

# WORLD DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

THE CONCLUSION OF THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE, FEBRUARY 2, 2016

## AN INTERVIEW WITH CONSECRATED WOMEN

Karen Stratton, Member of Secular Institutes & Regina Dibb, Consecrated Virgin

### YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Pope St. John Paul II instituted a day of prayer for women and men in consecrated life in 1997. This celebration coincides with the celebration of the Presentation of the Lord in order to highlight the gift of consecrated persons for the whole Church as they reflect the light of Christ to all peoples.

Pope Francis declared the Year of Consecrated Life from November 30, 2014 to February 2, 2016 in order to "wake up the world" with the radical evangelical living not only of the consecrated but also of every baptized Christian.

Saint John Paul II wrote of the different forms of consecrated life as "the many branches which sink its roots into the Gospel and bring forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church's life." These diverse forms include: Monastic Life, the Orders of Virgins, Hermits, and Institutes completely devoted to contemplation, Apostolic Religious Life, Secular Institutes, Societies of Apostolic Life, and new or renewed forms of the consecrated life (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 6-12)

When the word "consecrated life" is mentioned people normally think of religious brothers and sisters. In fact, there are various forms of consecrated life as mentioned in *Vita Consecrata*. We understand that you, Karen, are a member of a Secular Institute which is a rather new form of consecrated life. And you, Regina, a consecrated virgin, an ancient form of consecrated life restored after the Vatican II.

***Karen, would you please tell us about your vocation? What are Secular Institutes in general and specifically the one you belong to?***

**Karen:** In general, Secular Institutes are relatively new for men and women in the Roman Catholic Church. They were recognized in 1947 by the Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius XII and they are subject to the regulations of the Holy See. The members profess the counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. The members are lay women or men who do not live in a religious community. They continue to live their customary lives in the world and they usually live alone. They usually support themselves in

helping occupations and they save for their retirement.

Specifically, I am a member of the Secular Institute of Women in the Opus Spiritus Sancti (Work of the Holy Spirit). We are dedicated to the Holy Spirit's work of renewal in the Church and in the world. We share an Easter-Pentecost spirituality with other OPUS communities. We have a vision and a goal that "God may be all in all". Daily life is built on charity, worship, prayer and missionary activity

which relates to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. After seven years of formation and dedication

***Secular Institutes*** are a relatively new form of consecrated life established in 1947. ***Consecrated Virginity*** is rather an ancient form restored after the Vatican II.

time, the member may pray the life dedication and sign the respective contract with the Community. As a symbol of the dedication to the Holy Spirit the women receive a ring, a metal, and they also receive the Cross of Sending.

***Regina, what is consecrated virginity as a form of consecrated life?***

**Regina:** The consecration of virginity is the oldest sacramental in the Church. St. Justin, in the second century, mentioned that alongside priests were deacons, widows, and "ordo virginum," also known as sacred virgins, spouses of Christ and handmaids of God. By the 7<sup>th</sup>

century the consecration of virginity fell into disuse as the monastic life proliferated. Pope Paul VI restored the consecration of virginity for women living in the world on May 31, 1970.

According to Canon 604, consecrated virgins are women who have made a firm resolve to offer the gift of physical virginity to Christ, as a sign of her entire being to Him. After they have lived in the state of virginity in tranquility for a number of years, they are consecrated by the diocesan bishop according to the approved liturgical rite.

***How did you come to hear and respond to God's call to the specific vocation?***

**Karen:** In 1984, my sister and my mother died of horrible diseases, two days apart from each other. I realized for the first time that I might not be able to count on a tomorrow. Before my sister died, she said, "If I had known that this would have happened, I would have lived differently." My sister was a very good person and she lived a good life. But it made me think. If I can't count on tomorrow, how would I want to live each day?

I decided that I wanted to live in the highest awareness of Catholic truth and grow closer to God. I felt I could not do this without being in a community of dedicated believers. About that time, I was very fortunate that a dear friend told me about this OPUS community. I joined as quickly as possible. If I look back at the decisions I have made in my life, this

call to this vocation is one of the best decision I have made in my life. My commitment is a blessing from God.

**Regina:** When I was in my teenage years, my mother and the nuns at my school taught me to pray and to ask God to show me His way to live my life. I made a personal promise to God that I would keep my virginity until the day I was married or for the rest of my life if I were to be called to a religious vocation. Through God's blessings, as years, passed, I have lived a chaste life with happiness and joy.

However, there was something inside me that made me yearn to grow deeper in His love and to follow Him. I became more aware of God's love for me as I meditated on the words of St. John, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son as expiation for our sins." (1 Jn. 4:10) I wanted to love Him with my whole heart and being. When I learned of the vocation of Consecrated Virginity, I knew in my heart right away that God had called me to this vocation.

***How does living in this vocation help you to grow closer in relationship to God?***

**Karen:** My commitment helps me to keep focused on God and helps me to grow closer to God. As a member, my work, and my prayers are dedicated to God in a special way. Thus, my life and all my works gain special merit before God. Further, I have constant support and encouragement from my OPUS

brothers and sisters. We belong to an International Catholic Federation. We have communities of OPUS Apostolic Christians, Priests, and Sisters in Germany, Africa, India, United States and the Philippines. We are committed to each other and support each other in prayer and truth.

**Regina:** Canon 604 states that the "virgins are mystically betrothed to Christ, the Son of God." The consecrated virgin is a particularly striking sign of the love of the Church, the Bride, for Christ, her Bridegroom. At the same time, she is a faithful reminder of the life which is to be ours in the Kingdom of Heaven, life belonging completely in Christ. In the prayer of Consecration, the Church asks the Holy Spirit to "give the virgins modesty with right judgement, kindness with true wisdom, gentleness with strength of character, freedom with the grace of chastity. Give them the warmth of love, to love You above all others." By embracing the life of consecrated virginity wholeheartedly and faithfully, with the help of Blessed Virgin Mary, Virgin of virgins, I hope and pray that the grace bestowed through the Holy Spirit will bear fruit in me and that I would be in a most intimate communion with Christ now and for eternity. Please pray for me and all consecrated men and women. I am grateful that the Church instituted the World Day of Consecrated Life as we all need prayers and support to continue to live the life called by God, our Father.

For more information on Year of Consecrated Life and religious communities in the Archdiocese of Portland, please visit: [www.stceciliachurch.org/year-of-consecrated-life](http://www.stceciliachurch.org/year-of-consecrated-life).