

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 282

the family in Malawi



Malawi is a small country, bordering Zambia on the west, with Mozambique on the south east and with Tanzania on the north east. It covers an area of 118, 484 sq km, with a population of about 16.7 million of whom 85% are Christians. Life expectancy is 58 years for men and 62 years for women. It is a land-locked country that relies heavily on agriculture for its financial survival.

It is well known for its beautiful natural resources and hospitable people. It is one of those countries in the SADC [South African Development Community] region that has enjoyed total peace from the time of its independence in 1964 and it is called "the warm heart of Africa."

Malawians draw their understanding of family life from both traditional customs and from Church teachings. Traditionally Malawians understand a family not only as a unit comprising a husband, wife and children, but also their extended relations – uncles, cousins, nephews, aunties, nieces, including the in-laws. In which case the celebration of marriage is not just about the bride and groom but also the involvement of their respective families. One can accurately say it is a marriage of two families coming together. This kind of understanding has a powerful impact on the way Malawians handle family issues.

There is a proverb that is used to emphasize the communal aspect of marriage and family: "*mwana wa mzako ndi wako yemwe*", which means that the "*the child of one family belongs to the other family as well*". The morality behind this proverb is an understanding that the joys and sorrows, successes and failures, all the struggles in a family's life are not just those of an individual family, but of the whole community.

Based on this principle networks of family support groups have arisen which people relate to and which provide reasons for them to persevere in their commitment to each other. On one hand if Malawians can be praised for having a strong family life it is against this traditional background. On the other hand it has to be recognised that Christianity has provided additional values to the traditional understanding of family life. Values such as "till death do us part" – no divorce. It would be remiss to exclude the hard work done by

the pastors of local Christian churches in perfecting and orientating family morality especially at a time when family life values are under threat with the rise of *homosexual practices, single motherhood, child-headed families*, individualism, the spirit of giving up and a feeling of isolation from the community.

Here the praise of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, in his 06 Nov address to the Malawian Bishops finds its root - in the ground work done by the Church in establishing a well-structured and properly oriented **family apostolate**:

“I wish ... to express my appreciation for the admirable spirit of the Malawian people who, though faced with many serious obstacles in terms of development, economic progress and standards of living, remain strong in their commitment to family life. It is in the family, with its unique capacity to form each member, particularly the young, into persons of love, sacrifice, commitment and fidelity that the Church and society in Malawi will find the resources necessary to renew and build up a culture of solidarity.”

One cannot but notice the huge impact of the family apostolate right from the individual village level with its counsellors (*anamkungwi – alangezi*), through to the parish level with its small Christian communities (*miphakati*) and with its marriage/family instructions (*maphunziro azabanja*) all the way to the diocesan



and national level with marriage encounter groups and Christian family counselling centres. In all these endeavours the Church, under the wise and inspired guidance of the bishops and clergy, strives to demonstrate that ideal Christian marriages are both possible and practical.

Because of this one can be assured of baptisms into the future and growth in the number of Christians, and that the Holy Spirit will plant into the hearts of young men and women family-supported vocations to religious life and holy orders. With this, the future of the Church in Malawi is guaranteed!

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item 283

***“I want to say one word to you and this word is joy.
Wherever consecrated people are, there is always joy!”***
Pope Francis

Pope Francis has announced 2015 as the **Year of Consecrated Life**, exhorting each one of us to dedicate ourselves to the promotion of consecrated life, and to "wake up the world" through our testimony.



reflect on some extracts from the Congregation's writings so that we commence well-informed and with definite objectives.

