

# The Lamp



United States Association of  
Consecrated Virgins

February 2, 2011  
Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Volume 16, Issue 1

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

February 2, 2011, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

“Be wise: make ready your lamps. Behold, the Bridegroom comes; go out to meet him.” So you were instructed after the Gospel was proclaimed at your consecration. Being then summoned forward, you placed that candle in the sanctuary. That candle remains in the sanctuary until the end of the Mass when it is carried out in procession by the newly consecrated virgin.

There are many reasons why the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple is an important one for all our consecrated virgins. But one reason is because of the importance of light on this feast day. This day is also known as Candlemas Day.

Originally, this feast merely celebrated the presentation of Jesus in the temple forty days after his birth (Lk 2:22-40) and the encounter there with Simeon and Anna. According to Exodus (13:12-16) every first born animal is to be sacrificed to God or redeemed and every first born male human is to be redeemed. Leviticus (12:1-8) describes the mother’s purification after birth and the way for her to offer a sacrifice for the child and for herself as mother: “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” All of this was probably part of this presentation in the Temple.

However, the Gospel account of Simeon’s prayer, proclaiming Jesus to be the light of the nations, most likely helped lead to the blessing of candles as part of this celebration. This seems to be a very happy development.

After the words of Simeon, Mary marveled. To this Simeon added that Mary’s own soul would be pierced through as well. Such would be the love demanded of the Virgin Mary.

Thus, as virgins consecrated to your one spouse, Jesus Christ, you are yourselves the candles which Jesus holds as he is a light to the nations. May you burn brightly as this light of Christ. But in addition, like Mary, always marvel and always be willing to let the sufferings of Christ be borne by your own hearts and souls. This is part of what it means to be that candle of Christ. The only way that the candle gives light is by being spent. God bless you on this day. Happy Feast Day.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl Boyea  
Bishop of Lansing

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## *Something Ancient . . . Something New* *Magalis Aguilera and Judith Stegman*

Love is like a fountain of water running from the very essence of God in the mystery of the eternal family of the Trinity —“Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away” (Song of Songs 8,7) - because love is the essence of God. In this context, as we contemplate our sister virgins of the ancient Church as they gave up their lives in martyrdom, we come to understand that the essence of their heroic love flowed from the Eternal Father, who is love, and who is the fountain of love. Saint Agnes recognized the meaning of her being in love and being called to the eternal family of the Trinity. She did as our Lord Jesus Christ himself did – she gave up her life into the Eternal Father’s love. In the very moment of her martyrdom, she raised her hands and prayed: “Holy Father, hear me, I am coming to you whom I have loved, whom I have sought and always desired.” We notice three aspects of the affection of the Virgin Agnes: she lived her entire life as one approaching Eternal Love; she saw Him with the senses of her soul because her bodily sensations of affection were transformed into the experience of God’s presence in her soul; and, she witnessed to her love for the will of the Eternal Father in that the affections of her heart were set always to desire Him only.

Love and virginity in the life of the consecrated virgin are integrated in this same understanding of affection as was expressed by Saint Agnes. In a psychological interpretation, virginity is not understood negatively, as repression of the instinct of procreation or sublimation of the pleasures of the flesh. Rather, virginity is understood positively, as a total donation of our being to the being of Jesus Christ, as our Divine Spouse.

What this means is that our affections are transformed through the gift of virginity we have received. Our affections are transformed by the decisions we make of how we will express love. How we express love *is* a decision we make, because love is rooted in the essence of our being, created by God in the mystery of our free will. When our affections are directed to God, they are transformed in love so that our love for the Divine Lord Jesus Christ is not rooted in physical sensations of the body, but instead is rooted in the truest value of affection. The human being becomes centered upon the will of God; as Saint Augustine said: “homines sunt voluntates,” that is, “the human being is defined by his will,” which is a measure of his capacity to center his love in the Divine Will. (Cfr. Saint Augustine the Book of Confessions)

Rightly ordered affections give a person the capacity to put feelings and wishes into a mature equilibrium, enabling a person to share, communicate, and interact with others. The virgin, more than others, needs to manifest a mature equilibrium in her affections. There are among others, three levels of affective behaviors: 1) Spiritual affection that may be expressed in love, friendship, the faithful carrying out of one’s duties, humility, and other virtues; 2) A psychosomatic manifestation, such as an expression of anger, hate, obsession, disordered passion, or erotic affection. These are all reactions of the flesh, rather than responses of a person mature in affection and the expression of emotions; 3) a sensorial behavior in which a feeling of pleasure or displeasure is given inordinate consideration. The consecrated virgin is called in all ways to witness to the love of Jesus Christ as her primary consideration.

