

The Lamp



United States Association of Consecrated Virgins

January 1, 2008
Mary, Mother of God; Octave of Christmas

Volume 13, Issue 1

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

December 25, 2007 – Solemnity of the Birth of the Lord

Dear sisters in Christ,

My heartfelt greetings of the joy and peace of the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ! Be assured that you and your intentions are especially remembered in my prayers at Christmas Midnight Mass, at the Mass of Christmas Day, and throughout the Christmas Octave.

Today, we celebrate the saving truth that the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived and gave birth to Jesus Who is Emmanuel, that is God with us – God the Son made man – , and yet remained always a virgin. The mystery of the Virgin Birth points to the wonderful gift of your vocation in the Church. Resolving to remain always a virgin, you have offered your virginity to Christ and have been totally consecrated to Him in the Church. Your virginal consecration bears abundant fruit in the Church and in the world.

Because you belong totally to Christ, you bring Christ to all, especially to those in most need, through your maternal prayers and works of love. The witness of your pure and selfless love, offered with and in Christ for the salvation of souls, is a most treasured fruit of your consecration in a culture beset with a radical individualism and narcissism which betray love and violate human life. Remaining always virgins, you are spiritual mothers in Christ for all.

May Mary, Virgin and Mother, intercede for you and your intentions. May she draw you into an ever deeper knowledge and love of the mystery of the Virgin Birth, which we celebrate with so much joy today.

Asking a continued remembrance in your prayers, I am

Yours in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

(Most Rev.) Raymond L. Burke

Archbishop of Saint Louis

Episcopal Moderator of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins

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Behold The Queen of Virgins

By Diane Christine Farr

It is with special joy that the consecrated virgin prays in the litany of our lady, "Queen of Virgins pray for us." It is very important for us to ponder deeply this highest and most perfect ideal of virginity as we behold Mary the queen of virgins. We see the virginal purity of our blessed mother as a unique aspect of her exquisite beauty. We are called in our own lives to enter into this mystery of virginal love as the virgins of her train.

In the homily for the rite of consecration, speaking of virginity it says, "When the fullness of time had come the almighty Father showed, in the mystery of the Incarnation, His love for this great virtue. In the chaste womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word was made flesh, in a marriage covenant uniting two natures, human and divine."

We do well to remember that before Mary became mother of God she became His bride. Pope John Paul II tells us that her intention of virginity was the fruit of her love for the Lord. Thus she says to the angel, "How shall this be since I do not know man?" Mary's virginity would prove to be exactly what the divine plan would require rather than an obstacle to its fulfillment. We see Our Lady's virginity as a beautiful anticipation of the coming of our Savior even though she had no foreknowledge of her divine maternity. Her holy virginity would become the fertile ground from which would spring the Christmas Rose. In the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, she, who was full of grace, would come to know God in a spousal union of infinite majesty.

God himself anticipated all of this in the unique privilege of the Immaculate Conception. For it was through the interior counsel of the Holy Spirit that Our Lady chose a life of virginity.

Pope John Paul II told us, "The unique privilege of the Immaculate Conception influenced the whole development of the young woman of Nazareth's spiritual life." Thus it should be maintained that Mary was guided to the ideal of virginity by an exceptional inspiration of that same Holy Spirit who in the course of the Church's history would spur many women to the way of virginal consecration.

We see the sacredness of the virginal state as a most profound meeting place for a deeper intimacy with God. It is a spiritual reality that is expressed in our whole being. We read in a document of Vatican II, "Christ's birth did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity, but sanctified it." (LG 57) Bishop Sheen states in his book about our Lady, "Mary renounced maternity and yet found it in her virginity as the closed garden through which no one should pass except the Light of the world who would break nothing in his coming anymore than light breaks the window by coming into the room."

It is Jesus, the Light of the world, who enkindles the bright flame of virginal love, transforms our lives in his divine beauty, and gives meaning to all our actions. Being mindful of all that our Lady is we remember that we also, by virtue of our consecration, are to be known as sacred persons. Christ sanctifies our virginity making us holy in body and soul.

The same God, who in his love preserves the integrity of His tender virgin would also give her the grace and strength to stand under the cross of her divine son.

