

HOLY CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP

Prot. no. 600/70

DEGREE

The rite for the consecration of virgins belongs to the treasures of Roman liturgy. Jesus Christ left holy virginity as a legacy to His bride, one of his most precious gifts. Because of it, since the times of the Apostles, virgins consecrated their chastity to God, embellishing the mystical body of Christ and enriching it with admirable fecundity. Provident Mother Church, since the earliest times—as witnessed by the holy Fathers—used to confirm the pious and difficult vows of the virgins with a solemn prayer. As the centuries went on, other sacred ceremonies were added to this prayer that clearly show that the virgins were an image of the Church wedded to Christ and was thus introduced into the Roman Pontifical.

Vatican Council II also determined that the rite of the consecration of virgins be revised (cf. Const. of the Sacred Liturgy, "Sacrosanctum Concilium," art. 80). In obeying this order, the "Concilium ad Exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia" prepared this rite which His Holiness Pope Paul VI approved with his Apostolic Authority and had it published. For this reason, the Holy Congregation for Divine Worship, under personally expressed orders from His Holiness, promulgated it. It also determined that it would be adapted, if necessary, and that it would become effective beginning January 6, 1971, for those nuns that use it as decreed.

The popular version prepared by the Episcopal Conferences, and the adaptations of the ritual, should be sent to this Holy Congregation for approval as soon as possible.

Without objections.

At the site of the Holy Congregation for Divine Worship, May 31, 1970, Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

(Signed: Benno, Card. Gut, Prefect and A. Bugnini, Secretary)

CHAPTER I

CONSECRATION TO A LIFE OF VIRGINITY

INTRODUCTION

NATURE AND IMPORT OF CONSECRATION TO VIRGINITY

1. The custom of consecrating women to a life of virginity flourished even in the early Church. It led to the formation of a solemn rite constituting the candidate a sacred person, a surpassing sign of the Church's love for Christ, and an eschatological image of the world to come and the glory of the heavenly Bride of Christ. In the rite of consecration the Church reveals its love of virginity, begs God's grace on those who are consecrated, and prays with fervor for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

THE MAIN DUTIES OF THOSE CONSECRATED

2. Those who consecrate their chastity under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit do so for the sake of a more fervent love of Christ and of greater freedom in the service of their brothers and sisters.

They are to spend their time in works of penance and of mercy, in apostolic activity, and in prayer, according to their state of life and spiritual gifts.

To fulfill their duty of prayer they are strongly advised to recite the liturgy of the hours each day, especially morning prayer and evening prayer. In this way, by joining their voice to those of Christ the High Priest and of his Church, they will offer unending praise to their heavenly Father and pray for the salvation of the whole world.

THOSE WHO MAY BE CONSECRATED

3. This consecration may be received by nuns or by women living in the world.

4. In the case of nuns it is required:
a) that they have never married or lived in public or flagrant violation of chastity;

- b) that they have made their final profession, either in the same rite or on an earlier occasion;
- c) that their religious family uses this rite because of long-established custom or by new permission of the competent authority.

5. In the case of women living in the world it is required:

- a) that they have never been married or lived in public or flagrant violation of chastity;
- b) that by their age, prudence, and universally attested good character they give assurance of perseverance in a life of chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and of their neighbor;
- c) that they be admitted to this consecration by the bishop who is the local Ordinary.

It is for the bishop to decide on the conditions under which women living in the world are to undertake a life of perpetual virginity.

THE MINISTER OF THE RITE

6. The minister of the rite of consecration is the bishop who is the local Ordinary.

THE FORM OF THE RITE

7. For the consecration of women living in the world the rite described in Chapter I of this ritual is to be used.

For the consecration of nuns the rite found in Chapter II of this ritual is to be followed. This integrates religious profession with the consecration. For a good reason, however, these two rites may be separated, for example, when this is in accordance with long-established custom. But care should be taken not to duplicate parts of the rite; the two liturgical services should be so arranged that the rite of religious profession omits any prayer of consecration, retaining only those elements that belong to the religious profession. But the prayer, *Loving Father, chaste bodies* and the ritual elements with a nuptial significance (for example, the presentation of the ring) are to be preserved for the rite of consecration.

The rite consists of these parts:

- a) the calling of the candidates;
- b) the homily or address, instructing the candidates and the people on the grace of virginity;

- c) the examination by which the bishop asks the candidates about their readiness to persevere in their intention and to receive the consecration;
- d) the litanies, in which prayer is offered to God the Father and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints is invoked;
- e) the renewal of the intention of chastity (or the making of religious profession);
- f) the solemn blessing or consecration by which the Church asks our heavenly Father to pour out the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the candidates;
- g) the presentation of the insignia of consecration as outward signs of a spiritual dedication.

MASS FOR THE CONSECRATION TO A LIFE OF VIRGINITY

8. It is appropriate to use the ritual Mass for the day of consecration to a life of virginity. On a solemnity or a Sunday of Advent, Lent, or the Easter season the Mass of the day is used, but the special formularies for the eucharistic prayer and the final blessing may be used.

9. The liturgy of the word for the rite of consecration to a life of virginity can be a help in understanding the importance and place of virginity in the Church. Therefore it is lawful, when the Mass for the day of consecration to a life of virginity is not permitted, to take one reading from the special list of readings for this rite. But this may not be done during the Easter triduum, on the Solemnities of Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, or Corpus Christi, or on other solemnities of obligation.

10. White vestments are worn for the ritual Mass for the day of consecration.

The Rite

A. CONSECRATION TO A LIFE OF VIRGINITY FOR WOMEN LIVING IN THE WORLD

INTRODUCTION

1. It is appropriate for the rite of consecration to take place during the octave of Easter, on solemnities, especially those which celebrate the incarnation, on Sundays, or on feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary or of holy virgins.
2. On a day scheduled close to the day of the rite of consecration, or at least on the day before the consecration, the candidates are presented to the bishop, so that the father of the diocese may begin a pastoral dialogue with his spiritual daughters.
3. It is at the discretion of the bishop and by his authority that women living in the world are admitted to this consecration, and often they take part in the good works of the diocese. It is therefore fitting that the rite of consecration should take place in the cathedral, unless local circumstances or custom suggest otherwise.
4. As occasion offers, and especially to promote an esteem for chastity, to deepen understanding of the Church, and to encourage a greater attendance of the people, the faithful should be notified of the celebration in good time.
5. The Mass of the day or the ritual Mass for the day of consecration is celebrated in accordance with the rubrics (see Introduction, nos. 8-10).
6. The consecration ordinarily takes place at the chair. To enable the faithful to take part more easily, the bishop's chair may be placed in front of the altar. Seats for the candidates should be so arranged in the sanctuary that the faithful may have a complete view of the liturgical rites.
7. For the eucharistic celebration enough bread and wine should be prepared for the ministers, the candidates, their parents, relatives, and friends. If only one chalice is used, it should be sufficiently large.
8. In addition to what is needed for the celebration of Mass, there should be ready: a) the Roman Pontifical; b) veils, rings, or other insignia of bridal consecration to be presented in accordance with local rules or approved customs.

INTRODUCTORY RITES

9. When the people are assembled and everything is ready, the procession moves through the church to the altar in the usual way, while the choir and people sing the entrance song of the Mass. The candidates may join in the procession.

10. It is appropriate for two women – either consecrated themselves or chosen from the laity – to accompany the candidates to the altar.

11. When they come to the sanctuary, all make the customary reverence to the altar. The candidates go to their places in the body of the church and Mass continues.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

12. The liturgy of the word takes place as usual, except for the following:

- a) the readings may be taken from the Mass of the day or from the texts listed in Chapter V (see Introduction, nos. 8-9);
- b) the profession of faith is not said, even if prescribed by the rubrics of the day;
- c) the general intercessions are omitted, since they are included in the litany.

CONSECRATION

CALLING OF THE CANDIDATES

13. After the gospel, if the consecration takes place in front of the altar, the bishop goes to the chair prepared for him and sits.

When candles are not used see no. 15 below. If candles are used, the choir sings the following antiphon:

**Be wise: make ready your lamps.
Behold, the Bridegroom comes;
go out to meet him.**

Any other appropriate song may be sung.

The candidates then light their lamps or candles and, accompanied by the two women mentioned above (see no. 10), approach the sanctuary and stand outside it.

14. Then the bishop calls the candidates; he sings or says aloud:

**Come, listen to me, my children;
I will teach you reverence for the Lord.**

The candidates reply by singing this antiphon or some other appropriate song:

**Now with all our hearts we follow you,
we reverence you and seek your presence.
Lord, fulfill our hope:
show us your loving kindness,
the greatness of your mercy.**

As they sing the antiphon, the candidates enter the sanctuary and take up their positions so that everyone may have a complete view of the liturgical rites. They place their candles in a candelabrum, or give them to the ministers until they are returned at the end of Mass. They then sit in the places prepared for them.

15. Or, when candles are not used:

[138] The deacon calls each of the candidates by name. Each candidate, on hearing her name, rises and replies: **Lord, you have called me.** The candidate may make some other suitable reply. Then she goes to the sanctuary and stands outside it.

[139] After the calling of the candidates, the bishop invites them in these or similar words;

**Come, daughters,
that through me, his servant,
the Lord may consecrate
the resolution you have formed in your hearts.**

The candidates reply by singing this antiphon or some other appropriate song:

**Now with all our hearts we follow you,
we reverence you and seek your presence.
Lord, fulfill our hope:
show us your loving kindness,
the greatness of your mercy.**

As they sing the antiphon, the candidates enter the sanctuary, accompanied by the two women mentioned above (see no. 10), and take up their positions so that everyone may have a complete view of the liturgical rites. They then sit in the places prepared for them.

