

THE YEAR OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE

Introduction

On November 29, 2013, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, addressed the members of the General Assembly of the Union of Superior Generals at the conclusion of their 82nd Annual General Meeting in Rome. Although a brief meeting with the Union was planned, the Holy Father spent an estimated three hours in a question and answer discussion with participants. Before concluding the meeting, the Holy Father thanked Religious Congregations in the world for their years of service to the Church and announced that 2015 will be celebrated by the Universal Church as a year dedicated to the Consecrated Life.

Pope Francis' Remarks on Consecrated Life

During the question and answer period with the Superior Generals, the Pope made a number of remarks on Consecrated Life, giving the Church some insight into the Religious Life and what was expected to go into the *Year of the Consecrated Life (YCL)*.

The Pope talked about the mission and identity of Consecrated life, and said, “*A radical approach is required of all Christians, but religious persons are called upon to follow the Lord in a special way: They are men and women who can awaken the world.*” He added that, “*Consecrated life is prophecy. God asks us to fly the nest and to be sent to the frontiers of the world, avoiding the temptation to 'domesticate' them. This is the most concrete way of imitating the Lord.*”

On vocations to the Religious Life, Pope Francis acknowledged that vocations in young Churches are “bearing fruit”, but also stated that the Church must re-evaluate its “*inculturation of charism.*” Citing the example of the Servant of God, Matteo Ricci, a 17th century Jesuit priest, one of the

founders of the Jesuit Mission in China, Pope Francis told participants that the Church must ask *“forgiveness for, and looking with shame upon, apostolic failures caused by misunderstandings in this field.”* He added that, *“Intercultural dialogue must press for the introduction of persons of various cultures, expressing different ways of living charism, in the governance of religious institutes.”*

Concerning the formation of religious, the Holy Father called on the Union of Superior Generals to ensure that Religious formation avoided all forms of hypocrisy and clericalism. Formation, he said, is not a watch dog but rather, *“an artisanal craft.”* *“Its aim is to form religious persons with a tender heart, not acid, not like vinegar. We are all sinners, but not corrupt. Sinners are to be accepted, but not the corrupt,”* he said.

The Holy Father also emphasised the importance of the educational mission of schools and universities, saying, *“The pillars of education are transmitting knowledge, transmitting methods, transmitting values. By these means, faith is communicated. The educator must measure up to those he educates, and must give careful thought to how to proclaim Jesus Christ to a changing generation.”*

Other topics the Pope dealt with included the subject of brotherhood among the Religious and the relationships between those in Consecrated Life and their particular Churches. He concluded his interaction with the participants by thanking Religious men and women the world over for what they do and their spirit of faith and service. He also thanked them for their witness and for the humiliations through which they pass to bring love and joy to people of the world.

From this, we get to know that the Year of the Consecrated Life will among other things, review the mission and identity of Consecrated Life, vocations to Religious life, formation of Religious men and women, educational mission of schools and universities, brotherhood and community life, Relations between Religious congregations and Particular Churches (dioceses), to discover new and concrete ways of making Consecrated life responsive and relevant to the challenges of today.

The Aftermath of the announcement of the Year of the Consecrated Life

Since the announcement of the *Year of the Consecrated Life* by Pope Francis, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has been putting together a programme for the celebration of the year.

On January 31, 2014, the Congregation organised a Press Conference in Rome to officially announce the upcoming celebration. The event was jointly addressed by the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation, Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, and the Secretary to the Congregation, Archbishop Jose Rodriguez Carballo. Among other things, they announced that the beginning of the celebration at the end of October, 2014 was to coincide with the anniversary of the Conciliar Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (*On the Church in the Modern World*), promulgated on November 21, 1964, and the conclusion of the celebration would coincide with the promulgation of the Decree, *Perfectae Caritatis* (October 28, 1965), which adapted Religious Life to the Conciliar document, *Lumen Gentium*.

On the *Feast of the Presentation of the Lord* this year (2 February, 2014), the Congregation also published a letter to all men and women Religious, entitled, “*Rejoice: A Message from the teachings of Pope Francis*.” This document contains the reflections of the Holy Father on Consecrated Life on various occasions and is meant to help the Church in general and the Religious in particular to celebrate the Year fruitfully.

