



獻身生活年

教宗方濟各

致全體度獻身生活者書函

台灣天主教修會會士協會 出版

親愛的度獻身生活的弟兄姊妹們：

我以伯鐸繼承人的身分寫信給你們，主曾託付伯鐸，堅定他弟兄和姊妹們的信德（參路廿二32）。可是我也以弟兄的身分寫信給你們，因為我也如你們一樣，奉獻給了天主。

我們一起感謝天父，祂召叫了我們跟隨耶穌，完全接受福音並服務教會；祂又將聖神傾注我們心中，聖神是我們的喜樂之源，是我們在世界前，見證天主的愛和慈悲。

爲了回應你們中不少的人，以及獻身生活及使徒團體部的要求，我決定了在《教會憲章》公佈第五十週年，宣佈爲獻身生活年，該憲章在第六章，以及有關修會生活革新的《完美愛德法令》中談到修會會士。獻身生活年將於2014年11月30日將臨期第一主

日開始，並於2016年2月2日獻耶穌於聖殿慶日結束。

在與獻身生活及使徒團體部討論後，我選擇了聖若望保祿二世，在第三個千年開始，給予整個教會的目標。以某種意義來說，他重申先前在世界主教代表會議後，所寫的《獻身生活》勸諭，他說：「你們不僅有可記憶和細說的光榮歷史，還有要完成的偉大歷史！瞻望將來，聖神派遣你們要做更偉大的事。」（110號）

一、獻身生活年的目的

1. 第一個目的是「以感恩的心」面對過去。我們所有的修會，都是富有神恩歷史的繼承者。在它們的開始，我們看到天主的手，祂在聖神內，召叫一些人更密切地追隨基督，把福音詮釋為一種生活方式，以信德的眼光，看時代的訊號，並以創意回應教會的需要。這種起初的經驗逐漸成熟和發展，在新的地理和文化的背景中，汲取新的成員，並且興起實踐神恩的新途徑，表達使徒愛德的新方法。就像種子成了大樹，每個修會成長而伸展它們的樹枝。

在這一年中，每一個神恩家庭，適合反省它們的創始和歷史，爲了感謝天主賜給教會美化她的不同恩典，並裝備她作各種善事（參《教會憲章》12）。

爲了保持我們的特色，加強我們結合如一個家庭，以及我們共同的歸屬感，細說我們的歷史是必要的。這不但是一種考古，或是單純的懷舊，也要求追隨前輩們的足跡，爲的是把握啓發會祖及初創團體的崇高理想、遠見和價值。如此，我們可以看出神恩如何在過去年代中生活出來，它如何激勵了創意，遭遇到的困難，以及克服那些困難的方法。我們也可能遇到矛盾的情況，那是人性弱點的結果，有時是疏忽了神恩的某些主要觀點。可是概括而論，一切都是有益的，可作爲悔改的召喚。細說我們的歷史，就是讚美天主，感謝祂的一切恩惠。

我們特別感謝天主，梵二大公會議後的這五十年。大公會議象徵了聖神加予整個教會的一口「氣息」。因此，獻身生活進行了革新的有利途程，儘管有其光明和黑暗，曾是恩寵的時刻，顯示聖神的臨在。

希望獻身生活年，也是謙卑地承認我們軟弱的機會，完全信靠天主，因為祂是愛（參若十四8），在軟弱中，我們經歷到主的慈愛。願這一年，成為將有力而又喜樂的見證聖德和活力展現於世界的機會。這些聖德和活力，顯示在許多獻身生活中追隨耶穌的人。

2. 這一年也叫我們「以熱情活在當下」。以感恩的心紀念過去，同時仔細聆聽今日聖神給教會所說的一切，引導我們更完全地實施我們獻身生活的要點。

從隱修制度開始到現代的「新興團體」，每種形式的獻身生活，都是出於聖神的跟隨耶穌的召叫，一如福音所教導的（參《完美愛德》2）。為許多會祖和會母來說，福音是絕對的規律，其他規律只是福音的一種表達，且是圓滿地度福音生活的方

法。為他們來說，理想就是基督；他們致力於內心與基督的結合，然而可以像聖保祿一樣的說：「為我來說生活就是基督」（斐一21）。他們的聖願實是這項熱愛的具體表現。

在這一年中，我們當問自己的問題是，我們如何對福音的挑戰開放，福音是不是我們日常生活的真正「手冊」，是我們要做決定的指引。福音是有要求的：要求徹底和正直地生活。單是讀福音是不夠的（即使誦讀和研讀聖經是重要的），只是默想福音也是不夠的（每天我們快樂地默想福音）。耶穌要求我們實踐福音，將祂的話在我們的生活中實現。

再次，我們要問自己：耶穌真正是我們首要的和唯一的愛嗎？我們在宣發聖願時，曾經如此許下過。只有祂是唯一的愛時，我

們才能以真理和慈悲去愛，愛每一個我們遇到的人。因為我們會從耶穌學習到愛的意義和實踐。因為我們有了祂的心，才能愛。

我們的會祖和會母，分享了耶穌自己的憐憫，當祂看到民眾猶如沒有牧人的羊群。像耶穌一樣，祂以同情的心說出祂慈祥的話，治癒病人，給飢餓的人食物，犧牲祂自己的性命，我們的會祖和會母，以不同的方式，為聖神派給他們的人服務。他們以代人祈禱、宣講福音、教授要理、教育、服務貧窮和弱小者等，服務大眾。愛德的創新是無止境的。可以找到許多將福音的「新意」，帶給每種文化和社會各個角落的嶄新途徑。

