

Brief Reference for Discernment of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World According to Canon 604

Can. 604.1 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. 604.2 In order to observe their resolution more faithfully and to perform by mutual assistance service to the Church which is in harmony with their proper state, virgins can be associated together.

Theological Identity of the Vocation

From the text of the canon one may draw particular elements of the theological nature of this distinct vocation to a consecrated life in the Church:

- consecrated to God by the diocesan bishop according to a rite approved by the Church
- betrothed mystically to Christ and dedicated to the service of the Church
- public state of consecrated life in the Church
- individual form of consecrated life, under direction of diocesan bishop

[See “Consecration to a Life of Virginity for Women Living in the World” in the *Roman Pontifical* and “The Consecrated Virgin Lives and Manifests the Wedded Love of the Church for Christ” by Fr. Ignazio Maria Calabuig, given in Rome, June 1995 in [Information Packet](#), USACV, revised October 2001]

Criteria

The introductory norms state:

1. That they have never married or lived in public or open violation of chastity
2. 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 neighbor
3. That they be admitted to this consecration by the bishop who is the ordinary of the place

It is understood that only women may receive this consecration, as they can image the bride of Christ. And, it is understood by the above norms that widows would not fit into the stated criteria.

The bishop’s examination of the candidate for Consecration, as given in the rite, shows the image of the virgin as bride of Christ and indicates the permanence of this individual vocation:

1. Are you resolved to persevere to the end of your days in the holy state of virginity and in the service of God and his Church?
2. Are you resolved to follow Christ in the spirit of the Gospel that your whole life may be a faithful witness to God's love and a convincing sign of the Kingdom of Heaven?
3. Are you resolved to accept solemn consecration as a bride of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Central elements

- Candidate renews her resolution (the *propositum*): "Father, receive my resolution to follow Christ in a life of perfect chastity which, with God's help, I here profess before you and God's people."
- Then the solemn prayer of consecration sung or recited over the candidate by the bishop with extended hands.

These central elements are within the context of the Eucharistic celebration, for which there is a special ritual Mass.

Symbolism of bride of Christ, imaging the Church espoused to Christ:

- Ring
- Book of Liturgy of the Hours
- Veil (optional) — It is understood that the veil, if given, is a bridal symbol and is not for everyday attire as a religious might wear a habit.

Role of the bishop and diocese

The diocesan bishop is to judge whether or not to admit an aspirant as a candidate for consecration and to assure that a program of formation is arranged for the candidate before her consecration. [See "Preparation Process" in the [Information Packet](#), USACV, revised October 2001]

The rite states that the diocesan bishop is the minister, as chief pastor of the local Church. It belongs to him to choose and consecrate for service to the diocese. If delegation be necessary, the consecration may be performed by another bishop.

Because a particular bond exists between the bishop and the consecrated virgin, the bishop will want to express special pastoral and spiritual concern for her in his diocese. Many encourage the bishop to have a regular, at least annual, conversation with each consecrated virgin regarding her life of consecration and areas of service in the Church. This pleasant conversation is not spiritual direction, nor should this communication be delegated to another, such as a vicar for consecrated life. [See "The Diocesan Bishop and the Consecrated Virgin: Spiritual Bond" in the [Information Packet](#), USACV, revised October 2001] The vicar for consecrated life, however, acting on behalf of the bishop, may meet with those consecrated on various matters, but their meeting should not be understood as a replacement for the one-to-one pastoral conversation of the bishop with each consecrated virgin.

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. [See “Copy of Patricia Murray’s document to certify her Consecration” in [Information Packet](#), USACV, revised October 2001]

At no time is the diocese financially responsible for the consecrated virgin. She provides completely for her own material needs, medical care, and retirement provisions. [See Sr. Sharon Holland’s [“Consecrated Virgins for Today’s Church”](#), 1998, as printed in *Consecrated Life*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 257-75 and “Preparation Process” in [Information Packet](#), USACV, revised October 2001]

The consecrated virgin is free to choose her own way of serving the Church, according to her natural and spiritual gifts and time available, and this area of service could be part of the regular pastoral conversation of the bishop with the consecrated virgin.

As a public person in the Church, it is appropriate for the diocese to include the consecrated virgins in diocesan communications and various activities, such as vocation events and the celebrations of the annual World Day of Consecrated Life.

Pastoral considerations

Motivation for this distinct form of consecrated life in the Church [See “Discernment” section in [Information Packet](#), USACV, revised October 2001]

Formation in prayer, particularly Liturgy of the Hours [See “Basic Prayer Life Outline of the Consecrated Virgin” and “Fathers of the Church on Consecrated Virginité summarized” in the [Information Packet](#), USACV, revised October 2001]

On-going spiritual direction

Because of the individual nature of this vocation to be lived in a secular setting, adequate preparation time and level of maturity are necessary.

C. 604.2 on associations of consecrated virgins

As provided for in c. 604.2, the consecrated virgin may associate with other consecrated virgins to observe her resolution more faithfully and to perform by mutual assistance service to the Church. It is for these purposes that the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins exists. In no way does the USACV replace or impede that fundamental relationship of a virgin with her local bishop or diocese. While being a consecrated virgin is a prerequisite for membership in the USACV, membership in the USACV is optional for consecrated virgins. The ecclesial purposes of the USACV are to foster communications and solidarity among consecrated virgins living within the jurisdiction of the USCCB; to encourage ongoing in-depth growth of understanding of consecrated virginity; and to promote an accurate understanding of the nature of the vocation of consecrated virginity through programs of education.

Additional helpful references

- **In the *Information Packet, USACV, revised October 2001***

“The Vocation and Mission of Consecrated Virgins according to *Ordo Consecrationis Virginum* by the Most Rev. Pierre Raffin, OP, given in Rome, June 1995

“Diocesan Options”

“Sample ‘Preparation Process’ document”

“Consecrated Virgins for Today’s Church” by Sr. Sharon Holland, IHM

“Frequently Asked Questions” by the Most Rev. Raymond L. Burke, episcopal moderator of consecrated virgins in the United States

- **Website**

The website of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins is:

<http://www.consecratedvirgins.org>

e-mail addresses:

info@consecratedvirgins.org

usacv@catholic.org

- **Information Conference**

Sponsored by the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins, this two-day conference is presented by the Most Rev. Raymond L. Burke and consecrated virgins from the United States. It is designed to provide those inquiring about the vocation with a deeper understanding of the history and spirituality of Consecrated Virginity Lived in the World through lecture, prayer, and personal interaction. See the USACV website for upcoming conference dates and information concerning presentations for spiritual directors and others assisting women in the discernment process.

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Reviewed by the Most Rev. Raymond L. Burke, Bishop of La Crosse and Episcopal Moderator of the consecrated virgins in the United States, July 17, 2003.