administered by diocesan bishops, making it necessary for each diocese to develop its own formation program if a woman within its borders feels called to the vocation. This requirement, combined with this rite’s novelty, slowed its spread in the United States in the decades directly following Vatican II.

“During my research, I spoke with someone in the bishop and/or vocation offices of each diocese in the country,” said Kantor in an email interview with CNS. “Some had no knowledge of the rite.”

She began her national survey in the early 2000s. By the time she finished her dissertation in 2008, much had changed, she said.

“There were over 200 consecrated women; there was an established association of United States consecrated virgins. And along with the website and DVD, there was also a national newsletter about the rite put out by the USACV, yearly information retreats, information packets, and members of the United States association attended bishops’ meetings to inform them of the rite, the vocation, etc.,” she said. “International connections were being made across groups of consecrated virgins around the world and international conferences were held.”

To be set aside as a bride of Christ, the woman must have lived a life of perfect chastity. This is another factor that distinguishes the vocation of consecrated virginity from religious orders, which women may join if they are widowed or if they resolve to live a celibate life from that day forward.

As a member of “the secular state,” a consecrated virgin also provides completely for her own material needs, including medical care and retirement. A diocese is not financially responsible for her. Women called to this vocation do not live in a community as religious sisters do, nor are they called by a title like “sister” or wear distinguishing garb. They live simply and modestly. They may wear a wedding ring.

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