獻身生活年挑戰我們，審查我們是否忠於託付我們的使命。我們的職務、工作和臨在，是否符合聖神對我們會祖和會母的要求？它們是否適合今日在社會和教會中，擔

負起那些同樣的職務和工作？是否對我們的民眾，我們還有同樣的熱情，與他們相連分享他們的喜樂，分擔他們的痛苦，真正了解他們的需求而幫助他們呢？聖若望保祿二世曾說：「這種引領你們會祖的慷慨和自我犧牲，現在應該啟發你們，他們的神子們保持此神恩，因喚醒他們的聖神力量，不斷地豐富和適應它，同時不失去他們獨有的特色。是你們要利用這些神恩，為教會服務，並為基督王國圓滿來臨而努力」¹。

憶起我們的創始，照亮獻身生活的另外一點，我們的會祖受到宗徒們與基督的同心合意所吸引，也受到耶路撒冷初期團體的友誼所吸引。在建立他們自己的團體時，他們每個人都設法複製那些福音生活的模式，能

1 新世界福傳五百週年，宗座致拉丁美洲修會會士牧函《福音之路》（1990年6月29日），26。

夠一心一德，安享主的親臨（參《完美愛德》15）。

以熱情活在當下，是指成爲「共榮團契的專家」，「『合一計劃』的見證和設計師，合一是人類歷史在天主計劃中的頂點」²。在一個兩極化的社會，不同文化經驗到彼此相處的困難，在無能力的人遭受壓迫，充塞了不平等的地方，我們當提供團體的具體模式，承認每個人的尊嚴，分享我們的不同天賦，使能如弟兄姊妹般生活。

因此，要成爲共融的男士和女士！有勇氣臨於衝突和緊張之中，成爲聖神臨在的可信標記，祂在人心，啓發萬眾一心的熱情（參若十七21）。活出「相遇的奧祕」，

2 獻身生活及使徒團體部《會士與人類進步》（1980年8月12日），1980年11月12日《羅馬觀察報》附錄，第1-8頁。

它引發「聆聽的能力，聆聽別人；一起尋求方法和途徑的能力」³。依天主聖三的相愛關係而生活（參若十四8），聖三是一切人際關係的模範。

3. 「以希望擁抱將來」該是今年的第三個目的。我們都知道不同形式的獻身生活，目前經歷到的困難：聖召減少、會士年長、尤其在西方世界；自全球的金融危機產生的經濟問題；國際化及全球化的問題；相對論帶來的威脅；孤獨感和社會的冷漠等。可是在我們與許多同時代的人，共同忍受的這些不安，要求我們練習望德，它是我們對歷史的主宰信賴的果實，祂不斷地告訴我們：「不要怕……，因為我與你同在」（耶一8）。

3 2014年5月2日，教宗向羅馬的宗座公學和宿舍的院長及學生談話。

這種希望不是根據統計或成就，而是基於那位我們信賴的主（參弟下一2），為祂「沒有不可能的」（路一37）。這就是不會使人失望的希望，是能使獻身生活在將來繼續寫完偉大歷史的希望。這是我們常該追求的將來，意識到聖神傾注我們心中，祂和我們一起可以做大事。

因此我們不要陷於誘惑，以數字和效率看事情，不要信賴你們自己的能力。在審視你們的生活遠景和現況時，要謹慎和警覺。我與本篤十六世一起，奉勸你們不要「加入命運先知的行列，他們宣布今日教會獻身生活的沒落或是毫無意義，而要穿上耶穌基督和光明的盔甲，一如聖保祿所強調的（參羅十三1-14），保持清醒和警覺」⁴。讓我們信賴主，重新出發。

4 教宗本篤十六世，2013年2月2日，「獻耶穌於聖殿慶日」講道辭。

我們願意向你們年青人說一句話。你們是現代的，因為你們已經積極參與了你們修會的生活，提供一切清新的和你們慷慨的「是」（回應）。同時你們也是未來的，因為你們不久要擔任你們團體的生活、培育、服務及使命的領導角色。這一年，要看到你們主動地與上一代的人對話。你們應以手足之情，因他們的經驗和智慧而富裕。同時，用你們的力量和熱情啟發他們，收復他們原創的理想。這樣，整個團體能一齊找到新的活出福音的方法，更有效地回應見證和宣報的需求。

我也高興知道，在這一年，你們有機會與其他不同修會的年青會士聚會。希望這種聚會，成為促進共融團結、互助合一的定期途徑。

二、獻身生活年的期望

我特別希望從這獻身生活恩寵年得到什麼？

1. 古代的話常能是真的；「那裏有會士，那裏就有喜樂」。我們被召認知並顯示，天主能使我們的心，充滿喜樂。我們不必從別處尋求幸福，我們團體中找到的真正手足之情，能增加我們的喜樂，而我們完全自我奉獻在教會中服務，為家庭、青年、長輩和窮人的服務，都能帶給我們個人一生的成就。

我們中任何人都不該憂鬱、不滿和不樂，因為「一個憂愁的門徒是一個差勁的門徒」。與別人一樣，我們有我們的苦惱，我們心靈的黑夜，我們的失望和疾病，年老時經驗到退化。但在這一切事上，我們應該

