

CONSECRATED VIRGINS

“The custom of consecrating women to a life of virginity flourished even in the early Church. It led to the formation of a solemn rite constituting the candidate a sacred person, a surpassing sign of the Church’s love for Christ, and an eschatological image of the world to come and the glory of the heavenly Bride of Christ.” [Introduction to the Rite for the Consecration to a Life of Virginity, No. 1]

Consecrated virginity is among the oldest forms of consecrated life in the Church. A fruit of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council was the restoration of this solemn consecration for virgins living in the world; the revised Rite was promulgated on May 31, 1970. Through this sacramental at the hands of the diocesan Bishop, the Church receives the gift of virginity offered by the woman and calls down upon her the grace of the Holy Spirit. She enters a public state of consecrated life in the Church and receives the ancient title “bride of Christ”, a title shared with the Church herself.

Duties of the Consecrated Virgin

The consecrated virgin is dedicated to the service of God and the Church. As such, she has concern for the mission of the Church and for the people of God. The consecrated virgin prays the Liturgy of the Hours, receives the sacraments regularly and is faithful to private prayer. She prays for the Bishop and clergy, and the needs of her diocese.

How the Vocation is Lived

Consecrated virginity is a distinct form of consecrated life in the Church. The Church distinguishes three states of life: laypersons, consecrated persons, and the ordained clergy. Within the states of life, particular vocations are given by God. Consecrated persons are called to the monastic life, the eremitic life, consecrated virginity, apostolic religious life, contemplative religious life, or consecrated secularity. Consecrated virginity is related to these other forms of consecrated life but is not identical to any of them, nor is it a stepping stone to other forms of consecrated life.

The consecrated virgin lives her vocation individually under the direction of the diocesan Bishop. She wears her consecration ring, but otherwise has no special garb or title. She remains in the secular state, providing completely for her own material needs, medical care, and retirement. At no time is her diocese financially responsible for her. She witnesses subtly, but powerfully, by her virginal life given exclusively to Jesus Christ.

The consecrated virgin is free to choose her profession and how she will serve the Church, according to her natural gifts and talents. Consecrated virgins usually volunteer time to their local parish, diocese, a Church-sponsored association, social or civic responsibilities. It is her bishop who approves the conditions under which the consecrated virgin lives her vocation.

*The order of virgins is also to be added to these forms of consecrated life. Through their pledge to follow Christ more closely, virgins are consecrated to God, mystically espoused to Christ and dedicated to the service of the Church, when the diocesan Bishop consecrates them according to the approved liturgical rite.
[Canon 604 The Code of Canon Law]*

Requirements for Consecration

The norms for admittance to the Rite of Consecration state the following:

- that they have never been married or lived in public or open violation of chastity
- that by their age, prudence, and universally attested good character they give assurance of perseverance in a life of chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and of their neighbor
- that they be admitted to this consecration by the Bishop who is the local Ordinary

It is for the Bishop to decide on the conditions under which women living in the world are to undertake a life of perpetual virginity. It is assumed that a woman who wishes to be consecrated has lived tranquilly for a number of years a private resolve of perpetual virginity for the sake of Christ. A period of discernment and preparation precedes the Consecration.

The Consecration is irrevocable. It constitutes the virgin in a particular state of holiness; it is a definitive act on the part of the Church. Because of these facts, the virgin presenting herself for Consecration must be mature and ready to embrace this vocation for a lifetime. The Church has never stated an upper age limit. The candidate for Consecration practices her faith, accepts the teaching of Scripture and the Church. She has a vibrant and grounded spiritual life, possesses a capacity and readiness for personal growth, and is able to give herself totally to God and the Church.

Who are Consecrated Virgins?

Consecrated virgins around the world include professors and teachers, business leaders, physicians and health care workers, librarians, retired women, disabled women, women in the social sciences and the arts, clerical workers and those in leadership positions. They include women dedicated to prayer or devoted to the care of a family member, and many others.

Overarching this diversity, consecrated virgins naturally hold much in common with one another. Especially in her love for the Eucharist do consecrated virgins find a natural bond as they delight in the joy of their Divine Spouse.

Read more:

United States Association of Consecrated Virgins: www.consecratedvirgins.org

German link: www.bistum-regensburg.de/borPage001168.asp

Italian link: www.ordovirginum.it