

The Lamp



United States Association of
Consecrated Virgins

September 8, 2010
Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Volume 15, Issue 3

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

September 8, 2010, The Birthday of Mary

Ambrose of Milan was about 17 years old when with his recently widowed mother and his two brothers he attended the veiling and consecration to virginity of his sister, Marcellina, by Pope Liberius at St. Peter's in 353 AD. Later, as a lawyer and consul in Milan, he sought to reconcile the Arians and Catholics on the death of the Arian Bishop of Milan. Both sides turned to him, only a catechumen, and in 373 or 374 he was baptized and consecrated a bishop. His entire episcopate was marked by disputes with the Arians and by struggles with the imperial powers over the rights of the Church. He died in Milan on April 4, 397.

Ambrose was most known for his commentaries on Scripture. However, he also wrote on virginity. One of his works on this topic was a letter to his sister written about 24 years after her consecration. Book II focuses on Mary and others as examples of living a life of virginity. Ambrose notes: "She was a virgin not only in body but also in mind, who stained the sincerity of its disposition by no guile, who was humble in heart, grave in speech, prudent in mind..." Ambrose then lists long examples of Mary's virtues, no doubt, using this opportunity to provide his own guidance to virgins.

The Bishop of Milan adds that Mary cared for others: "For she became more humble when she knew herself to be chosen of God, and went forthwith to her kinswoman.... And she abode with her three months. Now in such an interval of time it is not that faith is being sought for, but kindness which is being shown." After the birth of Christ, Mary kept all things in her heart: "Though she was the mother of the Lord, yet she desired to learn the precepts of the Lord, and she who brought forth God, yet desired to know God."

In this realm, Ambrose concludes: "How many kinds of virtues shine forth in one Virgin! The secret of modesty, the banner of faith, the service of devotion, the Virgin within the house, the companion for the ministry, the mother at the Temple."

Next, Ambrose pictures Mary greeting virgins upon their entry into heaven, presenting them to her Son: "She has been faithful to her espousal, to my Son; she has kept her bridal couch with spotless modesty."

Ambrose then adds: "What a procession that shall be, what joy of applauding angels when she is found worthy of dwelling in heaven who lived on earth a heavenly life! Then too Mary, taking her timbrel, shall stir up the choirs of virgins, singing to the Lord because they have passed through the sea of this world without suffering from the waves of this world. Then each shall rejoice, saying, 'I will go to the altar of God, to God who maketh my youth glad;' and, 'I will offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay my vows unto the Most High.'"

On this great day of the birthday of Mary, the Mother of God and Mother of the Church, I pray for her loving glance on all of you as she is also the Mother of Virgins.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl Boyea
Bishop of Lansing

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Special Points of Interest:

- Report on 2010
Information Conference
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We would like to introduce this article as the first of a series in which we will try to delve into the meaning of our spousal relationship with Jesus, searching realities in our soul that are not impossible to discover, but take *courage* to engage and live. We will present understandings and tools designed to lead us towards spousal intimacy with Him, an intimacy that requires us to be courageous in our search to discover our Divine Spouse as the sole giver of union to our soul.

Truly, in the gift of virginity of body and soul, we have already received from Him all that is needed for this quest! Theresa of Avila spoke these words about a desire for intimacy and union with the Lord: “I tell you there is need for more courage than you think.” (Cfr. Theresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, The sixth Dwelling places). y “courage,” Theresa meant the decision to submit our own free will to the will of God. For us consecrated virgins, this means a complete gift, or donation, of our affections to Christ alone. We need the courage to give Him our hearts and to expect that He will enter that place where He alone can dwell within us – the very center of our soul.

Let us consider that all of creation is full of this “courage,” and we, as human beings, are already prepared with the capacity to move through each different and new “dwelling place” of the soul, until we are enriched and fully living the mystical meaning of spiritual betrothal. Spiritual betrothal for a consecrated virgin may reflect “something ancient” in its mystical and spiritual theological essence, but more significantly it is truly “something new,” available by the profound grace we receive through the Rite of Consecration of Virgins. It is the Church, responding to the will of the Eternal Father who has called us, which has named us “bride of Christ” on the day of our consecration, and has consecrated us to remain living in perpetual fidelity to Him until we are admitted to the wedding feast of everlasting joy,

Affection is a treasure created by God and given to the human being as a means to express love. We need courage to faithfully run the race that our Divine Spouse has uniquely given to each of us, to constantly submit our will to His, to give Him all of our affection, as we journey to discover His way of love on this earth and to approach the eternal wedding feast. We will discuss the meaning of affection as an introductory concept in our exploration of entrance to the “dwelling places.” As much as possible, we will use the complete works of Theresa of Avila as our guide, trying to relate them to our virginal spirituality as spouses of the Divine Lord who live in His Church as a real and vivid icon of His Spousal love for His Church.

Let us take a moment to imagine the journey of another of the creatures of God – one which has the tiniest cerebellum of all the winged animals, but flies in the strongest and greatest way. I am talking about the oceanic petrel bird, a tiny bird with black and white plumage that each January flies to the “Tierra del Fuego,” in late March darts back to the north, and weeks later appears on the U.S coastline. In July and August, this tiny winged creature heads to the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, eventually arriving in Europe, before heading on to the South Pole. This annual flight would be equivalent to running around the whole of our planet Earth in one year! Can we run in the Way of Love for Him?

