



## The Year of Consecrated Life

Pope Francis has proclaimed 2015 “The Year of Consecrated Life.” In these reflections I will draw on St. John Paul II’s 1996 document, *Consecrated Life*, to renew our appreciation for the many gifts we receive from the consecrated men and women at work in our diocese who belong to religious orders.

The roots of consecrated religious life in all its rich variety can be traced back to Jesus himself when he called disciples to leave behind their ordinary lives and walk with him in close friendship. Their consecrated successors today promise to make their own the way of life which Jesus himself chose to follow. Intimate friendship with him calls for the total gift of self expressed in the “evangelical counsels”—the public vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

As consecrated men and women live out these vows in the community of their religious family, “the characteristic features of Jesus—the chaste, poor, and obedient one—are made constantly ‘visible’ in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed toward the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven.”

When they take the vow of *chastity*, consecrated men and women freely give up, “for the sake of the Kingdom,” the right to

marry and form a family. Instead, with undivided heart they manifest the pure love of Christ for his Bride, the Church. In St. Thomas Aquinas’ phrase, they make themselves “empty for God.”

With their vow of *poverty* consecrated religious give up their right to own property and thereby make themselves poor with the poor man of Nazareth who had no place to lay his head. “By imitating Christ’s poverty they profess that he is the Son who receives everything from the Father, and gives everything back to the Father in love.”

Vowing *obedience* to their religious superior, consecrated men and women freely surrender their right to come and go and do as they wish. Instead, they manifest the humble receptivity of Christ, who preferred the will of the Father to his own and made himself “obedient even unto death.”

At the dawn of the life of faith every Christian was consecrated to God in Baptism, and each of us must find our own way to put the evangelical counsels into practice as the circumstances of our lives allow. From this perspective, the profession of religious vows is just “a special and fruitful deepening of the consecration received in Baptism.” On the other hand, “Baptism in itself does not include the call to celibacy or virginity, the renunciation of possessions or obedience to a superior in the form proper to the evangelical counsels.” Rather, the call to public consecration in the evangelical counsels “presupposes a particular gift of God not given to everyone, as Jesus himself emphasizes with respect to voluntary celibacy.”

God gives the gift of a religious vocation to a person—as he does the gift of a vocation to marriage—for the good of the whole Church. In this Year of Consecrated Life may he sow the seed of this great gift in the hearts of young men and women of the Diocese of Baker and inspire them to imitate the generosity of the consecrated religious in our midst.