

The Lamp



United States Association of
Consecrated Virgins

April, 2009
Easter Season

Volume 14, Issue 2

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

Dear sisters in Christ,

In 2004, the Congregation for Bishops sent to all the bishops in the world the “Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops.” Article 104 calls each bishop to care for the consecrated women in his diocese and “provide suitable and, if possible, abundant resources for their spiritual growth, their Christian instruction, and their cultural enrichment” and then notes: “The Bishop should show particular concern for the order of virgins, who are dedicated to the service of the Church, entrusted to the Bishop’s pastoral care and consecrated to God at his hands.”

This article strikes me as quite demanding. Obviously, most religious orders have their own provisions for caring for their membership, though there are diocesan communities which rely more heavily upon the support of the local Church. The relationship, however, between the diocesan bishop and the consecrated virgins in his diocese is very particular, since there is no other affiliation which the virgin has with the diocese other than through her parish and her bishop. In addition, the very act of consecration done by the bishop establishes a spiritual bond which is of great benefit to both the bishop and the one consecrated.

Article 100 notes that while all consecrated persons are subject to the pastoral authority of the bishop, the bishop has to respect their autonomy and adds: “He should reinforce the spirit of holiness in all consecrated persons, reminding them of their duty...since their specific contribution to evangelization consists principally in ‘the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters’ (Code 679).”

This article recognizes the mutual relationship of the bishop and the consecrated persons in his diocese. This is especially true of consecrated virgins. Their autonomy is to be respected such that no undue demands are placed on them. On the other hand, that demand can be placed on them which is the demand flowing from their very consecration, that is that they strive for holiness and that this be manifested in the way they live their lives.

This is especially to be seen in the arena of charity, as article #194 states: “he seeks to instill in all the faithful—clergy, religious, and laity—a genuine attitude of charity and mercy towards all who labor and are heavy laden (Mt. 11:28).” So certainly during this holy season of Easter, all of us are called to holiness, that holiness of charity and mercy which Christ himself manifested in his dying and rising for us. A most Blessed Easter season to all.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl Boyea
Bishop of Lansing
Episcopal Moderator of the USACV

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The Spirit that God gave us is no craven spirit, but one given to inspire strength, love, and self discipline. God has sent into our hearts the spirit of His Son, crying “Abba, Father”, Alleluia! (antiphon from the First Sunday of Pentecost). These words have resounded among us since the time of Pentecost, as they enter and transform our innermost beings in order to balance the pain of our human condition, a condition expressed by the sixth word of our Lord on the Cross: “Father, why have you abandonment me?” Our experience of the meaning of His redemption is based on our capacity to live as a child of the Father, as Jesus Himself lived in this world. We are called from our Lord Jesus Christ to pass through the experience of His cross as His blessed Mother passed through the experience, with Him. We are called to begin living in this world as we will live with Him forever – and yet in this world, the way of love we live with Him is the very way of love that He lived in this world, the way of His passion. It is in the midst of living in His passion that we learn to live in His resurrected presence. This is a great mystery of our virginal love for our Divine Spouse.

One of the greatest gifts of our Lord’s passion and death is the gift of the Church, His Spouse. As consecrated virgins, we are icons of the Church, and the temporal and eternal meaning of our virginity is due solely to the *gift of virginity* that we have received as icons of His Church. No one is able to live in the state of integral virginity without having received the gift, the habitual grace, of virginity. It is a gift, a great gift!

The Church in which we live the grace of virginity and in which we live totally for Christ is the very Church that represents the new covenant of God the Father with all of humankind. The Church, Spouse of God the Son, is the fulfillment of that promise of the eternal covenant revealed to us from God in the Old Testament. God the Father chose to fulfill his promise through the Church, which proceeded from His Son’s passion. Intrinsic to this new covenant is the new meaning of His presence among us as Spouse of the Church. Our virginal vocation is an icon of this expression of love between Bridegroom and Bride: “I will set you as a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts” (Haggai 2:23)

Fathers of the Church have testified to the virginity of Mary as the stronghold to fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah: “The dignity of virginity began with the Mother of the Lord.” Pursuing the idea of Athanasius, Ambrose holds up the life of the Virgin Mary as the model of virgins: “imitate her, my daughters ! Let Mary’s life be for you like the portrayal of virginity, for from her, as though from a mirror, is reflected the beauty of chastity and the ideal of virtue. See in her the pattern of your life, for in her, as though in a model, manifest teachings of goodness show what you should correct, what you should copy and what you should preserve. Her grace was so great that it not only preserved in her the grace of virginity, but bestowed the grace of chastity upon those on whom she gazed.” (Cfr. Information Packet of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins, page 187, revised 3/31/2006).

