

Vocations

Bishops called to define identity of consecrated

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Bishops participating in the October Synod of Bishops had no trouble talking about the work and witness of the sisters, religious priests and brothers in their dioceses.

But theme of the world Synod of Bishops was "consecrated life" — not religious life — and it included at least brief mentions of monks and hermits, consecrated virgins and members of secular institutes.

Repeatedly during the first dozen days of the synod, bishops called for a clearer explanation of the special identity that distinguishes all forms of consecrated life, although few made an attempt to make suggestions.

Consecrated men and women have promised their entire lives to following God in a special way, which includes pledging poverty, chastity and obedience.

Some, like cloistered women religious, make and live those promises in the context of a stable community. Others, such as the virgins, are consecrated by their local bishops and are directed by him in how to live and

work.

Two synod speakers who focused on the identity question were Bishop Francis E. George of Yakima, Wash., and Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco.

"Consecrated life is not a unified phenomenon," Bishop George said, but is lived in different ways in the church by 1.1 million men and women.

"The vocation to consecrated life arises in the heart from a powerful desire to be completely generous with God," said the bishop, a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

That generosity is modeled on Christ's total self-giving to God and to the world, he said, and as the consecrated person goes through a continuous process of conversion, Jesus shines through them more and more clearly.

Throughout that process consecrated men and women must be aware of how they are influenced by and influence their culture, he said.

One mark of many modern cultures that is particularly dangerous for consecrated life, Bishop George said, is its lack of love and its overemphasis on the in-

dividual.

Individualism can also lead to an overemphasis on personal experience in prayer, resulting in an inadequate reference to the Catholic faith a consecrated person professes, the bishop said.

Consecrated life necessarily involves the church, "which both approves a way of life and ratifies its particular mission," he said.

Archbishop Quinn addressed the identity issue with a specific focus on a current debate in which some religious emphasize their consecration while others emphasize their mission.

The solution to the identity question, Archbishop Quinn told the synod, is "to root religious life in the redemptive mission of Christ" and to see religious vows as the way one bonds himself or herself to Jesus and his mission.

While one religious community may focus more on the transcendent God — through prayer in contemplative communities, for example — and another may focus more on bringing God's loving presence to the world, both must see themselves as consecrated to God in mission, he said.

Holy Father: Some orders may not last

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Although individual religious orders have no guarantee they will last forever, the Catholic Church always will have members who are called to religious life, Pope John Paul II said.

"The guarantee of lasting until the end of the world, which has been given to the church as a whole, is not necessarily given to individual religious institutes," the pope said at his Sept. 28 weekly general audience.

The pope introduced a series of audience talks on the consecrated life just days before the Oct. 2 opening of the world Synod of Bishops to discuss the same topic.

While all members of the church are called to a life of holiness by virtue of their baptism, he said, some live their baptismal call "in a particularly intense way by embracing the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience."

The Holy Spirit is the source of the spiritual gifts given to individuals and religious communities to benefit the church and the world in every age and in a variety of circumstances, he said.

Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, the pope said, the communities can take on new tasks and ways of operating according to the needs of the times and the places they work.



Church must find new ways for expanding women's roles, cardinal says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Although women cannot become priests, the church must find ways to address their desire for more important positions within the church, said British Cardinal George Basil Hume of Westminster.

The cardinal, addressing an Oct. 14 press conference during the world Synod of Bishops, said women always have played important roles in church life and have deeply influenced almost every Catholic as mothers, teachers and spiritual guides.

But it is true, Cardinal Hume said, that the church must search for new ways to answer the call for more complete involvement of women in the church, especially in decision-making positions.

"The criticism is that we are a masculine-led church," he said, so the real question is "how do we share power. It's power we're talking about."

He said in his diocese most parishes have a woman as parish assistant.

"She may not be the parish priest, she may not be standing at the altar celebrating the Eucharist, but there are many other things she does that are of first importance," Cardinal Hume said.



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