

who are dedicated to the service of the Church, entrusted to the Bishop's pastoral care and consecrated to God at his hands. Bearing in mind the formation needs of consecrated women today, not dissimilar to those of consecrated men, the Bishop should assign chaplains and confessors to them from among the best at his disposal, distinguished by a good understanding of consecrated life and by their piety, sound doctrine, ecumenical and missionary spirit." [APOSTOLORUM SUCCESSORES, From the Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, April 25, 2007, 104]

Because of this particular spiritual bond that exists between the diocesan Bishop and the consecrated virgin, the Bishop has a regular, at least annual, conversation with each consecrated virgin regarding her life of consecration and areas of service in the Church. This regular conversation is not spiritual direction. Rather, it is part of the pastoral dialogue held between the Bishop and his spiritual daughters [Introduction to the Rite, No. 2] and for this reason should not be delegated to others. The Delegate for Consecrated Life assists to arrange for these annual meetings. In addition, acting on behalf of the Bishop, the Delegate for Consecrated Life may meet with those consecrated on a variety of other matters.

After her consecration, the consecrated virgin continues to meet regularly with her spiritual director. It is valuable and encouraged for consecrated virgins in the diocese to gather for spiritual encouragement and ongoing study of the vocation.



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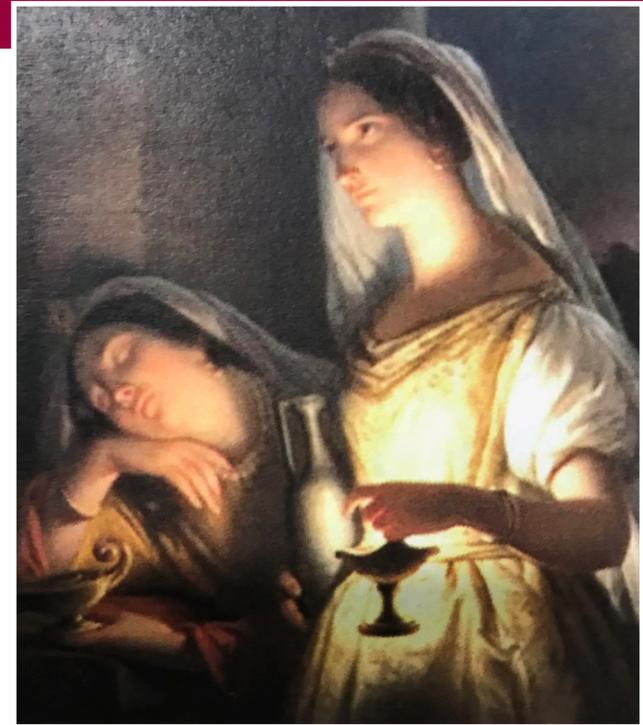
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Hope and Love*

Contact Information:

Carolyn Puccio, CSJ
Delegate for Consecrated Life
Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis
777 Forest Street
Saint Paul, MN 55106
Phone: 651-290-1635
puccioc@archspm.org

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The Order of Virgins: Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World



Practical Procedures for Admittance to the Order of Virgins

"Similar to these forms of consecrated life is the order of virgins who, expressing the holy resolution of following Christ more closely, are consecrated to God by the diocesan bishop according to the approved liturgical rite, are mystically betrothed to Christ, the Son of God, and are dedicated to the service of the Church." CAN.604 §1



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Nature and Value of Consecration to Virginity

“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. In the rite of consecration the Church reveals its love of virginity, begs God’s grace on those who are consecrated, and prays with fervor for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.” [Introduction, Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity, No. 1]

Those Who May Be Consecrated

This consecration may be received by nuns or by women living in the world. In the case of women living in the world, it is required,

- a) that they have never married or lived in public or open violation of chastity;
- b) that by their age, prudence and universally approved character they should give assurance of perseverance in a life of chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and of their neighbor;
- c) that they be admitted to the consecration by the bishop who is the ordinary of the diocese.

It is for the Bishop to decide upon the conditions under which women living in the world are to undertake a life of perpetual virginity.

Principal Duties of those Consecrated

“Those who consecrate their chastity under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit do so for the sake of more fervent love of Christ and greater freedom in the service of their brothers and sisters. They are to spend their time in works of penance and of mercy, in apostolic activity and in prayer, according to their state of life and spiritual gifts.

To fulfill their duty of prayer they are strongly advised to pray the Liturgy of the Hours each day, especially Lauds and Vespers. In this way, by joining their voices to those of Christ the High Priest and his Church, they will offer unending prayer to the heavenly Father and pray

- “The minister of the rite of consecration is the Bishop who is the Ordinary of the place.” [Introduction, Rite, No. IV.6]
- It is appropriate for the rite of consecration to take place during the Octave of Easter, on Solemnities, especially those which celebrate the Incarnation, on Sundays or on Feasts of the Blessed Virgin or of holy virgins.” [Rite, Chapter 1, No. 1]
- On a day scheduled close to the day of the rite of consecration, or at least on the day before the consecration, the candidates are presented to the Bishop, so that he the father of the diocese may begin a pastoral dialogue with his spiritual daughters.” [Rite, Chapter I, No. 2]
- It is at the discretion of the Bishop and by his authority that women living in the world are admitted to this consecration, and often they take part in the good works of the diocese. It is therefore fitting that the rite of consecration should take place in the cathedral, unless local circumstances or customs suggest otherwise.” [Rite, Chapter I, No. 3]
- “As occasion offers, and especially to promote an esteem for chastity, to deepen the understanding of the Church, and to encourage a greater attendance of the people, the faithful should be notified of the celebration in good time.” [Rite, Chapter I, No, 4]
- “The Mass of the day or the Ritual Mass for the day of consecration is celebrated in accordance with the rubrics.” [Rite, Chapter I, No. 5]

After consecration, the consecrated virgin should be given a certificate of consecration and notification of her consecration should be made on her baptismal record. If she needs to move to another diocese, a letter of introduction to her new Bishop would be appropriate from her current Bishop, since this is a public state of consecration in the Church.

