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National News

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Newsletter of the National Fraternity
Secular Franciscan Order - U. S. A.
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PAX ET BONUM - In this issue we have a report on the Directive Board Meeting by Terry Mc Cook who was attending for the first time, a presentation given by Father John Vaughn OFM at the Synod on the Laity and articles on "regionalization" and the new Constitutions. Much is happening in our Order at this time. THE EDITOR

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NATIONAL DIRECTIVE BOARD MEETING

As a first time participant in the National Directive Board of the Secular Franciscan Order - U.S.A., it is a privilege to offer the following observations on the annual meeting. Without question, the dominant qualities of the meeting were prayer, fraternity, and leadership.

The agenda was well thought out and included ample time for personal and communal prayer. The various liturgies were beautifully planned and conducted by Fr. Thomas Gardner, O.F.M.. The times "before the Blessed Sacrament" were my favorite, and it was a great joy to experience these times (mostly in the early morning) with other Secular brothers and sisters. Many of the Seculars were eager to take advantage of these treasured moments with the Lord.

The members of the National Directive Board worked together almost effortlessly, which impressed me as a real sign of fraternity. The National Minister, Jim Lynch, is a master at promoting fraternity, and even though he arrived late when his airline connections failed, he started circulating immediately to make sure that every one was interacting with the whole group. As various issues were discussed during Board meetings, the effectiveness of fraternal unity was very much in evidence.

Several major issues were presented to the Board. Most notably "regionalization" and the second draft of the Constitutions involved the most discussion. These are sensitive and multi-faceted issues, and only a strong leadership could have preserved Christian charity in the deliberations. Fortunately, our National Minister and the Executive Council provided the necessary leadership. The deliberations were honest, productive, and significant for the life of the Order in the United States. These results can only be achieved if leaders are willing to establish directions and be encouraging in the pursuit of truth.

My deepest impression of the meeting is the real care and concern that the National Directive Board has for all Secular Franciscans in the United States. Being a part of this Fraternity has deepened my commitment and a desire to serve all my brothers and sisters in St. Francis, and I can hardly wait for the next meeting.

Terry Mc Cook, SFO, Provincial Minister
Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

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REPORT ON REGIONALIZATION

The Directive Board of the National Fraternity at its October 22 to 24, 1987 meeting made an important decision to establish a committee to investigate and make recommendations regarding "regionalization".

To explain what regionalization is, you will recall that Paragraph 20 of the Rule speaks of the Secular Franciscan Order as being divided into four levels of fraternity: local, regional, national, and international. In only two countries, Italy and the United States, are local fraternities organized on the basis of the friar provinces boundaries. All the other countries are organized on the basis of regional, or geographical boundaries.

Regionalization is clearly mandated by Vatican II in its efforts to return the Church and its Orders to their beginnings. It was over two hundred years from our founding before we were placed under the jurisdiction of the First order (Martin IV, 1428). Even the Rev. Carl Schaefer, O.F.M., General Spiritual Assistant of the Secular Franciscan Order, at his meeting with all the friars attending the National Congress in San Diego in August 1987, requested that Secular Franciscans of this country consider regionalization at the National Fraternity level. Although Canon Law (303) requires that we remain under the general jurisdiction of the friar provinces, there are indications that our current provincial structure is no longer feasible. For example:

1. The size and distribution of some provinces is such that Provincial Ministers/Presidents and Provincial Spiritual Assistants are hard pressed to make the required visitations so vital to local fraternities. For instance, the Sacred Heart Province (5) is composed of 106 active fraternities and 17 emerging or newly forming fraternities. They are spread over an area from Montana to Texas, New York to California, and there is even one located in Trinidad, West Indies.

2. The withdrawal of a friar province from a given geographical location often leaves one or more local fraternities without the required provincial affiliation.

3. Affiliation with a specific obedience often produces a divisive attitude within our Order, so that our attachment is more to the friar province than to the Secular Order.

