

To the Members of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins,

It was so good to be with so many of you this summer at the Eucharistic Congress. It was a real privilege for me to be able to say Mass for you on Friday and Saturday morning. And wasn't that Eucharistic Procession a total act of grace? Your Bridegroom riding down those roads thronged by great crowds was very moving. I spent a good amount of time in the exhibition hall visiting many of the booths several times during the days in Indianapolis, including our USACV booth. The number of folks and the good will which was so evident on their faces was heart-warming.

I am very grateful to all of you who were unable to be present but were praying for us and all the participants. You are a blessing indeed.



Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl Boyea
Bishop of Lansing



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By Dr. Magalis Aguilera, Psy.D.

Following is a presentation Dr. Aguilera gave to consecrated virgins gathered in convocation July 14 to 18, 2010.

Practical Application of the Meaning of the Gift of Virginity in our Sexuality as Women

Our Holy Father Benedict XVI in his address to us at the International Congress, on May 15, 2008 said: “In choosing the theme for these days you were inspired by one of my affirmations which sums up what I have already had the opportunity to say concerning your state as women who live consecrated virginity in the world: A GIFT in the Church and for the Church . . . Take care always to radiate the dignity of being a bride of Christ, expressing the newness of Christian existence and the serene expectation of future life . . . Indeed, the consecrated virgin is identified with that bride who, in union of the Spirit, invokes the coming of the Lord: The Spirit and the Bride say *Come* (Rev. 22:17).”

The gift of virginity is intrinsically related to the meaning of the Church as the Spouse of our Divine Spouse. We were called in the integrity of our being, I mean, in our physical, spiritual, and divine realities. I define a human being according to the Second Vatican Council’s viewpoint: “man considered whole and entire, with body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will” (*Gaudium et Spes* 3:1). The total self means our created humanity: “the image of God as able to know and to love his creator with free will” (*Lumen Gentium* 12:3 and 17:1). This means that our sexuality as a woman involves: 1) our body, which has senses because we are situated in this world in time and space. Saint Augustine taught that the soul has internal senses, and this is a good characteristic of our gift of virginity as we approach intimate union with our Divine Spouse. 2) the human being’s capacities of intellect and free will. We have the

capacity to know the truth and to make free decisions throughout our ongoing developmental process as human beings (see Jn. 8:1). 3) the divine grace we received at our baptism, transforming us into children of God. In our call, we have also received the gift of a virginal vocation, as our Blessed Mother received— even more than this, the virginal gift was created for Her and it was because of Her that we received it.

The call of virginity is a call *to be* more than *to do*; what I mean is that we live in this mortal flesh the life to be lived by all in eternity. This is possible because integrity is a preternatural gift of freedom from concupiscence, ignorance, and sin, which reflects a harmonious relationship between flesh and spirit, completely subordinating man’s lower passions to his reason (see Pius XI Encyclical on Christian Education). The consecratory prayer points to this too when it says: “He has made our nature whole again, and made it possible for mortal people to reflect the life of angels” (Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity, 24).

A virgin and her sexuality as a woman are two dimensions of the unique expression of her spiritual marriage with her Divine Spouse. The sexuality of a virgin transcends her biological capacity to be fecundant and have biological children. The sexuality of a virgin is an essential element of the whole picture created by the Eternal Father to procreate children for His Kingdom. I used to say to the children in my practice as a psychologist, when they are trying to have an early sexual experience, that they need to wait until the time they are able to see the totality of the meaning of their sexual capacity. I explain that this meaning will help them understand their sexuality as a “beautiful picture” created by the best artist, named God, our Eternal Father. For a virgin, too, sexuality is a “beautiful picture” created by the Eternal Father. When the Eternal Father calls a virgin to be a consecrated virgin for Him alone, what is His will? It is that we

make a free decision to give back to Him the “beautiful picture” of our sexuality. The above definition is in accord with the teaching of Pope John Paul II when he defined sex as a “beautiful gift of God” as he explains:

“the human person becomes a GIFT in the Freedom of Love. This freedom lies at the basis of the nuptial meaning of the body. The human body, with its sex, and its masculinity and femininity seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fruitfulness and natural procreation. . . in the grace of hypostatic union . . . Mary’s divine maternity is also, in certain sense, a superabundant revelation of that fruitfulness in the Holy Spirit to which man submits his spirit, when he freely chooses continence in the body, namely, continence for the Kingdom of heaven.” (John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997, pp. 63, 269).

Sexuality in a virgin is an important part of her faithfulness to her Spouse. This means that our sexuality as a virgin is not a sublimation of our whole sexual capacity, nor a repression of any “normal calling” from our sexuality as a woman. By “normal calling,” I am referring to the “motion” in our being which is letting us know that we are ready to have biological children; this “motion” is like a “ringing bell” that doesn’t belong to our call, and we are peaceful when we pay no attention to it and redirect to our Divine Spouse this “normal calling” to be a mother.

Our sexuality as a virginal woman is the same beautiful picture that was created by our Eternal Father, and we make a *decision* to give it in totality to our Divine Spouse—to love Him alone with “all our body, soul and spirit”—because love is related to free will. In summary, the sexuality of a virginal woman is created exclusively and purposefully in order to love her Divine Spouse and to give to Him the

integrity of her being as an act of free will, or a decision, coming from virginal grace.

What else is meant by a “normal call of our sexuality as a woman?” I also mean the normal expressions of our body in our adolescent years, or later in our stage of maturity, coming in the normal context of our life of union with our Divine Spouse. In my personal experience, although I was called when I was 13 years old, the “normal call of my sexuality” was to me a source of serenity after I learned to give back “this call” to our Divine Spouse as a meaning of my spiritual fruitfulness. When I received the consecration of the gift of virginity, I also received a complete virginal understanding of my being a virgin, and I learned that if those “normal calls” were coming to me, I should pray and praise the Spouse in the most peaceful experience of my intimacy with Him. I am thinking now, as I share these experiences with you, that they are not part of my privacy, but are good news, a “news of love” as Saint John of the Cross named it, the lovely coming presence to him of the Divine Spouse as the Spouse of his soul; and, Saint Theresa of Avila named it the “presence of His majesty to her soul in an imaginary vision of His most sacred Humanity . . . in great splendor and beauty and majesty” (*Interior Castle, Seventh Mansions*, Chapter II, 1). I keep praying and praising Him that I might have their experience before I die.

We are each a spouse of the Divine Spouse. The virginal sexual joy of our being as a virginal woman is a very touchy concept and it is not usual to hear about this. But I think it is time to talk about this meaning of the Way (*Via*) of union with our Divine Spouse. Every single woman needs a man. At least this was the first neurological image we registered in our feminine being, through our beloved dad’s love. If a woman does not have a spouse, she focuses on meeting this demanding need for a spouse by engaging in duties which take all her energy, or maybe she passes all her life searching for the

spousal meaning of her being as a woman.

What happens with the consecrated virgin? She lives spousal intimacy with her Spouse who is true man and true God but who is resurrected and has ascended into heaven and is invisible. But to her He is visible, that is, visible in the mystical union of her love in Him and with him in the deep castle of her soul—in that place in her being where no other creature is supposed to enter, except the Spouse alone.

How does He keep visible and let her know of His love? She needs to realize in her daily living arrangement in this world the meaning of the following words, the voice of the Spouse during the consecratory prayer on the day of her consecration: “Today through our ministry He (The Holy Spirit) anoints you with a new grace and consecrates you to God by a new title. He gives each one of you the dignity of being a bride of Christ and binds you to the Son of God in a covenant to last forever.”

We are consecrated through a new covenant that lasts forever. We said yes to Him and He approached us and allowed us to enter into Him; and His being is in us. How is this possible? By the double dimension of this mystery: that is, our love when accepting Him, and His love in consecrating us. This is the essence of the eternal covenant between Him and us—a mutual possession and a mutual exclusion of any other affective possession of love which might come from any other man, directly or indirectly, in our life as a married virginal woman, as a bride of Christ.

To be a bride of Christ is to live alone for Him, who is true man and true God, with a resurrected body. The virginal woman spouse of Jesus needs to be prudent when interacting with men. She needs to be prudent, as well, when she interacts with any other creature who could be a source of distraction for her in fulfilling the meaning of His will in her mutual love with her Divine Spouse.

