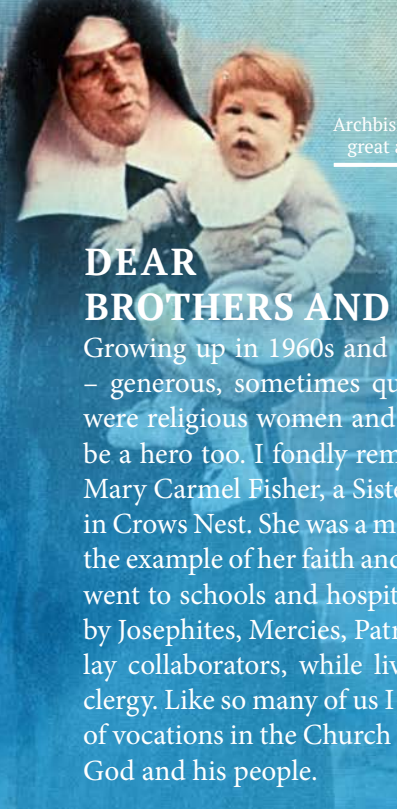




FOR ALL THE SAINTS

CONSECRATING LIFE TO GRACE, JOY AND LOVE

PASTORAL LETTER FROM ARCHBISHOP ANTHONY FISHER OP TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS AND LAY FAITHFUL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SYDNEY FOR THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE, ALL SAINTS DAY 2015.



Archbishop Anthony as a child with his great aunt Sr Mary Carmel Fisher rsm

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

Growing up in 1960s and 70s Sydney, I knew many heroes – generous, sometimes quirky, always giving people: they were religious women and men and they made me want to be a hero too. I fondly remember visiting my great-aunt, Sr Mary Carmel Fisher, a Sister of Mercy at the Mater Hospital in Crows Nest. She was a major figure in our family, giving us the example of her faith and compassion, and ensuring we all went to schools and hospitals run by religious. I was taught by Josephites, Mercies, Patricians and Jesuits, as well as their lay collaborators, while living in parishes led by diocesan clergy. Like so many of us I was blessed to witness the variety of vocations in the Church exercised generously in service of God and his people.

This helped me discern and embrace my own vocation as a religious and a priest. After studying, working, travelling and engaging in an active social life, I joined the Order of Preachers, which St Dominic founded 800 years ago this coming year. I received my priestly and religious formation from them, while also at various times living or working with those of other religious congregations.

Pope Francis, himself a religious, has called the whole Church to celebrate a Year of Consecrated Life¹ during which we are *to look at the past of religious life with gratitude, live the present with passion, and embrace the future with hope.*² In early November as we celebrate the journey of the Christian soul to God – ‘All Saints’ and ‘All Souls’ – it is a good time for us to join Pope Francis in recognising the unique gifts that consecrated men and women have brought to our Church and community, in supporting them in their vocation, and in doing what we can to ensure that religious life is carried forward in our land.

PERFECTAE CARITATIS

Fifty years ago, as the Second Vatican Council was coming to its close, Pope Paul VI published its thoughts on the renewal of religious life in *Perfectae caritatis*.³ The Council invited religious institutes to renew their inspiration by returning to the sources of Christian life and their original charisms, and to adapt their forms of life to the needs of the contemporary world. At the time of the Council there were nearly 15,000 religious women and 5,000 religious men in our country,⁴ and they were prominent on our streets, in our parishes and schools, and in many of the Church’s ministries. Today, there are fewer than 5,000 religious women and 2,000 religious men in our country,⁵ and they are not so visible. Sadly that means many young people today do not encounter consecrated persons and do not experience the spiritual maternity and paternity we received from them.

Of course, the statistics do not tell us the full story: much of the work of consecrated women and men is hidden but no less fruitful; as the abuse crisis highlights, the quality of vocations matters much more than the quantity; religious life always ebbs and flows, and new ecclesial movements and new forms of consecrated life are emerging even as others pass away. Many religious men and women persevered through the hard times of change and remained loyal servants of God

and his people, often embracing new ministries to the most vulnerable and marginalised. Consecrated women and men have handed on many of their apostolic projects to very capable and faithful lay people, and we can be optimistic that what these great men and women of God founded and sponsored will long serve us into the future.