HOMILY

16. The bishop then gives a short homily to the candidates and the people on the gift of virginity and its role in the sanctification of those called to virginity and the welfare of the whole Church. He does so in these or similar words:

Dear brothers and sisters, today the Church consecrates these candidates to a life of virginity. They come from God's holy people, from your own families. They are your daughters, your sisters, your relatives, joined by the ties of family or friendship.

God has called them to be more closely united to himself and to be dedicated to the service of the Church and of mankind. Their consecration is a call to greater fervor in spreading the kingdom of God and in giving to the world the spirit of Christ. Think of the good they will accomplish by their prayers and good works, and the abundant blessings they will obtain from God for holy Church, for human society, and for your families.

He then addresses the candidates:

And now we speak to you, dear daughters. Our words are not words of command but encouragement from the heart. The life you seek to follow has its home in heaven. God himself is its source. It is he, infinitely pure and holy, who gives the grace of virginity. Those to whom he gives it are seen by the Fathers of the Church as images of the eternal and all-holy God.

When the fullness of time had come, the almighty Father showed, in the mystery of the incarnation, his love for this great virtue. In the chaste womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word was made flesh, in a marriage covenant uniting two natures, human and divine.

Our Lord himself taught us the high calling of such a life, consecrated to God and chosen for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. By his whole life, and especially by his labors, his preaching, and, above all, by his paschal mystery, he brought his Church into being. He desired it to be a virgin, a bride, and a mother: a virgin, to keep the faith whole and entire; a bride, to be one with him for ever; and a mother, to raise up the family of the Church.

The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, through baptism has already made you temples of God's glory and children of the Father. Today through our ministry he anoints you with a new grace and consecrates you to God by a new title. He gives each one of you the dignity of being a bride of Christ and binds you to the Son of God in a covenant to last for ever.

The Church is the bride of Christ. This title of the Church was given by the fathers and doctors of the Church to those like you who speak to us of the world to come, where there is not marrying or giving in marriage. You are a sign of the great mystery of salvation, proclaimed at the beginning of human history and fulfilled in the marriage covenant between Christ and his Church.

Make your whole life reflect your vocation and your dignity. Our holy mother the Church sees in you a chosen company within the flock of Christ. Through

you the Church's motherhood of grace bears its abundant fruit. Imitate the mother of God; desire to be called and to be handmaids of the Lord. Preserve the fullness of your faith, the steadfastness of your hope, the single-heartedness of your love. Be prudent and watch: keep the glory of your virginity uncorrupted by pride. Nourish your love of God by feeding on the body of Christ; strengthen it by self-denial; build it up by study of the Scriptures, by untiring prayer, by works of mercy. Let your thoughts be on the things of God. Let your life be hidden with Christ in God. Make it your concern to pray fervently for the spread of the Christian faith and for the unity of all Christians. Pray earnestly to God for the welfare of the married. Remember also those who have forgotten their Father's goodness and have abandoned his love, so that God's mercy may forgive where his justice must condemn.

Never forget that you are given over entirely to the service of the Church and of all your brothers and sisters. You are apostles in the Church and in the world, in the things of the Spirit and in the things of the world. Let your light then shine before men and women, that your Father in heaven may be glorified, and his plan of making all things one in Christ come to perfection. Love everyone, especially those in need. Help the poor, care for the weak, teach the ignorant, protect the young, minister to the old, bring strength and comfort to widows and all in adversity.

You have renounced marriage for the sake of Christ. Your motherhood will be a motherhood of the spirit, as you do the will of your Father and work with others in a spirit of charity, so that a great family of children may be born, or reborn, to the life of grace.

Your joy and your crown, even here on earth, will be Christ, the Son of the Virgin and the Bridegroom of virgins. He will call you to his presence and into his kingdom, where you will sing a new song as you follow the Lamb of God wherever he leads you.

EXAMINATION

17. After the homily the candidates stand and the bishop questions them in these or similar words:

Are you resolved to persevere to the end of your days in the holy state of virginity and in the service of God and his Church?

Together, all the candidates answer: I am.

Bishop:

Are you so resolved to follow Christ in the spirit of the Gospel that your whole life may be a faithful witness to God's love and a convincing sign of the kingdom of heaven?

Candidates: I am.

Bishop:

Are you resolved to accept solemn consecration as a bride of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Candidates: I am.

Bishop and all present: Thanks be to God.

INVITATION TO PRAYER

18. Then all stand, and the bishop, without his miter, invites the people to pray:

Dearly beloved, let us pray to God the almighty Father through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that, by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, he will pour out the Holy Spirit of his love on these servants of his whom he has chosen to be consecrated to his service.

19. Deacon (except during the Easter season):

Let us kneel.

LITANY OF THE SAINTS

Then the bishop, the ministers, the candidates, and the people kneel (except during the Easter season, when all stand). Where it is customary for the candidates to prostrate themselves, this may be done.

20. The cantors then sing the litany (Chapter V). At the proper place they may add the names of other saints who are specially venerated by the people, or petitions suitable to the occasion.

21. Then the bishop alone rises and, with hands joined, sings or says:

**Lord,
hear the prayers of your Church.
Look with favor on your handmaids
whom you have called in your love.
Set them on the way of eternal salvation;
may they seek only what is pleasing to you,
and fulfill it with watchful care.**

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Deacon: Let us stand.

All stand.

RENEWAL OF INTENTION

22. Then, if it seems suitable, the candidates offer themselves to God at the hands of the bishop. This may be done, for example, in the following way: the candidates come one by one before the bishop. Each one kneels, places her joined hands between his hands and says:

Father, receive my resolution to follow Christ in a life of perfect chastity which, with God's help, I here profess before you and God's holy people.

If there are many candidates, the bishop may allow all to remain kneeling in their places and to say together:

Father, receive our resolution to follow Christ in a life of perfect chastity which, with God's help, we here profess before you and God's holy people.

23. Another suitable rite, in accordance with local custom, may be substituted.

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

24. After the renewal of intention, the candidates return to their places in the sanctuary and kneel. The bishop extends his hands over them, and sings or says the prayer of consecration. The words in brackets may be omitted.

**Loving Father,
chaste bodies are your temple;
you delight in sinless hearts.
Our nature was corrupted
when the devil deceived our first parents,
but you have restored it in Christ.
He is your Word, through whom all things were made.
He has made out nature whole again,
and made it possible for mortal people to reflect the life of angels.**

**Lord,
look with favor on your handmaids.
They place in your hands their resolve to live in chastity,
You inspire them to take this vow;
now they give you their hearts.
[Only you can kindle this flame of love, and feed its brightness,
giving strength and perseverance to our will.
Without you our flesh is weak,**

bound by the law of nature,
 free with false freedom,
 imprisoned by habit,
 softened by the spirit of the age.]

You have poured out your grace upon all peoples.
 You have adopted as heirs of the new covenant
 sons and daughters from every nation under heaven,
 countless as the stars.
 Your children are born, not of human birth,
 nor of man's desire, but of your Spirit.
 Among your many gifts
 you give to some the grace of virginity.
 Yet the honor of marriage is in no way lessened.
 As it was in the beginning,
 your first blessing still remains upon this holy union.
 Yet your loving wisdom chooses those
 who make sacrifice of marriage
 for the sake of the love of which it is the sign.
 They renounce the joys of human marriage,
 but cherish all that it foreshadows.

[Those who choose chastity have looked upon the face of Christ,
 its origin and inspiration.
 They give themselves wholly to Christ,
 the Son of the ever-virgin Mary,
 and the heavenly Bridegroom of those
 who in his honor dedicate themselves to lasting virginity.]

Lord,
 protect those who seek your help.
 They desire to be strengthened by your blessing and consecration.
 Defend them from the cunning and deceit of the enemy.
 Keep them vigilant and on their guard;
 may nothing tarnish the glory of perfect virginity,
 or the vocation of purity which is shared by those who are married.

Through the gift of your Spirit, Lord,
 give them modesty with right judgment,
 kindness with true wisdom,
 gentleness with strength of character,
 freedom with the grace of chastity.
 Give them the warmth of love,
 to love you above all others.

Make their lives deserve our praise,
without seeking to be praised.
May they give you glory
by holiness of action and purity of heart.
May they love you and fear you;
may they love you and serve you.

Be yourself their glory, their joy, their whole desire.
Be their comfort in sorrow, their wisdom in perplexity,
their protection in the midst of injustice,
their patience in adversity,
their riches in poverty,
their food in fasting,
their remedy in time of sickness.

They have chosen you above all things;
may they find all things in possessing you.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

PRESENTATION OF THE INSIGNIA OF CONSECRATION

One of the following forms, nos. 25 to 29 or nos. 151 to 154, is used.

25. After the prayer of consecration, the bishop and the people sit. The newly consecrated stand and, accompanied by the two consecrated or lay women mentioned above, come before the bishop. He says once for all of them:

If the veil is given:

Dearest daughters,
receive the veil and the ring
that are the insignia of your consecration.
Keep unstained your fidelity to your Bridegroom,
and never forget that you are bound
to the service of Christ and of his body, the Church.
They all reply together. Amen.

26. Or, if the veil is not given:

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.
They all reply together. Amen.

27. While the newly consecrated kneel, the bishop gives the ring to each one and, if customary, the veil and other insignia of consecration.

Meanwhile, the choir and the people may sing the following antiphon with Psalm 45.

**To you, O Lord, I lift my soul;
come and rescue me, for you are my refuge and my strength.**

The antiphon is repeated after every two verses. **Glory to the Father** is not said. The psalm is interrupted and the antiphon repeated when the presentation of the insignia is completed.

Any other appropriate song may be sung.

PRESENTATION OF THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

28. Then, if it seems appropriate, the bishop gives the newly consecrated the book containing the prayer of the Church, saying these or similar words:

**Receive the book of the liturgy of the hours,
the prayer of the Church;
may the praise of our heavenly Father
be always on your lips;
pray without ceasing
for the salvation of the whole world.
All reply together: Amen.**

The newly consecrated come before the bishop, who gives each a copy of the liturgy of the hours. After receiving it, they return to their places and remain standing.

