

# The Lamp



United States Association of  
Consecrated Virgins

December 12, 2011  
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Volume 16, Issue 4

## TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES ASSOCIATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINS:

December 12, 2011, Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

About seven years ago, I spent four weeks in Mexico with a few other bishops and some priests studying Spanish. That was it—four weeks! It was a blessed time. The major source of blessing was the many good people we met. A particular blessing was that I was able to celebrate Mass twice at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, once on the main high altar.

To see the faith of the people, to view the Tilma of St. Juan Diego, and to be in the presence of the image of Our Lady were experiences which everyone should have.

No one can live as a celibate or a virgin without an on-going and ever deepening relationship with Mary. Obviously, the same is even more important with her son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. However, we need to be one with Mary. And Mary has demonstrated over the past few centuries a great desire, at the Father's will, to be with us, to visit us, to speak with us. This has led to many apparitions. They all have one aim—to draw us to her son, Jesus. "Do whatever he tells you," she told the waiters at the wedding in Cana. We need to hear Mary tell us this every day.

Also notice that Mary usually appeared to the poor and emarginated. That in itself is a great clue to us celibates and virgins that our lives must be in service to the poor and needy. There will be the great fruitfulness of our lives. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe shows Mary as clearly pregnant, clearly fruitful. Indeed her visitation to St. Juan Diego was incredibly fruitful. So must our lives be and they will be if our own visitations imitate that of Mary.

My dear sisters, as we approach this great feast of Christmas, let us all spend some time meditating on this pregnant Mary. Let her image float in our minds and hearts. Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl Boyea  
Bishop of Lansing

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*Virginal Elegance . . . the countenance of a sacred woman in the Church, Part II*

(We continue a discussion begun in the June 2011 edition of *The Lamp*, on the *elegance* of the virginal vocation in the tradition of the Church, both in ancient and modern times.)

Virginal elegance comes naturally and joyfully to the virgin consecrated as a bride of Christ, as she continually gives her entire self to Him in fulfillment of the perpetual promise she made, and the Church affirmed, on the day of her consecration. Through the hands of the Bishop, the virgin has become the spouse of Jesus Christ, forever, and she gives to her Spouse the integrity of her virginity.

“Morally, virginity signifies the reverence for bodily integrity which is suggested by a virtuous motive. Thus understood, it is common to both sexes, and may exist in a woman even after bodily violation committed upon her against her will. Physically, it implies a bodily integrity, visible evidence of which exists only in women. The Catholic Faith teaches us that God miraculously preserved this bodily integrity, in the Blessed Virgin Mary, even during and after her childbirth. There are two elements in virginity: the material element, that is to say, the absence, in the past and in the present, of all complete and voluntary delectation, whether from lust or from the lawful use of marriage; and the formal element, that is the firm resolution to abstain forever from sexual pleasure. It is to be remarked, on the one hand, that material virginity is not destroyed by every sin against the sixth or ninth commandment, and on the other hand, that the resolution of virginity extends to more than the mere preservation of bodily integrity, for if it were restricted to material virginity, the resolution, at least outside the married state, might coexist with vicious desires, and could not then be virtuous. (Cfr. Paul IV, “Cum quorumam,” 7 August, 1555, Catholic Encyclopedia quoted in [www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org)).

According to Vizmanos, each virgin of the early Church loudly proclaimed her understanding of virginal integrity as she declared her propositum on the day of her consecration: “I renounce your works, oh Satan! I renounce the pomp of this century and its seductions; I promise to lessen my fleshly bondage, and I swear that, even when offered any human enticement, which I declare I don’t desire, I will remain uncontaminated and virgin, bride of Christ forever.” (Francisco de B. Vizmanos, *Las Virgenes Cristianas de la Iglesia Primitiva*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, page 186)

We note that the consecrated virgin must not be content to be a virgin only in the physical reality of her being. She must also present to others a virginal elegance in her physical and spiritual being, corresponding to the divine grace she has received as one who is now an icon of the Church. The man ordained as a priest takes on a new identity as one representing Christ, even “alter Christus,” as he celebrates the Sacraments in the person of Christ. The role demands that he be conscious of his demeanor, his dress, his actions, in every situation, as people expect to see Christ in him. It is the same for the consecrated virgin, who has taken on this new identity as one representing the Church herself in relationship to Christ, perhaps “alter Ecclesia,” as she brings the love of Christ through her service in every arena of daily life. The role demands that she also be conscious of her demeanor, her dress, her actions, in every situation, as people “expect to see in her what they expect to see in the Church.” (a favorite saying of Maria Lopez de Alba, a deceased consecrated virgin of Milwaukee.)