*Spiritual* affection is the level of expression of affection that a consecrated virgin is called to live. Theresa of Avila wrote about spiritual love saying that it is the place where God calls souls who are generous and trustful, to give to Him all their affection. (Cfr. Way of Perfection by Saint Theresa of Avila Chapters 7, and from 3 to 8).

Consecrated virginity is based on an integration of our affections, and on a directing of our affections towards God. The offering of the gift of our virginity for consecration wasn’t made as an act of obedience, but as an act of love! And the gift of virginity, consecrated to God, can sanctify the fleshly reactions we might have once been prone to have in our affections. In addition, consecrated virginity has a mysterious meaning of obedience and poverty of love towards God as the virgin is transformed body and soul, psychologically, ascetically, and theologically, in a canticle of praise to her Eternal Spouse (Cfr. *Spiritual Promotion of Religious Women*, Facing the Vatican II Orientations, Pedro Martinez -Cano, S.J. (RIP), Bibioteca de Estudios Pastorales, Desclee De Brouwer, Bilbao, Spain, 5 Edition, 1966 ).

# 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 Bettini, Treasurer**, 2011-2013, Archdiocese of St. Paul / 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

## Upcoming events:

### 2011 National Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins:

*July 26—31, 2011*

*Mundelein Retreat and Conference Center  
Chicago area*

*See article*

### 2011 National Information Conference:

*August 3—6, 2011*

*St. Francis Retreat Center  
DeWitt, Michigan  
Lansing area*  
*See article*

## U.S. Consecrations

Upcoming: June 2, 2011, **Paula Willenbrink**, at 10:00 AM in the St. Louis Basilica Cathedral, at the hands of Archbishop Robert Carlson. All are invited to attend!

## Team Announcements:

**Kateri Team: Florence Sundberg:** Again, I want to thank our sisters for their openness and generosity towards those among us who have had special needs. Please remember that if you know of a sister from among us who has a special need to let us know how we may be of assistance. Thank you and may the Lord bless you.

**Candidate Care Team: Barbara Swieczak:** The Candidate Care folder will be traveling to New Ulm, Minnesota for an October consecration. If you would like to share your consecration invitation, program, or other mementoes with candidates, or if you are a candidate and would like to receive the travelling consecration preparation folder, please contact Barbara Swieczak at 149 S. 24<sup>th</sup> Street, La Crosse, WI 54601.

**Membership Team: Shalina Stilley:** 2011 USACV membership renewal letters will soon be arriving to you by email or postal mail.

**USACV Website update report – Judith Stegman :** I hope to be sending birth announcements for Phase I of our new website, very soon! The development process is well underway. I wish to take the opportunity at hand to thank Loretta Matulich for the massive amount of work she put into preparing and collecting the materials for our current website. My heart is full of appreciation for her efforts as I work to transfer material to our new site. Thank you, Loretta.



## Announcements

Upcoming issues of *The Lamp*:  
**June 2, 2011** Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord,

**September 8, 2011** Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary,

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

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

Those **newly consecrated in 2010** are invited to write reflections on their consecrations for the June 2, 2011 issue of *The Lamp*. Please send reflections or other articles to [president@consecratedvirgins.org](mailto:president@consecratedvirgins.org).

The next **Symposium for Consecrated Virgins**, sponsored by the Office of Consecrated Life of the Diocese of La Crosse, will be the St. Agnes Fest, to be held April 9, 2011 at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from 9 AM to 3 PM. The day will include Mass celebrated by Archbishop Jerome Listekci.