The Executive Council has established a Regionalization Committee composed of the following Franciscans:

Mr. Bruce Fahey, S.F.O., St. Joseph Province (10), 20939 Quadrant Avenue
North, Scandia, MN 56073

Rev. Lawrence Landini, O.F.M., St. John the Baptist Province (3), Secular Franciscan Office, 1615 Vine Street, Cincinnati, OH 45201

Mrs. Mary Mazotti, S.F.O., St. Barbara Province (6), P.O. Box 2571, Arnold, CA 95223

Mr. Richard Morton, S.F.O., Sacred Heart Province (5), 3191 71st Street East, Inver Grove Heights, MN 55075

Mrs. Jerry Rome, S.F.O., St. John the Baptist Province (3), 12266 North Lakeview Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70810

Ms. Elizabeth Ryder, S.F.O., St. Mary Province (13), R.D. 1, Brandon, VT 05733

The process envisioned will be one of evolution, and the investigation and the drafting of recommendations will likely take several years. This will all be done in dialogue with Provincial Minister/Presidents, Provincial Spiritual Assistants, Fraternity Presidents, and the Provincial Ministers of the friar provinces. The many advantages and disadvantages of regionalization will be evaluated. Issues will be identified and resolved in the best interest of the Secular Order within the context of the Rule and the historical relationship between the First Order and the Third Order Regular.

I would like to request your prayerful support for the endeavors of the Regionalization Committee. This important study will be successful only through the prayers and cooperation of all Secular Franciscans and Friars throughout the country. Your comments should be forwarded to any of the committee members.

Richard Morton, S.F.O.
Regionalization Committee Chairman

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SFOs UnLTD

SFOs UnLTD is a penpal network for Secular Franciscans that provides a quarterly list of SFOs who are interested in corresponding. This list is just that: a list -- not a newsletter or calendar of future events, etc. SFOs UnLTD will simply give you the name/address, etc., of other SFOs who would like to correspond.

PLEASE SEND \$ 0.25 AND A BUSINESS SIZE SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE (this keeps it self supporting) to:

M. Marko, SFO
300 North State Street, #3426
Chicago, IL 60610

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THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN NETWORK

The Secular Franciscan Network is NOT an official publication of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order. The ONLY official publication is the SFO National News.

FROM THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON THE LAITY

Intervention made by Fr. John Vaughn OFM, Minister General
and President of the Union of Superiors General, in the
Synod of Bishops, October 8, 1987.

Most Holy Father, Venerable Members of the Episcopate, dear Sisters and Brothers:

I wish to speak about associations of lay people which have a relation with religious communities, as referred to in no. 59 of the Instrumentum Laboris. I speak in the name of the Union of Superiors General and also in my own name.

1. GROUPS OF LAITY ASSOCIATED WITH RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Religious men today are aware of the need for members of the Church to work more closely together. In particular, collaborating with the laity seems to us to be one of the great challenges and opportunities for religious life, and could be an important development for the future of the Church.

We see the importance of sharing our spiritual charisms with the laity in response to their desire for guidance in spirituality, for a form of apostolate, for a community of prayer and support.

A number of religious families include associations for lay people. Some groups are centuries old, while others are of more recent, even modern establishment.

Some groups emphasize voluntary forms of apostolic work. These generous people can be found in the missions, in service to the poor, and in staffing retreat centers. Some of their members play an important role in the animation and leadership of communities of worship and service.

What draws many people to associate with religious is not only a chance to serve, but a desire for holiness by sharing in the life and the spirituality of a religious community. There are new forms of lay community life being developed in conjunction with religious communities. There is a hunger for authentic Christian spirituality, for communities of faith, for gospel alternatives to consumerism, materialism and hedonism.

Some religious communities, in fact, owe their beginnings to such lay movements of spirituality or apostolate, and we religious men especially can appreciate the vitality and enthusiasm which these movements - both old and new - bring, not only to the Church at large, but also to our own religious communities. If it is true that they look to us for direction and encouragement, it is also true that their generosity in living out the spirit of our founders in the world is a great challenge and encouragement for us to live it as religious.