How can people see an icon of the Church in a consecrated woman who is not dressed with the dignity of one consecrated to Christ? To be female is a great gift we have received as children of the Eternal Father, and the external manifestation of our femininity is an indication of our integration as a virgin, physically and spiritually. People notice us! And we are called to show the elegance of our state in life, by the way we dress and comport ourselves. It is also important that we notice the manner in which we behave with men – placing appropriate boundaries in our interactions with men and being conscious of not arousing the attention of their eyes. In this, we must see ourselves as married women, and be on guard that we seek our fulfillment with our Divine Spouse – perhaps we might consider if we are acting as a woman in love with her spouse, or as a woman trying to fulfill herself through interaction with another, due to an emptiness and lack of integration in her love relationship with her own spouse. A man does not approach or touch a woman if she does not first give him room to approach her . . . it can be overt or subtle, but she provides the opportunity. When a virgin fails to be faithful with her Divine Spouse, it is not usually because she plans a particular interaction with a man, but it is because she slowly, over time, projects to him an emptiness in the integration of her love with her Divine Spouse. We have the duty, as virgin brides of Christ, to be on guard against being a temptation to any man with whom we interact, in the midst of our daily duties while living our vocation in the world, and in the Church. We must be prudent as we present ourselves, virgins with integrity.

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# Council News

## Current council members and officers are:

**Judith M. Stegman, President**, 2010 – 2012; Diocese of Lansing

**Magalis Aguilera, Member-at-large**, 2010 – 2012 (appointed **Vice-President** thru 2012); Archdiocese of Miami

**Nicole Battini, Treasurer**, 2011 – 2013; Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis

**Shalina Stilley, Member-at-large**, 2009-2011 (appointed **Secretary** through 2011) Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph

**Mary Kay Lacke, Member-at-large**, 2011-2013, Diocese of Steubenville  
**(Florence Sundberg, Member-elect**, 2012-2014, Diocese of Hartford)

## Upcoming events:

### 2012 National Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins:

*July 18-22, 2012*

*Mundelein Retreat and  
Conference Center  
Chicago area*

### 2012 National Information Conference:

*July 31-August 3, 2012*

*Bethany House  
at St. Francis Retreat Center,  
DeWitt, Michigan  
Lansing area.*



## Candidate Care Team: Barbara Swiecniak:

Please contact Barbara at scwjoy@gmail.com, if you have consecration invitations, programs, or other memorabilia that you would like to add to our traveling collection. Barb repeats two special notes:

✦ SOS Can you help find the missing sample book of invitations? It was last seen in the hands of a candidate in New Ulm, Minnesota. She, however, does not remember where and to whom she sent the book. If you could help us out with its location please contact Barb. St. Anthony, please help us find it.

✦ I have begun to put together a family photo album for us, featuring consecration photos. There is space for each virgin to have up to 3 horizontal and 2 vertical 4x6 inch photographs. We'll have the album available at Information Conferences, Convocations, and other gatherings. All are welcome to participate – please forward your photos by postal mail, rather than email. Thank you!

**Membership Team:** We will be sending out updated membership lists, to members, very soon.

## Formation Resource Development Team:

**Mary Kay Lacke** Mary Kay Lacke, Judith Stegman and Theresa Marshall met together on Nov. 19, 2011, to evaluate the 2011 Information Conference and to plan for the 2012 Information Conference. Their planning time was very productive and blessed.

December 9-12 was another planning time for some members of the Formation Development Resources Team. Mary Kay Lacke, Judith Stegman, Magalis Aguilera and Nicole Bettini met in Lansing to move ahead with the planned publication of essential resources for vocational discernment and ongoing formation.

**Email Prayer Request Network: Florence Sundberg:** I want to thank all who have committed to praying for those who have asked for our prayers. When told that consecrated virgins are praying for them and for their needs, people experience a sense of hope and of solidarity in knowing that they are not alone in carrying their burdens. Let us continue to turn over to Our Lord and to His Mother Mary all those who come to us in need of prayer and consolation. Prayer requests should be sent by email to prayer-requests@consecratedvirgins.org.

*For more announcements turn to page 7.*

## Consecration Announcements: United States

October 30, 2011, **Joyce Stolberg**, Diocese of Colorado Springs, at the hands of His Excellency Bishop Michael Sheridan.

November 5, 2011, **Nhung Thi Pham**, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, at the hands of His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, at Our Lady of Lavang Parish, Houston. Our Lady of Lavang is a Dominican and a Vietnamese parish. The church and parish site offered a beautiful setting for this consecration and for the reception following. With the consecration of Nhung Pham, there are four consecrated virgins in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. (see photo, courtesy of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston Office of Communications.)



December 11, 2011, **Sue Gudenkauf**, Diocese of Madison, at the hands of His Excellency Bishop Robert C. Morlino.