29. Then, if appropriate, this or some suitable antiphon is sung.

**I am espoused to him whom the angels serve;
sun and moon stand in wonder at his glory.**

If possible, all those newly consecrated sing the antiphon together; otherwise the choir sings it.

Or.

[151] (For the giving of the veil. The rite is omitted if those consecrated have already received the veil canonically.) After the prayer of consecration the bishop and the people sit. The newly consecrated stand and, accompanied by the conse-

crated or lay women mentioned above, come before the bishop. He gives the veil to each one, saying:

**Receive this veil,
by which you are to show
that you have been chosen from other women
to be dedicated to the service of Christ
and of his body, which is the Church.
Each one replies: Amen.**

After receiving the veil each one returns to her place and remains standing. When all have received their veils, they sing the antiphon:

**I will raise my mind and heart to you, O Lord,
that I may be holy in body and in spirit.**

The choir may begin the antiphon after the veil has been given to the first or second one. It may be repeated after one or more verses of a suitable psalm or canticle.

[152] (For the giving of the ring.) When all have received the veil, the rings are given in the following way: those consecrated come before the bishop in the same order as before. Then he gives each one her ring, saying:

**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.
Each one replies: Amen.**

PRESENTATION OF THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

[153] Then, if it seems appropriate, the bishop gives the newly consecrated the book containing the prayer of the Church, saying these or similar words:

**Receive the book of the liturgy of the hours,
the prayer of the Church;
may the praise of our heavenly Father
be always on your lips;
pray without ceasing
for the salvation of the world.
Each replies: Amen.**

Each returns to her place.

[154] After all have received the insignia of profession, those consecrated sing the antiphon:

I am espoused to him whom the angels serve;

sun and moon stand in wonder at his glory.

If appropriate the choir may sing the antiphon after the ring has been given to the first or second person. It may be repeated after one or more verses of a suitable psalm or canticle.

31. After this the newly consecrated return to their places in the sanctuary and the Mass continues.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

32. During the preparation of the gifts, some of the newly consecrated may bring to the altar the bread, wine, and water for the eucharistic sacrifice.

33. In the eucharistic prayer the offering of those newly consecrated may be mentioned (see Ritual Masses, Consecration to a Life of Virginity).

34. After **The peace of the Lord be always with you**, the bishop gives an appropriate sign of peace to those newly consecrated.

35. After the bishop has received the body and blood of Christ, the newly consecrated come to the altar to receive communion under both kinds.

Their parents, relatives, and friends may also receive communion under both kinds.

CONCLUDING RITE

SOLEMN BLESSING

36. When the prayer after communion has been said, those newly consecrated stand before the altar. The bishop faces them and sings or says one of the following:

**The almighty Father
has poured into your hearts
the desire to live a life of holy virginity.
May he keep you safe under his protection.
± Amen.**

**May the Lord Jesus Christ,
with whose sacred heart
the hearts of virgins are united,
fill you with his divine love.
± Amen.**

**May the Holy Spirit,
by whom the Virgin Mary conceived her Son,
today consecrate your hearts
and fill you with a burning desire
to serve God and his Church.
± Amen.**

Finally he blesses the whole congregation:

**May almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
bless all of you who have taken part in this celebration.
± Amen.**

Or [155, 156]:

**God inspires all holy desires and brings them to fulfillment.
May he protect you always by his grace
so that you may fulfill the duties of your vocation
with a faithful heart.
± Amen.**

**May he make each of you a witness
and sign of his love for all people.
± Amen.**

**May he make those bonds
with which he has bound you to Christ on earth
endure for ever in heavenly love.
± Amen.**

Finally he blesses the whole congregation:

**May almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
bless all of you who have taken part in this celebration.
± Amen.**

38. After the blessing by the bishop, the newly consecrated may take their candles. The choir and the people sing an appropriate song or a canticle of praise, and the procession is formed as at the beginning.

THE CODE OF CANON LAW

CANON 604

1. The order of virgins is also to be added to these forms of consecrated life. Through their pledge to follow Christ more closely, virgins are consecrated to God, mystically espoused to Christ and dedicated to the service of the Church, when the diocesan Bishop consecrates them according to the approved liturgical rite.
2. Virgins can be associated together to fulfill their pledge more faithfully, and to assist each other to serve the Church in a way that befits their state.

THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINS ACCORDING TO ORDO CONSECRATIONIS VIRGINUM

(Latin for: The Rite of Consecration
to a Life of Virginity),

Br. Pierre Raffin, OP, Bishop of Metz

The restoration of Ordo Virginum 25 years ago was the fruit of a liturgical decision since it is the promulgation of Ordo Consecrationis Virginum on May 31, 1970, resulting from the Sacrosanctum Concilium Constitution (n° 30) (= Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), which gave a new existence to a nearly obsolete institution. The canonical dispositions themselves were only to appear thirteen years later in 1983 when the new Codex Iuris Canonici (Code of Canon Law) was promulgated. It was therefore necessary to mark the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of Ordo Consecrationis Virginum and on the occasion of this jubilee, to spend some time studying the rite itself as well as underlining what callings and promises are entailed.

1. Liturgical Consecration.

The title Ordo Consecrationis Virginum as René Metz, a leading historian of Ordo Virginum (=the Order of Virgins) remarks, has a meaning. Although in the oldest liturgical tradition the three words consecratio, benedictio or velatio (= consecration, blessing, veiling) are used, in the most recent tradition, only the terms benedictio and consecratio have been retained; at the present time, the precise meaning of the words consecratio and benedictio in the technical language of liturgists and canonists should normally have led to the suppression of consecratio in favour of the word benedictio. Yet the reverse took place.

“By suppressing the word consecratio in order to keep benedictio alone, one ran the risk of seriously compromising the prestige formerly enjoyed by this sanctifying rite which is now being recovered. Indeed it means more than a simple blessing; by this rite, a person becomes so to speak “a thing of God”; she becomes sacrata to use an expression familiar to St. Ambrose. We have here a solemn act which goes beyond a mere benedictio.” (pp.1.94)

To refer to Ordo Consecrationis does not mean instituting an eighth sacrament. According to Praenotanda, (= the Introduction to the Rite) Ordo Consecrationis Virginum is a ‘sollemnis ritus, quo virgo constituetur persona sacrata’ (= a solemn rite constituting the candidate a sacred person) (Rite, n° 17) in other words, a sacramental. What is a sacramental? It is an action or sacred reality which belongs to the sacramental order in the broad sense of the word without being a sacrament properly so called. Before the seven sacraments were instituted in the 12th century, the word sacrament referred to any sacred function. It is commonly said that the sacraments act *ex opere operato*, i.e. only because the rite is accomplished, whereas the sacramentals bring about the action of the Church *ex opera operantis Ecclesiae*, i.e. only because of the action and prayer of the Church. Yet it is not a question of God acting in the sacraments while the Church deals with the sacramentals, since all liturgy is a work between God and the Church and the most humble sacramental appeals to God’s sanctifying action. What one should remember is that sacraments are of divine institution, whereas sacramentals have been instituted by the Church but not without the assistance of the Holy Spirit.⁽²⁾ In this present case of Ordo

Consecrationis Virginum, we are dealing with one of the most ancient sacramentals of the Church, since the oldest texts date back to the age of the Church Fathers.

Today the Church celebrates this sacramental, either for enclosed nuns or for women who lead a secular life in the world. In doing so, the Church revives an old and venerable practice. Since the 4th century there had been in Rome and elsewhere two kinds of virgins devoted to God: those who lived in the world and those who had accepted communal life in a convent. The 1970 Ordo considers both cases but the liturgical differences are of minor importance and only really concern the possible insertion of the religious profession in the ceremony for enclosed nuns.

2. Public and Solemn Consecration.

The words Ordo Consecrationis indicate that the consecration of virgins is primarily an act of the Church rather than a step taken by one person, or to put it better, an act of God himself through the ministry of the Church. In the usual vocabulary we refer to “devoting ourselves” or “devoting our lives to” emphasizing the human commitment. Let us mention here by the way that here is what is specific to the religious profession even if the vows are made to God Himself and if the new Ordo Professionis Religiosae (= Rite of Religious Profession) has introduced a Sollemnis benedictio seu consecratio professi (= a Solemn Blessing or consecration of the Professed) which is similar to the Sollemnis prex consecrationis (= a Solemn Prayer of Consecration) of the Consecration of virgins. Even if this Sollemnis prex consecrationis is preceded by Contitatis propositi renovation (= the Renewal of Intention to live a life of perfect chastity) it nonetheless remains essential and specific to the rite.

The ordinary minister of the sacramental of the consecration of virgins is the bishop of the diocese, “*Episcopus Ordinarius loco*” (= the Bishop who is the Ordinary of the Place) (Praenotanda, nb 6). Indeed through his ministry the virgin accepts Christ as her Bridegroom. “*Vultis consecrari ac Domino nostro Iesu Christo, summo Dei Filio, solemniter desponsari?*” (= Are you resolved to accept solemn consecration as a bride of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God?) as is said in the Rite, n° 17, an idea which Canon 604 has taken up. In this, the consecrated virgin becomes an eschatological image of the Spouse-Church, to quote the very words of Praenotanda: “*imago eschatologica Sponsae caelestis*” (= an eschatological image of the glory of the heavenly Bride of Christ) (n° 1). It is through the particular Church of which she is a living stone and of which her bishop is the Bridegroom that the virgin celebrates her exclusive mystical nuptials with Christ. And yet the human link of affection with the bishop of the diocese who consecrates her is secondary because what is prior is the link with Christ and the Church; the connection is not from the consecrated virgin to the bishop and through him to the Church but from the consecrated virgin to the Church and then to the bishop who is the servant of the Church and the instrument of the consecration. The virgin is not consecrated by the physical person of the bishop but through his ministry. Therefore what matters is the episcopal ministry and not the person who exercises it and who is bound to change. In analogy I revere the bishop who ordained me as a deacon, a priest and a bishop but what is prior is the episcopal ministry of those who have ordained me. . . Of course such a woman becomes a consecrated virgin in such a particular Church and through this has an institutional connection with her bishop, but she becomes a consecrated virgin in the Catholic Church, a member of Ordo Virginum of, and in the Catholic Church.