Christian virginity, consecrated virginity, is a perpetual donation of our entire being, body and soul, to our Divine Spouse. In previous articles, we have considered that virginity is perpetual because our Blessed Mother first received this gift – she who has been declared by the Church to be both perpetual virgin and Mother of God. The glory of her virginity endured before, during and after the delivery of her unique son. The living out of her perpetual virginity was characterized by total fidelity and the ongoing offering of herself to the mystery of being the Virgin Mother of the only Son of God.

The affections of our Blessed Mother were always directed towards accomplishing the will of the Eternal Father, as she lived out the integration of her virginity in body and soul, accepting her role of mother, even as she accepted her gift of virginity. Her virginal body, her virginal soul, honored the body of her Divine Son - the Son of God who offered his own virginal body on a cross in accomplishment of the will of the Eternal Father. The offering of His virginal body was an expression of the meaning in eternity of His living, and dying, solely for His Church. And this is also the meaning of the gift of virginity in our spirituality as consecrated virgins – to honor the Body of our Divine Spouse, Bridegroom of the Church, and our own Bridegroom, directing always our affections towards Him alone, as we grow in the knowledge of the capacity of our souls to enter into the mystical intimacy of His love.

We will discuss in the next article the psychological understanding of our affections in this process of discovering what we have received and what we offer, summarized so beautifully in the antiphon we sang on the day our Divine Spouse consecrated our virginity totally to Him: “I am espoused to Him whom the angels serve; sun and moon stand in wonder at His glory.” (Rite of Consecration).

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

Louise Pare, Treasurer, 2008 – 2010; Diocese of Lansing

Twanna Bolling, Member-at-large, 2008-2010 (appointed **Secretary** through 2010) Archdiocese of Chicago.

Shalina Stilley, Member-at-large, 2009-2011, Diocese of Kansas City—St. Joseph

Team Announcements:

Formation Resource Development Team: Please see **Mary Kay Lacke's** report on the 2010 Informational Conference on page.12

Membership Team: **Shalina Stilley** reminds us that anyone who hasn't registered yet for 2010 will need to do so in order to vote in elections this fall. We hope to send registration reminders soon.

Kateri Team: **Florence Sundberg** writes:

I'm sure we are all aware of many who are struggling as a result of the economic crisis in our country. I know some young people who have lost their jobs and who have been out of work for over a year because they are overqualified for the jobs they apply for and because employers don't want to hire someone who will leave for a better job once the economy picks up and more jobs are created. Those I know who are out of work are being helped by their families and Church communities. And that is as it should be.

And there are those among our consecrated sisters in the USACV who are also struggling to stay afloat during these difficult times and we want everyone to remem-

ber that we are family in Christ our Spouse and that we will do our best to be there for each other in any way that we are able to be. The need most often expressed is the need for prayers, and that is as it should be. But if you do have an emergency need for some short-term material assistance, I will see if I can coordinate some help. We will continue our prayers for each other, as we lean more trustingly on the shoulders of the one who called us to be His spouse and who is able to help us in all our cares and needs.

May blessed Kateri, our sister, enable us to bear with courage the cross that she bore so willingly and with such great love and joy.

Candidate Care Team: **Barbara Swieczak** writes that the folder of sample invitations is traveling now to Tina Raley as she prepares for her October consecration in Chicago, and it will soon travel also to the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois. She continues to invite anyone who has sample invitations, programs, or other consecration day mementoes that she would like to share, to send two copies to: Barb Swieczak, 149 S. 24th Street, La Crosse, WI 54601.

Upcoming events:

2011 National Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins:

Tentatively

July 26—31, 2011

Mundelein Retreat and Conference Center

Chicago

2011 National Information Conference:

Tentatively

August 3—6, 2011

Place to be announced

Announcements

Upcoming issues of *The Lamp*: December 12, 2010 Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe; February 2, 2011 Feast of the Presentation and World Day of Consecrated Life; June 2, 2011 Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. Please send any articles you have in electronic format at least 10 days in advance of the issuance date.

Brides of Christ Symposium, continuing education for consecrated virgins, October 2, 2010, sponsored by the Office of Consecrated Life of the Diocese of La Crosse, held at the Cathedral in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The day will include reflections on Our Lady and the four virgin saints included in the Roman Canon of the Mass. For more information contact Barb at 608-788-7700 #2240 or bswieciak@dioceseoflacrosse.com. Limited space available.

2010 Convocation

Reflection on the 2010 Convocation, from Pauline Garland of Australia:

For an isolated consecrated virgin, the meeting with other consecrated virgins gives a wonderful grace of being able to share and support one another in our vocation. This visit to America for the convocation was special as I noted the growth in understanding and expression of the unique spousal spirituality that we live as consecrated virgins. This has caused me to think and pray a lot about this aspect of our vocation because it is not only a state of life, and way of life. It is also a spirituality that is deep and beautiful, where we live our state as brides of Christ with whom we are united daily in the Eucharist.

There was a variety in the speakers giving input to the time together, with Bishop Boyea meditating on the spiritual fruits of the Upper Room. I enjoyed the talks by Shalina Stilley on the Thomistic understanding of propositum and virginity as a virtue, and by Magalis Aguilera who spoke about giving back to God our sexuality as a beautiful gift. The Symposiums were very practical sessions with different members speaking followed by smaller group discussions in which we were able to explore the thoughts together and discover different ways of application to our daily life. These touched on very practical issues such as the practice of particular virtues in the daily events of life. We also had sessions and occasions when we were able to discuss issues such as health and finance. The times of liturgical and personal prayer represented a special time together and the meal times a special time of sisterhood and an opportunity to get to know one another or renew old friendships.

For me this convocation was a special grace of renewal of my vocation and a deepening of my understanding of my vocation and calling as a bride of Christ.