*from the President's journal . . .*

So many thoughts come to mind as I sit down to write this journal. Over the past few months, I have had opportunity to engage in various conversations concerning the witness and meaning of this vocation of consecrated virginity. Time and time again, these discussions lead back to a reflection on the essence of our vocation as a spousal relationship with Christ. Speaking of Christ as "Spouse" isn't understood by the casual listener, neither by those familiar, nor those unfamiliar, with our Catholic faith. How can one speak of one's love for an unseen Deity as "spousal"? But, if our love for Christ is not a spousal love, then what is it that distinguishes our vocation, and who are we? There is a fundamental difference, I think, between the person who may want to live a single life, dedicated to service of the Lord and of the Church, and the person who wants to live in spousal union with her Lord, dedicated to service of Him and of His Church.

As the Church year drew to a close, and our hearts were drawn to reflect on the end of the age, I have also been struck by Jesus' words in Luke 17, vs. 32, "Remember Lot's wife." He says these words just after instructing the disciples about the days that would come, saying even, "let him who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away; and likewise let him who is in the field not turn back." I am reminded to live in the present, turning all to our Divine Spouse, and not looking back to what has been left behind, in His will, in His mercy.

A most blessed Advent and Christmas season to each of you and to your families.

*Judith Stegman*

## *Anniversary Reflections*

Consecrated virgins celebrating significant anniversaries during 2011 were invited to offer a reflection on their years of living as consecrated virgins. In our September issue, we heard from Frances Power (25 years) and Julie Enzenberger (5 years). We continue in this issue of *The Lamp*, with additional reflections...

**Magalis Aguilera**, consecrated February 22, 1986 in The Archdiocese of San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico

"How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?" (Psalm 116: 10-19) These are the words the Eternal Father wanted me to reflect upon, even on the day I was unexpectedly careened into in a military protected area in my own birth country of Cuba while awaiting my *Flight of Liberty*. I was scheduled to fly to the United States on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1968, but was not permitted to board the plane until May 22<sup>nd</sup>. That was the culmination of my decision, a difficult one, to give up everything I had known, to leave my birth land, and my family. But I was urged to search the will of the Eternal Father in the vocation of consecrated virginity, the same vocation He created for our most Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary of Nazareth.

I was born in Holguin, Cuba, in the very little town of Key Mambi, a land rich in sugar cane, with a sugar mill. When I was thirteen years old, this little town was visited only once a month by a priest. Preparing for Holy Communion was a long process, but on one Holy Friday evening, with the Nissan moon indicating the very moment when our Divine Lord died for us on the Cross, I spoke with an older cousin of mine about my desire. She gave me materials to prepare myself, so that when the priest next visited he could examine me and grant me the honor to receive the Lord in His most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. I discovered my vocation at that age of thirteen as I prepared, reading the lives of the virgin saints, including Saint Theresa of Avila and Saint Rose of Lima, Peru. I discovered that He desired to marry me!

Leaving Cuba, the flight stopped in Miami, and then went on to New York. But after just one month in New York, I had to move to Puerto Rico with my traveling companions - two young sisters from Cuba, who were like family to me. The very day we landed in Puerto Rico was the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, the Patron of the Archdiocese of San Juan (PR).

I knew about the restoration of the Rite of Consecration to a life of Virginity at the time I left Puerto Rico in 1971 to visit and consider life in a religious order in Spain. Religious life was not my vocation, and after seven months of various experiences, I returned to Puerto Rico. For the next thirteen years, living in the Archdiocese of Saint John the Baptist, I offered an annual propositum of virginity to the Lord through the moral virtues of chastity, poverty, and obedience, at the hands of His Eminence Luis Cardinal Aponte-Martinez. It was February 22, 1986 that His Eminence consecrated me according to the Rite for Consecration of Virgins living in the world.



## Reflections continued

The 13 years I spent waiting for the Cardinal's decision to consecrate me were very rich years, as I also developed professionally in the ways that I would live in the world. It was during these years that I collaborated with the Institute of Theology of the Archdiocese of San Juan, and, in 1981, authored a book entitled Basic Guidance for Youth Leaders. During these years, too, I created the curriculum to be implemented in the Archdiocesan Pastoral Office for Youth, worked at the University of the Sacred Heart, and studied and earned my doctoral degree in clinical psychology. It was not difficult for me to wait so long for the consecration, nor was I disappointed at the length of time, because I realized that what I would be receiving at the time of the consecration would be the highest honor and blessing a woman could ever receive in this world! I was faithful, waiting upon the will of the Eternal Father, even as the local Bishop continued to ask me to renew the commitment to the moral virtues. I entrusted myself to Him alone, and although I was living without the powerful blessing of the consecration, I was offering myself in the mystical meaning of a total contribution of myself to Him, and my love for Him grew each year. Each year during those 13 years of waiting, my love for Christ was greater than the year before. All this happened, even though I lived on an island without communication with any other consecrated virgin – I continued to learn about this vocation of virginity through my study and prayer.