可以發現「完美的喜樂」。因為正是這樣，我們可以學習認出基督的面目，祂在一切事上與我們相似，並且高興知道我們漸漸與祂相似，祂為了愛我們，沒有拒絕十字架的痛苦。

在這個崇尚效率、健康和成就，忽視窮人和摒棄「失敗者」的社會，我們可以真正以我們的生活，見證聖經的話：「當我軟弱時，我才是堅強的」（格後十二10）。

我們可以將本篤十六世的話，應用到獻身生活上，我在《福音的喜樂》勸諭中，曾引用過他的話說：「教會成長並非取決於誘人入教，而是靠吸引力」（14號）。獻身生活的繁榮，不是輝煌的聖召計畫的結果，而是因為我們遇到的青年人，覺得我們有吸引力，因為他們看到我們快樂！同樣，獻身生活的使徒工作成果，不是依靠其方法

的效率。它是靠你們生活的打動他們，你們那散發喜樂，和活出福音的美妙，以及充分地跟隨基督。

猶如我在去年聖神降臨節的前夕，向教會各個運動的成員說過的：「基本上，教會的力量是依福音而生活，為我們的信仰作證。教會是地上的鹽，世界的光。她被召在社會中，成為天主國的酵母，她主要以其見證，她手足之愛的見證，以與別人分享和守望相助而臨在」（2013年5月18日）。

2. 我指望你們「喚醒世界」，因為獻身生活的特徵是先知性。我曾對總會長們說過：「徹底的福音生活，不只是為會士的，也要求每個人如此。可是會士們以特殊方式跟隨主，以先知性方式追隨祂。」這是現在優先需要的：「成為先知去作證

耶穌是如何生活在世的…一個會士總不應該放棄做先知」（2013年11月29日）。

先知們自天主接受細察他們生活時代的能力，並詮釋事件：他們就像哨兵，在黑夜中守望，並感受晨曦的到來（參依廿一11-12）。先知認識天主，也認識男人及女人，這些人是先知們的弟兄和姊妹。先知們能辨別和揭發罪惡和不公。因為他們是自由的，他們除了天主外，不欠任何人，他們只對天主關注。先知們趨向於窮人和弱者，因為他們知道天主自己站在他們一邊。

因此我相信，不是活在什麼烏托邦中，你們常會找到製造「其他可選擇的空間」的方法，在其間福音的自我奉獻、手足之誼、接納不同的、彼此相愛，能夠繁盛。隱修院、團體、靈修中心、學校、醫院、家庭居所，這些都是你們的神恩產生的愛德和創

意，要以不斷的創新，繼續讓它們存在。它們應該不斷地成爲，受福音啓發的社會的酵母，一座「山上的城」，它證明耶穌的話的真實和力量。

有時，你們會像厄里亞和約納一樣，感到要逃跑的誘惑，放棄做先知的工作，因爲太苛求，使人厭煩，或似乎是沒有成果的。可是先知們知道他們絕不孤獨。就如天主對耶肋米亞般，鼓勵我們說：「不要怕他們，因為我和你在一起將你脫困」（耶一8）。

3. 男女修會會士，一如其他的獻身生活者，我說過，被稱爲「共融團契的專家」。我希望這「共融的靈修」，如聖若望保祿二世特別強調的，成爲事實，並使你們能在最前線，在新的千年，回應「面對我們的大挑戰」，「使教會成爲共融之家和學

堂」⁵。我深信在這一年，你們會盡一切努力，使你們的會祖所追求的手足之誼的理想，能伸張至各地，一如同心圓一樣。

共融首先是生活在每個修會的各個團體之內。對此目的，我要求你們想想我多次提及的批評、閒話、妒嫉、猜忌、敵對，以及做法，這一切不該在我們的屋內發生。展現在我們前的愛德，幾乎是無盡的，因爲它要求彼此接納和關懷，實踐物質和屬靈事物的共享，手足般的糾正，尊重那些軟弱的……。這是「生活一起的奧祕」，它使我們的生活「如一種神聖的旅程」⁶。我們需要問我們自己，我們對不同文化的人的關係，因爲我們的團體不斷地在國際化。如何讓每一個會士，能自由地表達他或她的想法，接納他或她的特殊天賦，真的完全共同

5 《新的千年來臨之際》牧函（2001年1月6日），43。

6 《福音的喜樂》勸諭（2013年11月24日），87。

負責？

我也希望不同修會的會士之間，發展共融團結。期望這一年為我們是一個機會，勇敢走出我們自己修會的領域，在地方的和全球的層面，對有關培育、福傳及社會活動的計畫，一起工作。這樣可以更有效地做先知的見證。不同神恩和聖召者之間的共融和相遇，能打開希望的路。沒有人可以單獨以他或她的努力，對將來有所貢獻，而是把他或她視為真正共融的一部分，它是對相遇、對話、仔細聆聽和彼此相助一直開放的。這樣的共融，使我們對自我欣賞的毛病，打了預防針。

獻身生活的男女會士，也被召與教會其他一切聖召有真正的相互作用，從與司鐸和平信徒開始，為了「廣傳共融靈修，首先是在他們的內修生活中，然後在教會團

體內，甚至超越其界限」⁷。

4. 我也期待你們如同我向教會的所有成員所要求的：走出你們自己，邁向生活的周遭。「走向全世界」，這是耶穌向祂的門徒們說的最後幾句話，祂繼續向我們說這些話（參谷十六15）。整個世界在等我們：那些失去希望的人、困難中的家庭、被遺棄的兒童、沒有將來的青年人、長者、病人及被棄的人、那些富有世上財物而內心卻窮困的人、為了追求生活的男女、渴求天主的人等。