Group picture from the 2010 convocation. For more photos see page 5

Report on the 2010 Convocation, by Judith Stegman:

Thirty-two virgins attended our 2010 convocation, including a consecrated virgin from Australia, one from Canada, five U.S. consecrated virgins attending the convocation for the first time, three who, I believe, have attended every convocation since we began in 1996, twenty other diverse and remarkable U.S. consecrated virgins, and two candidates for the consecration! Comments from those who attended were very favorable, giving high marks to the location, the schedule, and the content of the program.

Bishop Boyea's presence was a gift for us, as he encouraged us through his teaching, offered for us the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass, and engaged with us in friendly conversation. Very well-received were the focused presentations on significant aspects of our vocation: virginity (Dr. Shalina Stilley and Dr. Magalis Aguilera), and living in the world (Judith Stegman). Thursday and Friday afternoon symposiums were a new feature this year, and seemed to accomplish their goal of allowing direct participation by a variety of consecrated virgins in focused discussions on the practical living of our vocation. The CD's of all of these presentations are now available, and come highly recommended! Not available on CD is the presentation / discussion we held on Sunday morning on handling finances in this challenging economy.

Our Friday evening social activity received the highest ratings of all, and I, for one, can't imagine how Barb Swieciak and her recruits will top it next year! I smiled as I looked around to see old and young from all walks of life actively participating, singing, laughing, and simply enjoying the company of one another in the presence of our Divine Spouse. What a joy.

Each day was also marked with a significant period of time for Eucharistic adoration, along with our celebra-

tions of Holy Mass, and the Liturgy of the Hours. It was obvious that these times of prayer with our Divine Spouse were treasured by each of us.

Each one of the consecrated virgins actively participated – in music, prayer, fun time, symposiums discussions. A recurring topic during the symposiums was how we can foster virtue in our lives...and this will perhaps become a theme for our 2011 convocation. Thanks be to our Divine Spouse for His call and his faithfulness!

2010 Convocation continued



Prayer together in the residence center chapel in Mundelein.



Nancy Dvorak, Bishop Earl Boyea, Pauline Garland, and Anne Gishpert



Listening attentively to a talk.



Judith Stegman and the Vocation Tree presentation

Recordings of talks from the 2010 Convocation and 2010 Informational Conference are now available from Magalis Aguilera. Order forms are enclosed and available on our website, www.consecratedvirgins.com



Friday night chorus, directed by Maestro Mitzi Smith.

from the President's journal . . .

It seems like a long time since I have last written this column, but it was only three months ago. What a full three months for our vocation – participating in the June convocation of consecrated virgins in Germany, visiting Rome, our own July convocation in Mundelein, our August informational conference in Chicago! In the course of preparation and follow up for all of these events, it seems that the Holy Spirit has provided many opportunities for us to come to a deeper understanding of the distinctly spousal nature of our vocation of love for Jesus Christ, our Divine Spouse. I encourage all of our readers to order CD's from our 2010 Convocation and perhaps even the 2010 Informational Conference.

Let me quickly touch on a few things that come to mind: *First that minutes of our 2010 Association meeting in Mundelein, and minutes of the 2010 leadership council meeting with Bishop Boyea, will be available soon to members. *I am very pleased to also report that consecrated virgin Marilyn Wagner will be working on a full revision of our USACV website, and I hope that we can be in touch soon with those of you who have so generously offered to assist in the endeavor. *Consecrated virgins at both the German and U.S. convocations were introduced to a Powerpoint presentation of our vocation utilizing slides of the Vocation Tree – a colorful, artistic presentation that helps to show the distinct place of the vocation of consecrated virginity in the life of the Church. We hope to make this Powerpoint presentation available for consecrated virgins to use in their own local presentations of our vocation.

This issue of *The Lamp* is full of personal stories and reports of our vocation. I hope you enjoy it.

Judith Stegman



Candle at the US Convocation – a gift from the German OV.



Candle at the German Convocation—a gift from the USACV.

Geweihte Jungfräulichkeit, Gelebt in der Welt, Gefeiert in der Liturgie, Verkündet durch das Sein (Consecrated Virginity - Lived in the World, Celebrated in the Liturgy, Proclaimed through our Being)

German consecrated virgins gathered in convocation June 3 to June 6, 2010, in Regensburg, Germany, a charming, historic Bavarian city. Magalis Aguilera, Mary Kay Lacke, and Judith Stegman participated at the invitation of Maria Luisa Öfele, who has become well-acquainted with consecrated virgins of the United States. In Regensburg, we heard the original German-language version of her important talk, "Theological-Liturgical Significance of the Prayer of Consecration for Consecrated Virgins Living in the World," which she delivered in English at our 2009 U.S. convocation. It was a delight for the three of us to meet and spend time with our German sisters, in prayer, study, and play. And it was a particular pleasure to greet His Excellency Archbishop Raymond Burke, who had travelled from Rome to deliver an address on the Essential Elements of the Vocation of Consecrated Virginity.

For more details, you may visit the website of the newly formed German association, Ordo Virginum Deutschland, at www.ordovirginum.de. The website words may be in German, but the photos speak in a universal language! Our German sisters welcomed us warmly, inviting us also to assist in some ways – Magalis Aguilera recorded all of the presentations and offered English language resources for sale; Mary Kay Lacke offered her presentation, "The Rite of Consecration: Mirror of the Consecrated Virgin in the Heart of the Church." Mary Kay revived her German skills for this travel, although not quite to the point of giving her talk in German. German translations of the text of her talk, as well as Judith Stegman's Vocation Tree presentation, were projected on a screen while we spoke in English. It was an experience of solidarity.