It was just a few years after my consecration that I moved to Miami and began my private practice as a clinical psychologist. I joined the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins at its very beginning in 1996, as I was developing my practice. I am dedicated to serving our Divine Spouse in every way that He asks me, and helping our dearest Judith M. Stegman in her total donation of self to our vocation. I am honored to also collaborate with our other sisters in the mission of our Association, and I am pleased that this is a hidden work we are doing as we strive to communicate the great joy of this virginal vocation given to us at the Annunciation.

The joy of my consecration in 1986, the joy of meeting other consecrated virgins in our nation, and the joy of the celebration of my 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Rome on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011 are the most precious gifts I have received from our Divine Lord and Spouse in all my life.

It was the Feast of the See of Saint Peter when I was consecrated, and it was the Feast of Saint John the Baptist when His Eminence Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke celebrated the anniversary Mass of my consecration at the altar of our Blessed John Paul II in the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome. Remembering these matters confirms the refrain of Psalm 116: "I love the Lord for he has heard the cry of my appeal; for He turned his ear to me in the day when I called him"... (Psalm 116, 1-9), and I feel moved to sing **with** the psalmist: "How I can repay to the Lord for His goodness to me?" Surely His goodness is revealed in His spousal love for us the virgins, and for me.

My joy in attending daily Mass is the joy of a married woman approaching her husband to be near to him. His glorious presence in the Eucharistic Celebration recalls for me the meaning of His Priesthood, which the psalmist prefigured: "The cup of

salvation I will raise; I will call on the Lord's name." (Psalm 116,10-19) My life has no meaning outside of fulfilling the promise I made to belong to Him alone, and to let Him alone enter into the inner room of my soul - to rest in Him as the woman of the Song of Songs rested, and to be embraced by His resurrected presence and being.



Magalis (2nd from right) for 25th anniversary Mass

**Lori Rose Cannizzaro**, consecrated October 7, 2006, Diocese of Buffalo

Five years of Consecration... where does the time go? It seems like only yesterday that I became a bride of Christ on that sunny, warm Feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary. Dressed in my Mom's wedding dress, surrounded by family, friends, and our beloved seminarians and priests, it truly was a day fit for a princess. I can still hear the sounds of the splendid music that was created in that liturgy and am transported to a little slice of heaven encased within its notes. That day quite simply was the caress of the love of Jesus upon my soul.

Days of contentment and trial have followed, all hand in hand with Our Dear Lord. What an awesome gift to know that we do not walk alone and our whole lives will benefit the Body of Christ tremendously if we only let it.

By virtue of my Consecration, others feel comfortable asking for prayer and I'm often taken aback to think that even people I don't know well would ask *me* to pray for so many intimate and personal things. What a grace to follow in Our Lady's footsteps! I am constantly humbled by it and *never* take this ministry for granted.

As years pass I realize what a gift was given at our Consecration and how much I have yet to learn about the depths of God's love contained within that very gift. I am often reminded that we are part of that great multitude, the throng of witness in white before the throne of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9) and that the journey *there* is an ever-encircling, ever-widening process as we continue into the very heart of Jesus. I pray that we each will experience the fullness of this gift in this lifetime and the total consummation of it in the next.

*More reflections next page*

## More Reflections

**Regina Dibb**, consecrated October 20, 2006, Archdiocese of Portland (OR)

From Swimming to Diving: A Reflection on My Spiritual Journey

Growing up in a coastal province on the Gulf of Thailand, I naturally developed a love of swimming. My school, run by the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartes and named after St. Paul, had the beach as its playground. There I received my formal catechism which helped solidify my parents' early teaching of the faith and basic church prayers. During this period, I enjoyed developing my swimming skills as well as had a wonderful time growing in faith, prayer, and participating in many church activities. I particularly remember the joy of being a flower girl in the procession of the Holy Eucharist on the Feast of Corpus Christi.

At age twelve I had become a proficient enough swimmer that my parents would take me to neighboring islands to snorkel. It was fun discovering new ways to use my skills. This was also true in my faith journey. I was instructed and prepared for the sacrament of Confirmation, my faith grew stronger. I became a member of the Legion of the Eucharist, a group modeled after Legion of Mary. My love for in the Eucharistic Lord was deepened and it was at this time that I made my resolution to remain chaste and pure for Christ in case He called me to a religious life or until I was married. I did not know which direction He would lead me to.

Fast forward to October 20, 2006, I renewed my resolution to Christ at my Consecration of Virginitly for Women Living in the World. This time it is for eternity.