To be a bride of Christ, the virgin needs to ask for the gift of wisdom to discern when she might be putting

her Spouse in second place, if she follows some work, creature, family, friends or maybe some of her Spouse’s own friends. Theresa of Avila, when she was asked to receive visits in the convent by important benefactors of the Order, realized the excessive interest they fixed on her being as a woman, and she headed back to her mother superior and said “I will not receive more visits of these men” . . . and when the Mother asked her why, she replied, “because the woman who is married is not supposed to have such kinds of men as friends.” This is our life and our unique friendship and complete donation in love to the will of our Beloved Spouse and from Him to one another.

We witness to His love: “You are a sign of the great mystery of salvation, proclaimed at the beginning of human history and fulfilled in the marriage covenant between Christ and his Church” (Rite of Consecration). Our gift of virginity is a strong expression of our being witness to the “marriage covenant between our Divine Spouse and His Church”

The gift of virginity in our sexuality as a woman includes another aspect—the call of a woman to bear children. Every single woman is prepared to be “a human laboratory.” This is part of her being, and includes processes named “labor” and “delivery.” A consecrated virgin is prepared to have children. A consecrated virgin has a Spouse who is true man and true God, with a resurrected body. She also passes through the process of “labor.” Her children are spiritual children and include those who are unknown to her in this world, and those who are well known to her. At the end of this time, she will be celebrating with her Spouse at the eternal wedding feast.

Could a virgin be frustrated—could she have some angry feelings because she does not bear a child? I think if the virgin does not realize her capacity to be a fruitful, spiritual mother, and the meaning of her

motherhood, she could be frustrated at the end stage of her life when she is in the natural stage of integrating her life. If she hasn't integrated this aspect of not bearing a child, she could become desperate, rather than peaceful, at this stage. The consecrated virgin is no different from any other woman—she is prepared to be fruitful. On the other hand, the consecrated virgin is even more fruitful than other women in the spiritual meaning of her spiritual motherhood. This is an ongoing process throughout all of her life as she lives in intimacy with her Spouse and bears children for His kingdom. Each virgin has her own mystical way to live in spousal intimacy with her virginal Spouse.

My own style to live in intimacy with the Divine Spouse comes from a spiritual work I did early in my life, as I searched to discover Him as the totality of my being. Later in my life I began to use the teaching of the mystics of the Church and, of course, Theresa of Avila, who had the experience of the senses of the soul, by which she meant the inner knowledge of the presence of the Divine Spouse in her being and doing. Saint Augustine spoke, before Theresa of Avila, about the senses of the soul. It refers to a way of love which asks the Spouse for His presence in our soul and external actions, realizing in Him everything we need to do. It means thinking and acting in His resurrected presence as a part of our intimacy with Him. I keep working, assisted now by Him.

Jesus Christ's resurrected presence as Spouse, although it is not possible to experience with the senses of our body, is possible to experience with the senses of our soul. This way of love is not given through our human capacities but through the gift of virginity dwelling in us, in the deepest reality, more than one we are using or even knowing we have.

As a product of our virginal consecrations, we have the capacity to walk in this way of love, and the way is not through our extraordinary doing but in the ordinary doing of our daily living arrangements, walking hand-in-hand with Him.

This is possible because it is the way of love lived by our Blessed Mother in Her daily living arrangement and is the same way of love lived by our Divine Spouse during his 33 years on earth fulfilling the will of His Eternal Father. May our Blessed Mother and Queen help each of us to be the spouse who sings the glory of her Spouse while being witness to His love, living in this world and belonging to the heavenly home!



Artwork by
Marion Biestek

Life Corner

By Florence Sundberg

Raising awareness of the slaughter of innocent babies in the womb is becoming more and more difficult for me because it seems that nothing is changing and, in fact, more and more influential people are demanding that legal abortion—the slaughter of innocent babies in the womb—be extended up until a moment before birth and some are demanding that it go beyond the womb to 2 years of age. This, I have been told, is already permitted in some places. I get discouraged at times and wonder if my efforts mean anything in the fight against abortion and in defense of life but then I read something that Eleanor Roosevelt said decades ago: "We must do that which we think we cannot!"—and so I will keep praying, writing, speaking and acting to prevent innocent babies in the womb from being terminated. "We must do that which we think we cannot"—even if it seems impossible. With God nothing is impossible.

By Dr. Judith M. Stegman, JCD
Archdiocese of Miami (FL)

Tribute to Dr. Loretta Matulich, PhD., first president of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins, on the occasion of her Golden Anniversary of Consecration to a Life of Virginité Lived in the World



What to say? Where to begin? We give thanks to the Eternal Father for the gift of Loretta Matulich—a gift for our vocation of consecrated virginity in the United States, and a gift as a sister in our Beloved Spouse for the many consecrated virgins who have been blessed to know her.

Loretta was consecrated August 13, 1974 at the age of 33. The Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginité was promulgated in Latin in 1970 and the English translation was not published until 1975. In 1974, as one of the first women in the United States to receive the consecration of virgins, Loretta recalls her Bishop using a green liturgical book during her consecration—the green binding indicating the text was a Bishop's review copy. This wasn't the only time Loretta was a pioneer for our vocation. Twenty years later, in 1995, she would come to know other consecrated virgins in the United States and follow the call of her Divine Spouse to employ her writing and linguistic skills full-time for the *Ordo virginum*. Loretta was born and raised in Southern California, and she lived most of her consecrated life in the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon.

It was at the first international gathering of 6

consecrated virgins in Rome in 1995, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginité, that fourteen consecrated virgins of the United States met one another. There in Rome Loretta offered a status report on consecrated virgins in the United States. She spoke with hope for the fledgling vocation here in the states, noting the need of the consecrated virgins and candidates for a deeper understanding of the theological and mystical meaning of the vocation. As I read now what she spoke then, it appears as an outline of the work Loretta herself soon set out to accomplish. Before the close of that conference in Rome, Loretta called together the U.S. virgins in attendance. She invited the group of us to visit her in Oregon to begin to work towards a more formal association among us; she gathered our names and addresses; and she offered to begin a newsletter (the first issue of *The Lamp* followed shortly thereafter).

Our Lord gave Loretta a vision for this vocation in the U.S. and over the next eight years, during her service as founding president of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins, working hand-in-hand with other consecrated virgins, Loretta initiated works that continue today: *The Lamp* (Volume 1 published in 1996; today's issue is in volume 29); invitation to a Bishop to serve as our Episcopal Moderator; establishment of the USACV (statutes drafted and approved by members in 1998; initial slate of officers elected in 1998); holding an annual in-person retreat gathering/convocation of U.S. consecrated virgins (the first was in Lansing in 1996); an annual informational conference (beginning in 1997); maintaining a list of U.S. consecrated virgins, consecration dates, and contact information (beginning in 1995); establishing archives for the USACV (1996); publishing the Information Packet (1997?), and Preparation Process; initiating our first website with a wealth of information; publishing our first brochure about consecrated virginity; and more. It is safe to say that most if not all of the good works of the Association today, for the glory of God, have their roots in the work of Loretta Matulich.

Thank you, Loretta, for faithfully following the Lamb, wherever He leads. ---- *Judith Stegman*

Hear now, from other consecrated virgins:

Karen Bussey, consecrated 1992: “Joy to you and Congratulations dear Loretta, on your 50th Anniversary of Consecration! I will never forget meeting you and our sharing in those times that were my early days of my own consecration. Rejoicing with you in this wonderful marking of your Yes, and God's favor and grace upon you all these years of your life!”

Corinne (and Maureena) Dudschus, consecrated 1992: “I have known Loretta Matulich for over 40 years. We met at Saint Martin's Abbey in Lacey, Washington. Over the years we have had many visits, retreats, and prayer together at Saint Martin's Abbey where we would meet and spend a few days together. She was instrumental in helping Maureena and I get approval for the consecration. She even introduced me to the Vicar for Religious of the Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon, who knew the Archbishop of Seattle, and the Vicar for Religious in Seattle. She was also lector at our consecration, February 1, 1992. She has been a very special spiritual and close friend through the years. We still correspond often through email. 50 years as a Consecrated Virgin is tremendous! Maureena and I send our congratulations, Loretta, on your 50th year as a bride of Christ! In Christ, Corinne.”