Keeping our lamps lit is surely a common theme for consecrated virgins around the world. In an unplanned testimony to this, U.S. virgins presented a candle to our German sisters which they used during times of prayer at their convocation, and our German sisters presented to us a candle for use at our U.S. convocations. May we always help one another to keep our lamps shining brightly, as we together await the coming of our Bridegroom!

For pictures of the German convocation see page 7

U.S. Consecrations

June 26, 2010, **Shirley Ann Farrell**, Diocese of Green Bay, at the hands of The Most Reverend David Ricken

Upcoming:

October 30, 2010, **Tina Raley**, Archdiocese of Chicago
All are warmly invited. Please contact Tina Raley for more information at autumneve713@aol.com.

November 22, 2010, **Mary Jo Gretsinger**. **Note:** consecration will be in the Archdiocese of Kaduna, Nigeria. Consecrated virgins are invited, and should email mjgretsinger@gmail.com for information.

Other Countries:

Costa Rica

August 24, 2010, **Orfilia León Quesada**, Diocese of Tilarán.

Ghana

September 8, 2010, **Agatha Veronica Thompson**, Archdiocese of Accra, at the hands of The Most Reverend Gabriel Charles Palmer-Buckle, at the Holy Spirit Cathedral.



Ordo Virginum Deutschland Council members present gifts to three U.S. guests



Participants in the June 2010 German convocation of consecrated virgins gathered with Archbishop Burke outside Bildungshaus Schloss Spindlhof.

Continued from Denise on page 13

Hence this Benedictine monk was so excited about it in the 1950s.] Since the Consecration was reserved to monastic female religious at that time, Denise could only treasure the knowledge of the Consecration in her heart, never dreaming that one day it might be possible for her to receive this great sacramental. That is, she never considered it for herself until I proposed it to her during that stellar luncheon on Long Island in 1998.

How to proceed? Denise was caught between two dioceses. She had grown up in the Brooklyn Diocese and owned a house there, but at that moment she was living on Long Island, the Rockville Centre Diocese. Since Brooklyn had just had two virgins consecrated shortly before and Rockville Centre was waiting for the appointment of a new bishop, she decided to petition the bishop of Brooklyn. All paperwork was submitted, but then the snag came when her current address showed that she was living in the Rockville Centre Diocese. Brooklyn asked her to petition the Rockville Centre Diocese.

Loretta's complete formal tribute to Denise, is posted on our website, www.consecratedvirgins.com. You may request a printed copy from Loretta Matulich at LASMTA@gmail.com.

Anniversary Reflections

We continue with reflections from consecrated virgins celebrating significant anniversaries:

Ann Stitt, Archdiocese of Boston, consecrated June 2, 1974

Yes, JESUS; Yes, Us

Joy, peace, tranquility and great dignity radiated from the pages picturing monastic life and as I leafed through them again and again I sensed my desire to be able to live like that, somehow. Thomas Merton's commentary in this book, Silence In Heaven further attracted me in a way I could not yet understand, for I then did not know who God is, nor was I in the Church. When I became a catechumen and was Baptized and Confirmed at age 21, I began to learn – and have not stopped learning, since there is no end to learning, in Him Who is Infinite. Five years after my receiving the Consecration in 1974, I wrote a 6 – page paper, "To Follow JESUS", that described my vocation, quoted holy people, cited various books that helped me to follow Him. Obviously the Our Father says it all. I often pray: Jesus, show me Your Mother; Mary, show me your Son.

Now, 30 years after I wrote, I was asked to write about the spousal aspect of our holy vocation. How do I wrap mere human words around so delicate, so profound and so personal a topic as this? Only with the Sevenfold Gifting of the Spirit and time spent before the Tabernacle can I hope to point clearly and simply to God Who is Love. May His Spirit give both you and me a taste for Wisdom!

The most important and most intimate moments in life this side of Heaven are those times when, after receiving Holy Communion, the human body is united with the Body of Christ: physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally. Mass prepares us for all that happens away from the Altar, and whatever goes on in daily life is preparation for the Holy Sacrifice on the Altar – all under His Loving, guiding and protecting Providence.

Supernatural compassion, salvation, forgiveness, and the great Victory over sin and death – our own and others' – are embodied in the Incarnate Son of God, our Spouse, Who loved us first. The Holy Spirit, reminding us of all He did and said, makes us bear much fruit. Using His Gifts, we become more aware of the good growth in ourselves and in others, beginning with Joy and Peace. As we keep on saying our Yes to Him we find ourselves participating closely and deeply in His suffering, death, and resurrection. He heals, He fulfills, He embraces, He teaches us to love Him and our neighbor as ourselves. As He shared with us, so we share with others His Light, His Life, His Love. We discover that "poverty is the meeting – point of heaven and earth" (Heard in a homily). Lady Poverty, St Francis called this, of being spiritually naked before God in one's own nothingness and unworthiness, before Him who is our All – Our propositum simply says that we put ourselves in His Presence, the One Who has chosen us before we said first that Yes to Him. The Bride/Bridegroom imagery is joyous and peace-full because every human need and longing – our emptiness – is fulfilled in this sacred and strong – stronger than death – of ourselves, for Him, for others, Our un-

ion with Him, as we begin to live out whole being is His, here, now, for ever.

Whatever we say and do becomes more and more the fruit of our wordless union with the Living, Active Word. I once heard a priest say with great conviction, "The most powerful force in the world is the Word of God!" We "live and move and have our being" (Mass preface) in this Word. I close with St. Catherine of Siena's words:

"O Mary! tranquil ocean,
O Mary! giver of peace,
O Mary! fertile ground
in whom the Word was sown!"

