

# Order of Consecrated Virgins

Since the time of Christ, women have felt inspired to follow Christ in a life of chastity. By the late 2nd century this vocation was established as the *Ordo virginum*. During the 4th century, it flourished and a liturgical rite of admission was developed, known as the *consecratio virginum*. The consecrated women lived with their families, alone or in small groups, focused on prayer and service to the local church. For historical and cultural reasons, this way of life fell into disuse during the Middle Ages with the rise of religious orders. On May 31, 1970, at the request of the Second Vatican Council, the vocation was revitalized and made available again through the Rite of Consecration to a Life of Virginity for Women Living in the World.

Consecrated virginity is an ecclesial vocation. The Rite is celebrated by the local Bishop, either in the Diocesan Cathedral or in the parish where the woman is known. It gives a public witness to God's love present in our church today.

In 2016, at an international meeting on consecrated life in Rome, Archbishop José Carballo, Secretary for the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, spoke to the over 700 members of the *Ordo Virginum* gathered there. He said:

“The characteristic of the *Ordo Virginum* is ‘a special relationship of communion with the particular and universal Church’ (*Vita Consecrata*, n.42.) It is a relationship nurtured by love and service. Journeying with their local Church, while open to the universal Church, the consecrated virgins are called to share in the church's evangelization effort. Their reference to the local Bishop's ministry is essential and must be direct because it is he who must see to the vocational discernment and formation which precedes the consecration, the celebration of the rite and the pastoral accompaniment of the consecrated virgins.

“The consecrated are called to live ‘in the world’ just like the Church herself and participate in the joy, the hopes, the sadness and anxieties of today's humanity, especially of the poorest (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1.) For each consecrated, every lived-out experience becomes an opportunity to contribute to the renewal of society according to the Gospel spirit. Everything receives its authentic significance if it is based on an intimate relationship with the Lord: the way they live their prayer life and their affections; the commitment to their work; the gratitude and gratuity cultivated in contemplation, rest, in rejoicing for beauty and art, in taking care of creation; the challenge of the cultural elaboration of the faith; the responsibilities toward the civil and political community; the openness to dialogue and sharing with non believers; the service to the poor, the marginalized and the little ones; the awareness of their weakness and vulnerability, especially during sickness, old age, and in those situations where their virginal dedication to the Lord is not understood, or even despised.

“The consecrated of the Ordo virginum know that they have received ‘a special gift which originates from the source of the Father’s mercy’ – as the solemn prayer of consecration affirms. It is God’s merciful love that gives rise to their response of unconditional love. The whole person is involved - spirit, body and soul – to let oneself be transformed into an epiphany of the divine mercy.”

- *Mgr. Jose Rodriguez Carballo OFM, Archbishop Secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, given at the International Meeting on Consecrated Life, Jan 30-31, 2016*

“Among the many fruits of the Second Vatican Council, through which the Holy Spirit has richly blessed the Church the re-establishment of the Ordo Virginum stands out as a most significant one. The mission of consecrated virgins, so much a part of the life of the early Church, once more enriches the communities of the faith. Like the re-established order of the permanent diaconate, also a gift of Vatican II, the order of the consecrated virgins contributes greatly to the vibrant life of faith of many dioceses. Many Catholics, however, are unaware of the existence of this form of consecrated life. This may partly be because, although ancient in its origins, this vocation is recent in the experience of the Church of the 21st century. More importantly, by the nature of their vocation, the consecrated virgins work unobtrusively to witness to Christ in the world.”

- *Thomas Cardinal Collins, 2010 (Foreword to Ever Ancient, Ever New: An Introduction to Consecrated Life and the Ordo Virginum by Caroline Nolan)*

**The first consecration in the Archdiocese of Toronto was in April 1983. Today there are 10 women consecrated in the Ordo virginum who meet regularly with Bishop John A. Boissonneau for inspiration and mutual support.**

**Those interested in becoming consecrated would enter into a process of formation and discernment for several years. Enquiries should be directed to: Most Reverend John A. Boissonneau.**