In our way of love for Christ, Mary is our model because she is Mother of the Church and Queen of Virgins. Her role is as virgin-bride and mother, and her Magnificat is the expression of how she lived her spousal relationship with God. We must follow our Divine Spouse in His passion and resurrection, making the Magnificat our own song, as we celebrate the fulfillment of the hope of Israel and the hope of Mary – the hope which alone announces redemption for all generations. It is the triumphant hymn of the wise virgins of the Old Testament and the triumphant hymn of the wise Virgin of the Old and New Covenant rejoicing in Jesus Christ, one, true, divine Spouse of the Church! (Cfr. *The One Bride: The Church and Consecrated Virginity*, Mary J. Klimisch, O.S.B, Sheed and Ward, page 26).

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 (appointed **Secretary** through 2009) 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

Important email address changes:

Barbara Swieczak
scwjoy@gmail.com

Beth Grebe
grebeb1@gmail.com

Mary DeSantis
mdesantis@sbcglobal.net

Team Announcements:

Formation Resource Development

Team: Mary Kay Lacke

In the February newsletter, I shared with everyone my preoccupation with the care of my mother, Marguerite, whose health was failing at that time. My mother went peacefully home to the Lord on February 1. Thank you to all who expressed your condolences. Your prayers were very much appreciated.

The Team Update:

1. *The FDRT continues to work on the development of a type of formation resource handbook that can be used by bishops, their delegated diocesan personnel, spiritual directors of consecrated virgins and those preparing for consecration, and especially consecrated virgins themselves. Hopefully this document will be completed by the end of this year.*

2. *The official publication of the 2008 Rome Congress talks is very welcome resource that will influence the content of the formation resources that the FDRT is developing.*

3. *A bibliography of reference materials for the formation of consecrated virgins is an important part of the handbook development. I invite any consecrated virgin to share information concerning particular literary resources or other media forms she has found especially helpful in deepening her understanding of her vocation. Please email the info to mklacke@sbcglobal.net or send it by regular mail to 1203 Maryland Ave., Steubenville, OH 43952-1620.*

2009 Convocation Team: See separate announcement

Membership Team: Shalina Stilley

Thank you to all consecrated virgins and friends who have renewed membership in the USACV and shown support with your contributions. Follow-up reminders will soon be sent to those who haven't yet renewed. We can continue our work only with your personal and financial support, both

of which are greatly appreciated as we strive to serve the Church of Christ Jesus through our vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world. -

Shalina Stilley,

shalinastilley@hotmail.com.

Newsletter Team, You may hear soon from council member **Twanna Bolling**, who will begin to collect our personal stories for a new "getting to know one another" feature in "The Lamp." If you have ideas for a name for this new feature, or want to volunteer your story, please contact Twanna, tpbolling@yahoo.com.

2009 Information Conference Team:

Theresa Marshall. See insert

Kateri Team: **Florence Sundberg** "Some of our sisters are having difficulties because of the economic crisis we are experiencing in our nation, but all are dealing with this with fortitude and a sense of hope, inner peace and strength stemming from their belief that Christ, indeed, continues to stand with them as Spouse. Some have said that they may not be able to make it to our conference in Chicago this year, but will plan for next year in the hope that things will get better. All this, and all of us, and all of our people, we place in the hands and the Heart of Christ, as we continue to hold each other in prayer, with love, Florence"

Candidate Care Team: Team leader **Barbara Swieczak:** The resource booklet of sample announcements, invitations and participation aids for consecrations has travelled from its Wisconsin home to Hawaii and Georgia during the past month. Contact Barb if you or a candidate you know would like to see the samples or if you would like to contribute your mementoes to the travelling collection. Barbara Swieczak, 149 South 24th Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 54601

2009 Convocation “Keeping our First Love Alive”:

Registration forms and detailed information will soon be sent to consecrated virgins in the United States. Those who have attended an informational conference and are accepted as candidates for consecration in their dioceses are also invited to attend, as are consecrated virgins from other countries. We are working hard on a prayerful program that will be enriching spiritually and formatively for all consecrated virgins, as well as one that will provide time for renewing friendships among us.

