

DECREE
the *Ordo Viduarum* (ORDER of WIDOWS)
in the DIOCESE of LAFAYETTE

WHEREAS, the diocesan Bishop has all the ordinary, proper, and immediate power required for the exercise of his pastoral office, except in those matters which the law or a decree of the Supreme Pontiff reserves to the supreme authority or to some other ecclesiastical authority (c. 381);

WHEREAS, the diocesan Bishop must in a very special way foster vocations to the various ministries and to consecrated life, having a special concern for priestly and missionary vocations (c. 385);

WHEREAS, there as yet does not exist in the Universal Law for the Latin Church an order of widows, and diocesan Bishops are to endeavor to discern new gifts of consecrated life which the Holy Spirit entrusts to the Church (*cf* c. 605);

WHEREAS, an order of widows, like an order of virgins, does not intend a new religious institute or association destined for recognition as a religious institute of diocesan rite or of pontifical rite, which requires the recognition of the Apostolic See (*cf* cc. 605, 579; *Vita Consecrata* 62), but rather denotes an entrance into a special class of persons in the Church who are received into that order by a proper liturgical rite and consecratory prayer;

WHEREAS, proper statutes have been drawn up which describe the formational path necessary before the reception of the consecration, the expected continued formation and rule of life, the relationship to the diocesan Bishop, and conditions for definitive departure from the order of widows;

THEREFORE, I, Most Reverend J. Douglas Deshotel, D.D., decree the following:

1. The approval of the statutes for the *Ordo Viduarum* in the Diocese of Lafayette which are attached.
2. This decree takes immediate effect upon legitimate promulgation on March 6, 2026.

Given at the Chancery Office, 1408 Carmel Drive, Lafayette, Louisiana this 6th day of March, 2026.





Most Reverend J. Douglas Deshotel, D. D.
Bishop of Lafayette



Mrs. Maureen K. Fontenot, PHR, SHRM-CP
Chancellor

ORDO VIDUARUM OF THE DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE

STATUTES

Art. 1. Institution

To the *Ordo Viduarum* (Order of Widows) belong widows who intend to live permanently in the widowed state of life and that "through the vow of perpetual chastity as a sign of the Kingdom of God, consecrate their state of life to dedicate themselves to prayer and to the service of the Church" (*Vita Consecrata*, 7).

Art. 2 Nature and End of the "Ordo"

§1 The *Ordo Viduarum* is formed of widows who declare freely, in a definitive form, the proposal to remain permanently in their widowed state, and that, through the liturgical rite of blessing, are consecrated to adhere to a form of life in which they live more deeply their baptismal consecration and their confirmation, just as they lived their own marriage, acquiring a particular identity in the Church.

§2 The call to consecrated widowhood, following the death of the spouse, which has been lived as a trial in faith, is, for the widow, a call of God, a true and proper vocation to belong to Him unconditionally and without reservation. Thus, the widow lives, even now, as one who announces and gives a prophetic witness of belonging to the Kingdom. The widow's new state of life does not subtract from her the duty to continue in fidelity to care for her family, her children, and grandchildren.

Art. 3 The Formational Path

§1. The widow who requests to be consecrated should be motivated by a desire to follow Christ more closely and to be willing to follow a formation plan, which includes steps preparing for the consecration and for life after the consecration.

Initial formation includes the following:

- a. A preparatory period for consecration which lasts at least three years and involves periodic meetings with a spiritual director and a Delegate of the Ordinary as well as with other widows who are discerning the *Ordo Viduarum*.
- b. At the beginning of the formational journey, it is necessary to carry out an attentive discernment in which those responsible for the widow's formation have direct knowledge of the person, her intentions and motivations. The widow will need to demonstrate that she will be able to sustain, guide, and nourish her own normative way life.
- c. In the periodic meetings or encounters, the widows will be helped to deepen their knowledge of the form of life of the widow in the Apostolic and Patristic periods, the re-establishment of the *Ordo Viduanum* after the Second Vatican Council, and the presence of the holy widows in the history of the Church. They will be guided in a careful reading of the Word of God and also will be formed in the sacred liturgy. Full of love for Christ and the Church, under the guidance of the Bishop or his Delegate, mindful of the regular programs and needs of the Diocese, they will carry out their proper ecclesial service in the appropriate and respective areas (family, parish, diocese, society) with a particular attention to the least of their brothers and sisters, to the "peripheries", and to the ministry of consolation.