Elizabeth Lee, consecrated 1995: “I got to know Loretta at the beginning of the USACV. I had heard about a retreat for those who were consecrated in the Order of Virgins in 1996 and attended not knowing any consecrated virgins. I was a newly consecrated one and found it was a grace filled time! We all delighted in each other's life in Jesus and the fact that we had an opportunity to gather. Loretta shared with us a wealth of information about our vocation. At that time there was very little information regarding our vocation, and the USACV was in its infancy. Loretta's joy, enthusiasm and life was contagious. I, with others, joined in the work of building up the Kingdom, through the USACV, understanding that Jesus was calling many more women to this challenging, yet grace filled vocation. We wrote to each other, called, met for USACV board meetings, shared the wonders of the writings of the Church Fathers and of the depths and the richness of the vocation.



Through Loretta's work and guidance I came to see that this vocation is Love in the heart of the Church and in the World. *Cor ad Cor loquitur*. Over the years we continue to write and encourage each other. Thank you Loretta for your “Yes” each day to your Spouse. I rejoice with you in your 50th year of Consecration. May Jesus continue to draw you ever deeper into His Heart.”

Linda Ann Long, consecrated 1995: “Loretta Matulich was one of the first women I met (first at a distance) following my own consecration. I met her in person at one of the first gatherings of the USACV in La Crosse, Wisconsin, I believe in 1996 or 1997. I was and have been encouraged by her support and inspiration. I send her my very best wishes and fervent prayers on the remarkable event of her 50th Anniversary of Consecration. Linda Ann Long, MD”



Mary Therese Wyant, consecrated 1995: “I don't remember the exact year I first met Loretta, but it was in the late 90's, a few years after my consecration in 1995. It was at the first retreat (now called convocation) for consecrated virgins that I went to. At this retreat and all the others I've attended, I was always impressed by Loretta's deep love for Jesus and her knowledge and love of our vocation. She was always ready and willing to share this knowledge with us and anyone who was interested. I have cherished sharing with her in groups and alone with her over the years. Loretta is a remarkable woman, educator, and consecrated virgin. May our Divine Spouse continue to bless her as she continues to live for Him alone.”

Shalina Stille, consecrated 2002: “I had the privilege of meeting Loretta over twenty years ago. It was the first day of the Informational Conference in Wisconsin and she was one of the very first consecrated virgins I ever met. At the beginning of the conference, I wasn't quite sure what to expect and I confess I was a bit nervous; but Loretta put me at ease with her friendly smile and upbeat personality. I instantly felt a kinship with her, especially because she was not only a bride of Christ but also an academic. Her encouragement meant so much to me.

Over the years I have been blessed to spend time with Loretta at various retreats and

convocations. More recently our paths crossed at the consecration of Dalia. I have come to think of Loretta as a true pioneer for our vocation and, from day one, I have found her to be an inspiration. Her friendly smile is present every time I see her, as well as a delightfully contagious childlike joy. She has a glow about her, the glow of one who knows that she is perpetually espoused to the Sacred Heart. I hope and pray that she will continue to glow and inspire a stream of virgins who follow her as we journey to the eternal wedding banquet. May the Divine Bridegroom keep her ever close to himself. May she know how loved and appreciated she is.”

Ann Gishpert, consecrated 2004: “The first things I always notice about Loretta is her welcoming smile, twinkle in her eyes, and a loving welcome embrace. She has always made me feel welcome with total sincerity, whether in Oregon when I attended convocations there or elsewhere. Whenever I spoke with Loretta, she gave me her full, undivided attention. Her deep prayerfulness is a wonderful example. When I was struggling with issues in my life and went to Oregon, Loretta made time for me, listened wholeheartedly, gave me some much-needed sisterly advice, and comfort. Her calmness and complete trust in the Lord helped me to become more calm and trust in the Lord better. Thank you dear sister Loretta for blessing me in so many small, but profoundly meaningful acts of unselfishness, love, gentleness, and prayerful example. May Our Blessed Lady continue to draw you closer to herself and in so doing, to her Beloved Son, Your Spouse.”

Cathy Maley, consecrated 2006: “Loretta is an inspiration! I remember years ago reading an article in *Our Sunday Visitor* which included a photo of her. She was a pioneer in the vocation in the U.S. It's so wonderful to see younger women now receiving the consecration due to the grace of God and the efforts of people like Loretta who made this vocation better known. May the Lord continue to bring to fulfillment the good He began in Loretta. May she continue to walk this path with her heavenly Spouse.”

Joyce Stolberg, consecrated 2011: "I knew Loretta only through the wonderful retreats she organized in Beaverton, Oregon. That was a lovely facility, and I felt pampered to the max, as well as being treated to a charismatic speaker. Unfortunately, the retreats were stopped by the Covid outbreak."

Dalia Zakhary, consecrated 2024: "Dr. Loretta is one of God's gifts for me just before my consecration. I read a lot about consecrated virgins but I never knew exactly how it worked until Loretta showed me. She made me understand that this vocation is not about doing but being. Her fidelity in life, and most of all her humility in living as an ordinary person among others. She is a witness to the beauty of our vocation. She once said to me in regard to apostolate: "Just do everything well." On my birthday she said "Congratulations, one year closer to God." I am blessed to share with her in this period of my life."

Magalis Aguilera, PsyD, consecrated 1986: "November 23, 1996, on occasion of Carmen Margarita Muñoz' consecration in Athens Georgia, I met three consecrated virgins and among them was Loretta Matulich. We shared about our virginal vocation and my coming back to Miami, from Puerto Rico, in 1991. I had been advised about the 1995 Congress in Rome, and in the history of our vocation in our nation, I thought I was alone and questioned how I would travel to Rome without being in communication with other consecrated virgins. But the Eternal Father who "writes straight with crooked lines" gave me the opportunity to meet Carmen Margarita before her consecration, and she was the holy instrument for me to meet Loretta.

My personal experience with Loretta during those long years that she led our USACV is that she was the opening to let consecrated virgins be in the service of our Divine Lord and Spouse with what they had to give. My testimony is that on multiple occasions when I was a member of the Council, she could immediately translate into English what I was thinking or expressing in Spanish's root of words that were a transliteration of Latin words. She, in a gentle way with her doctoral degree in language, said: yes, this is very easy to understand because English is frequently a combination of other languages' roots. To give me a sense of



belonging in her doing and being for us, she also expressed that I think what you are concluding in numbers is "Cuban mathematics" but I understand, and then she said the correct quote. But more than these expressions was what she, in God's wisdom, understood, and she told me that I have a good writing capacity, and said some words that truly I don't deserve: In the future you will be writing to feed our virginal vocation. May the Divine Spouse keep you, Loretta del Carmen, in the way of UNION with Him approaching the dwelling of Divine Love."

Upcoming Issues of the Lamp

- December 12, 2024** Our Lady of Guadalupe
- February 2, 2025** Feast of the Presentation and World Day for Consecrated Life
- May 31, 2025** Visitation of the Blessed Virgin
- 9 September 8, 2025** Nativity of the Blessed Virgin

In Memory of Our Deceased Sister

Consecrated virgin [Cherie Benzin](#) of the Diocese of Buffalo (NY) passed into eternal life on Saturday night, August 31, 2024, after a long illness. Consecrated virgin Lori Rose Cannizzaro of Buffalo remembers Cherie: “She struggled with respiratory problems, diabetes, and heart issues but still maintained a life of prayer from her nursing home bed. Visits from other consecrated virgins and friends brightened her eternity, even as she admitted to bouts of loneliness and depression. Through it all she clung to her faith in our Spouse, remembering Our Lord’s passion and the Little Flower, St. Therese. She was a good and faithful friend to many and will be sorely missed. May her intercessory prayer for us now avail much as she prays from eternity.” Consecrated virgin Kathleen Hahn, also of Buffalo, arranged the funeral Mass, which was held September 19 in the Cathedral and concelebrated by the current Bishop of Buffalo, the Most Reverend Michael Fisher, and the former Bishop, the Most Reverend Richard Malone. Cherie was consecrated April 8, 1995 at the hands of Bishop Edward Head. May Cherie rest in peace now in the arms of her Divine Spouse, embraced by our virgin Mother. May her Bridegroom greet her with a warm caress and may eternal light shine upon her.

