

*January 19, 2015*



**CONGREGATIO**

**PRO INSTITUTIS VITAE CONSECRATAE**

**ET SOCIETATIBUS VITAE APOSTOLICAE**

To the Presidents of the Conferences of Major Superiors

of Religious Institutes and of the Conferences of Secular Institutes

To the Presidents of the National Bishops' Conferences

Dear Presidents and dear Pastors,

As you well know, on February 8, we will be celebrating the first International Day of Prayer and Reflection against Human Slavery. The day was purposely chosen because it is the feast day of St Josephine Bakhita, a Sudanese slave, who, once she was freed, became a Canossian nun; this seems to underline the prophetic mandate that consecrated persons have received "to set free the oppressed".

Significantly, the Day falls during the Year dedicated to Consecrated Life; it highlights one of the paths that invites consecrated persons to address the most urgent problems of our time: a path that has been dubbed "the Church going forth"; this augurs pathways of evangelical significance opened up as a result of cooperation between Apostolic Institutes, Societies of Apostolic Life, Monastic Life, Secular Institutes, Ordo Virginum and New Institutes. As Pope Francis amply writes in his message for the 48th World Peace Day, "*No longer slaves, but brothers and sisters*", the sad phenomenon of slavery does not refer solely to women forced into prostitution, but also to the trafficking of children, to the trafficking of persons destined to forced labor or begging, and to the trafficking of organs, among others: all these constitute what has been termed as the XXI century slavery. Also, this phenomenon does not concern certain geographical areas only: it is a global reality that involves the Countries of origin of the victims of slavery, those covered in transit and the final destinations of so many children, women and men.

The vastness and complexity of the phenomenon is such that it calls for the prophetic witnessing by consecrated persons by joining the struggle in favor of the rights and dignity of these persons. This witnessing may be expressed through various initiatives that all consecrated men and women can undertake; such initiatives will be beneficial, first of all, to those, who, in their life of self-giving to the Lord, opt to serve these suffering brothers and sisters. They can get involved, according to their charism and form of life, in the street committees, in the shelter communities, in the professional training, in legal assistance, in collaborating with the Embassies, in education and awareness programs, in prayer and in all those other forms that the fantasy of charity might suggest.

Through the Conferences, we ask all of you, religious, members of Societies of Apostolic Life, Secular Institutes and New Institutes, as well as those belonging to the Ordo Virginum and Monastic Life, to come together and plan this itinerary. We are convinced that, in every Country, each one of you may contribute to extent initiatives, or to create new ones, aimed at generating

awareness and actions that involve the human family, governments, society, the Church, schools, the media, Institutes of Consecrated Life and other ecclesial institutions; their concerted effort is meant to promote a change in mentality on the social and cultural levels so that the dignity of the human person is ever more safeguarded.

Moreover, it would be fantastic if the Bishops' Conferences were directly involved in this effort; this means that the parishes and the ecclesial institutions may be roped in this awareness exercise, Thus, the prophetic witnessing of consecrated persons may become a shared responsibility in the universal mission entrusted to that section of the people of God in that specific Country.

Please accept these words as an invitation. To all those who adhere to this initiative, I gladly impart my benediction.

From Vatican City, January 12, 2015

José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M.  
Archbishop Secretary CIVCSVA

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