Our annual convocation is an important time for us, as we gather together in expression of love for our Divine Spouse and encouragement of one another. We realize that the cost of the convocation is high, especially in these challenging economic times, and we want to assure everyone that we have been quite conscious about keeping the cost as reasonable as possible. Perhaps it may help to note that the cost of housing and all meals is included in the \$400 to \$450 fee, that airfare into Chicago is less than into many other cities in the country, and that this fee is about the same as what was charged in 2007 for those who requested private rooms (as many people did). At the time of registration we will ask for donations

from those who might be able to afford to help those who may need financial assistance in order to attend.

Our program will feature presentations by Bishop Boyea, the new Episcopal Moderator of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins. Bishop Boyea’s background in history and seminary formation are sure to inform his presentations, and we look forward to welcoming him. Our convocation will also feature an in-depth presentation on the Rite of Consecration, given by Mary Kay Lacke and Maria Luisa Oefele. Mary Kay’s spiritual presentation on the Rite has been a source of inspiration for those who have attended recent informational conferences, and we are pleased to have her offer an expanded presentation for our convocation. What better way to “keep alive our first love” than to return to the liturgical source of our consecration.

We hope to see many of you soon in Chicago! See our February 2009 issue of *The Lamp* for additional practical details, or anticipate the soon to come registration form. Please address any questions to Louise Pare at lepocv@gmail.com.

The virginal heart and God's action

Our Lady shows us how God wishes to transform the world. Her action was not an action of setting up an agency or overseeing a committee. Her action was not preaching or becoming a public figure. Hers was rather an inner assent to God. A virginal heart, as virginal, does not conceive by man, but by God it does. God wishes to bring Jesus into the world and to change the world through our heart, but that heart must become virgin, filled with the beautiful prospect of a divine fruitfulness that requires nothing more than everything, namely, our assent to Him. The virginal heart is mysteriously sterile to man's eyes, but fruitful by God's ministrations. The virginal heart changes all of history, and all of the world.

Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk

Consecration News . . .

United States: **Marion Strishock**, March 1, 2009, Archdiocese of Washington, Most Rev. Donald Wuerl. Marion writes, "My consecration day was the happiest day of my life. I think God gave me a glimpse of the joy we will experience in heaven. God's love was so intense in it! All the prayers in the Rite captured what my heart had been feeling for so long, and while Mary and the saints are present during every Mass, I felt their presence and loving support in a new way. Because I was consecrated at the beginning of Lent, it made my Lent a deeply personal and spiritual time. Archbishop Wuerl explained it beautifully, "As Christ is beginning to lay down His life, you are beginning to lay down your life for Him."



Marion's consecration!

We are delighted to announce and invite you to attend these upcoming U.S. consecrations:

April 28, 2009: Elizabeth Byrne and Patricia Sanford; 7 pm; Church of the Most Holy Trinity, Augusta, Georgia; at the hands of The Most Reverend J. Kevin Boland, Bishop of Savannah. You may contact Liz and Trish through Liz, email lbyrne52@yahoo.com or phone 706-793-3687.

April 29, 2009: Catherine M. Wright; 11 am; Church of Saint Raphael, San Rafael, California; at the hands of The Most Reverend George H. Niederauer, Archbishop of San Francisco. You may contact Catherine at email cwbiblio@pacbell.net or 1115 B Street, #204, San Rafael, CA 94901.

June 13, 2009: Michele DiVito; Holy Angels Church, 348 Porter Ave., Buffalo, New York; at the hands of The Most Reverend Edward Kmiec, Bishop of Buffalo.

MARIE-PAUL DION

"Here is a wise and faithful virgin who went with lighted lamp to meet her Lord."

Marie-Paul Dion, the first virgin to receive the restored Rite of Consecration in 1970, entered the Lord's presence on February 12. She passed from this life to eternity at the motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa, Canada, where she was cared for in her last illness.

Marie-Paul is the third pioneer of our contemporary vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world to leave us recently for the Father's house. Preceding her into eternity in France was Renée de Tryon Montalembert and in Argentina, Stella Maris Wiaggio.

Marie-Paul symbolized in her person the universal love of the Church and what living on the North American continent means. In 1995, at the First International Congress for Consecrated Virgins, I was privileged to sit down to lunch with her and discover how she was living the mandate of "living in the world" of her time and place. One might wonder how a French-Canadian, teaching in a Catholic seminary, would do this. She told me that she had made a special effort to adjust her teaching assignments and to improve her fluency in English so that she could "be all things to all men," as much as she was capable of doing in Ottawa. To me this showed magnanimity of heart, possible only with the grace that comes from God, to rise above and beyond provincialism in true Christian love.