Eternal rest grant onto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace.

If anyone would like to write a tribute to be published in an upcoming edition of the Lamp, please email it to info@consecratedvirgins.org.

Openings on the USACV Leadership Team

Three of five seats on the USACV Section Leadership Team will open on January 1, 2025, with the election to be held in fall 2024. All USACV members are encouraged to consider serving on the leadership team. We are a volunteer organization and depend on the offers of time, talent, and treasure of our members. We plan to offer an online virtual session in October, to discuss what's involved in serving in leadership. Please let Judith or Francesca know of your interest; president@consecratedvirgins.org (Judith), or usacvmembership@gmail.com (Francesca).

2024 Membership Drive Update

Thank you to all who have responded to our membership drive. We are very appreciative of all your help, support and generosity. As you know, the money helps fund all of the projects of the Association to advance our vocation. Online registration is the fastest and easiest way to complete this. Just go to Consecratedvirgins.org, click on USACV Website, and scroll down to the Membership Forms section. Thank you!

Francesca Riddick, usacvmembership@gmail.com

Volume III of the Ordo Virginum series

Shalina Stilley, Diocese of San Diego

Volume III, about virgin saints, continues to come along nicely and is in the editing stage at this point. If you have volunteered to write about a Saint but haven't yet submitted it, please contact Shalina at catherinestilley@gmail.com. Artists, too, are invited to contact Shalina if you haven't yet been in touch.

Recordings Available!

Links to recordings from the virtual sessions of the 2022 United States Convocation of Consecrated Virgins (held in La Crosse) and the 2022 Virtual Information Conference on the *Ordo virginum*, are now available, and links to the 2024 Virtual Information Conference will be ready soon. If you attended a particular conference in person or virtually, and would like to receive a link to the conference you attended, at no charge, please email info@consecratedvirgins.org with your request. If you did not attend the conference, links to the recordings are available for purchase through our online store at consecratedvirgins.org.

Pray With Us! Virtual Vespers

Consecrated virgins, candidates, and friends continue to join for Virtual Vespers on various feast days and memorials of our Blessed Virgin Mother and of virgin saints.

The next planned date is

- Tuesday, **October 15**, Saint Teresa of Avila, at 9pm ET (8pm CT, 7pm MT, 6pm PT)

By Diane Christine Farr

"I am the living bread come down from Heaven."

John 6:51

Let us ponder deeply these words from St. John's gospel. We cannot fathom the magnitude of the gift of The Holy Eucharist decreed by God's supreme will. All Christians owe a debt of gratitude to God for this priceless treasure. As consecrated virgins, how do we prepare ourselves to receive our Bridegroom in His sacramental life? Better still how do we allow Him to prepare us? Do we let our Divine Lord work to remove from us all that is extraneous to His own heart? He wishes to invest us with His divine qualities that we may become similar to our creator. God's holy will must reign in our hearts forming the foundation and life of all that we do and are. In order for this to happen, we have to acknowledge our need for inner healing and the cleansing power of God's mercy. There is a great need for us to expose ourselves to the healing rays emanating from the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. These rays must go deep within our hearts revealing our hidden wounds and drawing us into the transforming presence of our holy spouse. Jesus is always at work in our souls throughout our journey toward Heaven. We are always moving forward in our interior life. Sitting in prayerful silence helps us to focus on God's peaceful presence. It has been said that the sacraments impart grace and benefits to us in so far as we are prepared to receive them. It is no small matter for us to learn to open our hearts and receive with bridal love the gift of Holy Communion.

When we receive Holy Communion, a beautiful practice is to ask our Lord to give us the same interior dispositions of heart that His holy mother had. We should ask Him to teach us what this means. The Immaculate Heart of Mary is the most beautiful and perfect reflection of the heart of her Divine Son. Jesus rejoices to see again the beauty of this reflection in the

hearts of His own brides. We contemplate Our Lady as our perfect model for our vocation of consecrated virginity. As daughters of Mary and brides of Christ, we are honored and blessed to share in her beautiful privilege of perpetual virginity. We carry this precious gift in our entire being as we come forth to receive our beloved Jesus in Holy Communion. It is a celebration of our holy nuptial union with Jesus each time we receive Him in His sacramental life. He comes to us with all His words, works, sufferings and tears as well as His heavenly joys. He comes to strengthen us for life's journey. He is the Living Bread which means He nourishes us with His own divine life and invests us with His own sanctity. He gives all of Himself with infinite love. We make our hearts quiet and still that we may listen to Him as He comes to find rest in us. Jesus wishes to take delight in His brides, finding His own purity and sanctity in us. As we give ourselves to our heavenly Bridegroom, we receive His divine life and are clothed with His own sanctity. We can never comprehend the great value of Holy Communion. As we make our Thanksgiving, we lift our hearts in gratitude for the grace of our consecration. It is with reverence that we ponder its deep meaning for our lives. Embracing God's will we offer Him acts of love, praise, adoration and thanksgiving in the name of all for His greater glory. It is in this way that we desire to make up for the love others deny God. Our hearts must become living fountains of prayer.

A prayerful heart is a paradise for Jesus. He wants to fill us with His radiant light and steadfast peace in our communion with Him. This light and this peace is communicated to others through our generous acts of kindness. The Bridegroom must be seen in His bride. We continuously hand ourselves over to Him in our nothingness and He fills us with Himself. We see the profound humility of God in giving Himself to us as

our heavenly banquet. He confounds our foolish pride. It is in this banquet of Divine Love that we experience the joy of our Bridegroom and receive the strength to carry our daily cross. In our communion with God, we find an infinite expanse of truth, goodness and beauty. This is so wonderfully expressed in the gift of The Holy Eucharist. We receive truth Himself, the resurrected Christ. We experience His goodness as He descends into our lowly human nature in becoming our sustenance. We come to know Him in all His beauty as our Divine Lover. Receiving Holy Communion has been called a pledge of future glory. As we move forward in our walk of faith, each Holy Communion serves to strengthen the bonds of union between the Bride of Christ and her Holy Spouse.

May we begin to live the life of Heaven here on Earth as we journey toward our eternal home. All glory be to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.



Artwork by
Shannon Ryan

USACV and International Resource Center for the *Ordo Virginum* Leadership Team Members and Officers

USACV Leadership Team

Jenna Cooper 2022-2024; Archdiocese of New York (NY).

Claire Halbur 2024-2026; Diocese of Phoenix (AZ).
(*Secretary of the USACV-IRC and USACV Online Presence*).

Elizabeth Lam 2023-2025; Diocese of Oakland (CA).
(*USACV Website*).

Joani McCann 2022-2024; Archdiocese of Boston (MA). (*Convocation Liaison*).

Francesca Riddick 2022-2024; Diocese of Joliet (IL).
(*USACV Membership and eTapestry*).

IRC Leadership Team

Magalis Aguilera; USA, Archdiocese of Miami (FL).
(*Chairperson IRC*).

Judith Stegman, President of the USACV-IRC 2019-2025; USA, Archdiocese of Miami (FL).

Maria Luisa Meza; EL SALVADOR, Diocese of Santa Ana/San Miguel.

Renu Rita Silvano; INDIA, Archdiocese of Bombay.

Noemi Angeles; PHILIPPINES, Diocese of Malolas

One Unfilled Position

Other USACV-IRC Services, among others

Karen Webb 2024-2026; Treasurer of the USACV-IRC, Diocese of Rochester (NY)

Leandra Hubka; Coordinator of the 2024-2025 Candidate Discussion Group Season, Diocese of Winona-Rochester (MN).

Anne Gishpert; Archivist, Diocese of Pueblo (CO).

Florence Sundberg; Prayer Chain Coordinator, Archdiocese of Hartford (CT).

Amanda Schrauth; Publication of *The Lamp*, Diocese of Helena (MT).

SERVING THE VOCATION OF CONSECRATED VIRGINITY

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Consecration Announcements

June 15, 2024 — **Dalia Zakhory**, at the hands of the Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann, Bishop of Orange (CA).