Can the bishop of the diocese delegate his ministry of consecration of virgins? The Rite does not consider this possibility but the Caeremoniale Episcoporum which was promulgated more recently and is an authority in the matter, specifies that “*Alius tamen Episcopus ritis praeesse potest de consensu ipsius Episcopi diocesani*” (= Another bishop may perform the Rite with the consent of the diocesan Bishop) (n° 720). “*Alius Episcopus*” is not only the coadjutor auxiliary bishop but any bishop of the Catholic Church. The Caeremoniale Episcoporum does not envisage that a priest can be delegated as is the case for the sacrament of confirmation (Canon 884). Is a sacramental like the consecration of virgins more important than a sacrament? Of course not but it is not so frequently celebrated and has not the same urgent character as confirmation, a sacrament of Christian initiation.

The consecration of virgins is a **festive rite** of the Church. Thus one should choose to celebrate it during “*the octave of Easter, or on solemnities (especially those which celebrate the Mystery of Incarnation), on Sundays and on the feast-days of Our Lady or holy Virgins*” (Rite, n° 1).

It is also a public rite of the Church. If enclosed nuns are consecrated in the church of their convent, women who live in the world are consecrated in the cathedral church “*nisi res moresque loci aliud suadeant*” (= unless circumstances or local custom suggests otherwise); so the French adaptation of the Rite says that the consecration should “*normally take place in a church where the presence of the faithful expresses the part taken by the local community in this event. . . in the church where the place that the consecration gives them in the particular Church will be best conveyed*”.

Such details are reasonable for apart from the most knowledgeable Catholics, most people are not likely to understand the meaning of Consecrated Virginité easily.

Since it is a public rite of the Church, the people of God will be invited; “*pro opportunitate*” (= as occasion offers) as the Latin text says, and the translation into French specifies: “*One will encourage the enlightened participation of the people of God*”. (Here is what the English text says: As occasion offers, and especially to promote an esteem for chastity, to deepen understanding in the Church and to encourage a greater attendance of the people, the faithful should be notified of the celebration in good time. (Rite, n° 4).

3. Description of the Rite.

This public rite of the Church is celebrated during Mass after the homily which will bring out the ecclesial meaning:

“Thus we come back to an old tradition which we can trace back to a collection entitled the Pontifical of Saint-Aubin of Angers dating back to the end of the 9th century, as René Metz explains. In the middle of the 10th century the author of the Romano-German Pontifical also placed the consecration after the reading of the Gospel; but this practice was not kept. In most manuscripts of the Romano-German Pontifical, the place of the ceremony was changed and moved between the epistle and the Gospel. This practice was taken up in all the later rites without exception. It was still after the reading of the

epistle, more exactly after the singing of the gradual, that the consecration of virgins took place until the New Rite was promulgated in 1970.” ⁽³⁾

The Missal and the Lectionary contain the proper texts for the occasion and should be used according to liturgical rules.

The proclamation of the Gospel is followed by the Virginum advocatio (= Calling of the Candidate(s)).

As René Metz says:

“The ceremony begins with the call to the candidates. As they stand at the entrance to the sanctuary, the bishop sings the 12th verse of Psalm 33 (as an invitation to them to enter the sanctuary). ‘Come my daughters, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.’ The candidates respond to the invitation and as they approach the sanctuary, they sing two verses of the Canticle of Azariah (Daniel 3, 41-42): ‘Now with all our hearts we follow you. Lord’.

This part of the ceremony is relatively ancient. The rite of the call, together with the corresponding texts (mentioned above) are to be found in several Pontificals of the 12th and early 13th centuries. The elements of the ceremony could already be found in older rites which did not all concern the consecration of virgins. . .

The only change which the present text has adopted consists in mentioning the bishop’s call only compared to the three calls made to the candidates in the former rite. After each call, the candidates moved a few steps forward in order to reach their place in the choir after the third call.” ⁽⁴⁾

This rite may be accompanied by that of the light, inspired by the Gospel parable of the ten virgins who had lit their lamps. In this case, the antiphon Prudentes virgines (= Be wise, make ready your lamps) is sung after the bishop’s call while the candidates stand up, light their lamps and step forward towards the bishop.

After the homily, a dialogue takes place between the bishop and the virgins. The candidates must be fully aware of the commitment which they are undertaking and must assume their responsibilities in full knowledge of what they are doing before the people of God. That is why the bishop begins by asking the candidates if, on their part, they are resolved to persevere in the holy state of consecrated virginity (or monastic life) throughout their lives as well as in the service of God and his Church, and secondly if they wish to receive consecration and become the brides of Christ.

This dialogue which figured in the previous rite dates back to the late 13th century and bears some resemblance to the rite of ordination.

The dialogue is immediately followed by the Litany of the Saints. The final request, “*Ut has ancillas tuas benedicere, et sanctificare et consecrare digneris*” (= Bless these handmaids, make

them holy and consecrate them to your service), borrowed from the rite of ordination, was introduced at the end of the 13th century.

Then the candidates express or renew either the propositum of chastity (Renewal of the Intention) for women who remain in the world or the monastic vows for nuns. To take this vow, each virgin places her joined hands between those of the bishop. At the end of the 13th century, Guillaume Durand, the bishop of Mende, had already prescribed this gesture in his rite for the consecration of virgins. Guillaume Durand did not invent this rite but borrowed it from the rite of ordination for priests. Like the virgin, the ordinand placed his joined hands between those of the bishop as he swore allegiance to him; the bishop then gave the priest the kiss of peace. The embrace was probably suppressed from the rite of the consecration of virgins on grounds of propriety

This rite which has also been used in the religious profession of the Dominicans, *in manibus Fioris*, (= in the hands of the Prior) from the very beginnings of the Order, was borrowed from the feudal society. The gesture described in the ordination of priests or monastic Dominican Professions or in the consecration of virgins corresponded to the attitude of the vassal paying obeisance to his suzerain, i.e. bestowing his whole person upon him while swearing allegiance. The suzerain then gave the kiss of peace to his subject. In the rite of the consecration of virgins, the bishop stands for Christ—the Bridegroom to whom the virgin gives up her whole self and promises fidelity.

4. Nature of propositum castitatis (= the Renewal of Intention of Chastity)

The nature of the propositum has already been questioned. Indeed certain authors refuse to consider it as a vow or sacred bond (ligamen sacrum) which forms the basis of consecrated life (Canon 573,2). Yet consecrated virginity is indeed a stabilis vivendi forma (= stable form of living) (Canon 573,1) judging from the first question asked by the bishop to the candidates: “*Vultis in sanctae virginitatis proposito ac Domini Ecclesiaeque servitio ad extremum vitae perseverare?*” (= Are you resolved to persevere to the end of your days in the holy state of Virginity and in the service of God and his Church?) (Rite, n° 17) The oldest Tradition considered the unfaithful virgin as adulterous and sacrilegious towards Christ since it did not believe that the Church had power to give dispensation — as was it the case for Solemn Profession as St Thomas Aquinas teaches (Summa 2a 2ae q 88a 11). The propositum which the virgin professes for life, although it is not a vow strictly speaking, has the same dignity and similar effects. It introduces the person who makes it into a public state of consecrated life.

One might object that, unlike the vows, the consecration of virgins does not constitute, according to the present Code of Canon Law, a nullifying impediment to marriage. This discrepancy in the Code of Canon Law is sooner or later bound to be removed by the Pontifical Council for the interpretation of legislative texts, for, as I have just said, the Tradition is unanimous in suggesting the consecration constitutes a diriment impediment to marriage.

This indicates the high esteem accorded by the Church to the consecration of virgins and how important it is to confer it only on women who are sufficiently mature and fully aware of the implications of such a commitment.

The propositum concerns chastity (perfecta castitas) and the following of Christ (sequela Christi) but sequela Christi thus understood clearly includes the other evangelical counsels which form the basis of consecrated life (Canon 573,1) without which the propositum would not really be evangelical.

5. The Consecration Proper

The bishop then proceeds to the consecration proper. In the present Rite, the consecration consists of one prayer only. This gives it a dignified yet simple character which it did not have in the previous rites. The unique formula now used by the bishop is the oldest prayer of consecration which has come down to us through the ages. It is the prayer of consecration which is found in the Leonine Sacramentary, which is the oldest version of the Roman liturgy extant.

The various elements which make up the Leonine Sacramentary date back to a period extending from the late 4th century to the middle of the 6th century. In this Sacramentary we find the beautiful prayer of consecration of virgins which the new Rite has retained in full while later additions to the original text have been withdrawn.

This prayer is in the form of a long Preface. It begins by praising the Lord for the marvelous effects of the Incarnation. It tells us that not only has God reestablished man in his first state of innocence but He has also given him the ability to imitate the perfection of angels: the virgin who gives herself totally to God, realizes this ideal. What is more, God has opened up the prospect of meeting His Son to the human soul, an encounter of which married love, however great and holy it might be, only gives an imperfect image: through her commitment, the virgin is admitted into the intimacy of her divine Bridegroom.

But how could a human creature aspire to such happiness if God Himself did not both arouse in her a taste for it and give his help to achieve it? There are indeed many obstacles on the way of the woman who embraces such an ideal.

That is why the second part of the prayer is in the form of a supplication:

Lord, protect those who seek your help. They desire to be strengthened by your blessing and consecration.

The virtues proper to the consecrated virgin are obviously modesty but also prudence and simplicity, kindness and wisdom, gravity and tactfulness, "casta libertas" (= chaste liberty) and above all, charity.