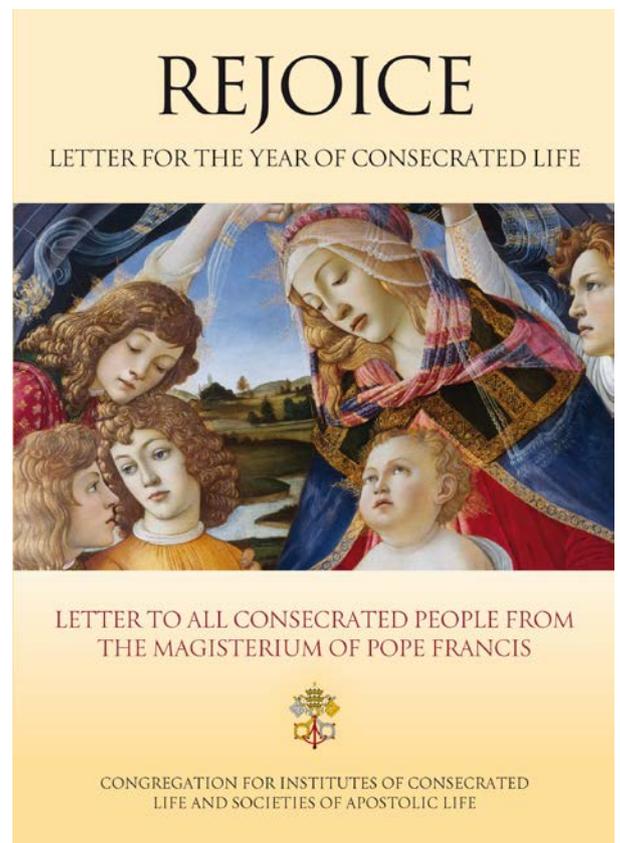
We are invited to reflect on the graced time in which we live, the space we have for personal, communal and institutional reflection. We should journey towards 2015 with the desire and intention of making courageous evangelical decisions leading to revitalization and joy. We are called to witness that joy which arises from the certainty of knowing that we are loved and from the confidence that we are saved. Consecrated life is a call to incarnate the Good News, to *follow Christ*, the crucified and risen one, to take on Jesus' way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to our brothers and sisters.

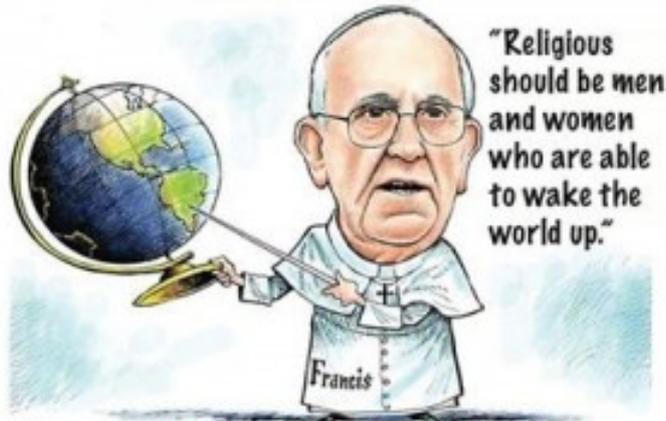
In practical terms, it is a call to take up Jesus way of life, to adopt his interior attitude, to allow oneself to be invaded by his Spirit, to absorb his surprising logic and his scale of values, to share in his risks and his hopes, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily generosity, and finally his complete self-giving. A relationship with the Lord is not static, nor is it focussed on self, because when we put Christ at the centre of our life, we have to move ourselves from the centre!

On one hand, there are many difficulties faced by consecrated people today, especially if we take into account the different cultural contexts in which they live. The decrease in members in many institutes and their ageing, evident in some parts of the world, raises the question of whether consecrated life is still a visible witness, capable of attracting young people. Given the ongoing religious crisis which heavily confronts parts of our society consecrated persons, particularly today, are obliged to look for new forms of presence and to raise not a few questions regarding the meaning of their identity and future. The influence of modernization and secularism run the risk of obscuring Gospel originality and of weakening spiritual motivations. The prevalence of personal projects over community endeavours can deeply corrode the communion of brotherly and sisterly love.

On the other hand, the questioning and the difficulties which religious life is experiencing today can give rise to a new *kairos*, a time of grace. For instance, if in some places consecrated people become *little flocks* because of a decrease in numbers, this can be seen as a providential sign inviting them to recover their very essential tasks of being leaven, sign and prophecy. The

The Holy Father, in nominating the Rector General of our Society as one of the members of the Congregation charged with oversight of consecrated life in the church, has acknowledged the contribution we as Pallottines make to its mission and, at the same time, has placed an even greater challenge before us to bear witness to the joy that Jesus has endowed us with through our consecration. As we are at the threshold of this year, it is an opportune time to





**The Year of Consecrated Life
November 2014-November 2015**

greater the mass of dough to be raised, the greater the quality of evangelical leaven called for, and the more exquisite the witness of life and charismatic service required of those consecrated. In fact their mission is to make Christ's way of life shine through the witness of the evangelical counsels. Clearly these challenges can constitute a powerful call to deepen the living of consecrated life itself, whose witness is needed today more than ever.

In conclusion it may be fitting to recall the ability of our holy founder, St Vincent Pallotti, to respond to the challenges and difficulties of his times with a genuine charismatic creativity and draw inspiration for our lives to respond to the need of our times as people consecrated.

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