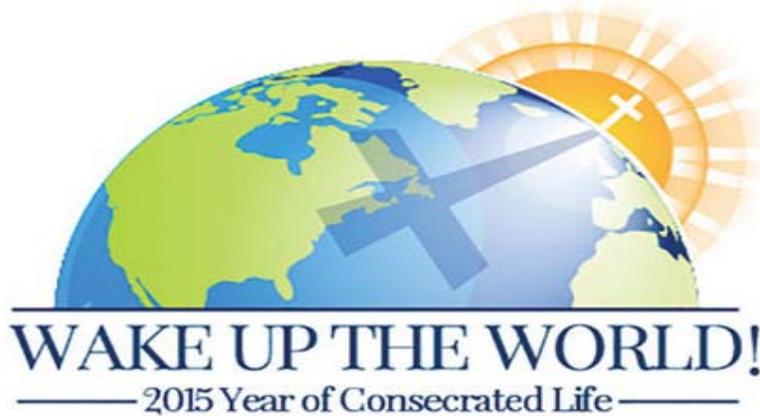


# Living a Consecrated Life

(An Interview with Fr. James Keenan)



Pope Francis started a project called “**2015 Project Hope**”. The purpose of this project is to help people understand the meaning of consecrated life, learn more about what it involves, and help both men and women decide if they want to join this dedication to God.

One way to learn is to talk directly to people who have consecrated their life to God. I interviewed Fr. James Keenan, a Jesuit priest. He is an older priest, so he was able to share his experiences over the years. Before I start telling the story of Fr. Keenan, I will talk about what is consecrated life, about who consecrates their life to God, and how they live.

Consecrated life is a way of Christian life when a person receives a special gift from God to follow His love and have a special relationship with him. With this way of life, a person is asked to take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. A person is asked to leave behind some worldly things and be special servants of God. The Code of Canon Law defines consecrated life as "a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all". They dedicate their lives to God to help us to live our lives according to God's plan for us.

Consecrated life is a strong desire to follow a certain path or career, a vocation. Some men and women choose to consecrate their lives to God so they can have a closer relationship with Him. People in consecrated life usually join a religious order. Some examples are priests, deacons, brothers, monks, sister, and nuns. Sometimes they live the life of a hermit, but usually they live in a community and work together to teach in schools, help the sick and poor, or say Mass and spread God's word.

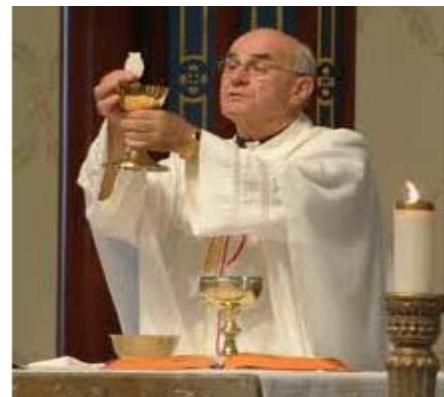
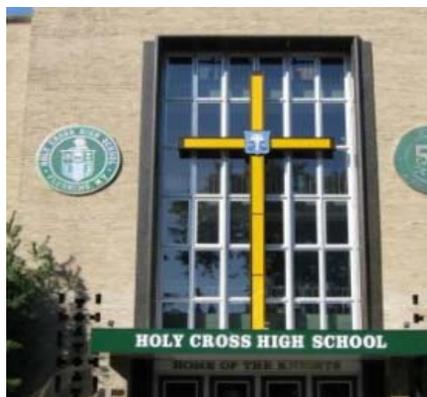
Most religious men and women take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. They do this to live more simply and not be attached to the material things which create stress, greed, and jealousy. In this way, they can more easily give themselves to God and depend more on Him for their needs.

Poverty does not mean you live a life where you don't eat a lot or live like a homeless person. It means that you are not concerned with material, worldly goods. You learn to share things with others.