Ongoing Formation

“The Bishop should show particular concern for the order of virgins,

theology, papal documents and the teaching of the Magisterium. The Catholic Encyclopedia article, “Virginity,” can be read as an introduction to this study.

Therefore, during the period of formation, in addition to regularly meeting with her spiritual director and meetings with the Delegate for Consecrated Life, the Archdiocese will assign to a candidate a consecrated virgin mentor who will assist the Archdiocese with her formation.

During the period of formation, candidates are highly encouraged to attend the Information Conference for Consecrated Virgins sponsored by the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins (USACV).

Catechetical Institute

Given the ecclesial nature of the vocation and depending on a candidate’s background, she may be asked to enroll in the Archdiocesan Catechetical Institute. Participation in this program will serve to strengthen and form the necessary catechetical understanding of the Faith. The consecration may be scheduled prior to the completion of the program.

Admission of the Candidate to Consecration

At the completion of the agreed upon period of formation the candidate submits a petition for consecration. In this petition, the candidate seeking to be consecrated as a virgin living in the world expresses her aspirations and how she would hope to live out this vocation following her spouse, our poor, chaste and obedient Lord. The bishop makes the final decision about the admittance of the candidate to consecration after considering the recommendation of his delegate.



Christ the
Bridegroom

Celebration of the Liturgical Rite

The consecration of virgins is received by the woman in a public celebration at the hands of the bishop according to the Rite of Consecration of Virgins. **The Rite states:**

for the salvation of the whole world.” [Introduction. Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity, No. 2]

*“May the praise of our heavenly Father be always on your lips;
pray without ceasing for the salvation of the whole world.”*

From the Rite of Consecration

Application Process • The process for the applicant includes:

1. Completion of the application form;
2. Recent baptismal certificate with notification of sacramental history.
3. Submission of three letters of recommendation; one from the applicant’s Pastor, and two other persons of the candidate’s choice. A reference should know the applicant well enough to answer these questions:

- What is her understanding of the doctrine of the faith and of the discipline of the Church?
- How has she shown her faith in practice?
- Can you attest to her way of life as virtuous?
- Describe her relationship with people?
- How does she understand herself as a woman?
- How does she understand her sexuality? Is she a mature, integrated person?
- Has she demonstrated freedom and maturity in making decisions for herself?
- How does she understand consecrated virginity? Does she understand it as a gift of grace?
- How has her call to consecrated virginity been tested over time?
- How is she stable in life—spiritually, emotionally, physically and financially?
- In your opinion does the applicant possess sufficient age, prudence, and universally esteemed character to provide assurance of persevering in a life of perpetual chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and her neighbor?

4. An autobiography describing the significant elements in the candidate's life, her family relationships and how she has come to understand her call to consecrated virginity lived in the world.
5. A personal interview with the bishop.
6. Psychological Assessment

Requisite Qualities

An applicant must meet the requirements found in the rite, which include physical virginity. While there are no age limits or restrictions, it is also required that her "age, prudence and universally approved character give assurance of perseverance in a life of chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and of her neighbor." [Introduction in the Rite, No. 3]

An applicant is to possess:

- Psychological health, including an integrated sexuality and a settled life of virginity
- Financial, emotional and spiritual stability
- A healthy and well-formed ecclesial understanding
- Proper appreciation of Christian marriage
- The capacity for sacrifice and the ability to bear up under hardships and loneliness
- Interior perseverance and fidelity
- A life lived in ordered circumstances
- A readiness to live in loving obedience to her divine Spouse, following the Lamb of God wherever he leads her (Suggested Homily, Rite of Consecration, No 16).

Formation

The diocesan bishop is responsible for the virgin's formation. Ordinarily the responsibility for overseeing and coordinating the formation of candidates will be delegated by the bishop to his Delegate for Consecrated Life. After the applicant is accepted by the Bishop as a candidate, the



bishop through his delegate develops an individual plan for the period of formation, including its content and length.

The formation period provides a time of further discernment for the Bishop, who admits the candidate for consecration and for the candidate. This period should further test and strengthen her resolve to live perpetual virginity. Ordinarily, the period of preparation is not less than two years or may be extended three or more. Length of time will depend on the candidate's progress and readiness. At any time in the application or formation process, the Bishop or virgin may decide that the process should not move forward.

Since the consecration is irrevocable, the probationary period should be serious and sufficient to assure perseverance in a life of chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and neighbor. The content of the formation period consists of a life rooted in faith, nourished by the Word of God, by prayer and contemplation; fidelity to the Prayer of the Church; service within the sphere of the Church corresponding to the circumstances of each woman's life; study of the Scriptures, theology and the Church's teachings in the areas of faith and morals; study of the nature and history of the state of consecrated virginity and of the liturgy of the rite of consecration of virgins; continuing spiritual direction received from a person approved by the bishop.

Furthermore, it is understood that candidates for the Consecration of a Virgin would have a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith as expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church as a foundation and accept and live their Catholic faith daily. An understanding and healthy growth throughout the process of human development from infancy to adulthood is fundamental to maturity. Only mature women should be considered for the consecration of a virgin living in the world. Growth in the spiritual life, especially in prayer, has its foundation in psychological maturity.

To have a clear idea of what the Consecration of Virgin implies a study of its basis in Sacred Scripture, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, historical studies of the Rite itself and of virgin and virgin/martyr saints,