Now, five years later, the graces of the Consecration continue to move me closer and deeper in union with the Lord. I am still in awe of His great love unmeritingly bestowed upon me. I could not help but feel overwhelmed at the words of the Lord, "*It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you.*" (Jn. 15:16) Again, St. John reminded us, "*In this is love; not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.*" (1 Jn. 4:10)

The Lord is asking me to love Him and to love all whom He loves. The Lord is asking me to swim, no, to **dive**, into the unfathomable ocean of His mercy. "Lord, you know I am afraid of the darkness and the dangers of the deep ocean," I plead. He answers, "*For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.*" (Mt. 19:26) I hold on to Him and dive! The fear of the darkness, sufferings, and difficulties in life that keep me from loving seem to evaporate at His tender grasp. From time to time in life, I get complacent and start drifting away from Him. That is when I find myself gasping for air of spiritual life. I cry out, "*Forsake me not, O Lord; my God, be not far from me!*" (Ps. 38:21) Again and again, He grabs my hand and I keep on diving into the deep ocean of His love and mercy.

**Cathy Maley**, consecrated April 1, 2006, Archdiocese of St. Louis

What Difference Has Consecration Made?

The difference is blessings in abundance! This vocation was so clear to me at 15, but in 2006, I wondered, "Why even bother now since I already have a private vow." Consecrated Virginitly has to do with us, yes, but its essence is evangelical. Surrendered love expands the heart if it is authentic.

I've been amazed how the Lord has used me and the people he has placed in my life since Consecration. Some of these individuals have been the poorest of souls for whom the Lord has allowed me to assist with time, encouragement and resources all because others had read about the Consecration and they continue to grace my life. Occasionally I am detained, in various places, by those who want to "run something by me" simply because they know I'm a consecrated virgin. I try to be like a "regular person," but there's nothing regular about this Consecration!

I find myself with a greater commitment to praying for the conversion of those on the way to hell, the most hardened sinners and the dying. Yes, I've always prayed for these prodigal brothers and sisters but now I do so with a greater intensity. Daily Eucharistic Adoration brings me into the Lord's focus and his vision for living out this life of love and service in the Church. It is here that I am grounded in obedience, without which, there can be no true spirit of Gospel simplicity, detachment or virginal love as a bride of Christ. It is here that obedience shapes my consecrated life because it means listening to the Lord being conformed to his will. For love is an act of the will.

In the St. Louis area the consecrated virgins gather monthly with the candidates over dinner at one another's homes. Jesus exhorts us, "The gift you have received, give as a gift. . . ." (Mt. 10: 8). My natural bent is to keep to myself as I am a true introvert but Jesus expects us to promote his agenda, not our own!

In one of his talks, Archbishop Robert Carlson said, "God doesn't choose the worthy but those whom he wants." Christmas is a feast that celebrates the humility of God who became a little child. So it is that I pray to be clothed with the humility of the Most High who has chosen the least of his servants. The Rite of Consecration calls the virgin to lay down her life for her Divine Bridegroom in daily sacrificial love and it is Christ's Spousal Love that sustains and continually surprises me!

I count as another blessing the extraordinary women of the USACV.

## Announcements *continued*

### Election Report:

Congratulations to **Florence Sundberg**, who won a close election for the open seat on the USACV leadership council. Her three-year term will begin January 1, 2012. Thank you, also, to each of the other consecrated virgins who graciously offered their names as candidates for the council position. It is a service of love to put forward your name; may our Divine Spouse reward you.

I would also personally like to thank **Shalina Stilley** for her service as a USACV Council member for the past three years. Shalina generously offered her service as she was completing her doctoral dissertation, and continued through her first years as a full time professor of philosophy. Shalina's insights, her assistance in significant ways with our convocations, and her service as our USACV Secretary, in addition to her expressions of personal concern that have touched so many of us, don't go unappreciated. Thank you, Shalina, for your labors of love. (**Judith Stegman**)

### Upcoming issues of *The Lamp*:

**February 2, 2012** Feast of the Presentation and World Day of Consecrated Life;

**June 3, 2012** Trinity Sunday;

**September 8, 2012** Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**December 12, 2012** Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Please send articles in electronic format at least 10 days in advance of the issuance date.

We will have some room in the February 2, 2012 edition of *The Lamp* to continue anniversary reflections of consecrated virgins who celebrated 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, or more? years of consecration in 2011. Please send reflections to [president@consecratedvirgins.org](mailto:president@consecratedvirgins.org)

The next **Symposium for Consecrated Virgins**, sponsored by the Diocese of La Crosse Office of Consecrated Life, will be held April 28, 2012. The topic will be "Virgin & Doctor of the Church St. Catherine of Sienna – Her Message and the Consecrated Virgin, for Today". Registration information will be available after Christmas from Barb, 608-784-6974, or at the website of the Diocese of La Crosse: [www.dioceseoflacrosse.com](http://www.dioceseoflacrosse.com), Office of Consecrated Life, Consecrated Virgins, EVENTS

**Recordings of talks from the 2011 Convocation and 2011 Informational Conference** are now available for order through Magalis Aguilera. Order forms may be obtained from our web-

site or by emailing [info@consecratedvirgins.org](mailto:info@consecratedvirgins.org).

