

Frères et sœurs dans le Christ,  
Dear friends :

**Nous sommes rassemblés aujourd'hui en la Pro-Cathédrale pour célébrer la Messe chrismale.**

In this liturgy, the Bishop will bless three oils which will be used in the administration of the sacraments throughout the diocese for the year:

- The oil of catechumens, will be used in the sacrament of baptism
- The oil of the infirm, will be used in the sacrament of the sick
- Holy chrism, a mixture of olive oil and sweet balsam, will be used in baptism, confirmation, and holy orders, which imparts an indelible sacramental character.

With the blessing of the chrism oil, Bishop Plouffe will breathe over the vessels, a gesture symbolizing both the Holy Spirit coming down to consecrate this oil, and the life-giving sanctifying nature of the sacraments for which it is used.” The priests will also extend their right hands toward the chrism as the bishop says the consecratory prayer, symbolizing their union with their bishop, in which they share “in the authority by which Christ Himself builds up ... the Church. (Vatican II, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, No. 2).

The mass of Chrism also offers us the opportunity to recall the institution of the priesthood and pray for the Bishop, the priests and all of us, God’s priestly people. Bishop Plouffe has also requested that I share with you another intention for celebration today. On the 29 of November 2013, Pope Francis announced to the International Union of Superiors General, that the year 2015 would be the “Year of Consecrated Life”. During this meeting, the Holy Father spoke about how religious congregations enrich diocesan life, and encouraged members to go out to the “frontiers,” working first and foremost with people excluded from society. He encouraged consecrated persons and religious communities to focus on developing “a tender heart.” That was two years ago, only 8 months after the Holy Father had been elected. As in most things Pope Francis does and says, it takes some time to absorb the deeper meaning of his “simple” invitations.

At the opening of the “Year of Consecrated Life” Pope Francis asked the entire Church and consecrated persons in particular, to live in hope. In a world that, if we only watch CNN and CTV Newsworld, would look like the antithesis of hope, Pope Francis suggested living in hope would require two things of us:

- 1) We would first have to Look to the past with gratitude, then
- 2) Live the present with great passion.

## Looking to the past with Gratitude

As Barbara Streisand sang:

*“Mem’ries, Light the corners of my mind*

*Misty water-colored memories*

*Of the way we were ...*

Not that many years ago, each year on Aug 15, postulants of my own congregation walked up the centre aisle of this cathedral in bridal gowns and were attended by flower girls. All of this was not the essence of consecrated life. It was simply a symbol of a deeper reality. Just as we say, “The clothes do not make the woman or the man,” so too “the habit did not make the nun.” Through the ritual of bridal gowns, later exchanged for religious habits, these young women gave tangible expression to their deeper call to live out their baptismal promises as “the bride of Christ,” where their primary love was publically proclaimed as Jesus, and all other things in their life would assume their rightful position as secondary to their Beloved.

When we look to our experiences of religious life in the past, most of us probably think of the Sisters or priests we have known through the educational and health system. If I did an Ipso-Reid poll and asked a broad segment of the Ontario population, “Who began public education and public health care in Canada?” many if not most might answer, “The government.” This is far from the truth.

**L’éducation, les soins de santé et les services sociaux au Canada furent fondés principalement par les congrégations religieuses, y compris celles de notre diocèse: les Sœurs de la Charité d’Ottawa, les Filles de la Sagesse, les Sœurs de l’Assomption, the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (Grey Sisters), les Pères de la Congrégation de la Résurrection, les Jésuites, les Basiliens, les Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie.**

These congregations who founded education, health care and social services in our diocese did so, not in an attempt to be politically correct.

- 1) They responded to real and pressing needs of the people in our diocese – for schools, for hospitals, and for Catholic charities.
- 2) These ministries offered a way for religious to share with the entire community, God’s love, and commitment to the poor, the disenfranchised, and to those who lived on the fringes of society.

## Living the Present with Passion

As we reflect on the past, do we define the past, both for religious congregations and for our Church, as “the glory days?” never to be repeated? Recently, I was speaking with a police officer and I introduced myself as “Sister Bonnie MacLellan.” He looked quite shocked and said, “I didn’t think there were many of ‘you girls’

left!” Ordinarily, in our “politically correct environment” we would not reference any group of women as “you girls.” As for me, I knew there was no malicious intent. It did reveal to me that in many ways, consecrated persons in our world are remembered because of their presence and ministry in the past. Might we harbour the notion that vocations to priesthood and religious life are passé, irrelevant, and unnecessary in today’s secular, post-modern era, or do we see vocations to religious life as essential to the life of our Church and our diocese?

