

1. What is the vocation of consecrated virginity lived in the world?

It is one of the oldest forms of consecrated life for **women** in the Catholic Church, existing since apostolic times. After consecration according to the approved liturgical rite, the consecrated virgin receives the title of the Church, **bride of Christ**, and she becomes 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.

She does not withdraw from the world, but remains in it in the secular state, providing for her own living, and witnessing to God by her virginal life given exclusively to Jesus Christ, whose bride she is. She lives her vocation in her own way according to her discernment as guided by her spiritual director and diocesan bishop. She usually lives alone, and is not organised under a constitution or rule.

Consecrated virgins are also known as the Order of Virgins (or *Ordo Virginum*), but the word "order" used here refers simply to a distinct category of persons in the Church. It does not refer to a religious order or congregation, nor does it refer to the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

2. Who may be consecrated?

The consecration of virgins may be received by nuns or by women living in the world. In the latter case, 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 give assurance of perseverance in a life of chastity dedicated to the service of the Church and of their neighbour;
- c) that they be admitted to this consecration by the bishop who is the Ordinary of the place.

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. These conditions include matters relating to income, housing, support persons from within the Church, etc.

In paragraph (a), the words "*public or open violation of chastity*" mean simply that the sexual activity is committed with another person. Physical virginity is an essential requirement for consecration. Rape, however, is not an impediment to consecration, since the woman did not willingly offer her virginity to the perpetrator.

3. Is this form of consecration permanent?

Yes. The consecration to a life of virginity happens once and is for life and cannot be dispensed. There is no temporary or trial period of consecration. Therefore, the consecration is carried out only after much prayer and discernment by the woman and by her diocesan bishop. It is **at his discretion and by his authority** that women living in the world are admitted to this consecration. This irreversible consecration, therefore, requires adequate preparation.

4. What kind of preparation?

The Suggested Formation Programme in this leaflet gives a general idea of what is expected of a woman who seeks consecration to a life of virginity lived in the world.

5. What do consecrated virgins do?

A consecrated virgin is first of all a bride of Christ. She gives witness to Him and is called to be more closely united to God and to be dedicated to the service of the Church and of mankind. Her consecration is a call to greater fervour in spreading the kingdom of God and in giving to the world the spirit of Christ.

She makes it her priority to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours each day, especially Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. She also frequents the sacraments, attending Holy Mass and spending time before the Blessed Sacrament daily whenever possible, and makes time for spiritual reading and study of Scripture. She spends her free time in works of penance and of mercy, in apostolic activity and in prayer, according to her state of life and spiritual gifts. She is free to take on any apostolate suitable to her gifts and vocation, and is not obliged to accept any particular apostolate.

6. Is her diocese or parish responsible for providing her financial needs?

No. She must support herself by work, pension, or other means, and provide enough for her own sustenance, medical and retirement benefits, and charitable works.

7. What kind of work can a consecrated virgin do to support herself?

She can take on any kind of work that is not inappropriate to her vocation and dignity. There are consecrated virgins in various occupations, eg: teachers, doctors, nurses, cooks, firefighters, electronic engineers, lawyers, real estate agents.

8. Does she wear any insignia or habit to indicate her status?

She wears her consecration ring but does not normally wear other insignia, or a veil or special attire.

9. If I've already made a promise of perpetual virginity, what difference would the consecration make in my life?

During the rite of consecration, the Holy Spirit anoints the virgin with **a new grace** and consecrates her to God by a new title, bride of Christ, and binds her to the Son of God in a covenant to last for ever. Many consecrated virgins experience the transforming power of this new grace, enabling her to live her vocation more authentically.

10. If I'm interested in this vocation, who should I contact?

Contact your Parish Priest, Vocations Director or Bishop's Office, and be guided by their advice.



Inquirer

- Understand basic information on consecrated virginity lived in the world and the essential element of physical virginity.
- Have firm belief in Catholic faith, maturity, stability, contentment, joy, ability to be alone, love of solitude and silence.
- Investigate the theology of vocations within the Church - marriage, dedicated single life, and different forms of consecrated life, ie: religious orders and congregations, secular institutes, clerical (bishops, priests, deacons).

Aspirant

- Introduction to diocesan Bishop.
- Contact with a consecrated virgin as spiritual companion.
- Understand consecrated virginity lived in the world, Rite of Consecration, mystery of the spousal relationship, Christian virginity, Theology of the Body, Ecclesiology, *Lumen Gentium*, the place of all the Sacraments.
- Financial stability, appropriateness of employment, apostolate, recreational and social activities, attire, comportment.

Candidate

- Obtain Baptism and Confirmation certificates.
- Formal petition to diocesan Bishop for consecration.
- Details of consecration - date, liturgy, wedding dress, veil, ring, book of the Liturgy of the Hours.

After Consecration

- Certificate of consecration.
- Notification to baptismal registry.
- Keep up with Church documents.
- Professional development in employment.
- Contact with other consecrated virgins.
- Six-monthly meetings with Bishop for spiritual father/daughter dialogue.

At all stages

- Spiritual director, regular confessor.
- Frequent Holy Communion and Confession, Rosary, Eucharistic Adoration, Scripture, spiritual reading, Liturgy of the Hours especially Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 922-924, 1618-1620, 2331-2359.

Roman Pontifical - Chapter 16, Consecration to a Life of Virginity for Women Living in the World.

Address of Pope Benedict XVI to Participants in the International Congress - Pilgrimage of the Ordo Virginum, 15 May 2008.

Deus Caritas Est - Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI on Christian Love, 25 December 2005.

Starting Afresh From Christ - A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium. Instruction, Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 19 May 2002.

New Vocations For a New Europe - Final Document of the Congress on Vocations to the Priesthood and to Consecrated Life in Europe, 6 January 1998.

Mulieris Dignitatem - Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II on the Dignity and Vocation of Women, 15 August 1988.

Lumen Gentium - Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Pope Paul VI, 21 November 1964.

Sacra Virginitas - Encyclical of Pope Pius XII on Holy Virginity, 25 March 1954.

www.consecratedvirgins.org - website of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins.

*(Published with the approval of
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The Vocation of

Consecrated
Virginity

lived in the world