We who are consecrated virgins must be closely united to our Lady in a spirit of deep humility and purity that seeks to give glory to God in all things. We must be clothed with her virginal mantle and love Jesus with her Immaculate Heart. We should be filled with unceasing gratitude that we have been given the grace of a vocation so closely patterned after that of the Immaculate Virgin. We see in her that this life of virginity to which we have been consecrated is like a well from which we continually draw a new understanding of our communion with Jesus. This appreciation makes us more effective in our service to our brothers and sisters. It gives us the confidence to stand firm through all the difficulties of our lives.

Let us take note of the Eucharistic prayer for Christmas, "In union with the whole Church we celebrate that day when Mary, without loss of her virginity gave the world its savior."

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Council News

Current council members and officers are:

Judith M. Stegman, President, 2007 – 2009; Diocese of Lansing

Magalis Aguilera, ; 2007 – 2009 (appointed **Vice-President** thru 2009); Archdiocese of Miami

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

Twanna Billing, Member-at-large, 2008 – 2010; Archdiocese of Chicago

Aliceanne Sawyer, 2006 – 2008 (appointed **Secretary** thru 2008); Diocese of Trenton.

Election Results

Congratulations to our new and re-elected USACV leadership council members, **Twanna Bolling** and **Louise Paré**, elected for the period of January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2010. Louise was re-elected to serve as treasurer and Twanna was elected to serve as an general council member.

I personally want to extend my gratitude to **Shalina Stilley** for her service these past three years as a council member. Shalina's greatest gift to us continues to be her intense and infectious love for her Spouse. I'll miss her caring presence on the council but am pleased that she'll continue to serve us well in her work with the newly formed Membership Team. You'll be hearing more from Shalina as memberships are renewed again in 2008. *-Judith Stegman*

from the President's journal . . .

Since I've last written, I've traveled twice to Rome to meet with other consecrated virgins for the planning of our May 2008 international Congress-Pilgrimage. Magalis Aguilera and I have begun to work closely with a team of consecrated virgins from France, Italy, Germany, and Spain – a group of women who each have the love of Christ as Spouse engraved upon their hearts. It is a joy to see that we share the same love and the same concerns among us...truly it seems a sign that the Holy Spirit has inspired the renewal of this ancient vocation throughout the world. I invite you to pray for the planning and success of this holy endeavor, that virgins throughout the world would be inspired to kindle their love for Christ (those who attend and those who participate in prayer).

And in this holy Christmas season, may we encounter the maternal love of Mary our mother, and learn from her the fruitfulness of our virginal vocation of love. . . . Judith Stegman

Upcoming events:

International Congress-Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins to Rome, May 14 to 20, 2008. *See update article!*

National Convocations of United States Consecrated Virgins

June 24 to June 28, 2009 St. Louis area

June 23 to June 27, 2010

National Information Conferences

August 6 to August 8, 2008 Chicago

August 5 to 7, 2009 Chicago

August 4 to 6, 2010 Chicago

Behold the Queen continued

Let us consider the precious intimacy which God granted to the loving heart of the virgin Mother. These words are taken from Christine Rosetti's lovely poem, "In The Bleak Midwinter."

*Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and Seraphim throng'd the air,
But only His mother in her maiden bliss
Worshipped the Beloved
With a Kiss.*

Consecrations

U.S. consecration announcements

Nicole Bettini, 11/17/07, Archdiocese St. Paul/Minneapolis; Most Rev. Harry J. Flynn

Katharyn Downing, 11/25/07, Diocese of St. Augustine

Other Countries

France

Christelle Seguenot, 1 October 2006, Archdiocese of Sens-Auxerre

Sandrine Martin, 1 May 2007, Diocese of Evry-Corbeil

Germany

Simone Twents, 8 December 2007, Diocese of Fulda

Holland

Elisabeth Boddens Hosang, 5 February 2005, Diocese of Rotterdam

Hungary

Veronika Hegyi, December 10, 2007, Diocese of Pannonhalma, Bishop Varszegi Asztrik

Mexico

Blanca Gomez, December 13, 2007, Feast of St. Lucy

Italy

Eugenia Lucia Migliorini and Giusi D'Agostino, Diocese of Livorno, 23 April 2006, Bishop Diego Coletti

Nicoletta Novacchia, Diocese of Cesena, 2 February 2007, Bishop Antonio Lanfranchi

Concetta Fede (Ketty), Diocese of Noto, 16 April 2007, Bishop Giuseppe Malandrino

