

## **MHJ and Consecrated Life**

### *Jesus Before Our Eyes*

When Vincent de Paul founded the Daughters of Charity he did so because there was a pressing need for sisters to come out from behind the walls of their cloisters in order to serve the poor in very practical and tangible ways. Until that time religious had remained within Papal enclosures, giving themselves to lives of contemplation, prayer, and mendicancy. Vincent's vision, his foundation, was a response to an actual and urgent need of his time. The Daughters represented a reform, a renewal of religious life, inspired by necessity, motivated by charity, driven by mission. Of his new congregation, his innovative society, he said, "They shall keep in mind that they are not a religious order since that state is not compatible with the duties of their vocation. Nevertheless, because they are more exposed to the world than religious bound to the cloister they shall have - for monastery, only the houses of the sick; for cell, a rented room; for chapel, the parish church; for cloister, the streets of the city; for enclosure, obedience; for grill, the fear of God; for veil, holy modesty."

This is the model for the Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus. Inspired and influenced by men and women of the French school of spirituality, we are designed as a contemporary apostolic society, born of necessity, motivated by charity, committed to our mission of incarnational evangelism. We are similar to religious orders in many respects, but dissimilar in others. While also professing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, obedience, (and fidelity), we are distinct from religious institutes in that we do not require our vowed sisters to reside in a community house (convent) with other members of the congregation. Further, and in keeping with the statutes governing Societies of Apostolic Life, our sisters are not obliged by canon law, as are religious, to relinquish all personal possessions and properties, a system in which religious congregations assume total responsibility for the support of their members. We in contrast, both for the sake of our mission, and in response to the unique situations of women with 'second vocations,' approach the relationship between the Society and our members differently. While steadfastly preserving the spirit of our vow of poverty, we nonetheless anticipate that some of our members will, primarily for the sake of their children, retain ownership of their own homes, will most likely live independently (though we encourage communal living), and most, though not all, will maintain a share of responsibility for their own welfare. Finally, after the pattern of the Daughters of Charity, we profess simple rather than solemn vows, and do so for renewable periods of time.

The Holy Spirit has begun a restoration of and renewal in religious life. And, as is so often the case with the Spirit's revitalizing activity in the Church, this renewal comes to us with a few surprises - one of the biggest of which is that the overwhelming majority of women who are currently responding to a vocation to religious life are doing so having fulfilled their original vocation to marriage. The Spirit, it seems, is gifting the Church with 'second vocations.' The response of MHJ to this work of the Spirit is to welcome these vocations with open arms and to design a community which can both remain faithful the spirit of religious life, while at the same time honoring the unique needs of widows and mature women desiring to answer God's call to consecrated life.