

Anne's marriage was remarkable deepening of faith journey

Awedding day with a difference marked a remarkable deepening of Anne Duell's faith journey. Her marriage was to Christ – and she became a Consecrated Virgin living in the world, a vocation dating back to Apostolic times.

For her special day in St John and St Martin Catholic Church, Balsall Heath, she wore a white dress and was presented with a bridal veil, a book of the Divine Office and a wedding ring as symbols of her consecration.

By becoming a bride of Christ and making a promise to God of perpetual virginity she was signalling her intention to live out her spiritual vocation through apostolic activity and prayer.

As a result of her consecration to God she was “mystically espoused to Christ and dedicated to the service of the Church” according to the approved liturgical rite (Canon 604.1).

She became one of only around 200 Consecrated Virgins in the UK and 5,000 worldwide. The rite was repromulgated by the Catholic Church less than 50 years ago.

The rite of consecration, conducted in 2015 by the then Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham Robert Byrne, marked Anne's public profession of her vocation – and she has never looked back

“I had felt that God was calling me to give myself to him completely since I was 13 and I was introduced to the concept of Consecrated Virginity when I was at the University of Central Lancashire as a student,” said Anne, aged 47, who is a nursing sister at Moseley Hall Hospital, Birmingham.

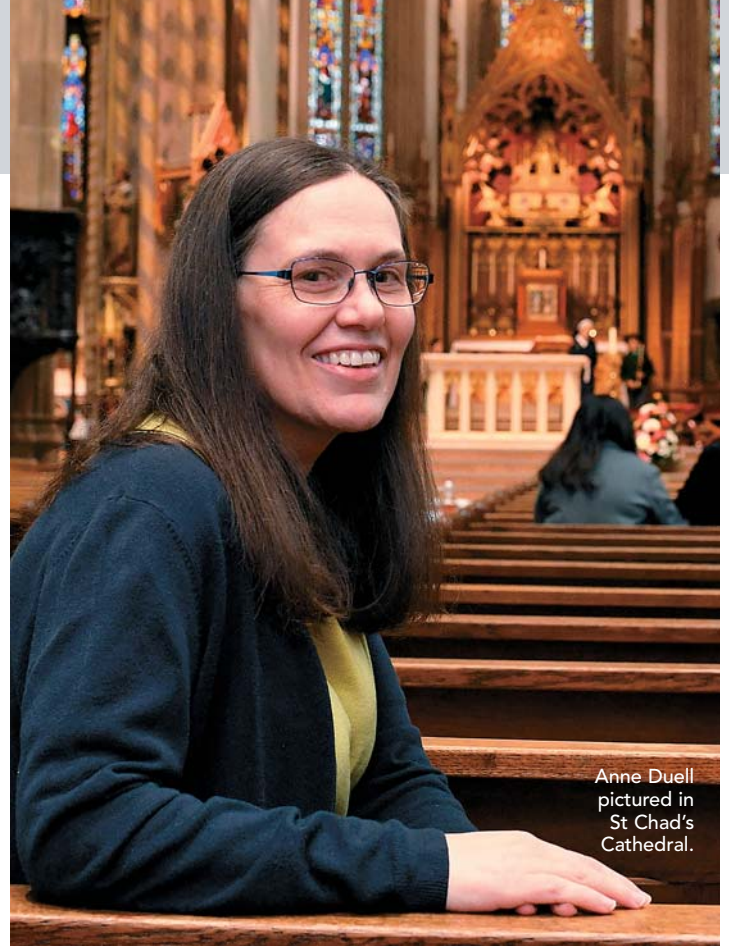
“After much discernment and once settled in work and life I entered a period of formation to be prepared for life as a Consecrated Virgin.

“There are many ways in which a woman can be called to follow Christ in the Church but I felt this vocation was my calling as it embraced elements of both the active and contemplative life in a balance that felt right for me.”

Certainly Anne's job as a nursing sister gives her the opportunity to follow her passion for caring for older people, while in her life away from work she prays the Divine Office daily as required by the Order of Consecrated Virgins.

She also prays for priests, seminarians and men and women who are discerning their vocations.

For the past few years in Balsall Heath Anne has supported the parish priest with sacramental preparations and most weeks she visits some of the sick and



Anne Duell pictured in St Chad's Cathedral.

housebound in the parish bringing Christ to them in Holy Communion.

Annually she meets with the Bishop designated the responsibility for overseeing the Consecrated Virgins in the Archdiocese.

In addition she meets monthly with a spiritual director to aid her ongoing formation and spiritual growth.

“My life is at the heart of the Diocese,” said Anne. “I offer my prayers for the Diocese in which I live, work and worship.

“Secular work keeps me rooted in the needs and struggles of society, since as part of our consecration we sign a declaration confirming that we are financially stable and have no recourse to the Diocese for funding.

“We are free to embrace work in the Diocese as requested and are able, as our secular work permits.”

Anne was brought up in her mother's Baptist faith and her spiritual journey began when the family moved from Scotland to Plymouth when she was in her early teens.

Sensing something was missing in her faith she found herself by chance at a Catholic Mass and was inspired, thus beginning her journey into the Catholic Church and its living faith and traditions.

The desire to give herself in totality to Christ resurfaced and

while at university she found a priest who was both “down to earth” and a “fantastic” spiritual director who guided her in this part of her journey to explore different life options including single life, marriage, monastic and active religious communities.

Finally, despite uncertainty from family who had their struggles accepting Anne's journey into the Catholic Church, Anne found her vocation and, in time, with her mother's support she chose the life she is now living.

“I have found my vocation as a Consecrated Virgin absolutely fulfilling,” said Anne, whose role model is Mary, Virgin and Mother.

“Virginity is a gift that we can freely choose to offer to another in marriage. For me, I chose to offer this gift back to God for the greater good of the Church and local community in which I am living and working.

“Of course I have chosen to sacrifice the opportunity of marriage and having a physical family, but I freely chose that sacrifice and this can only be done after a period of honest discernment, prayer and soul searching.

“Through embracing God's plan for my life, I have in return received the gift of consecration to Christ, and that of becoming a spiritual mother through my prayers and works in the Church.”



Anne with Bishop Robert Byrne on the day of her consecration.