Barbara Swieciak, Diocese of La Crosse, consecrated September 8, 1984

With this September 8, 2010 issue of the Lamp I conclude the celebration of my Silver Jubilee Year. Yes, I have been celebrating all year! Inspired by Chapter 25:8-10 in the Book of Leviticus from the Sacred Scriptures we read "In this to be a jubilee year for you..." A year of Jubilee, how can one begin to appreciate the abundant gift of His love received on the day of Consecration except through pondering.

The Birthday of Our Lady, September 8, 1984, a day of new life, my consecration day, was a birthday of grace for me and for the Church. For it is written that "the virgins are the glory of Mother Church and manifest her fruitfulness. The more numerous her virgins are the greater is her joy." (St. Cyprian). With my "yes", my solemn resolve, 25 years ago, there is one more virgin in the Church to glorify the Father with the Son in union with the Holy Spirit, and there is more JOY! Jesus, Our Yes!

This year of pondering the meaning of a jubilee year in the Sacred Scriptures with the Rite of Consecration has reinforced the reality that the Lord, the Bridegroom of my soul has made my ordinary life extraordinary through this great gift of His Love through the consecration. It is through His graces and love that change comes into our lives.

Remembering, pondering the reality of receiving the consecration on Our Lady's birthday and celebrating 25 years later on her name's day brings me to the Homily from the Rite – "Imitate the Mother of God, desire to be called and to be handmaids of the Lord" – These graces show me how much Our Lady loves me, to share her days with me. Saying "yes" to all that comes in life's challenges, seeing in the life of Our Lady an example to imitate, to follow moment by moment in her openness and readiness to do the Father's will. Her pondering teaches me how to "do whatever He tells me."

Through my daily hours with Our Eucharistic Jesus in my parish's adoration chapel, right down the block from my home, I am nourished with His presence so as to take His love to those I meet throughout the day. This time praying the Psalms with Christ, the Church in time and in eternity strengthens me with the words that strengthened Our Lady and the Saints and even Our Beloved Jesus in times of great stress and sorrow.

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Without that time with Him my day is empty for He indeed is my grace, my glory my whole desire. Through the time with Him I have experienced comfort in the sorrows of life, been given His wisdom to handle perplexing situations. He has protected me when unjust things have happened. He has been my source of patience in times of unusual adversity. He is my riches when spiritual poverty in situations dulls my mind and heart. His Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist nourishes and feeds my soul, body and spirit when I fast from things that keep me from Him. He is my remedy and healing through my confessor when my soul has been sick through sin and I meet Him in the sacrament of Penance and spiritual direction. In His Eucharistic Presence and through this gift of consecration I am truly blessed with a great treasure – Union with His Life as His bride in time and through all eternity! Yes, these 25 years have been filled with joys and sorrows, crosses beyond my imagining and blessings beyond measure.

As I now begin a new year, it will be one of gratitude and thanksgiving, recalling the final words of the suggested homily in the Rite of Consecration praying for the grace to continue "to follow the Lamb wherever He leads" me. Amen. Alleluia!

Isabel Bettwy, Diocese of Steubenville, consecrated September 15, 1984

Twenty-six years! It seems like yesterday. I was consecrated on September 15, 1984 by Bishop Albert Ottenweller (now retired) of the Diocese of Steubenville. During the 33 years previous to my consecration, I was a member of the Congregation of Mother Seton Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, Greensburg. When it became obvious that I should leave the Community to pursue the work God was calling me to, I went to see the Bishop to ask if he would permit me to make private vows. Instead, he handed me his ritual book and asked me to read the Rite of Consecration, which is so familiar to us now, but then, it was almost unheard of. As I read through the Rite I was both amazed and excited. I knew it was God's call for me. I didn't have to ask to be consecrated. Rather Bishop Ottenweller asked me what I thought of the Rite and after I told him my delight with it, he said, "Good, let's do it."

From then on it was a matter of preparing everything. Canonically, I had to leave the Congregation, which was not an easy step, but one I knew God was asking of me. I loved the Community and I loved being a Sister of Charity. I taught high school physics and mathematics for twenty-two of those 33 years, and then I became part of the administrative staff of Franciscan University located here in Steubenville. It was during this time that I sensed that God was calling me to a different style of life. It took several years before the circumstances clarified what I should do.

After my Consecration, my daily schedule did not change as I had been used to praying the Liturgy of Hours, attending daily Mass, and having a prayer time each day that sustained me in my life. However, my mother's comment after the consecration ceremony, "Do you realize this is much more than

what you did in the Sisters of Charity?" spurred me on to concentrate on the spousal relationship which I now had in a very real and different way with my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Each day when I receive the Lord in the Sacrament of Eucharist, I am reminded of the "more" and am deeply grateful to the Lord for His call.

Now, when occasionally I see Bishop Ottenweller he always greets me with "Good Choice!" He is so right. While I appreciate my life as a Sister of Charity, my life as a woman consecrated to the Lord for His purposes has allowed me to be involved in ministry that has taken me far and wide. I have come to realize that when God has a plan for my life, He makes it possible for that plan to be carried out, if I am willing to respond to His promptings and grace.

I am deeply grateful to Our Lord for shedding His mercy on me and allowing me to be a witness of His spousal love.