你們不要封閉自己，不要因瑣碎的小事而消沉，不要為你們自己的問題所綁架。假如你們走出去，幫助別人解決他們的問題，且宣報福音，以上的一切都會解決。你們因

7 若望保祿二世《獻身生活》勸諭（1996年3月25日），51。

為給予生命而得生命，給人希望而有希望，給予愛而獲得愛。

我要求你們具體地歡迎難民，接近窮人，尋找講授要理，宣揚福音和教人如何祈禱的創新方法。為此，我希望結構可以簡化，廣大的修會會院，為了工作而重新整理，使更好的回應目前福傳和慈愛的需求，使徒工作依新的需求而調整。

5. 我希望每一種形式的獻身生活團體詢問，今天天主和大眾要求他們的是甚麼。

隱修院和主要是默觀的團體，可以相聚交換祈禱生活的經驗，設法加深與整個教會的共融，支援受迫害的基督徒，歡迎並幫助那些尋求深切靈修生活的人，或要求道德的或是物質幫助的人。

那些從事慈善工作，教學和文化事業，宣傳福音或是負責特殊牧職的修會也可以這樣做。俗世會，它們的成員存在社會的各個層面，也可以這樣去做。聖神的創新曾產生不同的生活方式和活動，無法容易地將它們歸類，或歸納在現成的樣板中。因此我無法向每一個形式的神恩說話，在這一年，沒有人可以逃避嚴正地審查他或她在教會生活中的臨在，回應不斷要求我們的新需求，以及窮人的哭訴。

唯有以這種對世界需要的關切，以及對聖神鼓吹的順服，此獻身生活年才能成為真正的 **Kairos**，就是富有天主恩寵的時刻、改變的時刻。

三、獻身生活年的願景

1. 以這封信，我們不但願意向度獻身生活的人說話，我也願向平信徒說話，他們與獻身生活者分享同樣的理想、精神和使命。有的修會對此有長久的傳統，其他修會的經驗較近代。的確，在每個修會，每一個使徒生活團和俗世會，都有一個大家庭，一個「神恩性家庭」，它包括認同同一神恩的修會，尤其是感覺被召的平信徒，分享同一的神恩性事實。

我敦促你們身為平信徒，度此獻身生活年，是使你們更意識到是自己領受到恩惠的一項恩寵。要與你們的「大家庭」一起慶祝，使你們今日在社會中成長，並一起回應聖神的激勵。在不同修會獻身的男女會士聚在一起時，你們自己要設法臨在，作為對天主的一種恩惠的表示。這樣，你們會認識其

他神恩家族和其他平信徒團隊的經驗，因而有機會彼此充實和支持。

2. 獻身生活年不但關係獻身生活的人，也關係到整個教會。為此，我請求整個基督子民，不斷意識到我們許多男女修會會士臨在的恩典，他們是繕寫基督宗教歷史的大聖人們的後裔。假如教會沒有聖本篤和聖巴西略，沒有聖奧思定和聖伯爾納，沒有聖方濟和聖道明，聖依納爵樂耀拉和聖大德蘭，聖安琪里加、梅利奇，以及聖萬桑保祿，教會會成什麼樣子。聖人名單可以追述到聖鮑思高和加爾各達的真福德蕾莎。真福保祿六世曾指出：「沒有這些具體的標記，那激勵整個教會的愛德，有逐漸冷卻的危險，福音的救恩警世言詞不再鋒利，信仰的『鹽』會在走向俗化的世界失去味道」（《福音見證》3）。

因此，我邀請每個基督徒團體，體驗這一年，作為感謝天主及記起我們不斷領受恩惠的時刻。由於會祖和會母們的聖德，以及那麼多的獻身生活者表露出他們對神恩的忠誠。我要求你們與他們更接近，與他們一起高興，分擔他們的困苦並盡量幫助他們的職務及工作，因為這些工作也是整個教會的工作。讓他們知道，整個基督子民對他們的愛和熱情。

3. 在此書信中，我毫不遲疑地向其他屬於非天主教傳統教會的獻身生活的人和團體，說一句話。隱修制度是未分開的教會的遺產之一，在東正教會和天主教會中，還是非常活躍。隱修傳統，以及西方教會尚是合一的時代的經驗，啟發了更正教會團體中的類似創意。這些繼續產生更多的友愛團體和服務。

獻身生活及使徒團體部計劃了一些相聚

的辦法，幫助不同教會中的獻身制度和團體的人。我誠懇地鼓勵這種聚會，作為增加彼此了解、尊重和彼此合作的途徑，為使獻身生活的大公運動，能有助於所有教會的合一行程。

4. 我們不能忘記隱修制度的現象，以及在所有偉大宗教中有的宗教團體。有一些實例，有些是經年累月的，包括天主教會和某些大的宗教傳統間的，隱修院之間的對話。我深信獻身生活年，將是一次機會，檢視已有的進度，使獻身生活者覺察這類對話，並且看看可以採取那些步驟，走向更大的彼此了解，在許多服務人類生命的共同領域上，有更大的合作。