- d. The spiritual journey is ideally guided by a priest (the Delegate of the Bishop), who will be the necessary point of reference for formation and discernment.
- e. As the date of consecration draws near, emphasis will be placed on the nature and consequences of consecration carried out through the hands of the Bishop, a sign of the full and direct bond with Christ to whom the consecrated widow will unite herself in a new marriage bond with the Lord.
- f. The proposal to live as a consecrated widow must be formally expressed in writing to the Bishop.

§2. **Benchmarks** - identifiable benchmarks of progress and discernment will be identified by the Director of Formation and all women in formation will be subject to evaluation according to said benchmarks. Benchmarks will be identified in areas of human dimension, spiritual dimension, intellectual dimension and apostolic ministry. See Appendix for guidelines.

§3. **Permanent formation** continues after the widow's consecration and focuses on her total dedication to God, her belonging to the Church, the spirituality of the widow, the specificity of the service of the widow, and confirming her commitment to her vocation. This itinerary leads the widows to share the fruits of their spiritual consecration. It is a journey that perfects one's very being in Christ in the chaste, widowed state of life. The offering of their own lives is a participation in the cross of Christ. Their dedication to good works is done in the joyful hope of the life that is to come.

§4. Each consecrated widow should follow the Diocesan standard *Rule of Life*, then her own, elaborated by her own Spiritual Director or Spiritual Father. See Appendix for guidelines.

Art. 4. The Program of Spiritual Life and Pastoral Service

§1. The entire life of the widow, marked by sobriety and a spirit of humble reservation, should become an offering, prayer, and service to the Lord and the Church.

§2. **Her offering**, renewed in the Eucharistic sacrifice, conforms the life of the widow to Christ the Spouse, who nourishes her with the Bread of Life. Assiduous participation in the Eucharistic banquet becomes a privileged occasion to encounter the heavenly Spouse who has opened new "spaces" to the human experience of love. The heart and mind of the widow must be turned always to Mary, Virgin, Mother, Spouse, and Widow. Just as the Virgin "advanced in her pilgrimage of faith and persevered in her union with her Son" (LG, 58), so also the widow imitates Blessed Mary, "progressing continually in faith, hope, and charity, and seeking the will of God." (LG, 65)

§3. **Prayer**, the hinge point of the spirituality of the consecrated widow, should have the breath of prayer of the Church: the widow dedicates herself with perseverance to the liturgical celebration daily of Morning and Evening Prayer and nourishes her interior life with the Word of God. She participates assiduously in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and frequently approaches the Sacrament of Penance. She cultivates a particular devotion to the Virgin Mother of God with the recitation of the Rosary and participation in Marian feasts.

§4. **Service** is carried out with the awareness of serving Christ in four *loci*:

- a. In the family, this service is carried out in fidelity to the conjugal vocation and in witnessing to the communion in faith with the deceased spouse; this service is an act of love toward children and grandchildren whom the widow continues to experience as a great and precious gift, a sign of the benevolence of God and of the fruitfulness of conjugal love;

- b. In the parish community, she receives with generosity and simplicity those duties that the Pastor entrusts to her, with due regard to her other responsibilities. In particular, she carries out, with humility, "the ministry of consolation" so as to be close to and in loving solidarity with those who are marked by suffering and mourning, and, in particular, to widows in order to help them live the moment of trial in the light of faith, and with the courage of hope;
- c. In the diocese, she renders herself radically available to collaborate with the initiatives that the Bishop proposes;
- d. In the *Ordo Viduarum*, she always desires to collaborate in diverse responsibilities and initiatives.

Art. 5 Conditions for Admission

§1. To be admitted to the solemn rite of Solemn Blessing and to be inscribed in the *Ordo Viduarum*, the widow that intends to consecrate herself to the Lord must demonstrate that she possesses the following requirements:

- a. That she was united in a Canonically valid marriage until the death of her spouse. Therefore, excluded from formal belonging to the *Ordo Viduarum* are those persons who contracted a civil marriage only or who were not united in a Canonically valid marriage;
- b. That she received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and a Canonically valid marriage, which was dissolved by the death of her spouse (c. 1141, CIC);
- c. That she be animated by right intention; enjoy good reputation; and be irreproachable in behavior;
- d. That she will have manifested to the Bishop (by a written request) the desire to undertake the journey toward consecration and will have received from him a positive judgment. The proposal must be expressed formally in writing to the Bishop and/ or his Delegate, and must be accompanied by a letter from her own Pastor or another priest known to the Bishop, who can attest that the candidate is a person of proven faith, prudently solicitous in the care of her family; participates in an active and positive way in the life of the Church and is disposed, according to the grace received, to collaborate in the activity of the ecclesial community;
- e. That over at least a three-year period, she will have been adequately prepared according to a plan of formation and have a specific orientation in her own spiritual life to undertake the obligations of consecrated widowhood

§2. Whether in formation or having been consecrated, widows do not acquire a right to remuneration or support from the Church, but must be able to support themselves.