Aliceanne Sawyer, Diocese of Trenton, consecrated May 31, 1990

I live out my consecration as a bride of Christ by following the example of His virgin Mother; seeking to bring Christ to all I meet. Prior to my consecration I was in formation to be an Oblate of St. Benedict at the Monastery of St. Walburga. I noted its emphasis of hospitality and developing our own behavior to know God, "listening with the ear of our heart." As consecrated virgins we live in the world, we serve in the world and as an Oblate of St. Benedict I hear his advice "When you begin a good work, you must pray to Him most earnestly to bring it to perfection." So I pray and then work in the world. St. Benedict taught his followers to help the weak, and recognize in our dealing with people that souls are to be saved. Is this not what our Spouse has asked of us, to provide the light? I also made private vows prior to that, and fifty years ago I lived as a School Sister of St. Francis for 8 years, so I have a deep spiritual formation to draw on. Does this mean, I don't have problems...how we wish. No, I have problems and I do go to prayer to request from my Spouse the help I need to get through it. I also go to those ordained who are there as my guides.

I pray for our Holy Father, our bishops, priests and those in consecrated life unceasingly. I live our 'rule' by praying the Liturgy of the Hours; going to Mass when physically able; and meeting with my Confessor monthly. I seek out books relating to our state of life, of reaching out; of the Saints and on most days I use the Scripture of the day as my point of meditation. I rely on and seek nourishment from the Fathers of the Church, and I keep my Spouse ever before me. I feel strongly about supporting our USACV and I work within it as your Prayer Network coordinator. I daily pray in earnest for our Holy Father, my Ordinary, Bishop Smith, Priests, and their flock and I am there to support. I pray for vocations.

Continued page 10

Anniversary Reflections continued . . .

For my 20th anniversary celebration, I had a table of material gleaned over the years on our vocation, and many people took them home to read. Members of my parish bent over backwards to make the day a beautiful event. I thank them, especially John, as the head volunteer, from the bottom of my heart. The entire parish was invited and even though it fell on a holiday weekend, many came to celebrate. Priests from my consecrating diocese whom I had worked with closely as a student in CFM and as a deanery representative, Msgr Richard Arnholts, and with Council of Catholic Women and other priests from that diocese also came to celebrate with me. Those who couldn't due to their pastoral duties sent their blessings. Many of our sister consecrated virgins came. The former pastor of my present parish, Fr. John Bambrick, also came into our life and supports our vocation. Also sharing the celebration with me was my faith sharing group which originated when Renew was introduced in our parish a good 25 years ago, and members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

I have been blessed with many people along the way who love God and have shared that love over the years. I firmly believe that God does bring people into our lives when He knows His work will be blessed by that friendship. I thank God when I learn of the work of our consecrated virgins and who have taken up works of the church like life issues, and letter writing.

As I age I see how my life is more challenging and yet fulfilling. My strength is not as good as it always was. God is in charge. He puts people on our path as that is where He asks us for our Light at that time. I pray for you our virgin members and friends. I count on your prayers for me.



Aliceanne Sawyer and Bishop Smith celebrate her 20th anniversary of Consecration



Aliceanne Sawyer, Bishop Smith, consecrated virgins, and friends

Jeanne McNulty, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, consecrated October 4, 1995

Between Called and Consecrated

“In his longed for shade I am seated and his fruit is sweet to my taste.” (Songs of Songs 2:3)

There was a thicket deep down in the woods behind our family home. It was a solitary spot all circled round with green shade and laced with bird song. As a teen I felt drawn to just be alone and listen to the voice of nature in pristine wilderness and simplicity. Then I didn't even know the above quotation existed or that it was His shade and His fruit I searched for.

In high school I went through a type of faith crisis where I really doubted whether or not what the nuns were teaching us about Christ was really true or just a trumped up story about a great personage from the past. I only knew that, if this Jesus was Who He said He was, then He had to be followed. It was a very distressed and restless period; trying to read and sort out what to believe and what not to believe.

In all the confusion I decided to just sit quietly for long periods in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament and see what would happen. It had to be seen as strange behavior for a teen but I was desperate for an answer.

In the silence of the chapel a deep peace settled over my restless spirit and faith was found. One day with the ears of my heart, I believed I heard Him say: "I want you." A profound joy bubbled up from within and I had no doubt in my mind that I was being called to follow Him as His bride. The big questions were: How? Where?

A long labyrinthine path followed in and out of two established religious communities. Both were in the Franciscan tradition. One was active and the other contemplative. The active community had not the time I craved for contemplative silence and the contemplative community had no proximity to the poor of society. Years were spent searching. I cried out: "Jesus where do I fit?" Private vows were taken in the Secular Franciscan Order. I became a nurse and lived alone or together with others among the impoverished of the inner cities of Pittsburgh and Chicago. It wasn't until I reached the West Virginia Mountains and settled in an abandoned cabin in the woods, not far from the poor that I found my "spot" on earth. Years later I heard about the life of consecrated virginity in the church. At last! Perhaps my dream of being recognized as His bride in the eyes of the Church could be fulfilled. I wrote our bishop Bernard Schmitt and did the required preparation. On the Feast of St. Francis he came to this WV holler and the little chapel of St. Clare and bestowed the Rite of Consecration on one very happy spouse of Jesus Christ.

Linda Long, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, consecrated June 3, 1995

Twenty five years ago this September I was received into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. At the age of sixteen, while I was learning to be an Anglo-Catholic [to the dismay of my Lutheran family], I promised chastity to our Lord. At that time I did not know if this would be marital chastity or virginal chastity.

Around 1990 several priest friends told me about the Consecration of Virgins living in the world and said "this is you". One even brought me a copy of the rite in Latin from Rome. I thought that this

would look pretty silly at my age and tried to put it out of mind. However, the Holy Spirit would not leave me alone. Five years later, I decided to put the decision in my spiritual director's hands. He did not know about this consecration before but said I should proceed. He said that he would speak to our archbishop about it.