While it is good to “remember the past,” the truth and the fact of the matter is, we cannot do it exactly as we did it –in our faith journey, in religious life, and in the life of our Church. Fifty years ago, Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium* – Light to the Nations), noted the consecration of religious through their profession of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, acted as “signs that inspire all the members of the Church to fulfill their Christian vocation.”

**Alors, comme religieux/religieuses, comment continuer aujourd’hui de vivre notre vie avec passion? Il est évident que le nombre de religieux, tout comme le nombre de personnes qui fréquentent l’église, diminuent de façon importante dans le monde occidental. Nous vivons actuellement un changement démographique jamais vu dans le passé dans aucune autre société.**

In this, our current context, how can we religious and all the baptized live our lives with such commitment and intensity, that people look at us as they did with the early Church and say, “See how those Christians love one another?”

A few weeks ago, Fr. Richard Rohr, while being interviewed by Oprah Winfrey on Super Soul Sunday, recounted a story that I think reflects what it means for religious to live our lives with passion in our current context. Father Rohr recounted the story of a 4 y.o. little boy who welcomed a brand new baby brother into his home. He asked his mom and dad if he could talk to his baby brother – to which the parents said, “Of course you can talk to your baby brother.” The little boy looked seriously at his parents and added to his request, “I need to talk to him ‘ALONE’.” The parents were not quite sure what all of this would mean, but they left the boy alone with his brother, and anxiously waited at the door. While listening, they heard the boy say to his baby brother, “Quick, tell me where you came from ... Quick, tell me who made you? I am beginning to forget...”

### **A Passion for the Future**

The essence of living our life as consecrated persons with passion in the church is about serving as a living touchstone, reminding all whom we meet of “where we

have come from and who made us”. Consecrated persons commit to the Church and to the world to be bearers of God’s grace and God’s hope: “bringing glad tidings to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives, giving sight to the blind, and setting the oppressed free.”

**Bref, c’est dans ce contexte que nous devons nous souvenir de notre passé avec gratitude; vivre nos vœux avec passion et, comme le dit le Saint Père, nous préparer à accueillir l’avenir avec confiance. Un regard sur notre monde laisse parfois peu d’espérance. Les reportages des médias sont souvent des reportages de terreur et de désastres.**

It is precisely amid these uncertainties which we share with so many of our contemporaries, that we are called to practice the virtue of hope, the fruit of our faith in the Lord of history, who continues to tell us, “Be not afraid ... for I am with you.” (Jer 1:8) Our hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:2), the One for whom “nothing is impossible” (Lk 1:37). This is the hope which does not disappoint; it is the hope which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future. It is to that future that we must always look, conscious that the Holy Spirit spurs us on so that HE can still do great things with us.

**Comme peuple d’espérance, deux tentations nous guettent : celle de voir toute chose en fonction d’efficacité et celle de nous appuyer sur nos propres forces.**

As Pope Benedict XVI urged, we are called NOT to, “join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of consecrated life in the Church in our day; rather [we are called to] clothe ourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armour of light, renewing our trust in the Lord, recognizing as the Holy Father has said again and again, “A gloomy disciple is a disciple of gloom.”

To be bearers of hope requires that we join the chorus of believers who have come to know their own human limitations, echoing the words of Paul, the saints who have gone before us, and Pope Francis, as we proclaim “I am a sinner!” .” In a society that exalts the cult of efficiency, fitness and success, one which ignores the poor and dismisses “losers,” we are called to witness by our lives the truth, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” As consecrated person, we are called to proclaim by our life that our God is a God who pursues us and loves us as we are ... the good, the bad, and the ugly ..., and by the experience of this profound and perfect love, we

are transformed. From the day of our baptism, God has promised to never give up on us.

As we celebrate this year for consecrated life, we remember with gratitude our own Bishop Jean Louis who this year, celebrates his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of serving as shepherd of our diocese. On behalf of all religious who have been called to this ministry of service with you at this time in our Church's history, we express our gratitude to you Bishop Plouffe, to our clergy, deacons, and Diocesan Order of Service – for your commitment and dedication.

**Et vous, mes sœurs et frères religieux, soyons reconnaissants au Seigneur pour le témoignage de notre consécration et pour notre ministère dans le Diocèse du Sault Ste Marie. Puisse Dieu nous combler de tout ce dont nous avons besoin pour continuer à être ses témoins de lumière et d'espérance.**

May all of us gathered here today be grateful for having been summoned by God to the glory of a chosen race and royal priesthood.  
Amen.