§3. Consecration in the *Ordo Viduarum* does not make one an agent of the Bishop or the Diocese of Lafayette.

§4. The required age for admission to the *Ordo Viduarum* is to be no less than 60 years. In particular cases, accounting for a person's spiritual journey and maturity, the Bishop may dispense from this requirement.

§5. The candidate must declare her acceptance of the norms of the present Statute and of a Diocesan Rule, once it is established. After the journey of discernment, having obtained the approval of the Bishop, she may receive the Solemn Blessing and consecrate her own life to the service of God in the Church and for the Church.

§6. The candidate understands that upon admission she is not to neglect any perduring natural obligations she may have toward dependents.

Art. 6 The Rule

The *Ordo Viduarum* is to adopt a Rule designed to regulate the formational journey, both the initial and permanent formation, including the spiritual life of the solemnly blessed widow. Such a Rule should obtain the favorable opinion of those enrolled in the *Ordo* and the delegate of the Bishop, who must himself approve the Rule.

Art. 7 The Rite of Blessing

§1. The Solemn Blessing of Widows, completed according to an approved liturgical rite, is presided over by the Bishop or the Diocesan Delegate for the Ordo. The names of the consecrated widows should be inscribed in a diocesan book of the *Ordo Viduarum* as well as in the baptismal record in her place of baptism or in the baptismal records kept in the archives of the diocese in which she was baptized.

§2. The call is recognized and received by the Church; the blessing received by the widow is personal and individual. It is recognized as a gift from the Church who blesses the widow through a liturgical rite, presenting her to the faithful as a prophetic and eschatological sign. The rite is ordinarily presided over by the Bishop in the presence of the People of God.

Art. 8 The Delegate of the Bishop

The Delegate of the Bishop, with the Bishop, works to maintain ecclesial communion. He will exercise a special paternity in relationship to the *Ordo Viduarum*. Beyond vigilance over vocational discernment, he will ensure an adequate pastoral care for the widows and he will keep watch to guard always the original spirit of the *Ordo Viduarum*. The Delegate, if the number of widows increases or the territory becomes too large, may have an Assistant, appointed by the Bishop, to assist in the animation and formation of the widows and in the accompaniment of the widows in their journey.

Art. 9 A Secretariat

When the number of widows is sufficiently large, to ensure an efficacious coordination of activities and communication among the widows, a Secretariat may be constituted, consisting of three widows, elected in the course of a meeting or assembly, in which all the solemnly blessed widows have an active voice (and vote). The three widows forming the Secretariat will have a mandate of three years and must be approved by the Bishop and can be renewed for a maximum of three mandates. One of the three will be the responsible coordinator who will organize the initial and permanent formational meetings (in conjunction with the Delegate) and who will be responsible for the communication with the Delegate and his Assistant, and the Bishop himself.

Art. 10 Abandonment

The widow, during the period of formation, but before the definitive declaration to remain as a widow, may freely leave the path of formation by communicating her decision to the Bishop. Conversely, the Bishop or his Delegate (after consultation with the Bishop) may dismiss the widow from her obligations for foreseeable and understandable reasons.

Art. 11 Definitive Leaving

If after the Solemn Blessing, by which the widow intends to live widowhood to which she has committed herself in a permanent and perpetual way, she requests that she be permitted to leave the *Ordo*, she must request, in written form, an indult from the Bishop to do so, releasing her from her obligations.

Art. 12 Dismissal

Only the Bishop is competent to take up the case of the dismissal or expulsion from the *Ordo Viduarum* of a Solemnly Blessed widow, for grave and proven causes. The decision may be taken having listened directly to the interested party and the Delegate and should be done with discretion and in a pastoral manner.

Art. 13 Pastoral Attention to New Situations

§1. The *Ordo Viduarum* is attentive to those situations of widowhood connected to a union where the conditions of the Canonically valid marriage are missing (civil union, common law, cohabitation, etc.) for which a formal belonging to the *Ordo* is not permitted. Such widows may not be formally admitted to the foreseen Solemn Blessing of widows.

§2. Women in the situation mentioned above (§1), may participate in the initiatives of the *Ordo Viduarum* and if it seems opportune, the Bishop or his Delegate may formulate for them a prayer, in private celebration, utilizing part of the rites of the blessing of persons.

Art. 14 Statute Amendments

The statutes may be amended solely by the Bishop of the Diocese of Lafayette.

Diocese of Lafayette, March 6, 2026
First Friday of March 2026, in Devoted
Recognition of the Sacred Heart of Jesus