Why the Year of Consecrated Life?

The *Year of the Consecrated Life* is scheduled to be celebrated from November 30, 2014 to February 2, 2016. On a number of occasions, the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Cardinal Joao Braz De Aviz, has talked about the rationale behind the celebration of the *Year of the Consecrated Life*.

At the Press Conference in Rome referred to above, Cardinal Aviz noted that the year will take place in the context of the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. He said, “*We believe that the Council has been a breath of the Spirit not only for the whole Church but perhaps, especially for the consecrated life. We are also convinced that in these 50 years, consecrated life*

has undertaken a fruitful journey of renewal, not free, certainly of difficulties and hardships in the commitment to follow what the Council asked of the consecrated life fidelity to the Lord, to the Church, to their own charism and to the people of today.”

The *Objectives* of the *Year of the Consecrated Life* are:-

1. *To make a grateful remembrance of the recent past* – The year is being celebrated to help the whole Church but particularly, members of the Consecrated Life, to thank God for what He has done for them and with them in the past 50 years after the Second Vatican Council’s promulgation of its document on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and its specific chapter on Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*. According to Cardinal Aviz, *“This special year was prepared in the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the conciliar Decree on the Renewal of Consecrated Life, Perfectae Caritatis ... Because we recognize these 50 years that separate us from the Council as a moment of grace for consecrated life, as marked by the presence of the Spirit that leads us to live even our weaknesses and infidelities as an experience of God’s mercy and love. We want this year to be an occasion for gratefully remembering this recent past. “*
2. *To embrace the future with hope* – The celebration is to enable members of the Consecrated Life to affirm that the crises that affect the world and the Church also affect them so as to help prepare men and women religious to remain full of hope based not on their own powers but on trust in the Lord. Cardinal Aviz says that, *“In Him (God), no one can rob us of our hope.”*
3. *To live the present with passion* – The year is also to help the Religious live the present with passion (of Christ). This passion speaks of being in love, of true friendship, and of profound communion. Passion for Christ is the true beauty of the life of so many men and women who profess the evangelical counsels and follow Christ more closely in this state of life.

4. *Evangelical Focus* – The Year finally is to help Christian people all over the world to realise and appreciate the beauty of following Christ in the various types of religious vocations.

Some Major Activities of the Year of the Consecrated Life

1. *Preparation of Documents* – There will be preparation of some important documents guiding the work of the members of the Consecrated Life to be done by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in collaboration with the Congregation for Bishops. At the request of Pope Francis, the Congregation of Bishops is going to revise the document, *Mutuae Relationes* (May 14, 1978). This document regulates the relations between bishops and religious worldwide. The Congregation is also revising the Instruction, *Verbi Sponsa*, (May 13, 1999) the document which deals with the autonomy of cloistered nuns.

A third document being drafted will address the life and mission of religious while a fourth will discuss the management of the property of religious congregations and present guidelines on this matter. Last but not least is an Apostolic Constitution to replace the document *Sponsa Christi* (November 21, 1950).

2. *Special Events in Rome* - Several special events in Rome are scheduled during this year. These include a plenary assembly of the Congregation for Institutes of Religious Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (November 2014); an international Conference on the theology of consecrated life on the themes, “*Renewal of Consecrated Life in the Light of the Council and Future Prospects*,” and “*Consecrated Life, the Gospel in Human history*.” There will also be a symposium on the management of the economic goods and the property of religious institutes on March 8-9, 2014.

3. *Other important Events of the Year* - The Congregation has released the following programme of activities for the celebration of the Year. Local Churches are free and encouraged to adopt these activities while drawing up their own programmes.