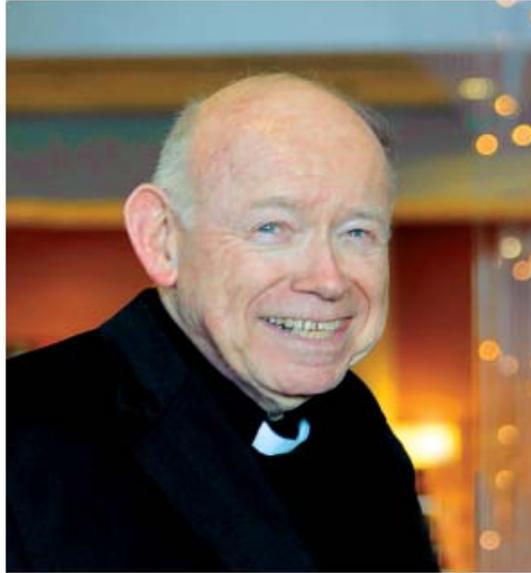
Chastity means you give yourself completely to God. This means your whole mind, body, and soul. This gives you the ability to love and serve God without things like marriage or a family taking up your time. You have more time to serve and help others.

Obedience means you give up your own will and instead you listen and respond to God's will. You obey God and your religious superiors, and follow God's will. This means you give your time and special gifts to God's family. You help people in God's community.

Here are a few pictures of people consecrated to God



# Interview with Fr. James Keenan (Jesuit Priest)



Fr. Keenan is a very special person in my life. He taught my dad at Xavier High School in New York City and has always remained close to my dad and my family. He was one of the 3 priests from Xavier who said the Mass when my parents were married. He gave Last Rites to each of my dad's parents, and he was at two very special occasions in my life, my communion and my confirmation. We still are very close to him. My interview with Fr. Keenan was based on the questions recommended by Project Hope.

**1. *Where were you born and where did you grow up?***

I was born in the Jackson Heights area of Queens, New York. I lived in Jackson Heights when I went to elementary school and high school.

**2. *What did you want to grow up to do when you were young?***

When I was young I always wanted to teach. I love being able to help someone and teaching was a great profession to do that. I enjoyed school and always looked up to my teachers. They helped me to expand my mind and taught me I can do things even when I thought I couldn't.

**3. *When did you first think about becoming a brother or priest?***

I was an altar boy in my later years in elementary school and also when I was in high school. This introduced me to the idea of priests. I watched what they did during Mass and outside of the Church. They helped the sick, gave Last Rites to the dying, they performed weddings, and said Mass.

**4. *Why did you decide to dedicate your life to God?***

I decided to dedicate my life to God so that I could help people through education. The more educated people are the better chance they have to make a good life for themselves. You can teach more than History or English or Math. You can teach about life and lessons learned in life. You can teach by your example, your words and your actions. I loved when I saw the look of happiness on a student's face after he tried hard and did well.

**5. *Did you have doubts and questions?***

When I was in seminary school it seemed so long. I was questioning if I made the right decision.

**6. *How did you resolve your doubts?***

I talked to my family members and my friends. They encouraged me to keep going and to work hard because the reward was wonderful.

**7. *What were the happiest moments in your life?***

Some of the happiest moments in my life are entering the Jesuit novitiate; pronouncing first vows; ordination; and final vows.

**8. *What was the saddest moment in your life?***

The saddest moment in my life so far is when I was not able to help some people when they had a problem, facing difficulties in life, etc. I always wished I could wipe away their problems.



**9. *What are you proudest of?***

I am proudest when I am helping someone to succeed or to overcome a difficulty. It gives me a great feeling of accomplishment to know I may have helped change someone's life in a positive way.

**10. *What is the most common question people ask about consecrated life?***

Probably the most common question people ask me is why I chose to be a Jesuit. They want to know what made me choose this order of religious life.

**11. *Has living a consecrated life been different than you imagined? How so?***

Yes. I had not given much thought to possible assignments of where I would be placed. It was not easy to leave a place, especially the people you have worked with and your family. Sometimes I was very far from home and missed everyone.

**12. *What are your future hopes for consecrated life?***

My future hope is that men & women will give serious consideration to the possibility of being open to a religious vocation. This is a great way to get closer to God.

**13. *What are your future hopes for the Church?***

My future hopes for the Church is that it be open to change and open to the needs of the poor.