一齊行走常帶來充實富裕，並能對人民和文化之間的關係，打開新的途徑，這一點今日看來似乎那麼困難。

5. 最後，我向我的主教弟兄們說幾句話。希望這一年成爲欣然接受獻身生活會的機會，作爲貢獻整個基督奧體的屬靈資源（參《教會憲章》43），而不單是個別修會團體的資源。「獻身生活是給教會的恩典，自教會誕生，在教會中成長，它是完全指向教會的」⁸。爲此，正是因爲是給教會的恩典，它不是孤立的或是邊緣的實體，而深切地是教會的一部分。它是教會心中，其使命的重要因素，表達了基督徒聖召和教會渴望的深刻本性，是與其唯一淨配結合的新娘。如此，「獻身生活絕對屬於教會的生命和聖德」（同上，44）。

爲此，我要求你們，個別教會的牧人們，在你們團體中推動不同神恩，表示特別的關切，無論是歷史久遠的或是近代的。我

8 貝爾高利奧主教於1994年10月13日，在世界主教代表會議中發表之談話。

要求你們支持和鼓勵，幫助辨別，在某些獻身生活者可能遭受到的受苦和軟弱的環境上，表達你們的慈心和愛的陪伴。尤其是教育天主子民有關獻身生活的價值，使其美和聖德，在教會中發光。

我將此獻身生活年託付給瑪利亞，她是聆聽和默觀的童貞，她愛子的第一位門徒。讓我們仰視她，天父至愛的女兒，祂賦予了她一切恩寵，她是所有追隨基督，愛天主並爲近人服務者的無人可超越的模範。

最後，我與你們一起，感謝主慈祥地給了我們此恩典和光明，並以我的宗座降福陪隨你們。

教宗 方濟各

發自梵蒂岡

主曆2014年11月21日聖母獻堂慶日

台灣天主教男女修會會長聯合會 恭譁



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE FRANCIS

TO ALL CONSECRATED PEOPLE

ON THE OCCASION OF THE YEAR OF
CONSECRATED LIFE

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Consecrated Life,

I am writing to you as the Successor of Peter, to whom the Lord entrusted the task of confirming his brothers and sisters in faith (cf. *Lk 22:32*). But I am also writing to you as a brother who, like yourselves, is consecrated to God.

Together let us thank the Father, who called us to follow Jesus by fully embracing the Gospel and serving the Church, and poured into our hearts the Holy Spirit, the source of our joy and our witness to God's love and mercy before the world.

In response to requests from many of you and from the Congregation for Institutes

of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, I decided to proclaim a Year of Consecrated Life on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, which speaks of religious in its sixth chapter, and of the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* on the renewal of religious life. The Year will begin on 30 November 2014, the First Sunday of Advent, and conclude with the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple on 2 February 2016.

After consultation with the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, I have chosen as the aims of this Year the same ones which Saint John Paul II proposed to the whole Church at the beginning of the

third millennium, reiterating, in a certain sense, what he had earlier written in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: “You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things” (No. 110).

I. AIMS OF THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

1. The first of these aims is *to look to the past with gratitude*. All our Institutes are heir to a history rich in charisms. At their origins we see the hand of God who, in his Spirit, calls certain individuals to follow Christ more closely, to translate the Gospel

into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the Church. This initial experience then matured and developed, engaging new members in new geographic and cultural contexts, and giving rise to new ways of exercising the charism, new initiatives and expressions of apostolic charity. Like the seed which becomes a tree, each Institute grew and stretched out its branches.

During this Year, it would be appropriate for each charismatic family to reflect on its origins and history, in order to thank God who grants the Church a variety of gifts which embellish her and equip her for every good work (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12).

Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities. In this way we come to see how the charism has been lived over the years, the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted. We may also encounter cases of inconsistency, the result of human weakness and even at times a neglect of some essential aspects of the charism. Yet

everything proves instructive and, taken as a whole, acts as a summons to conversion. To tell our story is to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts.

In a particular way we give thanks to God for these fifty years which followed the Second Vatican Council. The Council represented a “breath” of the Holy Spirit upon the whole Church. In consequence, consecrated life undertook a fruitful journey of renewal which, for all its lights and shadows, has been a time of grace, marked by the presence of the Spirit.

May this Year of Consecrated Life also be an occasion for confessing humbly, with immense confidence in the God who is Love (cf. 1 *Jn* 4:8), our own weakness

and, in it, to experience the Lord’s merciful love. May this Year likewise be an occasion for bearing vigorous and joyful witness before the world to the holiness and vitality present in so many of those called to follow Jesus in the consecrated life.

2. This Year also calls us *to live the present with passion*. Grateful remembrance of the past leads us, as we listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today, to implement ever more fully the essential aspects of our consecrated life.

From the beginnings of monasticism to the “new communities” of our own time, every form of consecrated life has been born of the Spirit’s call to follow Jesus as the Gospel teaches (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2).

For the various founders and foundresses, the Gospel was the absolute rule, whereas every other rule was meant merely to be an expression of the Gospel and a means of living the Gospel to the full. For them, the ideal was Christ; they sought to be interiorly united to him and thus to be able to say with Saint Paul: “For to me to live is Christ” (*Phil 1:21*). Their vows were intended as a concrete expression of this passionate love.

The question we have to ask ourselves during this Year is if and how we too are open to being challenged by the Gospel; whether the Gospel is truly the “manual” for our daily living and the decisions we are called to make. The Gospel is demanding: it demands to be lived radically and

sincerely. It is not enough to read it (even though the reading and study of Scripture is essential), nor is it enough to meditate on it (which we do joyfully each day). Jesus asks us to practice it, to put his words into effect in our lives.