A **new Vocation Tree DVD** entitled "Fundamentals of the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World" is also available for order through our website. The DVD includes the presentation in both English and Spanish, and is an excellent introductory presentation on the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world. Also newly available are two other Vocation Tree DVD's:

"**What about Me?**" is a presentation for high school students which guides them to explore the truly personal meaning of the call by God the Father to each individual.

"**You Follow Me**" is a presentation for a general adult audience (RCIA, parish groups, Serra Clubs) as a primer on vocational choices in the Catholic Church.

Please visit [vocationtree.com](http://vocationtree.com), and contact Judith Stegman at

[president@consecratedvirgins.org](mailto:president@consecratedvirgins.org) for order information.

**World Day of Consecrated Life** is celebrated in the United States on the Sunday nearest to February 2. The celebration will be February 5, 2012, and February 3, 2013.

## Life Corner

By **Florence Sundberg**

Advent is a season of hope and of joyous expectation, the season in which we await, with Mary, the always new and blessed coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And, just as Mary carried the Infant Christ in her womb, so too does each woman carry, within the protective enclosure of her own body, her own unborn child.

Although anti-life forces are still very powerful, there is reason for hope. In Christ, there is always reason for hope. Thanks to the work of pro-life groups, more and more people are being taught about the reality of abortion and are being given a glimpse into the horrible practices taking place in abortion facilities throughout the land. Slowly their eyes and their hearts are being opened to the goodness and beauty of each and every individual life.

This Advent, in a very special way, let us hold in our prayers, with Mary the Mother of Jesus, each and every newly conceived life and let us pray that every mother, like Mary, will welcome, reverence and nurture the new life within her. For each new life is a unique and beautiful expression of the love of God.



## More Reflections

**Nancy Kushman**, December 13, 2006, Diocese of Lansing

The years since my consecration on December 13, 2006 (the memorial of St. Lucy, virgin and martyr) have certainly sped by. I can hardly believe it's been five years since I was mystically wedded to Christ in the rite of consecration for a virgin living in the world. My consecration ceremony was for me the most beautiful event of my life and is engraved in my memory as the day the Lord fulfilled his promise that he would betroth me to himself forever. I had first heard the call to be his bride when I was 19 years old, but it wasn't until 35 years later that my hopes and dreams were finally fulfilled. God pursued me for 35 years and loved me so much that he wanted to unite me to himself in this beautiful vocation of consecrated virginity and give me the dignity of being called a bride of Christ. On the day of my consecration I was totally engulfed by his love!

So the courtship I enjoyed with the Lord and wedding day were overwhelmingly beautiful but the honeymoon seemed way too short! Inevitably, I discovered that the familiar problems and challenges of my life didn't magically go away just because I was now a bride of Christ. Times of spiritual desolation, struggles to overcome personal weaknesses, battles against temptations and sins: these are the types of experiences which we all face, and they soon began to re-assert their presence in my life. The question I naturally asked myself was: how am I supposed to deal with dry, difficult times in light of being his bride? At first I tried at all costs to relive the beauty of my consecration day and hope I would experience the emotions I felt that day. But recalling and reliving that day could only sustain me up to a certain point in my love relationship with the Lord. I needed to do more than just that.

In grappling with this issue a scripture passage from the Book of Revelation guided me: "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance...I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and *do the works you did at first.*" (Revelation 2:2-5) I hadn't really abandoned my first love for the Lord. However, it helped me in the transition to the next stage in my life as a consecrated virgin to remember that real love grows out of commitment: commitment to daily Mass, daily prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, sacramental confession, bearing Christ's love to the people I encounter every day and seeking to conform my will to God's will. These are "the stuff" of the spiritual life that will ultimately make my love relationship with Christ flourish and mature.

Although my journey to union with Christ seems at times to be very long and very difficult there are also times of profound awareness of Christ's love. These moments especially occur for me after receiving Holy Communion and as I sit before the Blessed Sacrament in prayer. The more I get to know my King and my God the more I just want to sit quietly in his presence and learn to listen to him and absorb his love. Recently my prayer at these times has been especially focused on a deeper desire to conform my will to his will as much as possible, in little things as well as in big things. I

see my life as a sculpture being worked on by the Master Artist. Little by little he is chiseling away at me, changing me so that one day I may be enough like him that he will be able to fully unite me to himself.

I am profoundly grateful that Christ has made me his bride, and I want to open myself up to him as much as possible. By the light of faith, which St. Lucy exemplifies, I pray that my committed love for him will one day lead me to the perfect vision of him in heaven.

**Theresa Gross**, consecrated February 12, 2006, Diocese of Bismarck

One day while on the internet I did a search with the question "What is available to single women in the Catholic church who do not want to enter a convent". The answer was to become a Consecrated Virgin Living in the World. I found the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins web site and printed out all the information they had available.