In the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity for Women living in the World, the Church brings to our attention the life of Saint Agnes, virgin and martyr. Through the use of the antiphons taken from her feast day, January 21<sup>st</sup> we are invited to ponder more deeply the mysteries and graces held out to this young virgin and martyr for our own journey of faith. Participants are invited to bring along any written works, hymns, poems, prayers, images of Saint Agnes, and reflections on the Rite of consecration, to share with the others present.

This is an opportunity to learn from each other the riches we share in this vocation and the lives of these virgin saints. Please contact Barb Swieczak if you have any questions by email ([bswieciak@dioceseoflacrosse.com](mailto:bswieciak@dioceseoflacrosse.com))

## from the President's journal . . .

*This life is so short, compared to eternity - and the human person, created by God and born within time, has been given the profound dignity of being an eternal creature. My life has been full of tasks over this past month, tasks of working to re-new our website, to prepare new Vocation Tree educational materials, to dialogue with many regarding the vocation of consecrated virginity, to assist new colleagues in learning tax laws (and to learn the new laws myself), to keep up correspondence, to analyze the merits of possible projects in various arenas of my life, and the daily duties of prayer and keeping up a home...many tasks. Routine tasks, some might call them, tasks that will never truly be completed. And yet, it is in the faithful carrying out of these daily duties, in love, uniting each thought, action, and affection with a Divine Spouse, that this life on Earth becomes connected to eternity. Each task, word, and prayer has meaning, each day becomes a new adventure of love, as we strive to live in union with our Divine Spouse.*

*On this Feast of the Presentation of Jesus, as we recall Simeon's declaration of Christ as the "light to the nations," may we, as consecrated virgins, along with all those living forms of Consecrated Life, place the light of Christ that is within us on a lampstand, and not under a bushel basket. May we learn to be the evangelical witness we are each called to be, exposing the light of Christ to all those placed in our lives at this moment in the time of eternity.*

*Judith Stegman*

## Life Corner

By Florence Sundberg

*We have seen in these past days people of all ages, races and cultures coming out to witness to life, and it has been inspiring and encouraging for all who work to create a culture of life in our country and around the world. Many have felt new hope at the election of so many prolife congressmen and women. But a culture of life cannot come about through politics alone because representatives change, and laws are overturned. We have to believe in the power of prayer. We must witness and hold to the hope that God is the author of life and will enable us to work with Him to protect, not only infants in the womb, but all life created in His image.*

*Each of us has a role to play in this battle for life and no part is too small or insignificant. Much information is being brought into the open about the unregulated abortion industry, about abortions being performed in facilities that are filthy, by unqualified personnel, and about infants who survive abortions and are then destroyed. If animals were treated in this way, there would be a major outcry against the practice. But there is hope. So many, many young people turned out to witness to life. One youngster, a boy of 13 named Kevin said: "Hopefully, the march for life will make politicians realize the importance of saving innocent lives. The unborn are future lives that could change society and the world." And Cardinal DiNardo praised the young participants for being "unflinching witnesses to the inestimable worth of each human person." May we too witness to the 'inestimable worth of each human person.'*



## 2011 Informational Conference

### Announcement:

**August 2-5, 2011** is the date for the 2011 USACV Information Conference. The Conference has a new location, this year: it is moving from the Cenacle in Chicago to St. Francis Retreat and Conference Center in DeWitt, Michigan. This is a new spot but also an old one. Many of the "old-timers" will remember that this site was the location of one of our first Information Conferences in the 1990's.

We encourage *Lamp* readers to promote the Information Conference among those interested in consecrated virginity as a very important and worthwhile event for anyone in the process of discerning a vocation to a life of consecrated virginity lived in the world or preparing for the consecration. The Conference is also important for those who are helping someone in the discernment process or who want to learn more about this vocation: bishops, diocesan vicars of consecrated life, spiritual directors and other consecrated virgins who may be helping a woman to discern.