Once again, we have to ask ourselves: Is Jesus really our first and only love, as we promised he would be when we professed our vows? Only if he is, will we be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person who crosses our path. For we will have learned from Jesus the meaning and practice of love. We will be able to love because we have his own heart.

Our founders and foundresses shared in Jesus’ own compassion when he

saw the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. Like Jesus, who compassionately spoke his gracious word, healed the sick, gave bread to the hungry and offered his own life in sacrifice, so our founders and foundresses sought in different ways to be the service of all those to whom the Spirit sent them. They did so by their prayers of intercession, their preaching of the Gospel, their works of catechesis, education, their service to the poor and the infirm... The creativity of charity is boundless; it is able to find countless new ways of bringing the newness of the Gospel to every culture and every corner of society.

The Year of Consecrated Life challenges us to examine our fidelity to the mission

entrusted to us. Are our ministries, our works and our presence consonant with what the Spirit asked of our founders and foundresses? Are they suitable for carrying out today, in society and the Church, those same ministries and works? Do we have the same passion for our people, are we close to them to the point of sharing in their joys and sorrows, thus truly understanding their needs and helping to respond to them? “The same generosity and self-sacrifice which guided your founders – Saint John Paul II once said – must now inspire you, their spiritual children, to keep alive the charisms which, by the power of the same Spirit who awakened them, are constantly being enriched and adapted, while losing none of their unique character. It is up to you to place those charisms

at the service of the Church and to work for the coming of Christ's Kingdom in its fullness".¹

Recalling our origins sheds light on yet another aspect of consecrated life. Our founders and foundresses were attracted by the unity of the Apostles with Christ and by the fellowship which marked the first community in Jerusalem. In establishing their own communities, each of them sought to replicate those models of evangelical living, to be of one heart and one soul, and to rejoice in the Lord's presence (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 15).

1 Apostolic Letter to the Religious of Latin America on the occasion of the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the New World *Los caminos del Evangelio* (29 June 1990), 26.

Living the present with passion means becoming "experts in communion", "witnesses and architects of the 'plan for unity' which is the crowning point of human history in God's design".² In a polarized society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters.

So, be men and women of communion!

2 SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Religious and Human Promotion* (12 August 1980), 24: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Suppl., 12 November 1980, pp. I-VIII.

Have the courage to be present in the midst of conflict and tension, as a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit who inspires in human hearts a passion for all to be one (cf. *Jn 17:21*). Live the mysticism of encounter, which entails “the ability to hear, to listen to other people; the ability to seek together ways and means”.³ Live in the light of the loving relationship of the three divine Persons (cf. *1 Jn 4:8*), the model for all interpersonal relationships.

3. *To embrace the future with hope* should be the third aim of this Year. We all know the difficulties which the various forms of consecrated life are currently experiencing: decreasing vocations and aging members,

³ *Address to Rectors and Students of the Pontifical Colleges and Residences of Rome* (12 May 2014).

particularly in the Western world; economic problems stemming from the global financial crisis; issues of internationalization and globalization; the threats posed by relativism and a sense of isolation and social irrelevance... But 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*).

This 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.

So do not yield to the temptation to see things in terms of numbers and efficiency, and even less to trust in your own strength. In scanning the horizons of your lives and the present moment, be watchful and alert. Together with Benedict XVI, I urge you not to “join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the Church in our day; rather, clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armour of light – as Saint Paul urged (cf. *Rom*13:11-14)

– keeping awake and watchful”.⁴ Let us constantly set out anew, with trust in the Lord.

I would especially like to say a word to those of you who are young. You are the present, since you are already taking active part in the lives of your Institutes, offering all the freshness and generosity of your “yes”. At the same time you are the future, for soon you will be called to take on roles of leadership in the life, formation, service and mission of your communities. This Year should see you actively engaged in dialogue with the previous generation. In fraternal communion you will be enriched by their experiences and wisdom, while

4 POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Homily for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord* (2 February 2013).

at the same time inspiring them, by your own energy and enthusiasm, to recapture their original idealism. In this way the entire community can join in finding new ways of living the Gospel and responding more effectively to the need for witness and proclamation.

I am also happy to know that you will have the opportunity during this Year to meet with other young religious from different Institutes. May such encounters become a regular means of fostering communion, mutual support, and unity.

II. EXPECTATIONS FOR THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

What in particular do I expect from this Year of grace for consecrated life?

1. That the old saying will always be true: “Where there are religious, there is joy”. We are called to know and show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness; that we need not seek our happiness elsewhere; that the authentic fraternity found in our communities increases our joy; and that our total self-giving in service to the Church, to families and young people, to the elderly and the poor, brings us life-long personal fulfilment.

None of us should be dour, discontented

and dissatisfied, for “a gloomy disciple is a disciple of gloom”. Like everyone else, we have our troubles, our dark nights of the soul, our disappointments and infirmities, our experience of slowing down as we grow older. But in all these things we should be able to discover “perfect joy”. For it is here that we learn to recognize the face of Christ, who became like us in all things, and to rejoice in the knowledge that we are being conformed to him who, out of love of us, did not refuse the sufferings of the cross.

In a society which exalts the cult of efficiency, fitness and success, one which ignores the poor and dismisses “losers”, we can witness by our lives to the truth of the words of Scripture: “When I am weak,

then I am strong” (2 *Cor* 12:10).