At that time, Archbishop Roach had put all decisions about vocations into the hands of his Coadjutor Archbishop Harry J. Flynn. In Divine Providence. Archbishop Flynn was already familiar with this vocation and had met me previously. Also a Benedictine Cardinal in Rome had taken an interest in me few years earlier. This cardinal, Paul Augustine Cardinal Mayer was willing to consecrate me at the delegation of Archbishops Roach and Flynn for the Archdiocese of St. Paul -Minneapolis.

Since I was the first woman consecrated for our archdiocese, I had many questions and no one to ask. I knew of no woman who had done this before. "Which finger does the ring go on? Do I have to wear a veil all the time?" This would be most difficult in the hospital. I decided on the left fourth finger and Archbishop Flynn decided that I would wear a veil only in church. [I am fortunate that wearing a veil at Mass is common in my parish and no cause for stares.] Most of my adult life I have prayed the daily Office, first from the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer and then, starting six months before I "swam the Tiber", from the Roman Missal; that was no problem.

I asked my spiritual director for a decision on Monday in Holy Week 1995. About two months later, I am prostrate on the floor of Cardinal Mayer's chapel at my solemn consecration. The Holy Spirit certainly worked rapidly once I said "fiat". The rite was in Latin and I even managed to sing "Ipsi sum desponsata" without falling over.

The date of my consecration had to be moved from the 2nd of June 1995 to the 3rd for another providential reason. Unbeknown to me, this was the 25th Anniversary of the Restoration of our Rite. There was an international pilgrimage of consecrated virgins to Rome. And Cardinal Mayer was scheduled to say the Mass for the pilgrimage at St Mary Major on the 2nd. Thus I attended that Mass the day before my own consecration on the 3rd of June in Rome.

The past twenty five years, and especially the past fifteen, have been joyous and grace filled for me. I have been permitted to assist our priests and seminarians in many ways and count them among my best friends. Now that I am semi-retired from teaching and practice in cardiology, I have more time for prayer and silence. This past July I was able to attend the national convocation of consecrated virgins at Mundelein. It was a joy to be with so many of my sisters and a time of spiritual refreshment for me. It was good to have the opportunity to meet Bishop Earl Boyea who is so gracefully following our beloved Archbishop Burke.

Ad Multos Annos!

Life Corner

By Florence Sundberg

Two very important events are coming up: '40 Days for Life' which will take place from September 22 through October 31, 2010, and the crucial mid-term elections which will take place on November 2nd, 2010. Prominent pro-life leaders are calling this the year of the pro-life woman and of the unborn baby because pro-life women are being elected to high offices throughout the land.



Prayer is our greatest strength and our greatest weapon in the battle for life. Prayer and solidarity. I want to ask everyone to please, if you are able, take part in this international campaign for life in whatever way you can. Every offering is priceless, whether it is a moment of prayer for the unborn and their mothers, or a Mass offered, or standing in prayerful vigil in front of an abortion facility, or asking Pastors to speak about the 40 Days for Life campaign at their Masses; or leaving information brochures in Churches, downloaded from the site: www.40daysforlife.com. If you have an internet connection, go to the site and click on 'locations' - this will show you where the vigil for life will be held in your state. If you are not able to go to the abortion site in your city, then please pray and fast in solidarity with those who will be physically present there. Some do this on Wednesdays and Fridays, some once a week and some for the whole 40 days. Every offering is important, every prayer is heard.

We cannot put an end to abortion through politics alone, but how we vote matters. Pray and vote! The Nov. 2nd election is crucial to the pro-life cause. If you want to see where those who are running for office stand on important issues, go to the 'Susan B. Anthony List' and you will find the names of politicians up for election who strive to advance good moral values in our country. Martin Luther King said in a Christmas Eve sermon in 1967: "The next thing we must be concerned about if we are to have peace on earth is the nonviolent affirmation of the sacredness of all human life." The 40 Days for Life campaign is such an affirmation. The unborn baby in the womb of his mother is a unique member of the Body of Christ and we are each called to stand for the lives of those babies in prayer and in action.

Report on the 2010 Informational Conference, by Mary Kay Lacke

Thirteen inquirers joined six consecrated virgins and Bishop Earl Boyea in Chicago for the fourteenth annual USACV Information Conference. Although the topics for the Conference are quite standard, each year a dominant theme seems to emerge. This year the theme was the espousal relationship with the Lord that is at the center of the vocation of the consecrated virgin. This was not only the emphasis in the presentations but also in the questions that arose from inquirers.

Bishop Boyea presented his own set of "Essential Elements" of the vocation. He gave a scriptural background for the vocation, a brief ecclesial history of consecrated virginity, a biographical sketch of a number of important virgins in the life of the Church and, finally, a reflection on the role of the consecrated virgin in the life of the Church as described in VITA CONSECRATA by Pope John Paul II, Canon 604 and the Rite of Consecration itself. Everyone was blessed by his unique insight into the vocation.

The consecrated virgins serving the Information Conference were Theresa Marshall, Judith Stegman, Magalis Aguilera, Mary Kay Lacke, Sara Navarro and Twanna Bolling. Together with Bishop Boyea, they formed an awesome team! The women attending the conference commented in their evaluations about the attention the team paid to the goals of the inquirers to learn about the vocation of consecrated virginity and to discern God's call in their own lives. Those who were concerned about a possible lengthy waiting period before they could receive the consecration found great encouragement and support through Theresa Drajin's testimony on Friday evening. Theresa made a guest appearance and wowed the group with the tale of her patient journey of faith, over many years, to her consecration.