I thought about it for a year, I also talked with my spiritual director about it a few times. Finally I talked to the Vocation Director of the Bismarck Diocese and told him about it and asked what I needed to do next. He talked to the Bishop about it and said that I should send in the application.

The Bishop accepted my application and we met and talked about my qualifications and spiritual life. We met a few more times and he also had me meet with Sr Agnes, who is a Benedictine sister. He wanted me to get an understanding of being a consecrated woman. After meeting with the Bishop and with Sr Agnes, I picked Feb 12<sup>th</sup> as my Consecration date. After the Mass, as I processed out of the church I realized that I had been given the desires of my heart. I knew that I "belonged" and I had a great sense of peace.

I am married to the most wonderful Groom. The peace I received on my consecration day has grown and has helped me in many ways. My depression is not as deep or as "strong" as it used to be. Because of this I am able to volunteer at my parish church. I am a sacristan and I set up for weddings and funerals and penance services. I set up and serve as an altar person for daily Mass. I also do data entry; I am entering the Sacramental books (Baptism, Confirmation etc.) on the computer.

Praying the Breviary (Liturgy of the Hours) has given me structure in my prayer life. At different times the psalms and other scriptures have been just what I needed to hear. As my spirituality and relationship to the Lord has deepened I have been better able to deal with all other areas of my life - including the unexpected and surprising reconciliation with my aging parents. My vocation as a Consecrated Virgin has been and is a wonderful blessing in my life and, I hope, is allowing me to be a blessing to others.

**Note:** We learned only recently of the 2008 death of consecrated virgin Patricia Jacobs. May she rest in peace, in the arms of her Beloved Spouse. [Loretta Matulich](#) writes...

Memorial of [Patricia Jacobs](#)

On the evening of December 4, 2008, God summoned our sister in Christ, Pat Jacobs, to Himself in eternity. It was our loss of a faithful, compassionate friend on earth, but our gain to have her now with the Lord and, I am sure, remembering us in His Presence.

I knew Pat from the year I met her at one of our first Information Conferences. Tall, blonde, and slender, she resembled the aspen tree which must have been her favorite here in the Pacific Northwest, since she even used “aspen” as part of her user name for emails. Over the years I got to know her better and better and always appreciated how helpful she was to me when I was President of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins.

Living through the tumultuous years of the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she remained faithful to God and to the Church. Her charity extended beyond the ordinary in that she not only cared for her elderly mother in various ways in her last years, but as a single woman she adopted a son. She intimated to me several years ago how happy she was because she was going to her son’s house for Thanksgiving dinner with his family. Perhaps because she herself knew personal illness, her compassionate care extended to the homebound sick in her parish in rural Washington State when she brought them Holy Communion regularly.

The story of her call to consecrated virginity was touching. She once shared with a few of us that she had wanted the consecrated life, but did not know what was available for her. She even revealed to us the words she had prayed to God over and over again. Then she went to see Bishop Sevilla, S.J., of her Diocese of Yakima. She asked him, “Is there anything for an old lady like me?” It was he who suggested to her the Consecration of Virgins for Women Living in the World. (By the way, one would never classify Pat as an “old lady,” if you saw her!)

A few years ago, at the invitation of the Seattle Archdiocese, the consecrated virgins of the Pacific Northwest dioceses conducted an Information Day in the Seattle Archdiocese. Pat drove for hours from her home in central Washington and over mountain passes in order to contribute her part to the program of the day. I never forgot the two points she made in her presentation: 1/ A consecrated virgin should have a little daily schedule that she sets up for herself so that she can be sure to balance prayer and work, and 2/ The consecrated virgin should never doubt that Jesus Himself, as Spouse, will take care of *everything* in her life, right to the end. I am sure He did just that in Pat’s case.

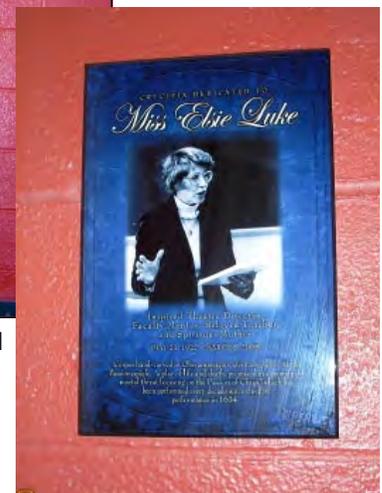
Consecrated Virgin [Elsie Luke](#) honored posthumously in Steubenville:

