

CONSECRATED LIFE

January 23-24, 2016

(Sr. Pam Owens, CSJ)

We know that Pope Francis has called this year to be the “Year of Mercy,” but many do not know that this past year was named the “Year of Consecrated Life,” which ends on Feb. 2. I will be speaking about consecrated life today.

A little background...

Those in “the consecrated life” include religious sisters (for example: the Sisters of St. Joseph & the Dominican sisters), religious brothers like the Alexian brothers, and religious priests, such as the Augustinians, the Dominicans, and the Jesuits. Fr. Ken tells me that without the religious priests, 25% of the parishes in this diocese would be without a pastor.

Diocesan priests, like Fr. Ken, promise obedience to the bishop and celibacy. *Religious priests*, like religious brothers and sisters take vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience, and belong to a religious congregation, in which all things are shared in common.

In practical terms, this means...

- The car I drive is not mine, it is the community’s, and when the community wants to switch cars to give me either a new car or a bit of a clunker...I switch cars...sometimes not thrilled with that decision, but I know that it is for the good of the community as a whole.
- It means that the salary I receive from St. Tom’s goes directly to the CSJ center, and then once a month,
- I receive a check for my food, rent, and personal items.
- It means that when it is time to change ministry positions, as I did when I moved from Florida to Kalamazoo, I don’t just pray... and then make the decision on my own.
 - I speak to a small group of sisters that I belong to, we meet monthly, and present my idea. They offer their suggestions – the pros and the cons.
 - Then I contact a member of a special committee, to continue the discernment, asking:
...Does this new position fit into the spirit/the charism of our congregation?
...Is this where the Spirit seems to be leading me?
- And in practical terms, it also means that...
 - We pray together, as we continue to deepen our relationship with our loving God, with one another, and with all creation.
 - It also means that we will always belong,... as sisters, in this religious family.
 - That we care for one another from the heart.
 - That we will be there for one another, in the good times and the difficult times.
 - That we will support and suffer with one another when a tragedy or sadness comes into our lives,
 - and have wonderful parties to celebrate vow ceremonies and holidays...though nun parties usually end by 8:00. We pack a whole lot of fun within a few hours!

And the reason we enter religious life/the consecrated life is...

- To give ourselves fully to God and to God's people
- To serve our "dear neighbor" – who is everyone
- To be free to go wherever we feel God calls us...to Tanzania, to Guatemala, to the border of Mexico, to El Salvador, where I was once a missionary, or to Florida, or Kalamazoo, MI.

I feel so blessed to be a sister, and a sister in the Congregation of St. Joseph. My CSJ sisters and our associates are amazing people, who have touched lives from Capitol Hill, to death row (Sr. Helen Prejean is one of our sisters), and to the poorest of neighborhoods. But more importantly, they are amazing because they exude God's love... that pours out of their tender hearts.

None of us is perfect, just ask the pastoral team, but we strive to bring unity to a torn and hurting world, in a spirit of gentleness, peace, and joy.

Some of these amazing people will be upstairs Sunday evening, because they will be working at the Sunday Supper, serving our college students, wearing aprons that say, "We're here to serve"!!!!

We have information in the narthex regarding the Congregation of St. Joseph, including our associate program – Lay women and men are invited to become associates of the Congregation.

And now I leave you with a section of a piece entitled:

Portrait of a Daughter [Sister] of St. Joseph

**Eyes open to the world both miserable and sinful,
but a world worked on by the Holy Spirit;**

Eyes open and ears attentive to the sufferings of the world.

Eyes open, ears attentive and spirit alert.. . .

never settled down, ...always in a holy disquietude,

...searching. . . in order to understand,

to divine [discover] what God and the dear neighbor

await from her today, now, for the body and for the soul;

Eyes open, ears attentive, spirit alert. . .sleeves rolled up for ministry,

without excluding the more humble, the less pleasing,

the less noticeable;

Finally, in her face the reflection of a virtue proper to our Congregation,

– continual joy of spirit..

This is the quiet inner glow of the Sister whose life

in the service of Jesus Christ has been successful.

(by Marius Nepper, S.J.)

Might God be calling you, or someone you know, to consecrated life?

Might you be interested in becoming an associate member of the congregation?

Don't ever dismiss God's nudges in your life. They will always lead you to a deeper peace and joy.