This year's Information Conference will place new emphasis on a couple of areas that have emerged as important in the discernment process: the pre-eminence of Our Lady as model and guide in the life of the consecrated virgin; and the central place of the Liturgy of the Hours in the spiritual as well as the ecclesial life of the consecrated virgin. Along with these topics, other fundamental topics concerning the vocation will continue to be covered. Refer to the flyer enclosed with this issue of *The Lamp* for more information.

Please call interested parties' attention to the flyer or direct them to the USACV website. Information about the Conference will be available on the new website.

Recordings of talks from the 2010 Convocation and 2010 Informational Conference are available for order through Magalis Aguilera. Order forms may be obtained from our website or by emailing [info@consecratedvirgins.org](mailto:info@consecratedvirgins.org).

## 2011 Convocation Announcement: Save the Date!

*In Praise of His Glory! – in our work of prayer and our life of virtue* will be the theme for the 2011 Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins. The convocation will be held **July 26-31** at the Mundelein Retreat and Conference Center, and all consecrated virgins are warmly invited to attend, including consecrated virgins from other countries. Virgins who have attended an Informational Conference and who have been accepted by their Bishops as candidates for the consecration, are also invited to attend.

The days together will include presentations by Bishop Boyea on the Liturgy of the Hours, the prayer of the Church, in order to enrich our appreciation for this work of prayer that has been entrusted to us as brides of Christ. In addition, we plan afternoon symposium-style discussions on the virtues of temperance, chastity, prudence, and providence. The days will be hinged about our times of prayer together: Morning Prayer, Holy Mass, and Evening Prayer. As well, we hope to include workshops on common music and psalm tones to enhance our prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, that the praise of our heavenly Father may be always on our lips.

More details will follow about our convocation days together, and if you have suggestions or want to help in any way, please contact Judith Stegman at [president@consecratedvirgins.org](mailto:president@consecratedvirgins.org).



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excerpt from the homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Vatican Basilica, Celebration of Vespers for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on the Occasion of the 14<sup>th</sup> Day of Consecrated Life, Tuesday, 2 February, 2010 :

“Consecrated people are called in a special way to be witnesses of this mercy of the Lord in which human beings find their salvation. They have a vivid experience of God's forgiveness, because they know that they are people saved, that they are great when they see themselves as small and feel renewed and enveloped by the holiness of God when they recognize their sins. For this reason, for contemporary men and women too, consecrated life remains a privileged school of "compunction of heart", of the humble recognition of one's poverty but it likewise remains a school of trust in God's mercy, in his love that never abandons us. Actually the closer we become to God, the closer we are to him, the more helpful we are to others. Consecrated people experience God's grace, mercy and forgiveness not only for themselves but also for their brothers and sisters since they are called to carry in their hearts and prayers the anxieties and expectations of human beings, especially those who are far from God. Cloistered communities in particular, with their specific commitment to fidelity in "being with the Lord", in "standing beneath the Cross", often carry out this vicarious role, united to the Christ of the Passion, taking upon themselves the suffering and trials of others and offering all with joy for the salvation of the world.”

The **USACV Prayer Request Network** is now being coordinated by Florence Sundberg. Prayer requests should be sent by email to

[prayerrequests@consecratedvirgins.org](mailto:prayerrequests@consecratedvirgins.org).

Thank you, Florence for offering your time and heart to this important work, that we may be the voice of the Church's prayer for so many needs in our world today.

Florence writes: *For all who have united in prayer for those in need, thank you. Please, if you know of a prayer need in your parish or town or neighborhood, let us know. There is such a need for prayer in union with Christ at so many levels today. Prayer upholds our Church, our nation, our families, our world. No request is insignificant. From a hymn for the Feast of St. Agnes, virgin and martyr: "We praise the witness of her radiant hope that held her through her darkness and her pain; her faithfulness until the final stroke: she called the Bridegroom and the Bridegroom came." In prayer, we who are espoused to Christ call upon the Bridegroom and He will come and take our prayers and hold them in His Heart.*



Mary Jo Gretsinger's consecration, November 22, 2010, in Nigeria. Consecrated virgin Martha Agbogo, from the Diocese of Otukpo, is pictured on the left.