

# to bring fuller life to others



Congregation of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother  
Third Order Regular of Saint Francis of Assisi

April 2015 #7



## Christian life and consecrated life within the mystery of the Church

Dear Readers,

The general theme of the three issues of this year's Newsletter is **Prophetic testimony of Consecrated Life**. We have chosen this theme since Pope Francis proclaimed this year the year of Consecrated Life; it is the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Decree *Perfectae caritatis* on the renewal of religious life. In a letter addressed to all consecrated people, he outlined a number of objectives and he especially called us to "awaken the world," recalling that prophecy is the characteristic feature of consecrated life. He strongly invites us to "be prophets who demonstrate how Jesus lived on this earth... A religious should never give up prophecy." The letter goes on stating: "The prophet receives from God the ability to search the history he experiences and to interpret events: he is like a sentinel who keeps watch during the night and knows when dawn is nearly here (cf. Is 21, 11-12). He knows God and he knows men and women, his brothers and sisters. He is capable of discerning and also of exposing the evil of sin and injustice, because he is free and must not report to other masters than God; he has no other interests than those of God. The prophet usually sides with the poor and the helpless because he knows that God is on their side."

Issue # 7 of the Newsletter offers reflections and testimonies on the **Identity of Christian life and of consecrated life within the mystery of the Church**.

The Christian vocation has a unique identity in Christ because we have one baptism, one faith, and we all share the same mission of the Church. A significant document of the Second Vatican Council referring to the mystery of the Church states that consecrated life is a "sign" that must effectively attract all the members of the Church and joyfully experience the commitments of the Christian vocation. In other words we can say that as consecrated people, we are called to revive the memory of God in the world and to communicate the joy of His presence among us. The key word is therefore the "joy" that stems from a life of intense prayer, of contemplation, of love in fraternity/community, of sharing and generous service—a joy which can be manifested at all ages and stages of life.

As Christians we are all called to live the Gospel, which is Good News for everyone, and to give an account of our faith in Jesus with our testimony of life.

What you will read in this issue can help us all to be more aware of the life abundantly received from God and the call to invest his gifts in our ecclesial and social ordinary life. May our grateful memory of the past help us create synergy among all vocations in the Church and look at the future with hope, but "a religious should never give up prophecy"

Sr. M. Teresina Marra, SSM  
General Superior

## Prophetic Testimony of Consecrated Life

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### CHRISTIAN LIFE AND CONSECRATED LIFE

Everyone's life is a story of calls and responses: call and love are one single action for God.

### OBEDIENCE

To follow Jesus means to seek God's will in our lives. This attitude of obedience requires a culture of listening and responding

### WITNESSES

Consecrated life and family life have vocations and gifts that differ but are complementary.

## CHRISTIAN LIFE AND CONSACRATED LIFE



**“We love because he first loved us” (1Jn 4:19)**

What comes to mind when we hear the word *vocation*? In the past, its implicit reference was the religious vocation, but today, *vocation* has different meanings; it may refer to a professional preference as well as the disposition of a person toward an activity, the special value of a work, or to a person's specific choice.

During the visit that I recently made to the Vatican Museums, I admired the Vault of the Sistine Chapel, the marvelous ceiling decoration by Michelangelo who narrated the first biblical accounts in nine fresco painting scenes. In the representation of the Creation of Adam, (I think that everybody has seen a copy of this suggestive scene somewhere) two fingers lightly touch: God's finger calls to life, and Adam's finger receives life.

The heart, the foundation of vocation is precisely this: *vocation* means *call*. *I am, I live* because God called me to life, because God called me to be His friend and to have a dialogue with Him. Call and love are one single action for God. Some theologians wrote that today's world *has lost the sense of life lived as a vocation, as a call*. Also the evangelization starts from the announcement of human life as a vocation. God calls us into being because He loves us, in order to make a journey with us in friendship.

The Bible is a story of calls: as we continuously stray from our friendship with God, God continuously offers His love to us in many ways, until He gives His Son to us. *“The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”* (1Jn 3:16)



Once we concretely experience God's love – laying down his life for us –then we will be able to live Baptism in joy, becoming a gift for others through a life of service and solidarity, through relationships that help to bring peace and justice, and to witness reconciliation and hope. To live Baptism means to follow and make a journey with Jesus laying down our lives as He did.