2. THE THIRD ORDERS

Some of the great masters of Christian life gave inspiration not only to groups of religious, but also to groups of laity, not to make them semi-cloistered, but to offer them the same deep experience of God as is available to priests and religious, but in the midst of the world, and precisely as lay people: as married couples, as professional people, as people involved in political life.

In turn, these lay people have prolonged and extended to the Church and the world the charism of their own religious family through a form of secular spirituality and involvement. The structure of the Third or Secular Orders has enabled the charism of the founder to be preserved by association with a religious family which offers direction and assistance. But the secular order is distinct from, and complementary to the religious order, and its leadership is in the hands of the laity who in communion with their pastors exercise their own proper gifts to build up the Church and evangelize society.

Historically, the Secular Orders have helped to keep the Church alive during times of persecution or when the clergy was scarce. They have been the source of many strong Catholic families which have in turn provided vocations to the priestly state and the religious life. They have had considerable influence in the social order, in education, in health-care, in works of justice, peace and reconciliation. Most important, they have given to the Church examples of gospel holiness lived in the midst of the world. They count many Saints and Blessed and continue to produce new candidates for the Altars.

The Secular Orders are still able to revitalize lay spirituality and promote new forms of involvement and collaboration within the mission of the Church. They are very loyal to the hierarchy. They ask only to be encouraged and helped.

The Secular Orders have renewed their legislation and structures in the light of the Second Vatican Council; this renewal stresses the dignity of the laity's vocation, their right and need to assume responsibility, and the rightful autonomy of their action in the Church and society.

They number more than a million: committed Catholics of all walks of life. In a number of countries, there are also youth groups which take their inspiration and structure from the Third Orders.

I hope that the Synod will affirm the value of these associations and Secular Orders whose spirituality for lay people has been cultivated and developed in great part by their contact with religious communities. This affirmation would be an encouragement to them, and a pledge also of continued involvement and pastoral care on the part of bishops and priests.

STATUS OF THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS

The second draft of the proposed General Constitutions has been sent to the national councils of the Secular Franciscan Order throughout the world by the International Secretariate in Rome. The national councils have been asked to carefully review the proposed text and to make recommendations as to any changes that should be made. This work is being done in collaboration with provincial councils throughout each country. The recommendations are supposed to reflect a national consensus with respect to the particular recommendations.

The document is of world-wide application. Therefore, the recommendations will be made in that context. The national councils have been asked to make their criticism and recommendations very specific, referring to specific articles, paragraphs or sentences with proposed new language where changes are suggested.

The national councils are working under a very tight schedule. The recommendations must be sent to the International Secretariate in Rome with a postmark no later than March 31, 1988.

The recommendations will then be referred by the International Executive Council to appropriate commissions for study. The commissions will then formulate proposals for revising the present text. These proposals, together with the present text, will be debated and voted on at a meeting of the International Council at Rome in June, 1988. It is the purpose of that meeting to adopt a final text of the General Constitutions and submit it to the Holy See for final approval.

The present draft is a substantial revision of the first draft and it is the result of many hours of work by many conscientious people including experts in various fields such as canon law, history and Franciscanism, as well as the recommendations of many national councils. There are now one hundred articles, whereas the first draft had eighty-five articles. There has been a rearrangement of articles and chapters to make a more logical presentation. There has been an expanded treatment of some of the previous articles and there has been an introduction of new articles to cover matters not previously covered. For instance, a new Article 45 treats of promoting vocations within the Secular Franciscan Order. A new Article 94 gives an expanded treatment of Franciscan Youth. A new Article 35 gives expanded treatment of secular priests. A new Article 36 treats of Secular Franciscans with private vows. Article 74 through 82 give a full treatment of elections, incompatible offices, resignation and removal from office. Article 90 through 93 give a better elaboration of pastoral and fraternal visitations.

A splendid opportunity is being presented to Secular Franciscans through their provincial councils and national council to take up the challenge of the new Rule to assume responsibility for their own Order. This is the opportunity to shape and formulate the General Constitutions to their secular needs. Let us hope and pray that this challenge is met.

Thomas W. Ricard, S.F.O.
International Executive Councilor - CIOFS

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I would like to apologize for getting this issue out so late--THE EDITOR