Bishop Vann said in his homily, “Dalia’s witness of consecrated life will strengthen all of us as we respond to the call to love ever more deeply in this often cold and broken world.”

June 22, 2024 — **Karen Bless**, at the hands of the Most Greg Kelly, Auxiliary Bishop of Dallas (TX).

Bishop Kelly is the former chaplain of the University of Dallas, where Karen serves as Campus Minister.

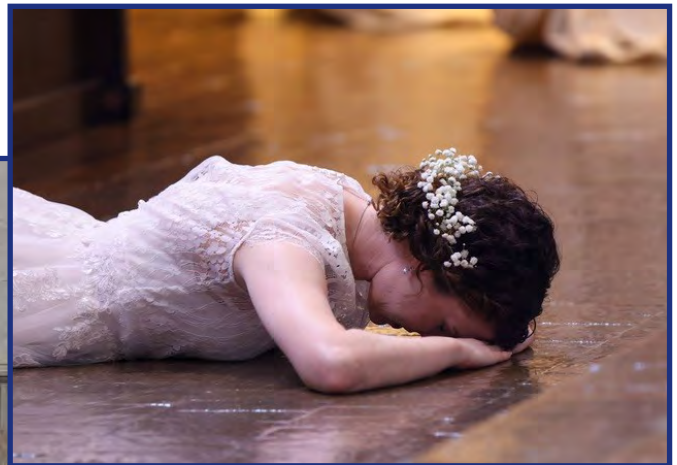
July 6, 2024 — **Mary Kelly**, at the hands of the Most Reverend Anthony Taylor, Bishop of Little Rock (AR).

August 10, 2024 — **Rubi Gabriela Garfias**, at the hands of the Most Reverend Ronald A. Hicks, Bishop of Joliet (IL).

August 22, 2024 — **Amber Elizabeth Buchheit**, at the hands of the Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski, Archbishop of Saint Louis (MO).



Dalia Zakhary with Bishop Vann



Karen Bless



Rubi Gabriela Garfias



Mary Kelly



Amber Buchheit with Archbishop Rozanski

Upcoming Consecrations

October 6, 2024 — **Helen Veronica Thérèse Almeter**, at the hands of the Most Reverend Stephen D. Parks, Bishop of Savannah (GA), at 3:00pm at the Cathedral Basilica of Saint John the Baptist in Savannah, Georgia. All are warmly invited to attend.

Consecrated virgins who celebrate significant anniversaries during 2024 are invited to submit an anniversary reflection for *The Lamp*. These anniversary reflections are popular among our readers as they convey a personal look at life lived as a bride of Christ in the *Ordo virginum*.

50 Years

Ann Stitt
consecrated June 2, 1974
Archdiocese of Boston (MA)

For fifty of my eighty years of life, I have been living in the Spirit, in the Church, as a consecrated virgin of the *Ordo virginum*. Christ, Bridegroom of extreme humility, and His Church, the bride of Christ, show and share the perfect union of humanity and divinity. We poor, little, limited mortals chosen from all eternity before we chose to say “yes” to Him participate in His life by being good, doing good, and following Our Lord wherever He goes. My story is mystery, not as in “puzzle” but rather as in “entering into”, closer in meaning to the original Greek word *mysterion*.

Twenty-one years after I was born I was baptized and then confirmed two months later in 1964. I learned to wait for God, I learned to pray (not merely *how to* pray), I read the Psalms, I perused the writings of the Saints.

Looking back on my childhood I see seeds sown by the Sower in my early years, even before I ever sought or knew God at all. My parents, each brought up in the Christian tradition, both agreed to avoid “organized religion.” So, although there was no church-going or Sunday school, no Bible reading or prayers, yet there was good influence from their own upbringings, Catholic and Baptist. Our house, on seven acres of land full of trees, birds, and butterflies was filled with music, art, books, antiques, stacks of *LIFE* and *National Geographic*. There was Boy Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, and Saturday morning trips to the library. My father preferred to work with things, animals, and plants. My mother was gifted with truth-telling and tact, working with people in the community for the common good. By the time I left home for college I was free to find out more about the Catholic Church that I had heard so much about

growing up. My father hated and denounced hypocrisy or dishonesty, whether religious, political, or financial. He had been badly hurt as a youngster in the old country by events both political and in the family. At 20 he left Europe and took advantage of the opportunities he found in America. My mother’s ancestors came to America some 350 years previous.

George Bernamos, quoted in a post-Vatican II book, wrote, “Holiness is an adventure, even the only adventure, to which God Himself invites us and whoever has once realized this and felt within himself the stirring of a hope far greater than any mortal dread has entered the sanctuary of the Catholic Faith.” That was the sentence that, as soon as I read it, made me realize that I had been given the gift of faith, supernatural trust in God.

An article in our diocesan paper about the newly-restored *Rite* in the Church gave me a moment of recognition that this should be something I must look into. My spiritual director, consulting with others, told me to write to our Archbishop, Cardinal Mederas, who wrote a long letter and gave me his advice which I faithfully followed for the next two years. Speaking to my pastor, formerly the Chancellor, I received the instruction to write 300 words on why I wanted to be a consecrated virgin and to send it to the Cardinal. I saw my new spiritual director regularly and, one day, he said to me, “We must consecrate you as soon as possible.” The prudent policy at that embryonic time was not to promote interaction among those few consecrated so far, allowing each to mature without undue influence from the strong personality of someone at so early a stage in one’s vocation. Some 22 years later when I first met the nascent USACV in 1996, I marveled at how each one is different and yet we all were together as sisters in the same vocation and greatly blessed by the counsel of the then Bishop of La Crosse, now a Cardinal in the Church. I happily came to the gathering every year for our Retreat and, later, Convocation, until I could no longer travel long distances by Greyhound or Amtrak. The USACV is now known and respected, fruitful in service to consecrated virgins, discerners, diocesan staff, and the USCCB as well as with international work ongoing.

Some Scriptures have given me great light on who I am and what my work is. The Psalms, the awesomely profound first sentence of the Prologue of Saint John's Gospel, the Emmaus encounter in Saint Matthew's Gospel, and the first parable that Jesus told (Mark 4). Just before 2020, my pastor began a *lectio divina* group which continued via Zoom during the pandemic. I joined a nationwide *lectio divina* teleconference network and the deacon who facilitates this each week is stationed in Austin, Texas. Currently I am re-reading *The Sanctifier* by the holy Archbishop of Mexico City, Luis Martinez. This classic was reprinted a few years ago and I first read it decades ago. It is almost as if I were reading this good writing on the Holy Spirit for the first time, since my understanding now is so very different from the long-ago first reading.

Thank you, Pope Benedict, for your suggested prayer at your final General Audience before retirement. Thank You, Lord, for this day. Thank You, Lord, for making all of creation. Thank You, Lord, for making me. Thank You, Lord, for making me a Christian. Thank You, Lord, for making me a consecrated virgin.

40 Years

Isabel Bettwy
consecrated September 15, 1984
Diocese of Steubenville (OH)

It seems like yesterday that I was consecrated by Bishop Albert Ottenweller (RIP) on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, September 15. The time has gone by quickly, and as each day comes and goes, I am deeply grateful for my consecration forty years ago. God is not outdone in generosity and I have experienced His love and mercy in measures beyond compare. Having been a Mother Seton Sister of Charity for thirty-three years, I knew the moment had come when I was being called to live out my call to a life dedicated to God and to the service of His people in a different mode. Forty years ago, the Rite was barely known but Bishop Ottenweller knew about it and supported me in my response to serve God's people by being consecrated.



As the days go by, I realize more and more how God's hand has been in my life. He has prepared me for the many changes that have taken place in these forty years—changes in ministry, changes in my living situation, and many other changes too numerous to recount. In a couple of months I will be ninety-one years old, and the patterned life of retirement has been a source of strength and grace. My day normally begins with Holy Mass where I am strengthened for the challenges and surprises of each day. I still serve as sacristan for three daily 7:00 am Masses and will continue to do so as long as I am able. Regular prayer times including the daily Office, the Rosary, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and many other regular prayers throughout the day help me to stay focused on the Lord and His blessings.