This is the foundation on which a religious vocation is built. It is a way to live Baptism and the vocation of love, a particular way of life, in a community and apostolate, which is characterized by the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. The religious/ consecrated vocation itself is a specific way of proclaiming God and making His love visible in the world.

Our life is a history of calls and responses. God calls us to life, God calls us to make a journey with him through the gift and the engagement with Baptism in the Church, He calls me to love through my self-giving, through a choice which involves my whole life, in the marriage, priesthood, consecration or other way of engagement.

How does God call me and love me today?

*Sr. Samuela Maria Rigon, SSM*



## OBEDIENCE

### Conduct of Life in the Light of Obedience

The basic question that surfaces some time in each life is: What do I want to live for? What is so important for me that other things rate behind it? For Christians it is or should be the Gospel. If the Gospel, which is not just a teaching but a person, is not important for me, it has consequences. The Gospel has a concrete face, the face of Jesus Christ. And if I want to follow Jesus, then I need to look at his life. Saints, such as St. Francis or our foundress, Mother Frances Streitel, oriented themselves towards the life of Jesus of Nazareth whose food it was to do the will of God.



The so-called three evangelical counsels are meant for each Christian. They are, in the first place, a matter of conducting life and can provide answers to basic questions for a person. They provide orientation and are guidelines that, if followed, can help us become better people. They lead to a lifestyle of a “gracious nature.” They can be lived only if people have experienced God’s unconditional attention and want to respond to it.

Such obedience then gives answers to questions like:

How do I conduct my life? How do I live with power and influence? How do I handle my need for self-determination? Whom do I allow to tell me something?

Obedience calls for a culture of listening and responding. Obedience includes a sense of “belonging” without falling into dependency or immaturity. Obedience means mutual trust, giving each other space to mature, to become one’s own person and to be home for one another. Obedience is the conscious acceptance of one’s own limitations, finiteness, and questionability. For this it is important to have times and places of silence. We need to learn to listen to each other. This is a lifelong process of a common struggle to find a better way. The stories about St. Francis and his conversations with his brothers, and the letters of Mother Frances to Father Jordan are excellent testimonies of a common search for the Will of God.

St. Francis accepts his brothers “for obedience” (NBR 2,9), meaning he searches with them for the best way to live the Gospel in common. Mother Frances speaks in her letters to Father Jordan countless times about obedience



and views it as the goal to be aimed at, because it frees us from a blind selfish will and has its basis in a childlike confidence in God. For her, obedience does not mean responding with an unreflected “yes” to what superiors want, but we need to give “*a candid explanation of the circumstances*” ..... as a way to seek peace or to a break” (see Mary Frances of the Cross, Letters to Father J.F. Jordan, 100,1 )

It is all about having ears open to hear God’s message. It also involves a nonviolent communication. Ultimately, it is the acceptance that I by myself don’t have all the answers. Obedience can change the world for good. Obedience is about listening and caring for each other, which allows the other to just be and listens to what he/she says, letting what is hidden grow.

Obedience enables one to be responsible for self with continuous attention toward oneself and others. That is how we attempt to live as sisters in a religious congregation, families and/or in other relationships—always with the greater goal of offering one’s life to others, and at the same time to do whatever is necessary to live a successful life with others having God as our foundation.

*Sr. Gudrun Maria Schellner, SSM*





## WITNESSES

In this particular issue of our newsletter we will focus on Family Life/Religious Life Identity – in the “Church – Mystery.” We will also address the first of the three objectives that Pope Francis listed in his letter to religious regarding the year dedicated to consecrated life, “*remember the recent past with gratitude.*” Consecrated life and family life have vocations and gifts that differ but are complementary. All vocations are called to personal holiness and are committed to a life of service. We share in the identity and mission of all the baptized with whom we relate as equals. Our mission as disciples is to make Christ present to the world through our personal witness. Together we work and support each other in build-



ing up and promoting the kingdom of God. We are committed in our daily lives to share our faith through witness, through our actions and words. As partners in ministry we call and support each other in our efforts to live the demands of discipleship in the Beatitudes and the faithful observance of the Commandments.



