

The Lamp



United States Association of
Consecrated Virgins

February 2, 2009
Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord

Volume 14, Issue 1

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

Pope John Paul II, in his 1997 “Message”, began the annual celebration of a day for Consecrated Life for three purposes: **1)** we need to thank God for the gift of consecrated life in the Church. This “is a gift which comes from on high, an initiative of the Father” (#2). **2)** There needs to be an increased knowledge of and esteem for consecrated life. Here the Holy Father notes that consecration is a re-enactment of the way of life of Jesus. For you, my sisters, particularly, he adds: “It is thus a special and living memory of his being Son, who makes of his Father his only love—his virginity” (#3). This esteem for consecrated life is due to the importance of calling all Christians “to live the same upward striving toward God who is all” (#3). **3)** The Holy Father’s words are wonderful in stating his third purpose: Consecrated persons “are invited to celebrate solemnly the marvels which the Lord accomplished in them, to discover by a more illumined faith the rays of divine beauty spread by the Spirit in their way of life, and to acquire a more vivid consciousness of their irreplaceable mission in the Church and in the world” (#4).

This day then calls us, who are living in the world, to pause and reconfirm our commitments. Thus, we “will be able to give witness with joy to the men and women of our time, in diverse situations, that the Lord is the Love who is able to fill the heart of the human person” (#4). It is this joy which must be the hallmark of our lives; for without it we cannot be effective witnesses. This joy should be a confirming criterion for the consecrated life; without it one would have to question whether the Spirit is really acting in the one offering up her life.

The Holy Father concludes by reminding us that all this should occur on this feast day today, the day on which Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple “to present him to the Lord” (Lk 2:22). This all points to the fact that Jesus was from beginning to end a total offering to the Father. And so, all consecrated virgins are invited today to renew that gift of self, particularly looking for any areas of life which are being held back from that offering. Seek the light of the Holy Spirit to bring insight regarding this matter so that a fuller, more complete handing over can take place, a present to the Spouse, Jesus Christ, which itself will be received with great joy.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl Boyea

Bishop of Lansing

Episcopal Moderator of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins

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The mystical way of love in which our virgin sisters in the early Church lived was a spousal way of love, a way that teaches us about our own distinct spirituality as brides of our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ. This mystical way of spousal love is rooted in the way of love in which our Blessed Virgin Mother lived. She was the first to promise perpetual virginity, as she gave her fiat to the Eternal Father's will and accepted with a humble spirit to become the virgin mother of God's Son. Ever since that moment, she is "the blessed who believed there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45). Why blessed? Blessed in her virginity and blessed in her maternity – she became an icon of the eternal love of God for humanity.

The mystical way of love in which we live in the world, as virgins consecrated to Christ alone, stems from a new blossom of the flower of the Virgin Mary's fiat. In her fiat, she freely accepted the Word of God, allowing the ancient promise of the Eternal Father to be done in her, putting "enmity between the devil and the woman and between the devil's offspring and the woman's offspring" and inaugurating the redemption of mankind. "He will strike at your head while you strike at his heel." (Cfr. Gen, 3, 15)

Mary's "fiat" is her nuptial "yes" and in her fiat is also the essence of our own nuptial "yes." "The beauty of Mary's act of faith lies in the fact that it is the nuptial yes of a bride to her bridegroom, uttered in total freedom." (Cantalamessa, *Mary Mirror of the Church*, The Liturgical Press, 1992, page 43) At the time of our virginal consecrations, we were asked, "Are you resolved to persevere to the end of your days in the holy state of virginity and in the service of God and his Church?" Our "yes" to this question is surely our nuptial "yes," meaning as it did for our Blessed Mother, that we are accepting His invitation forever: "I will betroth you to me for ever. I will betroth you to me in steadfast love." (Hosea 2:18-20)

Our Blessed Mother's "fiat" - her perpetual virginity lived in total faithfulness to God's will - instituted a new meaning of virginity for the human race. Such virginity is freely given by the Eternal Father and freely accepted by the virgin in the integrity of her being. As we analyze the meaning of our vocation of consecrated virginity, beginning with the fiat of the Blessed Virgin, the new Eve, perhaps we can begin to understand why the splendor of this new gift of virginity did not come earlier in the Old Testament. In the

Old Testament we find in the only daughter of Jephthah, a hero of Israel, the first woman who was offered to God as a result of a promise made by her father as he strove to defeat the power of the devil during a battle. She had to accept with a sorrowful spirit and without consolation to live in the virginal state and to be sacrificed to God. She did this only to fulfill her father's promise. (Cfr. Vizmanos, Chapter I, *Virginity in the Old Testament*, page 3) .

