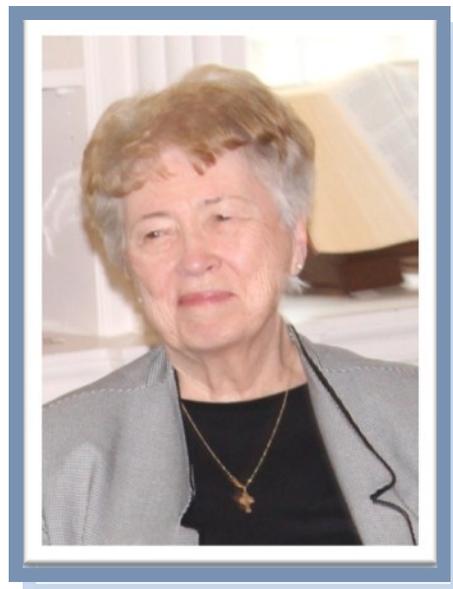


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60 Years of Consecrated Life

By Sr. Ann Gray, D.W.

On February 2, 2015, I marked my 60th anniversary as a member in the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom—sixty years of graced history. Wasn't it just yesterday that on a snowy February 2, 1955, my 13 companions and I pronounced the vows that would identify us as consecrated women religious? We were imbued with the spirit of our Founder and Foundress – a preferential love of the poor and a life-long quest for the Wisdom Jesus of the Gospels. We began the living out of those solemn pronouncements in the pre-dawn of Vatican Council II, that other event that was to shape the flow of our consecrated religious lives into the future. It is now fifty years since Vatican II was first proclaimed, with its bright promise of Church renewal. We are only just beginning to realize the impact of it all on our ways of being and doing.



My own personal journey and professional preparation led me into the mysterious, raucous, joyous world of the adolescent who filled my days with their energy while I filled theirs with Shakespeare, Poetry, and Literature; and helped them discover their true voice both on stage and off. In time, I turned my attention to the young adult of college age through a creative writing program where again my task was to help the novice writer find her voice and free herself of the anxiety that a blank page can create. I loved it all and as a teacher learned a great deal from my students.

My journey led me into many rewarding relationships. Undoubtedly, the most memorable was my time in leadership serving the US Province. In my days as Provincial I discovered other voices belonging to the women who went before me – and on whose shoulders I stand-- great women who poured their talents into our institutions: schools, hospitals and who grew parishes. We answered a need in the past for schools and hospitals. Yet with the future at our doorstep, we recognized a new moment in which there would be both dying and new life happening. Once more, as of old, God is inviting us to something new. One of our challenges in religious life today is to acquire a contemplative way of looking at the world, and not at what we have lost: our diminishment and lack of new members. For me, the question becomes where we are being called now. To what is the Spirit inviting us and how do we together and personally listen and respond? We are called by our vows to be communal not only within our own ranks but to see what our world is longing for and how our Wisdom spirit can connect with the hunger of the world around us. In communion with all of our collaborators, we endeavor to answer in 2015 the question, "What are we called to?"

As an international congregation linked to each entity on four continents, we are in touch with the unmet needs of the world. It is in the document by Pope Francis addressing this year as the Year for Consecrated Life that he calls consecrated persons "experts in communion." He describes the kind of synergy he sees in us that enables us to relate to different cultures, and to be open to encounter dialogue. Now, that is quite an affirmation as well as a challenge to be women who live the "mysticism of encounter" (a favorite phrase of Francis), but it does lay a heavy expectation on us to be courageous in the face of conflict and tension. Perhaps it explains why Francis has given us the imperative: Wake Up The World. It is the call to be prophets, for prophecy is the distinctive sign of the consecrated life; and the prophet, we have come to know is the one who stands with the poor and the powerless.

As I mark my 60 years of consecrated life, I see that Pope Francis is observing anniversaries of his own. At the invitation of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Pope Francis is marking the 50th anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, and *Perfectae Caritatis*, on the renewal of religious life (the Apostolic Visitation now part of a painful past). Celebrating anniversaries makes the present come alive. Francis takes full advantage of the importance of the present, by telling us "to live our present with passion." He recommends that we use the Gospel as "a manual for daily living." Living our present with passion according to Francis relates to being "experts in communion"; that is, becoming witnesses and architects in God's design to heal a tragically polarized society. Oh, and there is one more recommendation that Francis makes in this year of Consecrated Life—he hopes that Consecrated Life will reflect joy. "A gloomy disciple is a disciple of gloom." says Francis.

In this time of Jubilee, Passion and Encounter, how can we be anything less than joyful?