In collaboration we look for ways to reach out to those who are not being served (such as the increasing number of Iraqi refugees; the migrating peoples who are searching to meet their basic human needs; the women and children who are trafficked and terrorized each and every day; and, last but not least, the victims of violence on our own local streets), helping all to live in fullness of life. We take action together in order to grow in our faith. We promote friendship with one another in the traditional understanding of the word that is; it requires contact, connection and care. It requires love, which requires availability, conversation, concern and constancy. We journey with each other through the valleys and peaks, the storms and calms, and the joys and sorrows of life.





This particular quote from the Catholic bishops sums up for me the foundation of our partnership/relationship. *“We must be a people after God’s own heart, bonded by the spirit, sustaining one another in love, setting our hearts on God’s kingdom, committing ourselves to solidarity with those who suffer; working for peace and justice, acting as a sign of Christ’s love and justice in the world.”* (Economic Justice for All, #24, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986)

As a starting point to address our theme we have asked two of our partners in ministry to respond to the first question and two SSM’s to respond to the second question.

*Sr. Catherine Marie Hanegan, SSM*

**How can consecrated life and family life support each other in living out our call to discipleship? According to St. Paul some of the “signs of that call are: humility, gentleness, patience, love and unity.**

Today’s world marks a deep rift between consecrated life and family life. This is not good. In the beginnings of the Church, both groups faithfully supported each other for mutual growth. They didn’t make a distinction between clergy, as we call them today, and laity. Everyone felt that they were called to do good and to follow the Gospel.



Thanks to Vatican Council II, the role of the faithful laity regained strength and importance within the Church, without distinctions and hierarchies.



We are all called to holiness, as Pope Francis often reminds us, *“For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body.”* (1Cor 12:13) Each one has to contribute to the spiritual building up of the whole Church according to his/her own talents. Let’s divest ourselves of the old man, *“Take your life in your hands and make of it an authentic and personal masterpiece.”* (John Paul II)

*Francesco Cipri, SSM Collaborator*

I believe that family life can support consecrated life by regularly recognizing and discussing different vocations with our children, including consecrated life. Perhaps it might be helpful to share some details of what consecrated life looks like in a way that might help us as parents teach our children. I would love to see a family-centered prayer that families could say in support of consecrated life. I think that praying for strong, holy families is a way for consecrated individuals to support family life.

*Jennifer Schmitz, SSM Associate*



**ANIMA CHRISTI**

**“Grateful Remembrance of the Recent Past”:  
Would you please share your grateful re-  
membrances of living religious life during the  
past fifty years?**

Reflecting on my “gratitudes” of the past 65 years is a blessing in itself. The greatest and foremost blessing is the opportunity for daily Eucharist. Vowed life within community has allowed me to focus on prayer and ministry free from the concerns a lay person needs to be concerned about. My life has given me health, energy, ministry, companionship, travel, being a part of decisions that make a difference. Teaching has been a dream of my childhood, and so I am grateful that any ministerial assignments were in keeping with this natural gift. Living through the challenges of Vatican II and involved in Formation Ministry at that time allowed for time and the necessity to study and implement documents of Vatican II. I treasure the many years I served in an inner city, multicultural, ecumenical environment, which expanded my understanding of Church, deepened my appreciation of my own faith and allowed me to see the world in a new light.

*Sr. Frances Renn, SSM*



### *Grateful Remembrance of the Recent Past*



I entered religious life exactly 68 years ago. It is still amazing to me how God found me and drew me out of my hidden, unimportant corner of the world. I can only be grateful that He found me.

I spent my life in the community of the SSM's providing training and serving in the education of children and later nursing care. I was always happy to feel close to God, to help and to serve. From time to time God helped me see that this experience cannot be taken for granted. I experienced this to be true as I faced my health problems/handicaps but at the same time I always felt supported.

Since 1997, I have been living with my fellow sisters in the sisters' residence at Marienburg, Abenberg. Here, too, I see how God accompanies us even in the days when we lose our strength. The closeness of God is our comfort. We hope that God will continue to provide our congregation with the necessary young sisters who will dedicate themselves to help evangelize the world. May God continue to bless all the sisters and journey with them!

*Sr. M. Daria Pöschl, SSM*

### *A religious should never give up prophecy*