But God's plan of Salvation to defeat the power of the devil in this world did not involve imposition of a virginal vocation upon our Blessed Mother. She was asked by Him if she was open to embrace the gift of virginity – just as we are asked if we are open to embrace the gift. And so, we see the way of love of the first virgin, our Blessed Mother, a way of love characterized by embracing the will of the Eternal Father. We are called to follow this same way of love, resting and believing in the words of the Eternal Father, so that we, too, in the core of our being can say: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38)

Mary was "full of grace," and she heard of herself, "the Lord is with you." She was created immaculate, but her free will was intact. She lived as the "handmaid of the Lord," freely giving herself to God as an act of love. Following this way of love means that we live as she lived, freely giving ourselves to the will of the Lord in the midst of our activity and being in this world. Truly, this is the distinct spirituality of the consecrated virgin, to live as bride, as spouse, of Christ, freely choosing at each moment to give a gift of self to Him, to live in His light, to seek His will, to be faithful, and to trust in the Lord. Such is our spirituality as we embrace, like Mary, a full union with the mission of her Beloved Son.

We're called to give all and to share, as Mary, in the suffering and glory that comes with union with her Son. Mary grew in faith in the midst of her virginal mission as Mother of God, keeping always in her heart the words of the Old Testament, words meaningful to her spirituality as virgin and mother: "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not: See, I am doing something new!"... and now, as she is seated at the throne of the Father, we her daughters continue to hear: "See, I make all things new!" (Cfr. Isaiah 43, 19; Revelation, 21,5).

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 Bolling, Member-at-large, 2008-2010 ; Archdiocese of Chicago.

Shalina Stilley, Member-at-large, 2009-2011, Diocese of Phoenix

Upcoming events:

2009 National Convocation of United States Consecrated Virgins:

July 8-12, 2009

Mundelein Retreat and Conference Center, Chicago

National Information Conferences:

August 5 to 7, 2009

August 4 to 6, 2010

Each year at The Cenacle, Chicago

Team Announcements:

Formation Resource Development Team: Mary Kay Lacke

During the last couple of months, Mary Kay has been trying to work on an outline of topics to be formulated into a document of formation resources. Various consecrated virgins will be called upon to develop these topics.

However, since Thanksgiving, Mary Kay's 97 year-old mother has had a sharp decline in her health and at the moment is suffering from heart failure. Since Mary Kay is responsible for her care, she needs to focus on her mother's needs at the moment. Please pray for Marguerite, for Mary Kay and for the Lacke Family as it helps Mom to make her final journey Home.

Peace and All Good, Mary Kay

2009 Convocation Team: Louise

Pare "Keeping our First Love Alive" – see separate announcement.

Membership Team: Shalina Stilley

See announcement below regarding 2009 membership drive.

Kateri Team: Florence Sundberg:

Part of what the Kateri Team does is to point out a need of a consecrated virgin and make it known to those who might be able to help in some way. Some of our sisters in consecration have expressed a desire to share a living situation with another consecrated virgin. I'd be happy to serve as a referral point among us for such requests. Meanwhile, let us pray for one another, especially those under financial stress during these economically hard times.

Candidate Care Team: Barbara

Swieciak Team leader Barbara Swieciak reminds all that the candidate care team provides a booklet/source of sample announcements, invitations, participation aids for Holy Mass, prayer cards, etc., that candidates for consecration may use as a resource in planning their day of consecration. Contact Barb if you would like to send your consecration day mementoes to be shown to others, or if you know of a candidate who would like to see the samples. Barbara Swieciak, 149 South 24th Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601.

2009 USACV Membership – Members and Friends

Shalina Stilley, Membership Team Leader, announces that registration renewal for members and friends is now open for 2009. Registration forms will be mailed very soon by email and US mail, and we appreciate your support. Please return your forms by March 1, 2009. The registration campaign will include a funds appeal to cover special 2009 projects of the USACV, including in particular a redesign of the USACV website, enabling us to more fully serve consecrated virgins, Bishops and diocesan personnel working with the vocation of consecrated virginity in the United States and in English-speaking countries throughout the world. More news to follow, and we hope you will be generous with the campaign. The popular anniversary date calendars will also be available to members renewing registration.

