

World Day of Consecrated Life 2 February 2026

Pastoral Letter

It is only a few weeks since the Holy Doors on the four major basilicas in Rome were closed to mark the end of the year of Hope. Hope is a gift of the Holy Spirit which sustains us in the present “as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our saviour, Jesus Christ”. On this feast of the Presentation of the child Jesus in Temple in Jerusalem, we remember Simeon who had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Lord’s messiah, and Anna, a widow who had spent her life in prayer and fasting, and who after seeing Jesus in Simeon’s arms, talked about the child to those who had been expectantly waiting for God to rescue Jerusalem. Both Anna and Simeon are given to us by the Church on this day as models of consecrated life. Both lived long lives of prayer and fidelity to God allowing the Holy Spirit to work within them.

Prayer, fidelity to God, and living in expectation of Jesus coming again at the end of time are characteristics of the life lived by all Christians not just those who have consecrated their lives in a special way. But sisters, nuns, monks, friars and other forms of consecrated life live their lives as sign to others of the hope that is within them (cf 1Peter 3:15) or as living signs of what awaits us in God’s kingdom.

In our countries we may see religious life as thing of the past; just a decreasing number of old people living out their days until they die, having seen their work in schools, parishes, childcare, care homes and hospitals handed over to lay people and government institutions. They have

undoubtedly done transformational work in changing our society, but what of the future?

We must always remember that the future is God's future not ours. We cannot know what God has in store for consecrated life in the church, but we do know that witnesses to God's kingdom are needed more than ever. New communities, both religious and lay, are emerging to meet the needs of our new society, a society which has a spiritual depth but dislikes formality and long-term commitment. Some of the older orders and congregations have stood the test of time and despite being smaller in number have many applicants and novices and are a vibrant source of new life in the church of today. There is no doubt to my mind that the Holy Spirit is moving in the hearts of many women and men to offer their lives to God in prayer and service. We should not be discouraged because things are changing in ways that we do not always understand but look for new shoots which are emerging.

Simeon and Anna remind those who have consecrated their lives to God that after long and devout lives there is always hope. And it is the presence of consecrated people that gives hope to the world, especially the hope that is Jesus Christ.

+Malcolm McMahon OP
Archbishop emeritus of Liverpool