It is always a great blessing for those who serve the Information Conference. Each one who serves has the opportunity to witness the faithfulness of God who calls each individual to a unique vocation. Any consecrated virgin interested in attending the 2011 conference to help with the logistics of the conference is welcome to express her interest to Mary Kay Lacke or Theresa Marshall.

Requiescat in Pace – Denise Farrell, July 2, 2010

We bid farewell to our sister in Christ, Denise Farrell, who will surely be remembered for her enthusiasm for her Divine Spouse, her faithful life, her ready smile, and her heartfelt expressions of appreciation for virtues she saw in others. It was late in her life that Denise learned of the availability of the consecration to a life of virginity living in the world. It was a great joy for me and other consecrated virgins to attend her consecration on December 8, 2005, at the hands of the Most Reverend William F. Murphy, in the Diocese of Rockville Centre (New York). –

Judith Stegman

Maria Almeida writes: I attended Denise Farrell's funeral. She was surely loved by many, as evidenced by the presence of many priests, including Rev. Fr. Groeschel, deacons, and Franciscan brothers. The funeral was officiated by her Bishop, The Most Reverend William F. Murphy, and Denise's nephew gave a beautiful reflection on his aunt's life. A Monsignor longtime friend of the family gave a wonderful portrait of Denise, and it struck me most when he said, "Oh, Denise at this time must be going through one of those mansions that Holy Scripture outlines so eloquently." Denise's family, the Lay Franciscans Order of which she was an active member, and the Bishop, were glad to learn that I came as a consecrated virgin to attend her funeral.

Yvonne and Gloria Oliver write: We first met Denise at our consecration on April 27, 2008. When speaking to Denise, one could sense much joy, faith and love for the Lord. She had a gentle and jovial manner. I enjoyed my long telephone conversations with her and was pleasantly surprised and touched when she called us on the anniversary of our consecration. Denise was a very spiritually and emotionally strong woman of faith who always remained positive no matter what trials she endured. Denise Farrell was a holy woman who inspired many and who we had the honor of knowing.

Loretta Matulich writes: "Let us begin anew." This exhortation of St. Francis was a favorite of Denise and she often quoted it to me. She noted that St. Francis advised that we should begin each day with this attitude of freshness of disposition to serve the Lord. So let us begin today to serve the Lord afresh!

How did I meet Denise? Only Divine Providence could have arranged it. In March 1998 when I attended a national Vicars for Religious meeting as their invited guest in New York, I spent one extra day afterward in New

York with my friend Wyn Powers, Foundress of Rosary For Life. She asked me what I would like to do on that day. I replied that there was only one person I'd like to see and that was Msgr. Welsh, her friend. She was more than happy to arrange a lunch together. To that lunch on Long Island, in Msgr. Welsh's favorite restaurant where he could order their delicious beef stew, I met Denise. Msgr. Welsh had invited her to come to the luncheon also. When I identified myself as a consecrated virgin and started to explain what our vocation is, Denise immediately spoke up and said that she knew exactly what consecrated virginity is. Then she continued on to give me a



Denise Farrell greets Yvonne and Gloria Oliver on their consecration day.

perfect definition of it. I was astounded. She was the first future consecrated virgin that I had ever met who started off our conversation with an exact definition of our vocation! During the course of our luncheon when Denise and I excused ourselves from the table for a few minutes, Msgr. Welsh intimated to Wyn that he had never seen Denise so animated as when we were talking about consecrated virginity.

Subsequent to that luncheon, I continued to encourage Denise to think about the Consecration for herself, and one day I asked her how she knew about this vocation. She explained to me that when she was in college in the 1950s in New York, her major was music, voice to be exact. [Those who attended her Consecration in 2005 will remember her sung responses during the Rite with her operatic voice.] She said that one of her teachers was a Benedictine monk of St. John's Abbey in Minnesota, and he needed a feminine voice to demonstrate to the nuns at Regina Laudis monastery in Connecticut how to sing Gregorian Chant. He asked her to accompany him to the monastery for a few days and demonstrate how to sing Chant. While she was there with him, one afternoon she sat on the lawn with him and he excitedly explained to her what the Consecration of Virgins is. [In 1950, a special indult was granted to the Benedictine Sisters in the United States to be able to receive the Consecration of Virgins.

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More U.S. Convocation photos:



Deceased U.S. consecrated virgins remembered in prayer

USACV Elections Fall 2010

Two Council positions, **Treasurer and At-Large Representative**, will open January 1, 2011. We encourage members to consider running for these leadership positions in the association. Details of our governing structure can be found in the organizational statutes and bylaws of the USACV, which are available upon request. Detailed descriptions of the terms, duties, and responsibilities of the President and At-Large Representative positions can be found in the May 30, 2010 issue of *The Lamp*.

Election Process

Written notification of a member's desire to run for either of the open Council positions must be received by a USACV Council member by midnight on Friday, October 29, 2010. We encourage each candidate to also submit a biographical statement, (approximately 500 words) including remarks about why she desires to serve in the position.

Ballots (and candidate biographies) will be mailed to all USACV members in early November 2010. If you have not yet registered as a member in 2010, now would be a good time to do so!

● Ballots will be due back to our Elections Team leader by Friday, December 3, 2010. Ballots will be opened and counted in the presence of an independent party and notification of the results will be made to the USACV President, the newly elected, and all candidates. Results of the election will be published on the USACV website and announced in the December 12, 2010 newsletter.

Please do consider running for office, and encourage other members to run!



Friday afternoon symposium discussion