But we should not pretend that the decline in numbers of religious in our country has been all for the best. Consecrated life is vital to the Church’s spiritual health; without the contemplative prayer and active apostolates of religious, their creativity and dynamism, and the example of their sheer devotion to God and his people, our Church is the poorer. *Lumen Gentium* said religious life “undeniably belongs to the Church’s life and holiness”;⁶ so a decline in consecrated life is likely to leave the Church less devout and less apostolically effective.

Indeed, the diverse states of ecclesial life complement and strengthen each other.⁷ Anything that reinforces religious life is likely also to strengthen support for and the lived experience of marriage, family, priestly and single lay vocations; factors that undermine one are likely to undermine the others also. Himself a religious,



“The Feast of All Saints”: Fra Angelico, *The Communion of Saints* (1423-4, National Gallery London)

Pope Francis has pointed to the close connection between family life and consecrated life: each enriches the other, supporting the other's efforts in evangelisation and care.⁸ Catholic couples first dedicate their children to God in baptism and nurture any vocations to consecrated life, especially through their example of pursuing Christian charity. A young Franciscan told me once that he thought the life of his parish community and its families is greatly enriched by participation in the prayer life of the friars and by the witness of their lives of service; but that the friars' vocations come from and are supported by the prayer and witness of those families and parishes. It's a two way street!

Consecrated life, the Council taught, is supposed to be a school in loving – for *perfectae caritatis*. But in many ways modernity has forgotten how to love. Of course there are plenty of sentimental love songs and talk of being 'in love' and 'making love': but the hard loving, the love that endures when the loving requires self-sacrifice and does not always deliver up warm feelings, this is the kind of loving Christians in different states in life need to learn from each other. As I have sometimes put it: we have plenty of the heart-shaped, self-pleasing, Valentine's Day kind of loving: but what we most need right now is cross-shaped, self-giving, Easter Day kind of loving. That takes commitment, sacrifice, self-denial. Faithful consecrated women and men show this sort of loving to a Church and world that sorely needs such example.

SIGNS OF CHRIST SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM

Of course, all Christian disciples are called to live perfect charity, not merely religious.⁹ But consecrated men and women try to do this in a *radical way*. They publicly profess (vow) the three *evangelical counsels* of poverty, chastity and obedience. In a world that says wealth, sex and power are the ways to happiness, these vows starkly propose an alternative wisdom. These 'Good News counsels' imitate Christ "the chaste, poor and obedient one".¹⁰ He was *obedient for our sake*, conforming his will totally to the Father's to win our salvation. He stayed *single for our sake*, that we might join his family. He became *poor for our sake*, so that we might be rich.¹¹

In imitation of Christ consecrated women and men constantly make 'visible' that often hidden Kingdom he established and which will be manifest at the end of time.¹² As the old saying goes, "The habit does not make the monk" and I remember once asking a young religious in formation why he wore his habit and he said, "So I can be an eschatological sign". Though he was half joking, he was right of course. Consecrated persons show us not just by their dress but by their vows, lifestyles and ideals that there are 'higher

things', things that ultimately matter more than our work-a-day concerns.¹³ They say by their very being: this is not all there is; God's way, God's life, God's kingdom is to come! And they help to make *what is to come* present even now.

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS A LITTLE BIT PRIEST AND A LITTLE BIT NUN!

All the baptised share in the lives of priests and religious. It is not just that they are inspired, led and served by them: it is that by their baptism they are 'a royal priesthood' and 'a consecrated nation' (*1Pet 2:9*). You might say that every Christian is a little bit priest and a little bit nun! Every Christian, and not just the 'professional' religious, must be signs of Christ and of his Kingdom Come.¹⁴ And consecrated men and women must be our spiritual mothers and fathers in this, experts in communion, teachers in the school of perfect charity.¹⁵ Knowing Jesus intimately they must show us all that a close relationship with him is possible and show us how.