Such is the magnificent prayer which the liturgical reform resulting from the last Council has restored to us. Nowadays many historians think that Pope St. Leo the Great composed the prayer himself. Whether this is true or not, this magnificent text is for consecrated virgins the major spiritual reference on which the spirituality of Ordo Virginum (= the Order of Virgins) may be based.

6. What is meant here by ‘Consecration’?

The sollemnis prex consecrationis (= Solemn Prayer of Consecration) makes the virgin, over whom the bishop prays, a persona sacrata. How are we to understand this expression? When trying to define what consecrated life is, the October 1994 Synod which has not yet been concluded by the Holy Father developed the teaching of Vatican II that the fundamental consecration is that of the sacraments and first and foremost, that of baptism. Baptismal consecration makes the person, as St Paul says, a “new creature” and nothing else is needed for a Christian to attain the perfection of charity. It is an initiative of God, through the ministry of the Church, and a response of the person to whom this initiative is addressed. On this level, which is sacramental, we may say, for example, that married people lead a consecrated life. Any other type of consecration can only be understood on the basis of the sacraments of Christian initiation and by analogy, in relation to these sacraments.

Taking up the approach of Lumen Gentium which first and foremost referred to baptismal life and the universal call to holiness which baptism entails and only then mentioned religious life as an animating and significant response to this unique call, we may explain “consecrated life” as a specific response to this call, a response marked by evangelical radicality, particularly by the commitment to chastity lived in celibacy for the Kingdom.

Celibacy for the Kingdom is the main characteristic of “consecrated life”. Should celibacy be missing there would be no “consecrated life” in the full sense of the word: the sequela Christi (= the following of Christ), in its radicality, implies celibacy for the Kingdom. It particularly testifies to an exclusive attachment to God and the certainty that the Kingdom of God is here and to come. It is a response of faith to the dazzling attraction of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. It contributes to making consecrated life a sign given to the Church.

Moreover, Lumen Gentium states that among the evangelical counsels “*Outstanding among them is that precious gift of divine grace which the Father gives to some, so that by virginity or celibacy, they can more easily devote their entire selves to God alone with undivided heart.*” (n° 42).

History confirms this way of seeing since the first form of consecrated life which appeared after martyrdom is consecrated virginity, as Ordo Consecrationis Virginus (the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity) recalls.

Therefore, a persona sacrata is, in the fullest sense of the words, a baptized person who leads a “consecrated life” in the way it has just been described; a baptized person who, in response to a call from God, leads a Christian life according to one of the types of consecrated life officially recognized by the Church and thus seeks to be wholly devoted to God and his/her brethren. The consecrated virgin is a baptized woman who, strengthened by the liturgical consecration she has received from the bishop, becomes a signum transcendens amoris Ecclesiae erga Christum, (= a surpassing sign of the Church’s love for Christ) and an imago eschatologica Sponsae caelestis vitaeque futurae (= an eschatological image of the heavenly bride and of the world to come) (Praenotanda, n° 1).

The ‘consecrated life’ itself is a lay life, even if consecrated people may sometimes be ordained. However, the term lay should be clearly defined. Is it being used in the sense of Lumen Gentium n° 31 which defines the lay person by distinguishing him from the Christian in Holy Orders or in religious life — which results in dividing Christ’s faithful into three categories — or is it being used in the sense of Lumen Gentium n° 43 according to which the state of life based on the religious vows and taking into account the divine and hierarchical constitution of the Church, does not stand between the state of the cleric and that of the lay person, a position which has been adopted in Canon 207?

According to this meaning, a consecrated virgin remains a lay person as does an enclosed nun.

M.Th. HUGUET prefers to describe the consecrated virgin as secular since the Ordo refers to mulieres vitam saecularem agentes (= Women living in the world) (Praenotanda, n° 3).

“Indeed the consecrated virgin, she writes, is not devoted directly, as are lay people or members of Secular Institutes, to the building of this world since she stands on the frontier of earth and heaven” ⁽⁵⁾

This distinction seems to me somewhat far-fetched. Is there a fundamental difference between a lay teacher, a teacher who is a consecrated virgin or a teacher who is a member of a secular institute, as regards the building of the earthly city? Do not all three of them contribute to it, whether they intend to or not, if they lead their professional lives with competence and evangelical vigour? -

What is true is that the consecration of virgins must be clearly distinguished from a service or mission, which a bishop may entrust to one of the women of his diocese. The consecration is not a kind of ministerial ordination, however much the rite of ordinations may have influenced the rite of the consecration of virgins. A bishop may well entrust a given mission to a consecrated virgin, if he wishes to do so, but he may just as well content himself with the servitium Ecclesiae proprio statui consonum (= the service of the Church in a way that befits their state) mentioned by Canon 604,2. In these days of almost obsessive demand for women’s ministry, it is essential that we do not become confused and ask of the consecration of virgins that which it is not: it is not a sending out on mission, nor is it a commitment to mission; just as the propositum is nothing without the consecration which follows it.

7. Consecrated in the heart of the Church.

The servitium (= service) mentioned by Canon 604,2 is very well defined by Silvia Recchi when she writes:

“The consecrated virgin is a transcendent sign of the loving response of the Church to her Bridegroom. So, the virgin can be said to become an image of the whole Church. The virgin personifies the Church in her personal bridal vocation. Her mission consists in living and showing in a prophetic way this mystery of the love between Christ and the Church, a sign of what the Church already is and what humanity must become.”

This is the first and principal service she must render in the heart of the particular Church where she has been consecrated. If other services or missions whether pastoral, apostolic or charitable are entrusted to her within this Church, as Praenotanda (=the Introduction to the Rite) suggest (n^o 2), she may well take them upon herself, even if they do not properly belong to her state of life, on condition that they do not jeopardize what is essential to her vocation and witness.

As Silvia Recchi rightly remarks, the nuptial relationship to Christ which is so clearly emphasized in virginal consecration, concerns all consecrated women, particularly enclosed nuns, “*but for the consecrated virgin this relationship with her heavenly Bridegroom constitutes the strongest, most specific and most striking feature of her identity.*”

Thus the texts and ritual of Ordo Consecrationis Virginum (= the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginité) provide sufficient material from which to derive the spirituality of Ordo Virginum. The Fathers, in their various treatises on consecrated virginity simply comment on and develop the aspects opened up by the Rite. Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter, Mulieris dignitatem (=the Dignity of Women) is in keeping with this tradition. This pontifical text is essential reading if we are to properly understand the vocation and mission of women in the Church and in the world today.

As we can only correctly understand and speak of Christian marriage today by seeing it in the light of celibacy for the Kingdom, so we can only properly speak of the consecrated virgin when we put her alongside the woman who is a spouse and mother. The vocation of the consecrated virgin who is also a spouse and mother can only be understood with reference to the vocation of the married woman and of human motherhood.

This does not prevent a consecrated virgin from being connected to a spiritual family and leading her life along Benedictine, Carmelite, Dominican or Franciscan lines. . . in the same way as a diocesan priest may enrich his ministry by his links with a spiritual family — but the consecrated virgin remains primarily rooted in medio Ecclesiae (= in the midst of the Church). Her first point of reference is the bishop of the diocese — the primary moderator of consecrated virginity — with whom she works out the way in which she will live her vocation and to whom she will give account for it at regular intervals. This is quite different from religious life or life in a secular institute.

8. Bridal Consecration.

The consecration of virgins ends with the traditio (= handing over) of the insignia which symbolize the new status of those consecrated: the veil (if this seems suitable), the ring, and possibly the breviary.

Originally the veil was the only sign of the consecration of virgins. Its use is strongly attested as early as the end of the 4th century. The giving of the veil was borrowed from the rites of marriage so as to convey the parallel that exists between the union of the virgin to Christ and human nuptials.

The giving of the ring came later in the rites used in Frankish countries, especially around 950 in the rite to be found in the Romano-German Pontifical. This rite has the same purpose as the veil: i.e to express the parallel between both states of life, that of the consecrated virgin and that of the married woman.

The rite of the giving of the breviary only appeared in the 15th century when the Roman Pontifical was published in 1497. This rite was mainly used by enclosed nuns who celebrated the choral office but it is not out of place today since the last Council expressed the wish that the Liturgy of the Hours might become the prayer of all baptized people.

This overview of Ordo Consecrationis Virginum (= the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity) leaves us with the feeling that to live such a life authentically is no easy task. This state of life presupposes emotional and psychological maturity and the capacity to live in solitude whilst at the same time, living a life involving relationships with other people.

Being a consecrated virgin also requires having the evangelical virtues mentioned in the great Prayer of Consecration. Can one fulfill such a vocation without a preliminary formation: a human formation, (psychological balance, an ability to live on one's own, an ability to blossom as a human being: "*Consecrated virgins have no love handicap*", as Cardinal Danneels once said; biblical, liturgical, doctrinal, spiritual formation?

Only under those conditions will Ordo Consecrationis, which was restored twenty-five years ago, bear fruit for the Church and for the World.

- (1) René Metz. Le nouveau rituel de Consecration des Vierges. Sa place dans l'histoire. La Matson-Dieu, 110, 1972, pp. 93-94
- (2) Sacramental article, in R. Le Gall, Dictionnaire de Liturgie, CDL. 1983
- (3) René Metz, art. cit. p.109
- (4) René Metz, *ibid.*
- (5) M-Th. Huguet, La renovation du rite liturgique de a Consecration des Vierges, p. 97 -

Preparation Process
for the
Consecration of Virgins Living in the World

Prepared by the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins

15 September 2000, Our Lady of Sorrows

INTRODUCTION

The revised Rite of Consecration of Virgins for Women Living in the World was published by the decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship on 31 May 1970, after having been formally decreed by the Second Vatican Council.

The decree of promulgation explains the development of this venerable and ancient rite in this way.