My life is strengthened and enhanced by my involvement in the Community of God's Love, a charismatic community that I have been a member of since its founding in 1976. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit changed my life and gave me a new focus and desire to grow in holiness and love. So the life of consecrated virginity seemed a natural step for me to take.

The days go by quickly and my heart rejoices in the many blessings consecration has been for me. Daily, I "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His mercy endures forever." (Psalm 136)

10 Years

Stacy Cretzmeyer
consecrated August 15, 2014
Diocese of Charleston (SC)

Greetings in Our Divine Spouse! With great gratitude to Our Lord, I celebrated my 10th anniversary on the Solemnity of the Assumption. Much has changed since my consecration in 2014, in that our new Bishop, his Excellency, Jacques Fabre-Jeune, CS, was installed on May 13, 2022, when our previous Bishop, his Excellency, Robert Guglielmone (pictured in the attached photo) retired. We also have a new pastor and parochial vicar at my parish of St. Michael's. And, my spiritual director, who was very instrumental in my discernment process leading up to

my consecration, retired and returned to the Archdiocese of Connecticut, where he now resides in a Catholic assisted living facility. Change has never come easily to me, but, as I get older, I see how the Lord always provides for our good.

I continue my work as a counselor in private practice, mostly working with families, married couples, and young adults. I also continue to write when I have time. I rely heavily on St. Joseph and Our Blessed Mother for guidance, protection, and inspiration as I try to serve Our Lord in my work, in my parish, among friends, and especially in my mission of praying for priests and seminarians, because without priests, we have no Mass and no Eucharist!

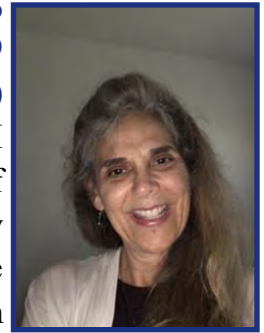
As I have reflected on the past ten years, the greatest thing I have learned—and am still learning—is to TRUST Our Divine Spouse more and more. With each challenge I have faced, I notice that when I have truly surrendered the matter to my Divine Spouse with trust, as in the *Surrender Novena*, given by Our Lord to the Servant of God, Father Dolindo Ruotolo (1882-1970), He always resolved the situation far better than I could ever plan or imagine. He truly is the most faithful, most gracious, most dependable, most loving, most surprising, and tremendous Spouse, and I cannot begin to express my gratitude for the blessing of my consecration.

I must give credit to Aaron Joseph (CatholicLifePhotography.com) for the attached picture. He was privately consecrated to St. Joseph many years ago, and took the photographs at my consecration out of the kindness of his heart! I keep you all—and those who are discerning this wonderful vocation—in my heartfelt prayers.



5 Years

Marianne Cano
consecrated January 19, 2019
Diocese of Venice (FL)



Reflecting this year, as I celebrated the 5th anniversary of my consecration, I can honestly say that I truly have been and continue to be ***the happiest of brides!*** I often echo the famous words of St Augustine: *“Late have I known you, oh Beauty ever ancient, ever new..... You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.”*

As with all relationships, my spousal relationship with our Divine Bridegroom is always evolving . . . always unfolding new depths as each season passes. One primary area of continuous growth for me during these past 5 years has been in the understanding of the meaning of spiritual maternity as it pertains to consecrated life and to the function of a spiritual mother as a conduit of God’s merciful love for the children entrusted to her care.

The role of spiritual adoption of souls—particularly of those who are in distress and/or nearing the end of life (and who may perhaps not be spiritually prepared), has become for me a clear ‘*call within a call.*’ This ‘calling’ has directed me into new a professional path—out of Physical Therapy into Chaplaincy/Pastoral Care. Instead of being an instrument of healing for the body the Good Lord now desires for me to be His instrument of healing exclusively for the soul.

I am presently completing a 1 year, 4 CPE Unit-Chaplain Residency Program in a hospital in Baton Rouge, LA. Once this training is completed, I’ll be eligible to apply for Board Certification as a Chaplain. I’m praying about where the Good Lord may be calling me to serve Him next as His virgin bride.

Sara Scheunemann
consecrated May 24, 2019
Diocese of Green Bay (WI)



As I celebrated my anniversary in May this year, it seemed to me that I had been consecrated for much longer than five years. Part of that I attribute to the strangeness of time during the pandemic. Mostly though, I have described the initial graces of consecration as settling more deeply and joyfully into a reality I had already been living with Jesus for a while. On my annual retreat in May, I looked forward to celebrating my fifth anniversary with Jesus. He reminded me that, during that same week fifteen years ago on another retreat, he had first called me to be his bride. So we had two anniversaries to celebrate together!

As is true for all of us, each day of consecrated life holds another opportunity to enter more deeply into His love. In August, I attended a conference on St. Elizabeth of the Trinity. For many years, I have wrestled with the letter she wrote shortly before her death to her Prioress, entitled "Let Yourself Be Loved." It appears in the first volume of her collected works.

St. Elizabeth writes to Mother Germaine, "Let yourself be loved more than these," a refrain that appears multiple times in her short letter. How I wanted those words to be for me! Yet, at the same time, I felt selfish having such a desire. How I could want to be loved more than these?

A moment of graced clarity came during the conference, likely due to St. Elizabeth's intercession. God does not inspire desires he has no intention of fulfilling. St. Thérèse has taught me that. It occurred to me that perhaps the problem was not my desire to be loved more than these. Perhaps the desire wasn't selfish after all. Rather, the problem was with my limited understanding of God's Infinite Love. What if it was possible for God to love everyone who desires it, including me, more than these? One speaker,

encouraged us to believe that those who desire to be loved in this way will draw down God's superabundant, infinite love not only for themselves, but also for all the souls they carry in their hearts and for whom they pray. O, the riches and wonder of God's Infinite Love!

I am slower on the uptake than most, so I don't expect this insight to be new to you, but I pray my sharing helps us all remember and adore the goodness of the One whose Infinite Love has chosen us for Himself.

I will close with the quote I chose for the back of my consecration card, from St. Thérèse: "You alone, O Jesus, could satisfy a soul that needed to love even to the infinite." Influenced now by St. Elizabeth, I would also say: "You alone, O Jesus, could satisfy a soul that needed to BE LOVED even to the infinite."

Linda Andrejek
consecrated September 8, 2019
Diocese of Joliet (IL)

Praised be Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother! It is with great joy that I write this reflection on the 5th Anniversary of my consecration as a consecrated virgin! It is indeed such a great honor to be a bride of Our Dear Lord Jesus Christ, while following the example of Our Blessed Mother Mary, the first consecrated virgin! During the last five years, it has been a great grace to live out this beautiful consecration while continuing my work in helping to spread the truth and beauty of our holy Catholic faith as the director of religious education at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Lombard, IL.

Additionally, I am so extremely grateful for this wonderful vocation, since it allows me to continue being my dear 90 year-old mother's main caregiver, who is legally blind and is now in a wheelchair. It is a great blessing to have my dear mother live with me, which would not have been possible had I been a religious sister (which I originally thought was my vocation some 40 years ago). It is truly amazing to see how the providence of God always leads one to the most perfect vocation!

The United States Association of Consecrated Virgins is pleased to announce open registration for the 2024–2025 season of the Candidate Discussion Group, following a positively received inaugural year. The Candidate Discussion Group is a discussion opportunity for aspirants and candidates for the *Ordo virginum*. Consecrated virgin Leandra Hubka takes the baton from Senite Sahlezghi in coordinating the 2024–2025 season.

2024–2025 Program

The Candidate Discussion Group (CDG), sponsored by the USACV, is designed to be a supplement (not a substitute) for diocesan-based formation for consecration in the *Ordo virginum*. The CDG meets quarterly, online, for one hour, to hear presentations and engage in guided discussion regarding relevant aspects of the life of consecrated virginity. Topics for the 2024-2025 Season:

November 4, 2024: *Ora et Labora: Prayer in the Life of a Consecrated Virgin In Saeculo*, Presenter Leandra Hubka.

February 3, 2025: Relationships in the Life of the Consecrated Virgin: Living in the World but not of the World, Presenter Dr. Magalis Aguilera, Psy.D.

May 5, 2025: Living Integrated Virginity: Living the Charism of Virginity through the Lens of Theology of the Body, Presenter Jen Settle.