"Your will, not mine, be done": Andrea Mantegna, *Agony in the Garden* (c. 1460, National Gallery London)

All Saints of Sydney

“Those who withdraw to the heights to fast and pray in silence are,” it is said, “the pillars bearing the spiritual weight of what happens in history.”¹⁶

Consecrated people have certainly been a major factor in the history of the Church of Sydney. Pioneering priests, sisters and brothers brought the faith to Australia and built up much of our spiritual and social heritage.¹⁷ ‘Charities’, ‘Good Sams’, ‘Joeys’, ‘Christies’, ‘Mercies’, ‘Marists and others founded and long staffed our schools and hospitals. Religious such as Franciscans, MSCs and Jesuits ran parishes and chaplaincies, and many newer congregations and movements have now joined them in doing so. Consecrated women and men have served the poor, sick, newcomers and needy, carried the Gospel out to our community, and constantly prayed for us at the feet of the Lord.

The first religious community in Sydney were Sisters of Charity. On arrival from Ireland they made their way immediately to the Female Factory in Parramatta where some of the most abandoned women and children in the colony and the world were living. It was reported that prior to their arrival “all was noise, ribaldry and obscene conversation” but that thanks to the Sisters, it became “the quiet of a well-ordered family. Not an oath nor curse nor brawling word is heard; and a general desire to frequent the Sacraments prevails.”¹⁸

Australia’s first Church leaders were Benedictines: William Ullathorne, John Bede Polding and Roger Vaughan led the Church in Sydney and beyond from 1832 till 1883, travelling thousands of miles to tend the flock and cultivate greater Christian observance.

Our most famous Australian Catholic was Mother Mary MacKillop, now St Mary of the Cross. In our city of Sydney alone she directed the founding of schools in Annandale, Bankstown, Bondi,



Camperdown, Campsie/Canterbury, Drummoyne, Dulwich Hill, Granville, Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Leichhardt and Leichhardt North, Lidcombe, Mosman, Naremburn, North Sydney, Penrith, Ryde, St Mary’s, Sydney and Woolwich. Her Sisters of St Joseph have educated thousands of children and cared for Aborigines, orphans and others. Mary long lived in North Sydney and is buried in the beautiful shrine there. Though she had her share of trouble with bishops, the day of my installation I went first to her tomb to ask her intercession as I began my new ministry. Mary MacKillop proves that Australians can be consecrated religious and they can be saints. All Saints Day calls us all to this!

Another great Sydneysider was Eileen O’Connor. Born in 1892, a childhood injury condemned her to a life of pain and suffering. But she experienced a visitation from Our Lady, instructing her to offer up her suffering for the sake of others. She and Fr Edward McGrath MSC, parish priest of Coogee, founded Our Lady’s Nurses for the Poor – ‘the

Brown Nurses’ – who serve the sick poor. When her body was moved from Randwick to Coogee sixteen years after her burial, witnesses reported Eileen had not suffered any corruption.¹⁹

There are many more stories to be told of heroic and hidden religious who built the Church of Sydney. Today there are over 900 sisters, around 450 male religious, several members of new forms of consecrated life, a consecrated virgin and a hermitess within the Archdiocese. Several new religious congregations and movements have come to us from overseas or been started in Australia in recent years. Together these consecrated persons enormously enrich our Church and society. They pray for us and work in their traditional apostolates such as education and nursing. Others now work in parishes, prisons or spiritual direction; with refugees, prostitutes and migrants; campaigning against the trafficking of women, men and children or the abuse of creation and the poor; or assisting the old, sick and lonely in new ways.



ARCHBISHOP JOHN BEDE POLDING OSB
Australia’s first bishop and a Benedictine monk



MOTHER M. XAVIER WILLIAMS RSC
First Religious Superior to arrive in Australia



ST MARY OF THE CROSS MACKILLOP RSJ
Co-foundress and Religious Superior of the Sisters of St Joseph



EILEEN O’CONNOR
Co-foundress of Our Lady’s Nurses of the Poor



Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE with other young men and women in consecrated life.

