

November 29, 2014

A Life Devoted to Service and Prayer
California Bishops Honor Those Leading a Consecrated Life

During 2015, *the Year of Consecrated Life*, the Bishops of California join with Pope Francis and the worldwide Catholic Church in honoring the women and men who fulfill their baptismal vocation by formally consecrating their lives to service, prayer and care for others.

The sisters, brothers and priests in contemplative communities, apostolic institutes and religious orders are a gift to us all. They are a living example of discipleship by their commitment to Christ, holiness, and compassionate service to others. They daily bring the joyful Gospel message to our world. Their fidelity to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience enriches the life of the Church.

Various religious orders of women and men have long graced California with their unique charisms and courageous missionary zeal. With a heartfelt devotion to the people of California and with a particular concern for the poor and immigrants, they have built schools, hospitals, social services, missions, children's homes and other institutions to address the needs of our communities. In doing so, they helped build the virtue and vitality of the Golden State.

Franciscans built the Missions beginning with San Diego in 1769. In 1854, the Sisters of the Presentation began ministries to serve settlers flocking to California during the Gold Rush. In 1872 the Sisters of the Holy Family were founded in San Francisco. At the urging of Archbishop Joseph Alemany – himself a Dominican – the Jesuits, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the Sisters of the Holy Name of Jesus and Mary, the Daughters of Charity and others opened schools and other ministries throughout California. These are only a glimmer of the formidable legacy of religious men and women who came to serve all Californians:

- Hospitals founded by communities such as the Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St. Joseph's of Orange, Providence and the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary are still thriving. Catholic health systems and independent hospitals comprise nearly one in five hospitals in California.
- Great universities across California – sponsored by religious men and women – continue to graduate thousands of men and women who give shape to our society in business, the arts, politics, science and other fields.
- Religious orders like the Christian Brothers, Sisters of Providence, Jesuits, Dominicans and Salesians operate outstanding high schools and primary schools serving generations of families.
- And countless charitable and pastoral ministries were birthed and flourished – meal programs, youth groups, bible studies, migrant ministries, counseling centers, spiritual direction and more. Many of these apostolates are still coordinated by sisters and other religious. They invigorate and animate our parishes.

This noble history continues. California and the Church are still benefitting from many new religious orders founded here and elsewhere in the world. As in the past, religious men and women from all over the globe bring the richness and power of their faith to this State.

At the heart of all that is done are the lives of women and men who have given themselves to Lord Jesus. They have chosen to know, love, and serve him in their fellow Californians. These lives aflame with the wisdom and charity of Christ are what bring hope and joy to the work of the Church in this State.

A special note of gratitude goes to the families, the domestic church. They have generously given their children to the saving mission of the Church. Families support and encourage their children to follow Jesus. To this day some have chosen to do so along the path of a consecrated life. As the Universal Church examines how to better evangelize families in the midst of tremendous societal changes, we should celebrate the role of the families in nurturing vocations for the good of the Church as well as society.

Special celebrations and events are planned by the Church around the world and California during 2015. Each diocese is blessed with religious communities of women and men who are an integral part of the life of the local church. This partnership will be savored and celebrated in the coming year. Each of us can also offer our prayers of thanksgiving and ask God's blessings upon our sisters and brothers living a consecrated life. We can also learn about religious communities near us, visit a monastery or cloistered community, examine the consecrated life through parish activities or visit with elderly sisters, brothers or priests. Even though many religious have retired from active ministry, their faithful prayers and sacrifices still sustain the mission of Jesus.

Coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II and the issuance of *Perfectae Caritatis* (Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life), the *Year of the Consecrated Life* is also a time for religious communities to look back with gratitude at the charism upon which they were founded as they look toward the future with evangelical hope. We assure them of our prayers during this year as we all strive to listen to God and to live our life in imitation of Christ who came not to be served but to serve. (Mt. 20.28)

We look to Mary who was the first to give herself body and soul to the power of the Most High (Lk. 1.35). The religious men and women give echo to her canticle by allowing their lives to magnify the greatness of the Lord (Lk. 1.46). May her tender intercession continue to inspire those of the consecrated life. Together with them may all the Church go with missionary haste to announce the joy of the Gospel (Lk. 1.39). Holy Mary, temple of the Holy Spirit and ark of the New Covenant, pray for the men and women of the consecrated life. May all your Son's disciples be living stones making an acceptable offering to God, our Father, through Jesus Christ, our Lord (1 Pt. 2.5). AMEN ###

Note: Additional information on the consecrated life is available at www.cacatholic.org and a prayer in both English and Spanish is available at www.usccb.org. A special touring exhibit on the impact of women religious in California is available at <http://womenandspiritcaliforniaonline.com/>. The website for the special touring exhibit is: <http://womenandspiritcalifornia.com/>. And more on communities of religious men can be found at the Conference of the Major Superiors of Men - <http://www.cmsm.org/>.