We can apply to the consecrated life the words of Benedict XVI which I cited in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction” (No. 14). The consecrated life will not flourish as a result of brilliant vocation programs, but because the young people we meet find us attractive, because they see us as men and women who are happy! Similarly, the apostolic effectiveness of consecrated life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods. It depends on the eloquence of your lives, lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full.

As I said to the members of ecclesial movements on the Vigil of Pentecost last year: “Fundamentally, the strength of the Church is living by the Gospel and bearing witness to our faith. The Church is the salt of the earth; she is the light of the world. She is called to make present in society the leaven of the Kingdom of God and she does this primarily by her witness, her witness of brotherly love, of solidarity and of sharing with others” (18 May 2013).

2. I am counting on you “to wake up the world”, since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the Superiors General: “Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic

way.” This is the priority that is needed right now: “to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth... a religious must never abandon prophecy” (29 November 2013).

Prophets receive from God the ability to scrutinize the times in which they live and to interpret events: they are like sentinels who keep watch in the night and sense the coming of the dawn (cf. *Is* 21:11-12). Prophets know God and they know the men and women who are their brothers and sisters. They are able to discern and denounce the evil of sin and injustice. Because they are free, they are beholden to no one but God, and they have no interest other than God. Prophets tend to be on the side of the poor and the

powerless, for they know that God himself is on their side.

So I trust that, rather than living in some utopia, you will find ways to create “alternate spaces”, where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive. Monasteries, communities, centres of spirituality, schools, hospitals, family shelters – all these are places which the charity and creativity born of your charisms have brought into being, and with constant creativity must continue to bring into being. They should increasingly be the leaven for a society inspired by the Gospel, a “city on a hill”, which testifies to the truth and the power of Jesus’ words.

At times, like Elijah and Jonah, you may feel the temptation to flee, to abandon the task of being a prophet because it is too demanding, wearisome or apparently fruitless. But prophets know that they are never alone. As he did with Jeremiah, so God encourages us: “Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you” (*Jer* 1:8).

3. Men and women religious, like all other consecrated persons, have been called, as I mentioned, “experts in communion”. So I am hoping that the “spirituality of communion”, so emphasized by Saint John Paul II, will become a reality and that you will be in the forefront of responding to “the great challenge facing us” in this new millennium: “to make the Church the home

and the school of communion.”⁵ I am sure that in this Year you will make every effort to make the ideal of fraternity pursued by your founders and foundresses expand everywhere, like concentric circles.

Communion is lived first and foremost within the respective communities of each Institute. To this end, I would ask you to think about my frequent comments about criticism, gossip, envy, jealousy, hostility as ways of acting which have no place in our houses. This being the case, the path of charity open before us is almost infinite, since it entails mutual acceptance and concern, practicing a communion of goods both material and spiritual, fraternal

⁵ Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 43.

correction and respect for those who are weak ... it is the “mystique of living together” which makes our life “a sacred pilgrimage”.⁶ We need to ask ourselves about the way we relate to persons from different cultures, as our communities become increasingly international. How can we enable each member to say freely what he or she thinks, to be accepted with his or her particular gifts, and to become fully co-responsible?

I also hope for a growth in communion between the members of different Institutes. Might this Year be an occasion for us to step out more courageously from the confines of our respective Institutes and

⁶ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 87

to work together, at the local and global levels, on projects involving formation, evangelization, and social action? This would make for a more effective prophetic witness. Communion and the encounter between different charisms and vocations can open up a path of hope. No one contributes to the future in isolation, by his or her efforts alone, but by seeing himself or herself as part of a true communion which is constantly open to encounter, dialogue, attentive listening and mutual assistance. Such a communion inoculates us from the disease of self-absorption.

Consecrated men and women are also called to true synergy with all other vocations in the Church, beginning with priests and the lay faithful, in order to

“spread the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries”.⁷

4. I also expect from you what I have asked all the members of the Church: to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries. “Go into all the world”; these were the last words which Jesus spoke to his followers and which he continues to address to us (cf. *Mk* 16:15). A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world’s goods but impoverished

7 JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 51.

within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine...

Don't be closed in on yourselves, don't be stifled by petty squabbles, don't remain a hostage to your own problems. These will be resolved if you go forth and help others to resolve their own problems, and proclaim the Good News. You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love.

I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray. Consequently, I would hope that structures can be streamlined, large religious houses repurposed for works

which better respond to the present demands of evangelization and charity, and apostolates adjusted to new needs.

5. I expect that each form of consecrated life will question what it is that God and people today are asking of them.

Monasteries and groups which are primarily contemplative could meet or otherwise engage in an exchange of experiences on the life of prayer, on ways of deepening communion with the entire Church, on supporting persecuted Christians, and welcoming and assisting those seeking a deeper spiritual life or requiring moral or material support.

The same can be done by Institutes

dedicated to works of charity, teaching and cultural advancement, to preaching the Gospel or to carrying out specific pastoral ministries. It could also be done by Secular Institutes, whose members are found at almost every level of society. The creativity of the Spirit has generated ways of life and activities so diverse that they cannot be easily categorized or fit into ready-made templates. So I cannot address each and every charismatic configuration. Yet during this Year no one can feel excused from seriously examining his or her presence in the Church's life and from responding to the new demands constantly being made on us, to the cry of the poor.