Wake Up the World – with grace, joy and love!

The Holy Father reminds us that institutes of consecrated life are “heir to a history rich in charisms”, those ideas which have inspired the great founders of religious congregations and inspired others to join or support them.²⁰ Our word ‘charism’ derives from the Greek for *grace* or *gift*, a word related to the Greek for *joy* and the Latin word for love. So religious life is graced, joyful and loving!

Sydney today needs such grace, joy and love. Pope Francis identifies declining membership and ageing, globalisation and economic downturn, moral and cultural relativism, isolation and social irrelevance, as threats to consecrated life.²¹ In the midst of all these uncertainties he calls all forms of consecrated life to practise the virtue of hope, the fruit of our faith in the Lord of history, who gives the reassurance that he is always with us. Our Pope’s

name-saint Francis of Assisi, that most beloved religious, shows how men and women can consecrate themselves to a love for the cosmos and all its creatures, a love for humanity and especially the poor, and love for the Creator of them all.²² Those in consecrated life “find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love”.²³ They offer a wake-up call to our world, by radiating “the joy and beauty of living the Gospel” and following Christ so closely that they become magnets to others.²⁴ Their humility and asceticism are much needed countersigns in a world “the throw-away society”; the grace, joy and love with which they live that life help heal our relationships to creation, neighbours and God.



**FIND LIFE BY GIVING LIFE,
HOPE BY GIVING HOPE,
LOVE BY GIVING LOVE**



Calling All Saints of Sydney:

DO YOU WANT TO BE A HERO?

WE CARRY CHRIST'S WORD THAT BRINGS HOPE, RESTORES WHAT IS BROKEN, HEALS WHAT IS HURTING, GUIDES THE LOST AND VALUES WHERE THERE IS LOW SELF-ESTEEM.

When Jesus called some people to drop everything and follow him more radically, some wondered: for what? (*Lk 18:28-30*) People have talked about a crisis of consecrated life in Australia and they are probably right to think that Catholics are yet fully to appreciate what they have lost or would be losing if consecrated life were not recovered in this country. Yet one meaning of the word 'crisis' is *turning point*. As we gratefully acknowledge the role of consecrated women and men up to today, we must rekindle our determination that they will feature in the future of the Church in Australia also. It is up to existing religious to lead the way forward in this, but up to all of us to pray, discern and support vocations to consecrated life.

I have high hopes for consecrated life in our country. Inspired by older religious, many young men and women are now willing to embrace the life of radical discipleship and find a deep and abiding happiness in doing so. A member of an emerging consecrated community says "Christ has taken me on an adventure of discovering his deep personal love for me". A *Verbum Dei* missionary says "being a consecrated missionary in the heart of Sydney is the most challenging and most rewarding experience of my life... We carry Christ's Word that brings hope, restores what is broken, heals what is hurting, guides the lost and values where there is low self-esteem." And an experienced Josephite wrote: "God's message to each chosen one is: Don't stop. Keep performing. Keep loving. Keep creating. Keep transforming. I have not called you because you are equipped. I equip you because you are called." Perhaps you could ask a religious in your parish what consecrated life has meant to them...

To the saints – or saints-in-the-making – of Sydney I say: pray for consecrated life in our land. When you get the chance, thank your religious for all they have done. Join them in one of their works of prayer, mercy or outreach. Encourage members of your family to consider this noble calling. Nurture in your young people openness to God's will by doing God's will yourselves.

To our parish priests and parishioners, principals and members of our school communities I say: please include regular prayer for vocations to consecrated life or for the fruitfulness of the works of our religious in your Masses and other prayers. Invite consecrated women and men, especially those who previously worked or currently work in your parish or school to speak about their experience and passion, perhaps after Holy Communion at Mass or in a school assembly or at some other celebration. Thank them, perhaps through a special meal or other function. Make Pope Francis' letter to men and women in Consecrated Life available.