The rite for the consecration of virgins is one of the most treasured in the Roman liturgy. Consecrated virginity is among the most excellent gifts bequeathed by our Lord to his Bride, the Church. From apostolic times women have dedicated their virginity to God, so adding to the beauty of the mystical body of Christ and making it fruitful in grace. Even from earliest times, as the Fathers of the Church bear witness, mother Church in her wisdom set her seal on this high vocation by her practice of consecrating those who followed it by means of a solemn prayer. This prayer, enriched in the course of time by other ritual elements to bring out more clearly the symbolism of virginity in relation to the Church, the bride of Christ, was incorporated into the Roman Pontifical. [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 62 (1970): 650]

Canon 604 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* provides for the establishment of the Order of Virgins as a form of consecrated life in the Church. The word, order, is used in the sense of a distinct group of persons in the Church, for example, the order of presbyters, the order of deacons, the order of penitents or the order of widows. It is not used in the sense of a congregation of consecrated religious, for example, the Order of Saint Benedict, the Order of Preachers, or the Order of Friars Minor.

As expressed in the *Roman Pontifical*, the consecrated virgin is to be a “spouse of Christ,” a sign of Christ’s Virgin Bride, the Church. She is freely and joyfully to bear to Christ the same undivided and perpetual love that joins Christ and the Church. The ring she receives during the Rite symbolizes her perpetual fidelity to her Bridegroom. The suggested Homily in the Rite of Consecration of Virgins for Women Living in the World explains the origins of consecrated virginity in this way.

Our Lord himself taught us the high calling of such a life, consecrated to God and chosen for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. By his whole life, and especially by his labors, his preaching, and, above all, by his paschal mystery, he brought his Church into being. He desired it to be a virgin, a bride, and a mother: a virgin, to keep the faith whole and entire; a bride, to be one with him for ever; and a mother, to raise up the family of the Church.

The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, through baptism has already made you temples of God’s glory and children of the Father. Today through our ministry he anoints you with a new grace and consecrates you to God by a new title. He gives each one of you the dignity of being a bride of Christ and binds you to the Son of God in a covenant to last for ever.

The Church is the bride of Christ. This title of the Church was given by the fathers and doctors of the church to those like you who speak to us of the world to come, where there is no marrying or giving in marriage. You are a sign of the great mystery of salvation, proclaimed at the beginning of human history and fulfilled in the marriage covenant between Christ and his Church.

.....

You are apostles in the Church and in the world, in the things of the Spirit and in the things of the world. . . .

You have renounced marriage for the sake of Christ. Your motherhood will be a motherhood of the spirit, as you do the will of your Father and work with others in the spirit of charity, so that a great family of children may be born, or reborn, to the life of grace.

Your joy and your crown, even here on earth, will be Christ, the Son of the Virgin and the Bridegroom of virgins. He will lead all of you to his presence and into his kingdom, where you will sing a new song as you follow the Lamb of God wherever he leads you.
[from "Homily," #16, *Rite of Consecration for Women Living in the World*]

Consecrated to God, as a "spouse of Christ," the consecrated virgin is at the service of the Church. Her vocation is authenticated by the call of the bishop of her diocese. She lives in the heart of the Church in a definitive state of life. Her consecration does not establish her within a new structure or institute in the particular Church. Rather it establishes her in a true spiritual bond with the Diocesan Bishop and gives her a distinct spiritual identity in the whole Church.

Like the Church herself, her vocation is virginal, spousal, and maternal. Her primary service in the Church is prayer; hence she is given the Liturgy of the Hours as a sign of this spiritual responsibility. Consecrated virginity looks to its foundation in the early Church herself, under the inspiration of the mystery of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The consecrated virgin expends her efforts and energy according to her own unique talents, age, profession or occupation, and charisms in service to the Church. Her works of charity flow from her life of prayer as "spouse of Christ." She is dedicated to the service of the Church because she is espoused to Christ, her Bridegroom, forever.

**CONSECRATION OF A VIRGIN FOR A WOMAN LIVING IN THE WORLD
According to Canon 604**

APPLICATION FORM

To _____
(Bishop of the Diocese)

I, _____ (name), of _____ (city),
_____ (state), desiring to begin formal preparation to receive the Consecration of a
Virgin for a Woman Living in the World, according to Canon 604, make this petition to be
considered for such Consecration. I understand that a period of preparation must precede this
sacramental, and I offer my cooperation in such a process.

Signature: _____

Dated: _____

Personal Information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Place and Date of birth: _____

Place and Date of Baptism: _____

Place and Date of First Holy Communion: _____

Place and Date of Confirmation: _____

References: (Please list three. By listing their names below, you are agreeing that they may

answer questions about you and how they know you. Please do not list your spiritual director as one of these references.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please list the name and address of your pastor, who will be asked to be a reference for you.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please list the name and address of your spiritual director, who will be asked only if you have been receiving consistent spiritual direction.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Have you ever been a member of a religious institute or other form of the consecrated life, or have you applied to another diocese for the consecration of virgins living in the world? If yes, please explain.

Have you ever been married?

Have you ever lived in open violation of chastity?

Documentation:

Please attach proofs of Baptism (current copy of Baptismal Certificate), First Holy Communion, Confirmation, and citizenship.

Because the (Arch)Diocese of _____ is not responsible for the financial care of consecrated virgins, please indicate your means of financial independence:

- 1/ What is your current means of income?

- 2/ Is it adequate to support you?

- 3/ How are you providing for your retirement?

- 4/ What health insurance provisions do you have?

- 5/ Additional comments on your financial status if desired.

Please attach a personal life history, indicating your reasons for seeking the Consecration of a Virgin for a Woman Living in the World.

Please list below education and work experience, both salaried and volunteer, and indicate approximate dates. Attach a separate sheet if necessary.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Reference for: _____

As a Consecrated Virgin Living in the World, according to Canon 604

Note: This petitioner for the Consecration of a Virgin has agreed that you may respond to these questions.

Please be as thorough and specific as possible as you answer as many of these questions as you can.

1. Under what circumstances did you come to know her? How long have you known her? What is your present contact?

2. What characteristics do you observe that make her a fitting candidate for Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World?

3. What is her understanding of the doctrine of the faith and of the discipline of the Church?

4. How has she shown her faith in practice? Can you attest to her way of life as virtuous?

5. What is her experience and understanding of prayer and the spiritual life?

6. Describe the quality of her relationships with people.

Reference for: _____(cont.)

As a Consecrated Virgin Living in the World, according to Canon 604

7. How does she understand herself as a woman? How does she understand her sexuality?

8. Is she a mature, integral person? Has she demonstrated freedom and maturity in making decisions for herself?

9. How does she understand Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World? Does she understand it as a gift of grace? Does she understand the responsibilities that this vocation entails for the rest of her life?

10. How has her call to consecrated virginity lived in the world been tested over time?

11. How does she understand her relationship with the neighborhood/area in which she lives?

12. In your opinion, does the applicant possess sufficient age, prudence, and universally esteemed character to provide assurance of perseverance in a life of perpetual chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and of her neighbor?

13. Other comments. . . .

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Reference for: _____(cont.)

As a Consecrated Virgin Living in the World, according to Canon 604

Evaluator's name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip code: _____

Phone : _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

PROCEDURES

Criteria

1. Candidates must have suitable character and sufficient qualities of maturity as an integrated person. By age, prudence, and universally attested good character, the candidate must give assurance of perseverance in a life of chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and of her neighbor. Psychological health, character, and maturity are to be attested to, if necessary, by using experts.
2. Candidates must be free to accept a life of consecrated virginity lived in the world. It is required that she have never been married or lived in public or open violation of chastity. She should demonstrate in some way that her call to perpetual virginity has been tested over time.

Application

1. The individual completes the Application Form and submits it with the required documentation to the diocesan bishop.
2. Three references submit letters of recommendation to the diocesan bishop. See preceding sample reference questions.
3. In addition to the Application Form and the letters of recommendation from three references, documentation of Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation, and citizenship, and assurance of financial independence are required.
4. The applicant's spiritual director testifies in writing to the diocesan bishop that the applicant has been receiving regular and appropriate spiritual direction.
5. The diocesan bishop reviews the application and supporting documentation and letters. He accepts or rejects the application.

Period of Preparation to Receive the Consecration of a Virgin for a Woman Living in the World

1. The purpose of the period of preparation prior to reception of this sacramental of Consecration is to help the candidate better understand and live this divine vocation to which she is called. This period should further test and strengthen her resolve of perpetual virginity.
2. Ordinarily, the period of preparation is for not less than two years, but length of time will, nevertheless, depend on the candidate's progress and readiness.
3. The period of preparation is carried out with the assistance of the spiritual director and a

preparation coordinator who is well acquainted with the Consecration of a Virgin and who is appointed by the diocesan bishop to help coordinate the preparation process for the candidate. Should the Diocesan Bishop request it, the spiritual director may carry out the preparation coordination for the Consecration. In any case, however, the preparation coordinator should well understand the nature of the Consecration itself and the practicalities of life as a consecrated virgin living in the world. Ideally, the preparation coordinator would be a consecrated virgin.

4. The spiritual director and/or preparation coordinator is to provide guidance in development of prayer and the vocation of consecrated virginity itself. This spiritual guidance should include the model of the Church as Bride of Christ and the consecrated virgin as an icon of the Church. Guidance in prayer should include especially an understanding of the Liturgy of the Hours.

5. The preparation coordinator and the candidate periodically evaluate the progress of the preparation process. They will keep the diocesan bishop apprised of this progress.

6. At the conclusion of the period of satisfactory preparation, the preparation coordinator is to write a letter to the bishop recommending that the candidate receive the Consecration of a Virgin for a Woman Living in the World, according to Canon 604. The spiritual director will write a letter also attesting only to the fact that the candidate has been receiving regular and appropriate spiritual direction throughout the period of preparation.

Records

1. A file of all applications, letters, documents, and progress reports of the candidate is to be retained in the office of the diocesan bishop. A copy of her certificate of Consecration should be added to her file after her Consecration has taken place.