**14. *What is your understanding of the mission of the Church?***

I believe the mission is to make Christ's message "real" to our world and its people.

**15. *How are the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience helping in the mission of the Church?***

The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience allow an individual to be free to serve people through different ministries. You do not spend time worrying about material things; you spend more time helping others.

**16. *If you could do it over, would you still become a priest? Why or why not?***

If I had to do it over again I would definitely still become a priest. This allows me to be able to help people through different ministries.

**17. *Did anyone influence you to become a priest? If so, who and why did they want you to dedicate your life to God?***

I had many people influence and encourage me to become a priest. My parents, family members, teachers, parish priests, friends, and fellow classmates each have an impact on my decision. I listened to their ideas and reasoning about becoming a priest.

**18. *How are you living the mission of the Church?***

I am living the mission of the Church by being available to respond to assignments, requests, invitation and in doing these things I spread the word of God. I share in people's happiness and try to meet their needs whether it is a sounding board or someone to pray with them.



**19. *What words of advice would you give to someone who was considering being a priest or brother?***

My best advice would be to be open, be willing to talk with someone regarding a religious vocation, and to make time to reflect, to read, and to pray.

## **Testimonial to Fr. Keenan**

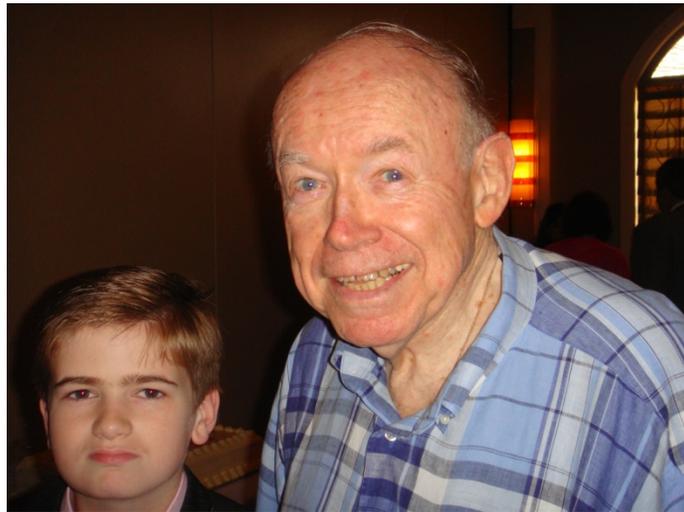
A funny thing happened after I interviewed Fr. Keenan. My mom and I were in Dunkin Donuts. We were waiting on line when my mom started to talk to the man (Mr. M.) in front of her. He had on a Fordham sweatshirt and my mom said told him that my dad went to Fordham also. The man told my mom that he went to high school at Xavier. My mom said it was such a coincidence since my dad also went to Xavier. Since the man and my dad were only 5 years apart when they graduated, my mom figured he might know some of the priests she knew. She mentioned Fr. Keenan and the name brought a big smile to his face. He then told my mom and me the story of how Fr. Keenan saved his life.

During his freshman year, the man's mom became very ill and was very sick for a long time. The man could not concentrate at school. He began to fail. Fr. Keenan, who was headmaster of Xavier at the

time, told the man not to worry about school. Fr. Keenan told the teachers to be easier on him because of what he was going through. He told the man to pray and to have hoped that his mom would get better. Fr. Keenan used to go visit his mom in the hospital and pray for her.

The man never forgot Fr. Keenan and said he saved his life. He could have dropped out of school but Fr. Keenan kept his hopes up and provided him the guidance and support he needed. The man's mom did get better and live a few more years. The man graduated from Xavier, went on to college, and has now been a teacher himself for 29 years. He said he became successful and a teacher because of Fr. Keenan. The man said he really owes his life to Father and will never forget what he did for him. He asked my mom to say hello to Fr. Keenan for him.

This story was so nice to hear. It showed me what a great person and teacher Fr. Keenan is. He is helping others just like he said he always wanted to do.



**Fr. Keenan celebrating my Confirmation with me in June, 2013.**