Keeping Our First Love Alive
USACV Annual Convocation
July 7-12, 2009
University of St. Mary of the Lake Conference Center
Mundelein IL

Mark your calendars now and set aside the time to attend the 2009 USACV Convocation. The dates are July 7-12, 2009. On-site registration will be from 3:00-5:00 and we will begin with dinner at 5:30, followed by Mass together to begin our convocation.

Registrations forms will be sent out right after Easter and will be due by June 1st. We do not have a final price set yet, but it will be between \$400 and \$450. We are in the final negotiating process right now and we are doing all we can to keep the price down.

Mundelein is located 28 miles north of O'Hare airport in Chicago. Please take a look at the website to see what a beautiful location this is: <http://mundeleinseminary.org/default.htm> There are 300 wooded acres, including a 180 acre lake. All rooms are air conditioned and there is wireless internet access throughout the building.

Bishop Earl Boyea, recently installed bishop of the Lansing, Michigan diocese will be attending. Bishop Boyea is the new Episcopal moderator for the association and has been very open in his support and affection for our vocation and for the women who are living it. The theme for this year's event came originally from Bishop Boyea as he encouraged the consecrated virgins in his diocese to keep alive that light of first love in our hearts. This should be an inspiring and

spiritually refreshing time for all.

We will have time to visit "Marytown", which is a shrine dedicated to perpetual Eucharistic adoration. It is adjacent to the University of St. Mary of the Lake (USML). Details of talks and speakers are still being worked out, but I am sure it will be a time of great blessing.

If you will be flying, you should fly into O'Hare airport (not Midway). As much as possible, try to arrange your arrival time between noon and 3:00 PM. I know that will not always be possible, and we will do our best to arrange shared shuttles from the airport. The cost for shuttles is not yet established. It is very much less expensive if we can group people together, which is why we encourage you to cluster your arrivals together. Flights home should be after 1:00 on Sunday if possible. If you choose to come a day earlier or stay a day later, you will need to arrange your own transportation from the airport. More details will come with the registration forms. But, I encourage you to plan ahead on your flights since many airlines are cutting prices right now due to the economic downturn. I will need your flight information at the time you register if you are planning to fly.

Please address any questions to Louise Pare at lepocv@gmail.com, or 734-482-0893. I'll get back to you as soon as possible. I look forward to seeing you in Mundelein!

Good News! Publication of Texts from Rome 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins

We are pleased to announce that the original language texts of the conferences and homilies from the Rome 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage of Consecrated Virgins will be published in the final 2008 issue of *Sequela Christi*, the official publication of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. We are grateful to Cardinal Franc Rodé for this good news and generous offer.

The cost of the issue, 2008 / 2, including shipping to the United States, will be 17.50 €, or approximately \$23. Order forms will be available very soon on the USACV website, consecratedvirgins.com, and on the ordovirginum.info website. Please tell your Bishop and others who may be interested! In order to help determine the number of volumes to print, please also email as soon as possible the number you intend to order: info@consecratedvirgins.com.

Note: We are still working to collect translations of texts, to be made available at a later date through the Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Finding All Things In Possessing Christ

By Diane Christine Farr

Christ Himself is the model of all goodness and perfection. He is the wellspring and source of all of our true joy and peace. This is because He is a divine and infinite being.

The last paragraph of the prayer of the consecration of virgins reads, "Be yourself their glory, their joy, their whole desire. Be their comfort in sorrow, their wisdom in perplexity, their protection in the midst of injustice, their patience in adversity, their riches in poverty, their food in fasting, their remedy in time of sickness. They have chosen you above all things; may they find all things in possessing you."

We who have been chosen for consecrated virginity have been given the grace to see our virginity as a treasure that is cherished and hidden in the most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Our choice of perpetual virginity as well as our whole lives must be seen as totally immersed in God. We cherish all that marriage foreshadows, as the prayer of consecration also states. However, we find joyful fulfillment in preserving our virginity for our beloved Jesus who has taken complete possession of our hearts. As brides of Christ we must be careful to observe purity of intention, and that every thought, word and

deed is done for the glory of our divine Spouse. Our foundation must be firmly rooted in Him that he may be free to act in and through us. We will cling to him in absolute trust in every sorrow and adversity. We will gain wisdom of heart as we enter into the mysteries of Christ's life, death and resurrection. We will be challenged to grow in intimacy with Jesus throughout our whole lives, and this will be the basis of our sanctification. Times of prayerful silence are crucial in order that this intimacy between Bridegroom and bride may be established.