August 4, 2025: Virginity and the Interior Life: The Virginal Heart in Its Seasons, Presenter Elizabeth Lee.

Who is invited to participate?

Diocesan delegates for consecrated life, and diocesan vocation directors, are often the diocesan personnel responsible for discernment and formation for those interested in the *Ordo virginum*.

Aspirants or candidates for consecration in the *Ordo virginum* who are referred by a diocesan representative, and who have previously attended an Information Conference sponsored by the USACV, are warmly invited to participate in the Candidate Discussion Group. Consecrated virgins are also most welcome.

Registration

Registration information and online registration forms are available here: [OV Candidate Discussion Group Registration](#). There is no cost to register. Further information about each of the 2024-2025 presenters can be found on the registration form.

Questions? Please contact Leandra Hubka at info@consecratedvirgins.org.

Submissions Accepted

If you would like to submit an article or artwork for consideration in a future edition of The Lamp, please email it to [Amanda Schrauth](mailto:Amanda.Schrauth@consecratedvirgins.org) at info@consecratedvirgins.org. We accept articles and artwork from consecrated virgins related to our vocation or related to Our Lady and the virgin saints. If you would like to write and submit a remembrance or memorial for a deceased consecrated virgin to be published in a future edition of The Lamp, please email it to info@consecratedvirgins.org.

A Note from the Archivist

Anne Gishpert, USACV-IRC archivist, reminds consecrated virgins who have not done so to please send her a copy of your consecration certificate (providing this copy also enables United States virgins to be full voting members of the USACV). Anne also keeps the USACV "family" albums, which include mementos from consecrations. You are warmly invited to send Anne the program, invitation, holy cards, photos, or other items from your consecration. Anne especially asks those consecrated in recent years to send these so that she can update our albums. The "family" albums travel each year to our convocation, and always bring smiles and memories. You can email Anne at 18anne.gishpert@gmail.com.

Judith Stegman

We had a very full week at the 2024 convocation and National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. What an event! Below are reflections from a few of the consecrated virgins who attended, expressing their joy at being together with 60,000 Catholics in thanksgiving and love for our Eucharistic Lord. Serving together at our *Ordo Virginum* Expo Booth, consecrated virgins welcomed Bishops, religious, diocesan representatives, candidates and applicants for the consecration, and women inquiring about our vocation. It was a delight to share love for our Divine Spouse with many, and to offer resources, including the Vocation Tree, to those interested in consecrated virginity.

Many thanks to Bishop Boyea, who celebrated Mass for us at the retreat center on Friday and Saturday mornings, and to Bishop Silva of Honolulu who celebrated Mass for us on Thursday. And many thanks to the consecrated virgins who worked so hard to have the events unfold smoothly—there was a tremendous amount of time spent in planning materials for the booth, designing and producing those materials, designing a new website landing page, planning liturgies—including Vespers Thursday evening for thousands of NEC attendees, organizing transportation, facilitating communications among us. Special thanks to Lorraine Manlolo, Mary Beth Bracy, Jenna Chang, Claire Halbur, and Miara Cash for their enormous contributions to this effort. And each of them point only to our Divine Spouse, and to His Blessed Mother, who guided each step!



Left to right: Laurie Power, Claire Halbur, and Jenna Chang at our booth.

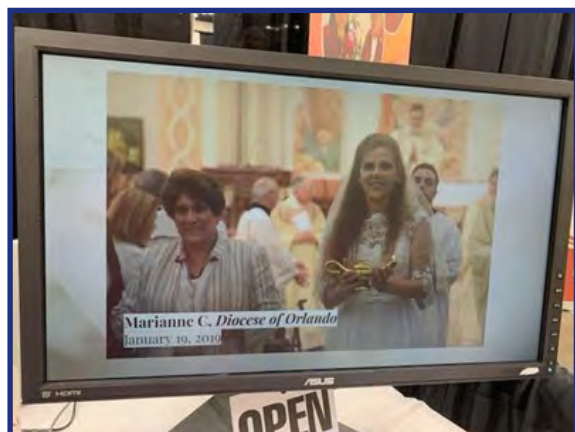
Elma Espinosa of the Diocese of Fresno (CA): “I had the desire to go to the National Eucharistic Congress and I asked my Beloved Spouse to open the doors so I may go if it was His Divine Will. I guess it was because in unexpected ways God provided and He opened the doors widely allowing me to attend a wonderful event with so many great speakers. One of my favorite speakers was Mari Pablo who was an emcee during the impact sessions.”



At our booth in the expo hall at the National Eucharistic Congress. Mary Rose Rynda (left) and Jenna Chang (middle) with a discerner. We handed out literature, mints with our website, and had a raffle.

The most beautiful and memorable sight during the whole event was the times during adoration in the stadium because there were SO MANY people all at once silently adoring Jesus in the Eucharist. It was breathtaking to see and feel the love emitting from the Eucharist to the people and vice versa. Besides those climax moments of the congress, I really enjoyed spending quality time getting to know other Consecrated Virgins more as we helped in the Expo Booth, prayed together, and carpooled to various locations. Oh yeah, also the times we ate together at Steak ‘n Shake. That was fun!

I am so glad that during the congress there was a church near the convention center that had adoration 24 hours. Going straight to the church was my priority after leaving the airport. I attended mass and I volunteered for the first shift of adoration. My desire was to be with my Beloved Spouse to give Him thanks for safely arriving at Indianapolis, to



Claire Halbur helped design the slide show, which featured virgins, from antiquity and now, on our Expo booth monitor.



pray for everyone there and those on their way, as well as to thank Him ahead of time for the surprises He had in store for us all who would be living this experience. The National Eucharistic Congress was definitely full of surprises. May the Lord Almighty be always adored in the Holy Eucharist!



Some consecrated virgins lining up before the Eucharistic procession in Indianapolis.



Claire Halbur of the Diocese of Phoenix (AZ): “The National Eucharistic Congress was a moment to be renewed and refocused on the source and summit of our life as Catholics, and especially as consecrated virgins: Jesus in the Eucharist. His Body is broken and given again and again for our life and the life of the world. The lived charism of virginity is to echo back to Him, ‘This is my body, given for You.’ The NEC moments of prayer, of adoration, of worship, of Liturgy alongside tens of thousands of other pilgrims all oriented toward our Lord and King were, put simply, a foretaste of Heaven. The presence of throngs of priests, religious, consecrated, and laity of all ages was a beautiful snapshot of the Mystical Body of Christ as we were reminded of the miracles in our midst.”

Magalis Aguilara (left) and Judith Stegman, (right) followed by other consecrated virgins during the Eucharistic procession in Indianapolis.

Miara Cash of the Diocese of Phoenix (AZ): “WHAT A GIFT it was to gather with so many other consecrated virgins and 60,000 Catholics in adoring Our Lord, receiving encouragement and wisdom from speakers, and praying with and for our whole Church. There is truly a revival happening in the Catholic



Several consecrated virgins during the Eucharistic procession in Indianapolis.



Our Eucharistic Bridegroom during the Eucharistic procession in Indianapolis.



Left to right: Ginnie Meyer, Miara Cash, Jenna Chang, and Elma Espinosa near the Convention Center in Indianapolis.

Church in the United States! I pray and believe that this National Eucharistic Congress lit a new fire in the Church in the US. There was such a spirit of conversion and communion during those five days. For me personally, I left this convocation and Congress with a renewed and clarified sense of mission in the Church, to witness with joy and enthusiasm the beautiful identity of the Church as Bride. Come, Holy Spirit!”

Mary Seguin of the Diocese of Gaylord (MI): “I was overjoyed to be at the Eucharistic Congress to worship our Spouse with all who came to adore, praise and worship Him. Also to be with my sisters in the *Ordo virginum*. It is always a support and time of friendship and edifying for my spiritual growth. A big thanks to all who were involved in the planning.”

Marge Giesken of the Diocese of Grand Rapids (MI): “I am so blessed that I was able to attend the Eucharistic Congress!! I think mostly of three events, the opening Mass and the revival after, the Eucharistic procession, in which I was able to do part, and the closing Mass, where we were so beautifully told to, GO! GO! I must now go out, and take the Lord with me. It was great to see all of you!”