2. A certificate attesting to the Consecration is to be kept in the diocesan archives. [Please see sample.] The Consecration of a Virgin for a Woman Living in the World should be noted on the consecrated virgin's Baptismal record.

THE DIOCESAN BISHOP

Before the Preparation Period of the Candidate

The diocesan bishop is to decide if the applicant is suitable to begin preparation to receive the Consecration of a Virgin for a Woman Living in the World. He will take care in admitting individuals to the preparation process. Only a virgin who by her age, prudence, and universally approved character, and who gives assurance of perseverance in a life of virginity lived in the world should be allowed to receive the Consecration.

In collaboration with the candidate, he will decide on the conditions under which she will undertake a life of perpetual virginity lived in the world, in accord with her life's circumstances, health, occupation, individual talents and interests. He will also decide with her when they will have their regular meetings and whether he wishes to have any reports from her.

The diocesan bishop will see to it that a suitable preparation process is available for the candidate.

He will be able to suggest the names of possible spiritual directors in the diocese, if she does not know any who are knowledgeable about the Consecration of a Virgin for a Woman Living in the World.

He will be aware that the preparation for the Consecration of a Virgin Living in the World is not identical to that which some candidates may have received elsewhere in their spiritual life; therefore, he will be sure that the candidate understands the nature of this vocation in the consecrated life. It might be helpful to have available printed materials, videotapes, and audiocassette tapes that the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins has prepared as a service and resource to candidates. She should be encouraged to attend the annual Inquirers Retreat sponsored by the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins. It is understood that membership in the USACV is not required of any candidate or consecrated virgin; however, the USACV is always glad to be of service and to assist voluntarily with educational resources and personal communication.

During the Preparation Period of the Candidate

He will meet with the candidate early in her preparation process for the Consecration and continue to follow her progress in her preparation for this sacramental.

The diocesan bishop will make the final decision on whether a candidate, after proper preparation, is suitable to receive the Consecration of a Virgin for a Woman Living in the World.

The Rite of Consecration and after the Consecration

He will meet with her close to the Consecration date to begin the spiritual dialogue that they will carry on regularly after the Consecration.

The Rite of the Consecration of a Virgin is reserved to the diocesan bishop. He may, however, delegate another bishop to consecrate the virgin.

The Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginitv for a Woman Living in the World is to be celebrated in the manner set forth in the *Roman Pontifical*.

THE CANDIDATE

The virgin seeking to follow Christ more closely by the Consecration to a Life of Perpetual Virginity is consecrated to God by the diocesan bishop according to the approved liturgical rite. The diocesan bishop may delegate another bishop to perform the Consecration.

A virgin who aspires to receive the Consecration of a Virgin does so for the sake of a more fervent love of Christ and out of love of her brothers and sisters in the Church and in the world.

As a consecrated virgin, the individual is dedicated to the service of the Church. Her service will be according to her own abilities, circumstances, talents and charisms.

The virgin who petitions to receive the Consecration of a Virgin should have already lived a virginal commitment in tranquility for a number of years.

Each virgin petitions individually and not as part of a group or formal organization.

The individual who petitions to receive the Consecration of a Virgin accepts the responsibility to collaborate actively with her spiritual director and preparation coordinator so that she may faithfully respond to the grace of a divine vocation during her preparation period.

The candidate may freely leave the period of preparation prior to the Consecration; moreover, the bishop or the bishop in consultation with the preparation coordinator can dismiss the candidate.

Following her preparation period, the virgin may petition the bishop of the diocese to receive the Consecration of a Virgin for a Woman Living in the World. The bishop makes the final decision to consecrate the virgin.

The diocese assumes no financial responsibility for the support of a Consecrated Virgin Living in the World. In cases where she may be employed by a Church institution, the normal salary and benefits are to be assigned.

According to the Rite of Consecration, the virgin renews her resolve to follow Christ in a life of perfect chastity and then is consecrated to a life of perpetual virginity in the Church by the diocesan bishop.

The virgin is to be given a copy of the Liturgy of the Hours and a ring during the Rite of Consecration.

The spiritual bond between the consecrated virgin and the diocesan bishop should be nourished by their personal meeting, preferably two times a year, but at least once a year. The bishop will also encourage other means of communication, e.g., written communication when necessary.

The consecrated virgin should be considered an integral part of the diocese and can be called

upon for prayer and intercession; she should be included in diocesan events for consecrated persons as well as on mailing lists, in vocational information events, and other diocesan events proper to consecrated life.

The consecrated virgin, on her part, should participate as much as possible, as her circumstances permit, in the full life of the diocesan church.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Certain questions and areas of concern often come to mind as one reflects on this ancient and venerable vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world. Hence we have grouped together several questions often posed during retreats and meetings with our Episcopal Moderator. We hope the following paragraphs will help enlighten inquirers as they discern the nature of this vocation and whether this is the form of consecrated life they are called to follow.

1. Can you explain some of the theological/spiritual facets of the nature of consecrated virginity lived in the world?

We must remember that the theological virtue of love--the laying down of one's life for one's brothers--is the most important virtue, and it applies to all vocations in the Church. The Church has come to an understanding at this time of three states of life: the clergy, the laity, and consecrated persons. The consecrated virgin is a member of that third category; that is, she is a consecrated person.

As a consecrated person she lives in the world; she does not flee the world. Her life is 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 total virginity is a gift of grace; God Himself was the author of that gift, which she has kept intact and offered back to Him in total love on the day of her Consecration when she renewed her resolve to remain a virgin forever. During the Rite, exactly at the Prayer of Consecration which the bishop pronounces over her, the Holy Spirit poured out His grace on her to make that virginity spiritually fruitful.

2. Perhaps you can be more specific to help us understand how consecrated virginity is like and unlike other forms of consecrated life.

Yes, sometimes it helps to compare/contrast consecrated virginity lived in the world with other forms of consecrated life so that we can see and understand each form more clearly. Often consecrated virginity is regarded as a private vow lived in the world, or as a form of Religious life. Sometimes the term "Order" is misleading. Let us clarify these misunderstandings now.

In *Vita Consecrata*, the papal exhortation which is the result of the meeting of the World Synod of Bishops, we find that various categories of consecrated life are listed. They are all forms of consecrated life, e.g., monastic life, consecrated virgins, hermits, institutes of religious dedicated to the apostolate, religious institutes completely devoted to contemplation, and secular institutes. Each of these is a separate category under the larger, general "umbrella" term of "consecrated life." Each form is distinct in itself with its own attributes. Each

form, however, lives the evangelical counsels in imitation of Jesus Christ Himself, poor, obedient, and chaste. That does not mean, however, that all forms pronounce poverty, chastity, and obedience as vows.

In the case of Religious profession, the vows are pronounced and received by the Church. In the case of consecrated virginity the virgin presents herself to the Church and she is consecrated by the Church as a virgin living in the world. The Consecration is a definitive act on the part of the Church, constituting the individual in a particular state of holiness by the Church. Whereas it can be fitting, even, to speak of dispensing someone from vows or promises which she may have made, it does not make sense to speak of dispensing someone from an act of consecration made on the part of the Church itself.

The Consecration of a Virgin is a sign of the relationship of Christ, the Bridegroom, to the Church, the Bride. The consecrated virgin is a sign of the relationship of the Church, the Bride, to Christ, the Bridegroom. The sign is founded on the natural order, the relationship of a man and a woman in the marriage bond. Clearly, a man cannot be the sign of the Bride of Christ. Likewise, the spiritual relationship with Christ the Bridegroom is expressed in action by spiritual maternity in the Church. A man does not have the natural gifts of woman to exercise spiritual maternity.

The bond of Christ with His bride, made as a definitive act on the part of the Church as stated above, cannot be “undone.” That is, it cannot be dispensed. For that reason, a virgin should not be admitted for Consecration until she has reached a mature age, has lived consistently a chaste life, and shows every sign of perseverance in the gift of her virginity.

As such also, the Consecration cannot be “renewed,” as vows are, because the Consecration was received by the woman, not made or professed by her. She can reflect on the great gift of the Consecration which she received, she can renew her resolve to live as a virgin, but she cannot “renew” her Consecration as such. It is God who consecrates; the virgin merely offers herself.

We often hear of “Orders” in the Church, and most of the time reference is being made to a Religious institute, e.g., Order of Carmel, Order of St. Francis, Order of St. Benedict. In English we have only one word for “Order” which could mean a Religious institute as well as a category of consecrated life. The Order of Virgins refers to the latter meaning, that is, a category of consecrated life. It is not an Order in the sense of a Religious order, which is another form of consecrated life. One cannot, therefore, transfer vows from a Religious institute to the Order of Virgins and thereby be constituted a consecrated virgin under Canon 604.

Lastly, some people raise an objection or question why one would even aspire to receive the Consecration of Virgins when one already has a private vow or promise of perpetual virginity in place. Sacramentals are part of the treasury of

the Church constituted to confer grace when received properly. As any consecrated virgin can tell you now, great graces are conferred through that sacramental of the Church when the candidate properly prepared for this Consecration.

Today, even with just the relatively few consecrated virgins living in the world, we know that they are praying for families, priests, and Christian unity. Prayer is their primary “work.” They do not wear habits and veils, nor use the title “Sister,” nor write “OCV” after their names--these marks of consecrated life for those living in a Religious Institute do not belong to their state of consecrated virginity lived in the world. However, consecrated virgins witness subtly, but powerfully, by their very lives as virgins. Their life in their occupations often draws people to ask questions of them, and this is the very same kind of witness that the early virgins in the Church gave. They did not wear habits or live and work apart from the everyday world, yet they witnessed very powerfully by their consecrated life given exclusively to Jesus Christ alone. Consecrated virgins today wear their ring, but their comportment, modesty in dress, simplicity in life style all betoken their living of the evangelical counsels. Their loyalty to their bishop and the entire Magisterium of the Church should be a flawless witness of their obedience in the Church. They often are known in their parish communities or in other diocesan groups or apostolic endeavors, as they give of their time on a volunteer basis. They are not obliged to take up any particular work or apostolic activity in their parish or diocese, but they do all that they can as their circumstances permit in service to the Church.