Graziella Longo and Oriana Rodella, 22 April 2007, Bishop Ambrogio Piantanida

Elena Verdiani, 6 May 2007, Diocese of Florence, Bishop Claudio Magnago

Antonella Tata, 19 May 2007, Diocese of Rome, Bishop Gianfranco Girotti

Donata Callisti, Antonella Duilio, Grazia Le Mura, Diocese of Aversa, 27 June 2007, Bishop Mario Milano

Rome 2008 Update

Rome 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage for Consecrated Virgins -& Shrines of Italy Pilgrimage

May 12 – 21 will be here before long! And an international planning team has been hard at work, having met in Rome in October and again on December 17. At our October meeting, **Cardinal Rodé**, Prefect of the Congregation for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, announced to us the good news that **our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI looks forward to receiving in private audience those who gather for the Congress-Pilgrimage**. What a great joy and privilege!

Over **400 consecrated virgins** from **32 different countries** have registered for the event in Rome. The planning is moving forward, but hasn't been without difficulty, and we've needed to delay the issuance of a more detailed letter to registrants. It will come soon, though, and with it we look forward to announcing pilgrimage sites and details of hotel and meal arrangements. The final cost for registration, room and board will also be announced with this letter.

There is still time to register for the after-pilgrimage **Shrines of Italy tour, until March 12, 2008**, and there may still be a slot or two available for the Congress-Pilgrimage. If you're interested, please contact **Isabel Bettwy** (by email imabettwy@aol.com or by phone 740-282-1683) as soon as possible. Isabel also reminds me that the **final payment installment will be due March 12, 2008**.



Eternal Rest Grant

Unto Her, O Lord

Aurora Dupont

Consecrated in Buenos Aires in 1973, one of the first in Argentina and in the world to be consecrated.



International Survey

The following questions are being asked of each country which will participate in the May 2008 gathering in Rome. Mary Kay Lacke, consecrated virgin of Steubenville, OH, will give the report on behalf of the United States. She welcomes any input you may have on any of the questions. She realizes, however, that a good number of questions require information that is only available to the USACV administration or a national level. Please contribute any input from your own experience and the experience of your diocese that you think would be helpful. You may reach Mary Kay at mklacke@sbcglobal.net or 1203 Maryland Ave., Steubenville, OH 43952.

Questionnaire in preparation for presentations about the state of the Order of Virgins in various countries

Overview

- How many consecrated virgins are there in your country?
- In what year were the first consecrations?

What are the professions and Ecclesial services most represented among those who are consecrated?

Vocational research and orientation

- Regarding vocations of young people: what do they hope to find in the vocation of consecrated virginity?
- With what type of formation and spirit of availability do they come?
- What is the usual age of those requesting the consecration?
- How is the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world made known to young women as a vocational choice?
- Are there resources available in your country to assist those planning the Rite of Consecration, such as music, worship aids, sample invitations?

What resources on the consecration do you find most helpful in the preparation of candidates?

Discernment and formation before consecration

- Are there diocesan or national guidelines for the initial formation of consecrated virgins in your country?
- How is the vocation to consecrated virginity discerned?
- Is the discernment of the vocation to consecrated virginity lived in the world made directly with the Bishop?
- Is he assisted by an Episcopal vicar?
- Is the importance of a spiritual father or a spiritual director stressed?

Canon 604 describes the consecrated virgin as one who is both mystically espoused to Christ and dedicated to the service of the Church. During the Rite of Consecration, at the taking of the veil, the Bishop says, "Never forget that you are given over entirely to the service of the Church and of all your brothers and sisters." The suggested homily for the Rite goes as far as to state that the consecrated virgin is an apostle in the Church and in the world.

- As candidates in your country are screened and prepared for consecration, are both the contemplative and active spousal dimensions of our vocation discerned and integrated into the formation process?

Life as a consecrated virgin

- Are there diocesan or national guidelines for the ongoing formation of consecrated virgins in your country?
- Describe the ongoing formation for consecrated virgins.
- Is it only on a personal level, or are their common initiatives?
- Do you have meetings and a time of prayer on certain occasions with the Bishop of your diocese?
- What are your main desires or concerns regarding the living out of your vocation?
- In your country, are there diocesan, inter-diocesan, or national associations of consecrated virgins, as envisioned in the second paragraph of Canon 604?
- What are the specific goals of these associations?
- Are there particular issues in relation to the experience of associations of consecrated virgins that you would like to mention?
- Are some of the consecrated virgins in your country also members of a third order? Do some hold close relationships with apostolic, monastic, or newly-founded communities? With regard to these experiences, are there particular questions you might have?

see SURVEY continued on page 6

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SURVEY cont.