Only by such concern for the needs of the world, and by docility to the promptings of

the Spirit, will this Year of Consecrated Life become an authentic *kairos*, a time rich in God's grace, a time of transformation.

III. THE HORIZONS OF THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

1. In this letter, I wish to speak not only to consecrated persons, but also to *the laity, who share with them the same ideals, spirit and mission*. Some Religious Institutes have a long tradition in this regard, while the experience of others is more recent. Indeed, around each religious family, every Society of Apostolic Life and every Secular Institute, there is a larger family, a "charismatic family", which includes a number of Institutes which identify with the same charism, and especially lay faithful

who feel called, precisely as lay persons, to share in the same charismatic reality.

I urge you, as laity, to live this Year for Consecrated Life as a grace which can make you more aware of the gift you yourselves have received. Celebrate it with your entire “family”, so that you can grow and respond together to the promptings of the Spirit in society today. On some occasions when consecrated men and women from different Institutes come together, arrange to be present yourselves so as to give expression to the one gift of God. In this way you will come to know the experiences of other charismatic families and other lay groups, and thus have an opportunity for mutual enrichment and support.

2. The Year for Consecrated Life concerns not only consecrated persons, but the entire Church. Consequently, I ask the *whole Christian people* to be increasingly aware of the gift which is the presence of our many consecrated men and women, heirs of the great saints who have written the history of Christianity. What would the Church be without Saint Benedict and Saint Basil, without Saint Augustine and Saint Bernard, without Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Angelica Merici and Saint Vincent de Paul. The list could go on and on, up to Saint John Bosco and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. As Blessed Paul VI pointed out: “Without this concrete sign there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church

would grow cold, that the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted, and that the “salt” of faith would lose its savour in a world undergoing secularization” (*Evangelica Testificatio*, 3).

So I invite every Christian community to experience this Year above all as a moment of thanksgiving to the Lord and grateful remembrance for all the gifts we continue to receive, thanks to the sanctity of founders and foundresses, and from the fidelity to their charism shown by so many consecrated men and women. I ask all of you to draw close to these men and women, to rejoice with them, to share their difficulties and to assist them, to whatever degree possible, in their ministries and works, for the latter are, in the end, those

of the entire Church. Let them know the affection and the warmth which the entire Christian people feels for them.

I thank the Lord that the Year of Consecrated Life coincides with the Synod on the Family. Family life and consecrated life are both vocations which bring enrichment and blessings for all. They are spaces where human growth comes about through relationships, and they are also places of evangelization. Each can help the other.

3. In this letter I do not hesitate to address a word to the consecrated men and women and to the members of fraternities and communities who belong to Churches of traditions other than the Catholic tradition.

Monasticism is part of the heritage of the undivided Church, and is still very much alive in both the Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church. The monastic tradition, and other later experiences from the time when the Church in the West was still united, have inspired analogous initiatives in the Ecclesial Communities of the reformed tradition. These have continued to give birth to further expressions of fraternal community and service.

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life has planned a number of initiatives to facilitate encounters between members of different expressions of consecrated and fraternal life in the various Churches. I warmly encourage such

meetings as a means of increasing mutual understanding, respect and reciprocal cooperation, so that the ecumenism of the consecrated life can prove helpful for the greater journey towards the unity of all the Churches.

4. Nor can we forget that the phenomenon of monasticism and of other expressions of religious fraternity is present in all the great religions. There are instances, some long-standing, of inter-monastic dialogue involving the Catholic Church and certain of the great religious traditions. I trust that the Year of Consecrated Life will be an opportunity to review the progress made, to make consecrated persons aware of this dialogue, and to consider what further steps can be taken towards greater mutual

understanding and greater cooperation in the many common areas of service to human life.

Journeying together always brings enrichment, and can open new paths to relationships between peoples and cultures, which nowadays appear so difficult.

5. Finally, in a special way, I address my brother bishops. May this Year be an opportunity to accept institutes of consecrated life, readily and joyfully, as a spiritual capital which contributes to the good of the whole body of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 43), and not simply that of the individual religious families. “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”.⁸ For this reason, precisely as a gift to the Church, it is not an isolated or marginal reality, but deeply a part of her. It is at the heart of the Church, a decisive element of her mission, inasmuch as it expresses the deepest nature of the Christian vocation and the yearning of the Church as the Bride for union with her sole Spouse. Thus, “it belongs... absolutely to the life and holiness” of the Church (*ibid.*, 44).

In the light of this, I ask you, the Pastors of the particular Churches, to show special concern for promoting within

8 BISHOP J.M. BERGOGLIO, *Intervention at the Synod on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World*, XVI General Congregation, 13 October 1994.

your communities the different charisms, whether long-standing or recent. I ask you to do this by your support and encouragement, your assistance in discernment, and your tender and loving closeness to those situations of suffering and weakness in which some consecrated men or women may find themselves. Above all, do this by instructing the People of God in the value of consecrated life, so that its beauty and holiness may shine forth in the Church.

I entrust this Year of Consecrated Life to Mary, the Virgin of listening and contemplation, the first disciple of her beloved Son. Let us look to her, the highly-beloved daughter of the Father, endowed with every gift of grace, as the unsurpassed

model for all those who follow Christ in love of God and service to their neighbour.

Lastly, I join all of you in gratitude for the gifts of grace and light with which the Lord graciously wills to enrich us, and I accompany you with my Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 21 November 2014,
Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed
Virgin Mary.*

Francis