It was then that she informed me, too, that she was probably the first in the world to receive the Consecration to a Life of Virginity in its revised form. She said that in March 1970, the doctors had not thought that she could live much longer, so her bishop consecrated her to a life of perpetual virginity at that time, knowing that it would not be long before Pope Paul VI would promulgate the revised form of that Rite. Ironically, we both mused, by the time of our conversation in Rome together, she had already lived more than 25 years beyond the doctors' predictions, and at her entrance this month into the bridal chamber of the Lord, she had almost reached 39 years of holy espousal.

Marie-Paul, our first sister in this glorious vocation, pray for us before the throne of our Beloved Spouse!



May they rest in peace:



Jane Claire Forte, Archdiocese of Boston, consecrated June 30, 2000, entered eternal life April 17, 2009. *More will follow in the next issue of "The Lamp".*

Marie-Paul Dion, Canada, consecrated 1970, entered eternal life February 12, 2009. *Tribute written by Loretta Matulich.*

A Sign of the Kingdom of Heaven

By Diane Christine Farr

On Holy Saturday we pray in the liturgy of the hours, “Lord Jesus when your side was pierced there flowed out blood and water, the marvelous symbol of the whole Church, through your death, burial and resurrection, bring life to your bride, the Church.”

The consecrated virgin enters deeply into the paschal mystery of the Lord. We draw all of our life and sustenance from His Divine Being. In a very real, but hidden way we begin to live the divine life of heaven here on earth.

Speaking of Christ, the prayer of consecration says, “He has made our nature whole again and made it possible for mortal people to reflect the life of angels.”

Our perpetual virginity becomes a beautiful sign of this divine life of heaven when we experience it as a vital part of our loving intimacy with Jesus. The beauty and fragrance of this everlasting bouquet that we continually offer to our beloved Spouse gives him great honor and glory. It is our Lord Himself who imparts this beauty to virginity of body and soul that we have kept for Him alone. It is He who gives it its mystical quality. We must always remember that it is Jesus who has first chosen us and prepared us for consecration. It is the Holy Spirit who has enlightened our hearts and drawn us to choose and prefer for ourselves this holy state of perpetual virginity. Never allowing this to be a source of pride, we remember Our Lord’s words to St. Faustina, “Only the humble soul is capable of receiving grace. I favor humble souls with My confidence.”

Given the fact that our treasured vocation is a unique gift from God, the Church looks upon the consecration of virgins with special reverence. So we must conduct ourselves with great modesty and take care to preserve our interior life. We must help all Christians to live their lives on a deeper level, since our lives are to be a foreshadowing of the kingdom of heaven. Recognizing the importance of the spiritual life, we strive to be open to all opportunities that will enable us to grow in love, and thus prepare us for eternal life with God in heaven.

When we are in the midst of great suffering it is often quite difficult to make sense of anything. It is crucial, at such times, that we remember that we rely not on ourselves, but on our compassionate Lord who has gone before us. Firmly united with Him we are led through the darkness of the cross to the joy and light of the resurrection.

It is when we view our lives in light of our eternal destination that we come to appreciate the value and worth of each person. Each human soul is a unique heaven in which the Blessed Trinity desires to reign.

The consecrated virgin desires to live in intimate communion with Jesus for she knows that it is His divine love and infinite merits that give value to all of our actions. In her virginal state and in her call to contemplation, the bride of Christ is a sign of the kingdom of heaven. Christ has told us in the gospels that in the resurrection of the dead all will be like the angels. Let us ponder these words from the homily for the consecration of virgins:

“Your joy and your crown, even here on earth, will be Christ, The Son of the Virgin and the Bridegroom of virgins. He will call you to his presence and into his kingdom, where you will sing a new song as you follow the Lamb of God wherever He leads you.”

President's Journal

Dear consecrated virgins and friends,

A blessed and holy Easter season to each of you! As I write this article, I have just learned of the death of our sister Jane Claire Forte, one who was fervent in her love for the vocation of consecrated virginity. Many will fondly remember the Boston retreat she sponsored for us - in the summer of 2003 I believe - a retreat with a focus on the protective love of St. Joseph for virgins. After the retreat, Jane Claire treated me to a day visiting the Massachusetts places of her varied life ministries, a day I'll always cherish. If you have memories of Jane Claire, please write with them and we'll publish in our next issue of "The Lamp."