- Do you publish a bulletin or review? If so, how often?
- Do you have you a website?
- Do you have national meetings? With what frequency and level of participation?
- Do you have a communications office or committee in your country? If so, how does this office or committee function? If not, how does communication occur among the consecrated virgins of your country?
- In your country, what are some concrete examples of the relationship of consecrated virgins, individually and as a group, with:
 - o other forms of consecrated life
 - o Bishops and the national Episcopal conference
 - o Do you have a Bishop accompanying the consecrated virgins at the national level?

How has the preparation for the Rome 2008 meeting been received in your country? What do you think of international meetings?

Is there anything else you would like to add, having to do with the vocation of consecrated virginity as lived in your country.

Something Ancient Something New

“... therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel” (Is 7,14) She who is both Queen of Virgins and Mother of God will reveal in herself the fruitfulness of virginity lived as a lifelong vocation. Ireneus comments that certain fathers of the Church consider the integrity of creation to be symbolized by the integrity of the woman, the woman as virgin. And the fruitfulness of creation they see symbolized in the fruitfulness of woman, the woman as mother.

In our Blessed Virgin Mother, these fathers see a concretization of the original integrity of creation, an integrity which will one day be restored. Virginal integrity in Mary, manifested in her physical virginity, embodied in her very self the fullness of the will of God, a total freedom from sin and assent to God’s plan. As the disobedience of Eve resulted in the loss of her virginity in this large sense (Werner Dettloff, O.F.M.), so the gift of the virginal integrity of Mary brings new hope to the human race. Consecrated virgins are surely invited to follow in the path of she who restored in herself the integrity of virginity, as we too live as both virgin and mother.

Saint Augustine understood the eternal essence of Mary’s virginity to be in her role as Mother of the Church, explaining that it was necessary that Christ be born of a virgin, so that His members would be born, after the Spirit, of a Virgin Church. Tertullian agreed with Saint Augustine, saying: “Just as Christ became man through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, we should all be reborn through the Holy Spirit and the virginal Church, the Mother of us all.” Tertullian was also the first to speak of consecrated virgins as “virgins Christo maritatae,” this is, virgins married to Christ. He was the first to call the virgins “sponsae Christi,” writing: “You have married Christ. You have handed over to him your body. You have made to him a gift of the first fruit of your young womanhood. Continue to do the will of your spouse. If Christ wants even every married woman to wear a veil at her wedding, how much more must he desires of his own spouses that they take the veil.”

As our heavenly Father gave our Blessed Mother the grace of holy virginity, so the Church reminds us on the day of our consecration: “It is He, infinitely pure and holy, who gives the grace of virginity. Those to whom He gives it are seen by the Fathers of the Church as images of the eternal and all-holy God.” (homily of the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity for a Woman Living in the World.)

Far from representing the absence of something, our virginity represents fruitfulness, the fruitfulness of motherhood. We see in our Blessed Mother the fruitfulness of one who accepts her calling as Mother of God, who carries Christ in her womb, who ponders in her heart prophetic words concerning the mystery of God revealed uniquely to her, and who accepts her part in the redemptive suffering of her Son. Surely our fruitfulness will mirror hers. Holy Church reminds us on the day of our Consecration: “Your motherhood will be a motherhood of the spirit, as you do the will of your Father and work with others in a spirit of charity, so that a great family of children may be born, or reborn, to a life of grace.” (homily).

And from my personal reflections on this gift of virginity: “The consecrated virgin is consecrated by God to eternally stand in the person of the Church as bride of Christ (alter Ecclesia). She is set apart as a sacred person and her consecration cannot be removed. It must be female and virgin that is consecrated, because this is who God chose, in the Blessed Virgin, to wed the Holy Spirit and to bear His Son. She must be female because the Church, born of the side of Christ as Eve from Adam, is born as the bride of Christ. She is pure, a virgin bride” (Judith M. Stegman: “The Consecrated Virgin – ‘Alter Ecclesia’”)

-Magalis Aguilera and Judith Stegman