Inside Lucas Oil Stadium during the Eucharistic Congress.



The front of our new prayer card which we distributed at the National Eucharistic Congress.

Judy Kvasnicka of the Diocese of Salina (KS): “At the beginning of the Wednesday evening session the verses from the Book of Revelation came to mind, about the great multitude worshipping the Lamb upon his throne, and these words have been a backdrop to the entire Congress for me. A foretaste of the heavenly Jerusalem. If I had to sum everything up in one word it would be CHURCH.”



Jenna Chang designed the logos on some of the stickers on these mints that we passed out at the booth.



Consecrated virgins assisted with liturgical prayers, including Miara Cash and Claire Halbur who led Vespers at the Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration chapel for the NEC. Senite Sahlezghi lectured at the closing Mass of the NEC.

Mary Beth Bracy of the Diocese of Ogdensburg (NY): “Since the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus captured my heart as a teenager, I have wanted to reciprocate His Love and help lead others to Him. The Eucharistic Revival and Congresses seem like a dream come true. Some of the most moving aspects for me were seeing hundreds of people flood into the 24/7 Eucharistic Adoration chapel across from the Convention Center during the Congress. I was blessed to pray there more than once and each time the Church had standing room only. It reminded me of the words of Bl. Dina Belanger who said: ‘If souls but understood the Treasure they possess in the Divine Eucharist it would be necessary to encircle the Tabernacles with the strongest of ramparts for, in the delirium of an overwhelming and holy hunger, they would themselves press forward to feed on the Bread of Angels.’ When I drew close to the altar to pray before the Blessed Sacrament one night, I noticed that families had brought hundreds of roses to leave before our Eucharistic King.

As I volunteered to help in guest services and also at the Consecrated Virgins booth for most of the days, I didn’t have time to attend talks until the evening. However, due to the kindness of one of the exhibit

Diane LeMay of the Diocese of Columbus (OH): “As I prepare to celebrate my 1 year anniversary this week, the Eucharistic Congress was pure gift. Being able to share the experiences with you as Brides of Christ was a special part of the time in Indy. My devotion and love for Jesus in the Eucharist has grown more deeply and intimately since my consecration. So, to be with more than 50,000 others who are also devoted to and love Jesus in the Eucharist added to the joy of his peaceful Presence in my life as a Consecrated Virgin in the world.”

Lorraine Manlolo of the Diocese of Honolulu (HI): “What a tremendous blessing to have a modified convocation including the NEC this year. The chance to pray together at the retreat center and then experience such a large event with so many Catholics on fire is something I will never forget and cherish forever! I am also thankful to see so many familiar faces and meet other consecrated virgins for the first time. Thank you to all who helped make this such a memorable and spiritually fruitful time.”



At the Anniversary celebration dinner in Indianapolis.

workers, I was blessed to be able to see both the Shroud of Turin replica and the Miracles of the Eucharist exhibit created by Bl. Carlo Acutis, along with his relics and those of several other saints. Although I've read a few books on the Shroud and also previously seen some of the Miracles of the Eucharist, I found myself moved beyond words and could only pray in my heart: "My Lord and my God." This wasn't my experience alone, as people waited in line for two to four hours to see these glimpses of our Savior. It was important for me to venerate the relics because, as a consecrated virgin, I consider it to be one of the greatest blessings of my vocation to prayerfully intercede for others. So many people who were sick, suffering, or struggling in some way had asked for my prayers both before and during the pilgrimage, and I wanted to ask our heavenly friends to intercede for them.

The nightly Eucharistic Adoration at Lucas Oil Stadium was also very powerful for me. To be in the midst of 60,000 people and yet experience a silent hush as people knelt on the cement for long periods of time out of reverence and devotion was truly heartening. It was like being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, while at the same time feeling like Christ's gaze rested on you alone. On the day of healing, Fr. Boniface Hicks, OSB led a special litany and Eucharistic procession throughout the stadium. It was really like the scenes in the Gospels where Jesus came to cure everyone, whether their needs were physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual. For this reason, I also found the praise and worship with Matt Maher deeply transformative. The organizers took great care to have the only lights in the stadium be on Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, so the focus was on Him as songs like "Run to the Father" were sung. I pray that all of the faithful will go out and work so that every soul on the face of the earth may also share in this experience of Eucharistic Love through daily Mass and Adoration. In the words of St. John Paul II, "In a child's single look fixed on the gentle Host I met the heavenly Father looking at me with love." The heavenly days and closing liturgy were triumphant reminders of what the world can be like if we do God's will on earth as it is in Heaven by living in praise of His glory.



Many of the consecrated virgin Convocation attendants with Bishop Earl Boyea at the Fatima Retreat Center.



Artwork by Marion Biestek

Rome in 2025?

Pope Francis has chosen the motto "Pilgrims of Hope" for the 2025 Jubilee Year. The Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has announced a Jubilee of Consecrated Life to be held October 8-9, 2025, in Rome, with the title, "Pilgrims of hope, on the path to peace." Preparatory stages are taking place now. A Jubilee Celebration for consecrated persons, by country, is also planned for February 2, 2025. More details to come!

2024 Virtual Information Conference on the Ordo Virginum

The 2024 Virtual Information Conference on the *Ordo virginum* was held from 1 to 5pm Friday to Sunday, September 6 to 8. More than 50 people attended and were fully engaged in the three-day virtual conference, as they asked questions, participated in prayer, listened to speakers, and ordered materials to assist in discernment and formation for our vocation of virginal, spousal love for Jesus Christ. Many thanks to Bishop Earl Boyea, Bishop of Lansing and Episcopal Moderator for the USACV, who was with us once again as he offered a presentation from his office on historical aspects of the vocation and stayed to respond to participant questions. Thanks also to the consecrated virgins who assisted in giving conferences, preparing prayer and music, and assuring that the organization and technical aspects went smoothly: Magalis Aguilera, Elizabeth Black, Mary Beth Bracy, Karen Bussey, Claire Halbur, Leandra Hubka, Maria Luisa Meza, Julie Radachy, and Judith Stegman.

Many conference attendees have offered positive feedback. A religious sister who serves as delegate for religious for an archdiocese in the United States wrote after the conference: "Thank you so much for arrangement of such an excellent conference! I was very impressed with the professionalism and fidelity of life witnessed by each presenter. I live with seven other Sisters who heard me recount much of the conference highlights. I feel more comfortable assisting young women who seek this beautiful vocation. I will be sure to convey to the Archbishop my admiration and confidence in the leadership of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins."

Consecrated virgin Julie Radachy is editing recordings of the Information Conference. When a link to the recordings is ready, we will make it available without charge to those who attended the conference and we will offer it for purchase through our online store. There are new and revised sessions that consecrated virgins will appreciate viewing. More to follow.

Welcome to the Information Conference on the Ordo Virginum

Agenda for September 6, 2024:

- Session 1: Overview of Vocations in the Catholic Church, and Ecclesial Identification of the *Ordo virginum*
- Session 2: Scripture and the Witness of the *Ordo virginum*, in *Ecclesiae sponsae imago*
- Session 3: The Liturgy of the Hours and Prayer Life of the Consecrated Virgin
- Session 4: Historical Aspects of the Consecration of Virgin; Virgin Saints

Questions and Answers
Evening Prayer and Close of the Day

Sponsored by the USACV-IRC

Thoughts
Body
Social
I
His affectivity
His thoughts
His Body
His Faith or Spiritual Reality
The adult receives and gives
The Adolescent Discovers
The Child Receives

Closing Sessions for Day #3: Questions and Answers: Evening Prayer

St. Philomena
(d. 298, Greece @ Italy; Feast: Aug. 11)
Greek princess martyred at 13 by the Emperor Diocletian
Her relics were discovered in the Roman catacombs in 1802; miracles followed.
One of her greatest devotees was St. Jean Vianney

Virgin Saints in History
Brides of Christ
Daughters of Mary
Servants of the Church

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Virgin, Spouse, Mother

- Spousal relationship analogy (Eph 5:23-32)
- Wedding of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9)
- Be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28; 9:1,7)
- Insignia: veil, ring, Liturgy of the Hours
- Spiritual fecundity (fertility): mothers of souls

Photo: Julie Radachy