3. As women discerning the call to consecrated virginity, what concrete steps should they be taking?

Certainly one should start with the prayer life of a consecrated virgin: daily Mass if possible, the Liturgy of the Hours, frequent Confession, and when possible the Rosary and visits to the Blessed Sacrament. They should read the Rite of Consecration and the lives of the virgin saints. If possible, they should then read what the Fathers of the Church wrote on consecrated virginity. Of course it is understood that if one cannot pray the Divine Office by reason of some handicap or another, one could still be consecrated. The same applies to daily Mass.

It is understood that those discerning this call should progress toward the Consecration with a spiritual director. Eventually, if it be discerned that this is the proper call, then the spiritual director will help them receive the Consecration properly and with its full effect as a sacramental in the Church.

Specifically, the process usually goes this way. One normally should have had a spiritual director for some years, and it is understood that the virgin is a practicing Catholic and accepts all the teachings of the Catholic Church. After a discernment process with her spiritual director and after having lived in tranquil celibacy for a number of years, then she can write a letter of petition to the bishop

of her diocese and request that she be considered to become a candidate for the Consecration of a Virgin living in the world. The bishop will usually meet with her to determine if she is a good candidate. If it is decided that she would be suitable for the Consecration, then she begins her preparation process. The time of preparation depends on how much the candidate already understands about the Consecration and how fast she can absorb the concepts. For each individual it will be different. The bishop of the diocese makes the final determination on whether the candidate, after her preparation, be suitable for the Consecration.

The Consecration as such has no upper age limit. At the other end of the scale, there is no certain age that one should have attained before one can receive the Consecration. Dioceses may choose to set a minimum age, but the important point is that the woman be of mature character, that she have lived in tranquil continence for a number of years, and that from all indications she will persevere in perpetual chastity.

The spiritual bond that the consecrated virgin will have with the bishop starts even before she receives the Consecration. In the introductory text for the Consecration, it is stated that the bishop is to start a dialogue with the virgin even before she is consecrated. It is understood, then, that if this dialogue is only to start before the Consecration, it will continue on after the Consecration too. Usually, the bishop will meet with the consecrated virgin every six months, or at least once a year. Of course the bishop himself will meet with the consecrated virgin as an individual, never delegating such a rich meeting to someone else nor meeting with all the consecrated virgins in the diocese at once. This is not an annual review, but a rewarding and pleasant dialogue. It is a good idea sometime to read the Fathers of the Church as they wrote about virgins as they knew them in the early Church.

4. Some practical questions often come up about the Rite itself and related matters. Let us tackle those briefly now.

Some candidates ask if they can receive a crucifix as part of the insignia during the Rite. It is discouraged to add anything to the Rite, and usually a crucifix is an insignia of mission to Sisters after they make Profession. This addition of a crucifix, as devotional as it is, would tend to blur the distinction of consecrated virgin living in the world and a Religious making Profession in an apostolic institute.

Sometimes it is thought that the Consecration could be delegated to a priest to perform. It is very clear from history and from the *Roman Pontifical* that this Rite is reserved to the bishop of the diocese. The bishop of the virgin's diocese, however, may delegate it to another bishop to perform, but he should not delegate it to a priest. The full symbolism of the Rite of Consecration is reflected when the diocesan Bishop carries it out because of the spiritual bond which exists between consecrated virgins and their bishop.

After the Consecration, an official notation should be made in the Baptismal record of the consecrated virgin, just as one records marriages or Religious Profession. The consecrated virgin herself should receive a document testifying to her Consecration and a copy of this document should be filed in the diocesan archives.

5. Could we look at some of the practical questions now about the actual living of this vocation in the Church? What are some of the aspirations of consecrated virgins today?

Because consecrated virgins want to grow in their life of prayer and to participate in their diocese as much as their individual situations permit, they often have two requests. They want to be able to adore the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament as fervently and as often as they can and, therefore, they ask how they can receive permission to have the Blessed Sacrament reserved in their homes. This permission can be granted only by the Ordinary of the diocese. The pertinent canons of the *Code of Canon Law* are: canons 934 § 1, no. 2; 934, § 2; 938, §§ 2-5; 940; 941, §§ 1-2; and 943. A second request is that they be notified of diocesan events that would pertain properly to them so that they can attend, if they can.

Sometimes they want to know if they can be a god-mother for a child at Baptism. Of course they can. Others wish to know what procedure to follow should they have to move from their current diocese into another one, to take a job, for example. In the case of relocation, a consecrated virgin should write a letter to inform her current bishop that she will be moving and write a letter to the bishop into whose diocese she will be living to let him know who she is and of her plans to change residence. It is helpful for the bishop of her current diocese to write a letter to the bishop into whose diocese she will move to introduce her to him.

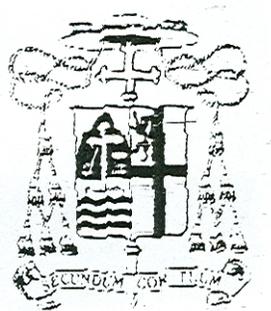
In some rare cases, a consecrated virgin may live in one diocese but work “across the border,” so to speak, in another diocese. Then the question comes up as to which diocese she should consider herself a part. The answer is that her diocese is the one in which she intends to make her home.

Another question, sometimes posed, is whether a person after having received the Consecration of Virgin for a Woman Living in the World could become a Religious Sister at a later date. It is possible that a consecrated virgin living in the world may later discern a further vocation to the religious life. There is nothing in the vocation to consecrated virginity lived in the world which is contrary to profession as a religious. It would, however, mean that the consecrated virgin ceases to live in the world and accepts the essential elements of religious life, which are distinct from consecrated virginity. What must be noted here is that consecrated virginity lived in the world has its own integrity as a distinct form of consecrated life and leads the consecrated virgin to holiness of life. It is not a lesser form of consecrated life which can be perfected by the call to a higher form

of consecrated life. Therefore, the consecrated virgin living in the world who has carefully discerned her vocation will not be likely to discern another form of vocation to the consecrated life. It is important to discern properly, through a thorough preparation, whether one is called to consecrated virginity lived in the world. Once the virgin has made the proper preparation and received the Consecration, she should devote herself with an undivided heart to fulfilling the requirements of her state and vocation in life.

RAIMUNDUS LEO

Divina Miseratione et



Apostolicae Sedis Gratia

EPISCOPUS CROSSENSIS

Hisce litteris fidem facimus atque testamur

dilectam Nobis in Christo filiam

CLEMENTISSIMAM DOMINAM PATRICIAM MARIAM MURRAY

Virginem vitam sæcularem agentem

intra Missæ celebrationem

iuxta ritum Sanctæ Roman Ecclesiæ

et formam in *Pontificali Romano* præscriptam

a Nobis consecratam esse

die octava mensis iunii anno Domini MCMXCVII,

in cathedrali templo Sancti Ioseph Opificis.

Datum Crossæ, die octava mensis iunii anno Domini MCMXCVIIº, Dominica decima per annum.

L. S.

Episcopus Diœcesanus

Cancellarius

RAYMOND LEO

By the Grace of God and



the Favor of the Apostolic See

BISHOP OF LA CROSSE

We hereby certify and attest
that Our beloved daughter in Christ
MISS PATRICIA MAE MURRAY
a Virgin living in the world
was consecrated by Us
according to the rite of the Holy Roman Church
and the form prescribed in the *Roman Pontifical*
on the eighth day of June in the year of Our Lord 1997,
in the Cathedral Church of Saint Joseph the Workman.

Given at La Crosse on the eighth day of June in the year of Our Lord 1997, the Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

SEAL

Diocesan Bishop

Chancellor

DIOCESAN OPTIONS

The individual diocese may wish to set up its procedure for application to receive the Consecration of a Virgin living in the world, according to Canon 604. Some suggestions include:

1. A spiritual-director approved and recommended by the Bishop of the diocese. Often a person does not know of spiritual directors available in the diocese who are knowledgeable about the Consecration of a Virgin. This spiritual director should help her discern if this is the vocation for her.
2. Application procedure to include an autobiography written by the candidate herself with particular attention paid to her own spiritual history over the years and her stated reason(s) for desiring the Consecration of a Virgin; application form; letters of recommendation.
3. This Formation material available for the spiritual director (and Formation director, if these be two different persons). The period of Formation should be as long as is necessary within reason for a candidate to grasp and understand the meaning of Consecration of a Virgin and to grow intellectually and spiritually in preparation for this sacramental of the Church. Candidates will differ in their rate of growth and understanding, depending upon their background, time available for study, and individual capabilities.
4. No age limits are stated in Canon Law nor in the Roman Pontifical. It is understood however, that a candidate should have a history of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual maturity.
5. The consecrated virgin is responsible for her own financial security and health insurance provisions.
6. It is important that the bishop of the diocese decide ultimately on the suitability of the candidate who petitions to receive the Consecration. Therefore, meetings with the bishop should be scheduled so that the bishop and the candidate may get to know each other. After the Consecration, the diocesan bishop should meet individually with the consecrated virgin about once every six months and not less than once per year. These meetings are not to be delegated to another person nor are they to be held as group meetings.
7. Because the Consecration of a Virgin for a Woman Living in the World is a distinct vocation in itself, it should not be assumed that because a woman has Religious Life background she is suitable, or formed already, for this vocation. Consecrated virginity should also not be regarded as the vocation for those who are not suitable, for various reasons, to enter or remain in Religious Life.
8. After the Consecration, the consecrated virgin should be regarded as an integral part of the diocese and should be included in diocesan events and on the diocesan mailing list.