On September 14, the Feast of the Holy Cross, Fr. Richard Davis, TOR, along with the faculty and students of the Franciscan University of Steubenville Drama Department, celebrated the blessing of a crucifix carved in Oberammergau, Germany, by commission of the head of the Drama Department, and mounted above the door leading into the FUS theatre. The crucifix was dedicated in memory of Miss Elsie Luke, a consecrated virgin from the Diocese of Steubenville, who founded the Drama Department during her long career at the University and faithfully witnessed to the love of Christ through her excellence in her field as well as in the strength of her dedication to the Gospel. Mounted alongside the theatre door, a plaque commemorating her life reads: “*Miss Elsie Luke, Inspired Theatre Director, Faculty Mentor, Beloved Teacher, and Spiritual Mother – May 23, 1922-March 8, 2005.*”

In his remarks during the blessing ceremony, Father Davis noted that he had never met another person like Elsie who was so filled with the love of God. Her enthusiasm for life and her wholehearted worship of God, Father Davis said, were contagious; she was a tremendous influence on everyone who knew her.



**Crucifix dedicated in Steubenville**



**Elsie’s Plaque**

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*Something Ancient . . . Something New continued*

The essential dignity of the consecrated virgin rests in her witnessing with her entire being to the reality of the great mystery of salvation: "...a great mystery of Salvation, proclaimed at the beginning of human history and fulfilled in the marriage covenant between Christ and his Church." (Cfr. Rite of Consecration of a Virgin living in the world)

As a bride of Christ, the consecrated virgin stands as an icon, a sign, of the Church. Let us live this sign in the fullness of our vocation, learning from the Fathers of the Church what it means to live in integrity as virgin-brides. For example, Saint Basil of Cesarea wrote a letter to an unfaithful virgin. He is also considered to be the author of a treatise on integrity in virginity, but although this book is listed among his works, it really belongs to Basil of Ancira. The treatise is important because it is the first that deals with the physiological side of virginity (Cfr. Vizmanos, page 111). Saint Basil of Ancira was expert in medicine, and he spoke about triggers of the flesh that could put at risk virginal integrity, particularly in the use of the senses in interactions with males. He was expert in illuminating the meaning of the wrong use of the external and internal senses, using both a scientific and a philosophical approach. To Saint Basil, the tactile sense is the most powerful. He noted that the stimuli produced by touching arouse all the others senses, which in turn elicit or arouse pleasures from those senses...he gave examples of prolonged handshakes, or other prolonged touches or embraces. (Cfr. Le <De virginitate virginitate>, de Basile d'Ancyre, <Revue d'Historie Ecclesiastique, t. VI (1905), pp. 5-14 ; c 14: PG 30, 697; and , Basile d'Ancyre, DS\M, t I,1283 quoted in Vizmanos, op.cit, page 111-112).

In future articles, we will continue to present references from the Fathers of the Church, in order to nurture our daily lives of union with our Divine Spouse. May we recall the words of Saint Cyprian, who scolded the virgins, who "having chosen to guard firmly their continent state, later are unfaithful. They have committed the crime of adultery, not against just any husband, but against Christ". Let us pray to keep as faithful virgins! At the same time, we must keep close in mind the pastoral exhortation of Saint Cyprian, who said: "Now I will speak to the virgins, because, as their glory increases, the more they have to be on guard. They are the flower from the seed of the Church, glory and ornament of the grace of the Spirit, a happy family, whole and incorruptible work of praise and honor, image of God that responds to the sanctity of the Lord, the most noble of Christ's cohort." (Saint Cyprian, De habitu virginum, quoted by Alvarez Gomez, C.M.F., 1977).

**Spanish Consecrations**

News Note from **Sabina Boet** –

*(Many of us remember Sabina Boet from her years with us in the United States. She is living in El Salvador now, where she is a theology professor at the Catholic University.)*

As I was catching up on world news on a Saturday morning, I came across a headline that immediately caught my attention: "Twenty first century virgins." The news was in one of the most popular Spanish newspapers: *El Mundo*. The story was about the consecration of virgins and followed one of three newly consecrated virgins for the Archdiocese of Valencia, Spain. The three recently consecrated virgins are: Ana Lacruz who is 43 and a piano professor, Pilar Sarrió who is 49 and a lawyer, and Inmaculada Parra who is 38 and a religion teacher. The ceremony was celebrated at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Helpless on October 22, 2011 by the Archbishop of Valencia, Carlos Osoro.

The article makes a thorough explanation of our vocation and how this form of consecrated life is flourishing in the Church; it mentions that there are about 150 consecrated virgins in Spain. Also, it answers many questions people might have about the vocation.

Finally, it talks about the journey of Ana Lacruz and how she had spent twelve years searching for the way to live out her call to give herself completely to God finally finding her vocation in consecrated virginity. The preparation process she went through was personalized through the guidance of a spiritual director and lasted for a year and a half. It included courses in Theology and participation in various retreats. Her formation is ongoing to this day. If you want to practice your Spanish, you can find the article at this link with a three minute video of the consecration: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2011/11/04/valencia/1320417060.html>.