



NEW VATICAN DOCUMENT ON LAY BROTHERS PLANNED



The prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life announced plans for two new documents,

on lay brothers and liturgical formation of religious.

Cardinal Franc Rodé explained Tuesday, February 2nd, the World Day of Consecrated Life, on Vatican Radio that the figure of the lay brother, members of a religious order who make vows but are not ordained priests, "must be appreciated in the Church."

For this reason, he said, a document on this topic is planned for publication in the fall.

"Recently we reflected on the figure of the lay brother in the religious congregations of brothers and in mixed religious congregations of priests and brothers," the cardinal said. "We have seen that in the last decades the number of lay brothers has decreased a lot."

For example, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christians Schools had some 16,000 members in 1965, and currently has less than 5,000.

Cardinal Rodé noted: "It is a great diminution. Unfortunately, all the congregations of brothers have great difficulties.

"And this also affects the mixed congregations of priests and brothers: The number of brothers has decreased much more than that of priests."

Problem

The prelate asserted, "There is a problem and something must be done."

He observed the absence of documents on this vocation, stating, "We think that one of the reasons for this decrease in vocations of lay brothers is, in fact, a certain lack of attention on the part of the Church to this figure of consecrated Christian as a lay brother."

"We want to prepare a document dedicated specifically to this figure of lay brother, as an autonomous figure, a figure that makes sense in itself, which has its own identity," the cardinal affirmed.

He pointed to the specificity of this call of God, affirming that "a lay brother is not – as is often thought and as people think – someone who has not been able, or has not wanted for some reason, to be a priest."

"It is a vocation that has a logic in itself with a particular mission in the Church, and history amply demonstrates this," the prelate stated.

He invited his listeners to reflect on the important function that congregations of brothers have had in the formation and education of young people, with numerous schools and universities in many countries.

"Let us also think of sanctity," Cardinal Rodé said. "Numerous are the brothers who have been canonized, especially brothers of mixed congregations, among them the Capuchins and Jesuits."

Necessity of prayer

The cardinal spoke next about the second document due for publication, which addresses "the absolute need of prayer" and of "liturgical formation" for religious.

"Some say that the men and women religious of today pray too little," he noted.

"Today, in such an agitated world, prayer is, without a doubt, more difficult," the cardinal acknowledged.

For this reason, he continued, "we must stress the absolute necessity of prayer in the spiritual life of a consecrated man or woman."

The prelate explained that the prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, Cardinal Antonio Cañizares, had suggested the preparation of an interdicasterial document.

The proposal was to entrust the first part to the dicastery for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and the second, to the dicastery for Divine Worship.

Cardinal Rodé said that this is important "because, on one hand there is a certain ignorance, a certain lack of knowledge and liturgical formation in young men and women religious."



"On the other hand," he added, "there are also liturgical fancies that are not always in good taste, and which do not correspond to the desire and will of the Church and to the spirit of the liturgy itself."

Where Have All the Lay Brothers Gone?

This arresting question was posed by Robert Mickens in the current issue *The Tablet*.

The Vatican Congregation for Consecrated Life, he observes, is "alarmed that the number of lay brothers has dropped significantly in the past four decades." The Prefect of the Congregation, Cardinal Franc Rodé CM believes that some of the fault lies with leaders of the Church.

"Neither Vatican II nor the post-conciliar documents have restated the importance of this vocation. There are references here and there, but not much more than that." It is unfortunate, he notes, that all congregations of brothers along with mixed institutes (such as the Franciscans) are seeing significant declines in the number of their brother-members. The Christian Brothers, for example, numbered 16,000 in 1965; today that number is only 5,000. Our Sacred Heart Province in 1970 had 219 Brothers and even a separate formation and training program for Brothers; today that number is down to 58.

Cardinal Rodé believes that one of the reasons for the decline is the Church's lack of attention to this type of Christian person. Brothers in mixed institutes frequently possess skills which make them valuable to internal fraternal ministry (e.g., as cooks, tailors, maintenance and housekeeping personnel, bookkeepers, etc.) but might be less comfortable with traditional external ministries.

"If you think vocations to the priesthood have fallen, the decline has been even sharper in vocations among the brothers," and this is a great loss for the entire Church. "Think of the important role brothers have played in educating young people and those in health care. Consider the many brothers who have been canonized."

As a way of addressing the problem, Cardinal Rodé said that his office is planning to produce a document focused specifically on "the lay brother as an autonomous person, a person with his own sense of identity."

This is obviously an important question which affects Sacred Heart Province and certainly has implications for our approaches to recruitment. When we find ourselves asking "Where have all the lay brothers gone?" the answer has to be more than a few anecdotes about brothers we have known in the past!

(Thanks to Joe Rogenski OFM for bringing this article to our attention.)

♥ Franciscans Making News:

♥ Last week **Mario DiCicco OFM**, president of Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, California, introduced four new books by faculty members of FST. For those who want more information on these books, contact Mario at mdicicco@fst.edu.

♥ "Spirit and Life" with **Albert Haase OFM** and his sister, Sr. Bridget Haase OSU, a weekly radio show focusing on issues in contemporary spirituality, will begin airing on the Relevant Radio Network the first weekend of March. The show airs on Saturdays at 8:30pm with an encore presentation on Sundays at 2:30pm.

♥ **Adrian Fischer OFM** announces that Little Flower Parish in Monroe, Louisiana, is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year.



Don't Forget!

The primary ballots for electing members to the Steering Committee for the next Provincial Chapter are due by noon on Friday, February 26, 2010.

+ PLEASE PRAY FOR ...

+ ...**Conrad Duran OFM**, 86, a professed friar of St. Barbara Province for 64 years, who died on February 15, 2010, in Quito, Ecuador;

+ ...**Frances Wicks SFO**, wife of former national minister Bill Wicks SFO and editor of the national newsletter for the Secular Franciscan Order, who died February 18, 2010;

+ ...**Sister Florence Niemet OSF**, 93, a member of the Joliet Franciscan Sisters for 76 years, who died on February 20, 2010;

+ ...the sick of the Province, especially **Terry Santiapillai OFM** who had his second heart surgery on February 19 to correct a genetic defect.

AROUND THE PROVINCE is the weekly newsletter of the Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart, edited by Benet A. Fonck OFM from the Office of Communications, 422 North Dixon Avenue, Joliet IL 60435-7050, 314.603.3951, fonckbenet@aol.com.