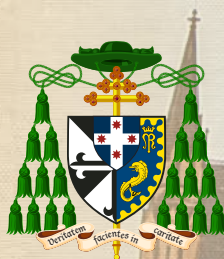
To all young Catholic men and women I say: listen to God speaking in your hearts, in Word and Sacrament, in your families and communities, in the signs of our times and the needs of our world. Have the courage to be a hero! Be generous enough to join the great adventure of consecrated life!

Visit our vocations website (www.vocationcentre.org.au) and make a vocations discernment retreat.

Help fill Sydney with grace, joy and love!

Anthony Fisher, OP

**MOST REV. ANTHONY FISHER OP
ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY**



Prayer for Vocations to Consecrated life

Lord God, you have called men and women to Consecrated Life,
setting them apart as experts in communion and witnesses to your Kingdom,
serving Christ in the needy through prayer and apostolate,
and building up your Church in grace, joy and love.

We give you thanks for those religious who in the past
so generously build up the Church in Australia.
We ask you to bless those who in the present
serve so well in our Archdiocese.

Open the hearts of young women and men to the Consecrated Life;
inspire them to heed the call to radical love;
and grant them courage and generosity to respond to that call.

We ask this through the chaste, poor and obedient One,
Christ our Lord. Amen.

All holy men and women religious: pray for us.

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- 1- For information on celebrations of the Year of Consecrated Life in the Archdiocese of Sydney see: https://www.sydneycatholic.org/news/consecrated_life.asp; https://www.sydneycatholic.org/news/latest_news/2014/2014125_708.shtml; https://www.sydneycatholic.org/news/latest_news/2015/2015414_1269.shtml.
 - 2- Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life* (2014): https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacrat.html; see also Bishops Commission for Church Ministry, *Wake Up the World: Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life* (26 February 2016): <https://www.catholic.org.au/acbc-media/media-centre/media-releases-new/1637-pastoral-letter-on-the-consecrated-life>.
 - 3- Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis: On the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life*, Proclaimed by Bld Paul VI on 28 October 1965; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 914 to 933.
 - 4- Stephen Reid, Robert Dixon and Noel Connolly, *See, I Am Doing a New Thing! A Report on the 2009 Survey of Catholic Religious Institutes in Australia* (Mulgrave: John Garratt Publishing, 2010), 2.
 - 5- *The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia: 2015-16* (Belmont: National Council of Priests, 2015), 795-6.
 - 6- Second Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 44.
 - 7- Cf. St John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici: On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World*, 20.
 - 8- Pope Francis, *Year of Consecrated Life*, III, 2.
 - 9- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 915.
 - 10- St John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata: On the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World*, 1.
 - 11- *Mt* 19:12; 26:42; *Lk* 18:18-30; 22:39; *Jn* 1:12; 2Cor 8:9; *Rom* 5:19; 8:17; *Gal* 3:16; *Phil* 2:5-11; *Eph* 1:15; *1Jn* 3:2; *Heb* 5:8.
 - 12- Cf. St John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 1.
 - 13- Cf. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 44.
 - 14- St John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio: Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, 11.
 - 15- Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 44; Pope Francis, *Year for Consecrated Life*, I, 2.
 - 16- Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 125.
 - 17- *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI at Welcoming Celebration by the Young People, Barangaroo, Sydney Harbour, 17 July 2008*: https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/july/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080717_barangaroo.html
 - 18- Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History* (3rd ed., Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1992), 121-2.
 - 19- Michael McKernan, 'O'Connor, Eily Rosaline (Eileen) 1892-1921', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (1988): <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/oconnor-eily-rosaline-eileen-7875/text13687>. See also Our Lady's Nurses for the Poor: <http://ourladynurses.org.au/>.
 - 20- Pope Francis, *Year of Consecrated Life*, I, 1.
 - 21- Pope Francis, *Year of Consecrated Life*, I, 3; cf. St John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 87-91.
 - 22- Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home* (2015).
 - 23- Pope Francis, *Year of Consecrated Life*, II, 4.
 - 24- Pope Francis, *Year of Consecrated Life* II, 1-2; cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life, *Rejoice! A Letter to Consecrated Men and Women* (2014) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_20140202_rallegratevii-lettera-consacratii_en.html.