

Introduction to the *Ordo Virginum*

The ancient *Ordo virginum* (Order of Virgins) is a distinct group of women in the Catholic Church (an *ordo*, such as *ordo episcoporum*) comprising virgins who have received from their bishop the consecration of virgins in the approved liturgical rite in the Roman Pontifical; these women are called sacred virgins (*virgines sacræ; velatas*) or consecrated virgins. The *Ordo virginum* is explicitly mentioned in the 1983 Code of Canon Law (can. 604) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (922-924).

During consecration, the virgin is elevated to the dignity of “bride of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God” and is constituted “a sacred person (*sacrata*), a surpassing sign of the Church’s love for Christ, and an eschatological image of the world to come and the glory of the heavenly Bride of Christ” (Roman Pontifical, *Prænotanda* 1). So she enters into a public state of life in the Church and is a public representative of the Church as the Church’s image, Bride of Christ; and as bride of Christ the virgin is also mother of souls.

The bishop’s consecratory prayer unites the virgin and Christ in a marital bond, and in that bond lies the source of her vocational rights and obligations, including the duties of maintaining virginity because of her *marriage* with Christ, significant prayer time, penance, good works, constant deepening of virtue, continual formation, etc.

So the consecrated virgin is first and foremost a bride, and since vocation in the *Ordo virginum* is a marriage vocation, there is no institutional rule, mother superior, nor constitution to live by.

For her upkeep, the virgin can engage in any appropriate employment not inconsistent with the life of a consecrated virgin.

At present there are four *velatas* in Christchurch diocese – Monica Lee and Tema Colati (consecrated in 2011 and 2023, respectively, in this diocese), Bernadette Chen (consecrated in Auckland diocese in 1998), and Em-Em Talaboc (consecrated in Cebu diocese in the Philippines, 2021).

For more information on the *Ordo virginum*, see www.ordovirginum.wordpress.com.

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