Opening of the Year of Consecrated Life:

29 November, 2014 – Prayer Vigil at the Basilica of St. Mary Major, Rome, Italy, at 7 pm

30 November 2014 – First Sunday of Advent, Eucharistic Celebration at the Basilica of St Peter, Vatican City, at 10am. Opening of the Year

Times for Reflection and Sharing (on the global level)

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Ecumenical Meeting of Religious

22-24 January 2015, Rome

24 January 2015 – Prayer Vigil

Seminar for those forming others for the Consecrated Life

8-11 April 2015, Rome

11 April – Prayer Vigil

Workshop for Young Religious

23-26 September 2015, Rome

Worldwide Week of Life Consecrated to Unity

Theme: *Towards the future of evangelical discipleship, a permanent form of life in the Church*

24 January – 2 February 2016, Rome

Participants from Monastic Life, Apostolic Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life, Secular Institutes, Consecrated Virgins, New Institutes and New Forms

Closing of the Year of Consecrated Life:

30 January 2016 – Thanksgiving at the Basilica of St Peter

1 February 2016 – Prayer Vigil

2 February 2016 – World Day of Consecrated Life: Eucharistic Celebration at the Basilica of St Peter.

Special Events

International Symposium

For Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life - Rome, 27-30 January 2016

For the Monastic Life – Rome, 28-31 January 2016

For the Secular Institutes – Rome, 29-31 January 2016

For the Consecrated Virgins – Rome, 29-31 January 2016

For New Forms of Institutes - Rome, 29 – 31 January 2016

Group Celebrations

Thanksgiving – 30 January 2016: Prayer Vigil at St Peter's, 8.00pm. Theme: *Prophecy, sanctity and martyrdom in the human city*

Papal Audience – 1 February 2016

Eucharistic Celebration celebrated by the Holy Father – 2 February 2016: Closing of the Year of Consecrated Life

Suggested Ways of Celebrating the Year

Events in different dioceses, regions, countries and continents - These will be coordinated by the Congregation for Consecrated Life in conjunction with particular local interest groups. They will include, among others:-

1. Research Workshop

To be organized by the network of Pontifical Universities of Religious Orders on the issues and questions of the Consecrated Life on the 50th anniversary of Vatican Council II.

2. Memorial of the Saints and Martyrs of the Consecrated Life – 26 September 2015.

To be celebrated at places of apostolic significance and testimony all over the world.

This will be organized by Episcopal Conferences and by Conferences of Major Superiors at national and international levels. In Rome: There will be activities at Santa Maria in *Ara Coeli*, the Mamertine Prison, the Imperial Forum and the Coliseum.

3. “The Church Reaching Out”

Paths of evangelical significance decided and implemented in the interactions between Apostolic Institutes, Institutes of Apostolic Life, Monastic Life, Secular Institutes, Consecrated Virgins and New Institutes.

4. Global Chain of Prayer in Monasteries – 8 December 2014

To take place at various monasteries of special significance all over the world.

- Monastery of the Assumption – Asmara (Eritrea)

Congregation of Casamari of the Cistercian Order.

- Ashram of Shantivanam – Shantivanam (India)

Camaldolese Congregation of the Order of St Benedict.

- Protomonastero Santa Chiara – Assisi (Italy)

Order of the Poor Sisters of St Clare.

- Monasterio de Santa Catalina – Arequipa (Peru)

Second Order of the Order of Friars Preachers.

- Monasterio de la Encarnacion – Avila (Spain)

Second Order of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel.

- Getsemani Abbey – Kentucky (USA)

Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance.

5. The Way of Beauty

“One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple” (Ps 27:4). A celebration of the artistic languages of the Consecrated Life, for the contemplation and proclamation of the truth and beauty of faith.

6. Studies on the Consecrated Life

Monastic session will be held online for nuns.

Conclusion

It is the hope and prayer of the whole Church that this year dedicated to the Consecrated Life will be a graced time for our Religious to live the special invitation to wake up the world. We pray with Pope Francis that in their everyday struggles, consecrated men and women will live out their fidelity giving a reason for the joy that lives in them so that they can become splendid witnesses, effective proclaimers, companions and neighbours for the men and women with whom they share a common history and who want to find their Father’s house in the Church.

May the prayers of the Holy Father that, *“Wherever consecrated people are, there is always joy”*, be fulfilled now and at the end of this celebration. God bless all our Religious men and women and bless the Church.

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