In choosing Christ above all things the consecrated virgin has truly found all things in possessing Him. We have found in Him a most noble Bridegroom who has drawn us to Himself by His beauty and infinite love. We have found the joy of this heavenly life of virginity in our mystical espousals with our Lord. We have found the joy of spiritual motherhood in our care and concern for the spiritual and temporal needs of others. This care and concern should always extend to our sisters in Christ so that we may all grow together in the grace of our consecration. Let us pray that in union with the Blessed Virgin Mary our hearts will always be virginal, maternal and lovingly directed toward the will of God.

Invitation to Fatima Some consecrated virgins from different countries who met at the Congress in Rome have had a desire to encounter each other again in prayer and adoration, feeling the great need of our hearts and our world for peace and unity. We have chosen Fatima as the meeting place for our retreat-pilgrimage, which will take place from October 5-10, 2009, as we wish to deepen our knowledge and realization of our Blessed Mother's call at Fatima for prayer, adoration, reparation and total consecration to her Immaculate Heart, so needed to be a true spouse of Jesus Christ.

The Bishop of Fatima, His Excellency Antonio Marto, and the Bishop responsible for Consecrated Life in Portugal, Msgr. Antonio Montez Pereira, as well as the rector of the Shrine of Fatima, Fr. Virgilio Antunes, and Fr. Manuel Antunes, responsible at the Shrine for the spreading of the message of Fatima, have agreed to give us some of their time and wisdom. Their homilies and conferences will be simultaneously translated in 4 languages. We will also visit some beautiful historical and religious sites in Portugal, but our main focus is to be together in the love and prayer of our Spouse and of the Most Blessed Trinity.

If you would like more information about the retreat, please let us know *immediately* so that we can forward information and a pre-registration form. We will need to receive back the pre-registration forms by April 4TH if you are interested in attending. The retreat is limited to a 100 persons, on a first come first served basis. Total cost in Portugal is 275€- 300€ depending on the number of participants. Please note that this is not a congress or convocation but a simple retreat –pilgrimage for consecrated virgins, and we wish to preserve that atmosphere and spirit of simplicity. For more information, and pre-registration forms, please contact:

smiriam@szczecin.opoka.org.pl; Tel: 0048-91-4626755 and 0048-607397617 (cell.)

Or ir_maria_joao@hotmail.com; Laide de Conceicao Borges : Tel: 00351-919321326

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Special Announcements:

St. Agnes Fest:

Originally scheduled for the Feast of St. Agnes, the celebration has been re-scheduled to the 9th of May, 2009. More information coming as to the time and place. Those interested should contact Barb Swieczak at 608-784-6974,

mysisterbarb@hotmail.com or

Sr. Stephania at the Office of Consecrated Life in LaCrosse, Wisconsin:

snewell@dioceseoflacrosse.com.

from the President's Journal

This morning I had occasion to enjoy coffee with a young lady from my parish – she's fifteen, and beginning to explore vocational options. What a pleasure it was to hear her say that she and other girls on a recent retreat were comparing notes about the vocations of consecrated virginity and marriage! Imagine - these girls have grown up knowing that the Order of Virgins is an option, and that Christ may have given them the precious gift of virginity in order that they might give it back to Him alone.

Each week, we receive a variety of inquiries into our USACV website: questions about physical virginity or other requirements for consecration, questions concerning formation, veils, distinctions among the forms of Consecrated Life, the Rite, third orders, widows, financial independence, and many others. It's a privilege and joy to discuss these matters, bringing to bear the richness of Ecclesial tradition in presenting the spirituality of the consecration of virgins. A team of consecrated virgins looks forward to upgrading our website in 2009 to better serve the needs of all of our visitors.

On this Feast of the Presentation, Bishop Boyea's article recalls for us the words of our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, on the first celebration of a day for Consecrated Life. And Louise notes the theme of our 2009 convocation: "Keeping our First Love Alive." In these days of economic and political turbulence, let us present ourselves anew to our Divine Spouse on this Feast, uniting our wills to His, and going forth to bring His message of tender love to a world in great need.

-Judith Stegman

U.S. Consecrations

Jewel Brennan, December 13, 2008,
Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Jenna Marie Cooper, January 3, 2009,
Archdiocese of New York

Joan McCann, January 3, 2009,
Archdiocese of Boston

