



## DIOCESE OF PORTLAND OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 2015

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Pope Francis, announcing that this will be a Year of Consecrated Life, has written that “consecrated life is a gift to the Church, it is born of the Church, it grows in the Church, and it is entirely directed to the Church”. Indeed, that is the case. Think of the richness that the Church knows through the dedicated commitment of religious sisters, brothers and priests, as well as others who direct their lives according to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. We can well see why this year would be set aside in this way. As the Holy Father suggests celebrating Consecrated Life should “look to the past with gratitude”. It should also encourage those who are living consecrated life “to live the present with passion” and “embrace the future with hope”. Those in consecrated life have found in Jesus and his message of love the meaning of their lives. They take to themselves the words of St. Paul, “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21). Their joy is infectious and continually renews the Church with hope. Rooted in the Gospel their prayer and ministry renews the lives of those who are touched by them in chapels of prayer and places of their service, particularly to the poor and needy.

The Year of Consecrated Life began on Sunday November 30, 2014, the first Sunday of Advent, and will continue until February 2, 2016, the World Day for Consecrated Life. This Year takes place within the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. Documents both on the Church and the important place that consecrated life has in the Church were first published in 1965 but continue to enrich us even to today.

Like the universal Church, our Church in Maine has been touched by the many women and men in consecrated life who have offered prayers for the people of the diocese in monastic chapels and ministered to all in education, healthcare, social services, pastoral ministry, and religious education within parishes, healthcare facilities, schools and social service agencies. From the first Mass offered by a Jesuit priest on an island in the Kennebec River in the 1600s to the arrival in Maine of the Sisters of Mercy in 1865 to the establishment of new communities of consecrated life in recent years, the diocese has been blessed with the presence of those who live out a consecration to Jesus Christ through the Gospel counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

It is a good thing to celebrate the richness of this gift to our communities. Therefore, I invite each parish of the diocese to identify a weekend between now and February 2, 2016 to honor those men and women in consecrated life who have touched your particular parish. There are many ways in which this can be done. A Mass of Thanksgiving can be offered. A lunch can be offered for the religious. A day of prayer for vocations to consecrated life can be scheduled. When you determine your celebration let the diocesan communication office know of your plans. We can publicize these events and keep before the eyes of the entire diocese the focus of this year. During the year the diocese will also be sponsoring events which lift up this precious heritage of our Church.

There is no question that the number of religious and those living in consecrated life has diminished. Yet we are constantly renewed in the lives of those who continue to witness. They live in hope, one founded in a profound trust in the Lord Jesus who has promised to be with the Church until the end of time. From the earliest days of the Church, there have been men and women who have dedicated themselves to prayer and to selfless service to their fellow pilgrims. The forms of consecration have changed, but the underlying realities remain and teach all of us to live in that same hope.

Pope Francis, reflecting on the smaller number of people in consecrated life within the Church today still challenges those living it to “Wake up the World!” The Holy Father challenges members of religious communities and all those living in consecrated life to live the present with passion. Light up the world with your witness to the truth you have found in Jesus. At the center of a religious vocation is a profound conviction of being loved by God. No matter what happens, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved by a God who can only love. Following, then, on Pope Francis, I encourage all religious and men and women in consecrated life, whether your charism be that of contemplation or action, to be Christ to those around you and thus be evangelizers. Let your light shine. The Church needs you.

To each religious or consecrated individual in our diocese, I want to express my profound thanks to you for responding to the call of the Lord to serve the Church. I thank you for your witness of fidelity, the joy you show forth in your life, and your dedicated commitment to the richness of your service and ministries. I am particularly grateful, as are we all, for your service and your presence and involvement within the parishes and institutions of our diocese. Continue to show us the Gospel of Joy. Know that we pray for you as we journey together seeking God’s way.

With gratitude and every prayerful best wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ, our Hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert P. Deeley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Robert P. Deeley, J.C.D.  
Bishop of Portland