We've received an important update from the Congregation for Consecrated Life regarding publication of the texts from the Rome 2008 International Congress-Pilgrimage: "The original plan of including these texts in volume 2008/2 has been changed. Because that issue was already scheduled to contain the proceedings of the Congregation's 100th anniversary celebration and its Plenaria on Monasticism, it was considered more appropriate to dedicate an entire number to the theme of the Order of Consecrated Virgins. Therefore *Sequela* 2009/1 will be entirely on that theme. It is our hope that that issue will be in the mail in June. The orders of those who requested the single number containing the Congress texts will be adjusted accordingly. We regret this inconvenience, but believe the resulting issue will be much more satisfactory." I've been delayed in updating the ordovirginum.info website with this information, but hope to do so soon. There is still time to order your volume of the text!

For those of you who don't know, my work in the world includes preparation of many income tax returns for individuals and businesses - and with our economic concerns, this year has been particularly challenging. I'm glad to have April 15th behind me once again, and, by the grace of God, I look forward to moving ahead again with our website and other initiatives.

Let us re-commit ourselves to prayer for our Bishops and priests, especially in these days of increased stress between Church and political leaders on the most fundamental issues of life and marriage. May God grant us the courage to stand firm for the Gospel, in season and out of season.

In the joy and hope of Christ Jesus, our Divine Spouse,

Judith Stegman

Of Interest . . .

• **Lori Rose Cannizzaro** recommends a new CD, "All for You," which features the song "Hearts Desire", used by Lori Rose during the candle lighting ceremony at her Consecration. "All for You" includes songs in a variety of musical styles, all composed and performed by Tammy Stanek to convey and foster a deep love for God. Email Tammy at server-girl63@yahoo.com for ordering information.

• **Barbara Swieciak:** Bishop Listecki, Bishop of La Crosse, has set aside September 12, 2009 to celebrate Barbara Swieciak's 25th anniversary of consecration. All are invited! A formal invitation will follow, but for planning purposes, Barb writes now to ask people to let her know about your travel arrangements, and the number of nights you'll be staying. The anniversary Mass will be at 10 AM on Saturday, September 12, at the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman, followed by a brunch reception at

the Diocesan Center. A Saturday evening meal is planned for those who will be staying on. Barb is arranging housing with generous friends, but if you prefer a hotel, just let her know. Contact Barb at scwjoy@gmail.com.



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EASTER DAY

Promised dawn.

Nudging the horizons of a new era,

Removing the blemish

Of ancient guilt.

Sunlight shifts through slits

In slumbering skies,

Banishing the darkness.

For Christ our Light

No longer lies entombed.

He has risen from the dead.

Earth glows with hope

As mankind shares

God's love in Christ.

Rejoice! Be glad!

On this joyful Easter Day.

*Jo Spencer, consecrated virgin
(England)*

Easter greetings.

Easter greetings have been exchanged among consecrated virgins throughout the world...we present here the greeting sent by Carmen Margarita Munoz: (consecrated virgin, USA)

"Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!"

This is the Day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad.

May the joy and peace of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ fill with hope and love the hearts of all!

As the Holy Father said this morning of Easter Sunday, "Christ...needs...men and women to help Him, always and everywhere, to strengthen His victory [over evil] with His same weapons: the weapons of Justice and Truth, of Mercy, of forgiveness and of Love."

A happy and blessed Easter!

In union with Our Lady of the Resurrection,

¡Aleluya! ¡Cristo ha resucitado! ¡Verdaderamente ha resucitado el Señor!

Este es el día en que actuó el Señor, sea nuestra alegría y nuestro gozo.

¡Que la alegría y la paz de la Resurrección de nuestro Señor Jesucristo llene de esperanza los corazones de todos!

Como ha dicho esta mañana de Pascua de Resurrección el Santo Padre, "Cristo... necesita ...hombres y mujeres que lo ayuden siempre y en todo lugar a afianzar Su victoria [sobre el mal] con sus mismas armas: las armas de la justicia y de la verdad, de la misericordia, del perdón y del amor".

¡Una feliz y bendita Pascua Florida!

En unión con Nuestra Señora, la Virgen de la Resurrección,



Archbishop Timothy Dolan is welcomed to New York by Consecrated Virgins Barbara Blumers and Susan Munroe.