

www.cmis-int.org

SACRED CONGREGATION
FOR RELIGIOUS

INSTRUCTION
CUM SANCTISSIMUS

Rome, 19 March, 1948



cmis
CONFERENCE MONDIALE
DES INSTITUTS SECLIFIERS

SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION *CUM SANCTISSIMUS*

1. When Pope Pius XII promulgated the Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* he assigned to the Congregation for Religious, as having competence in this field, the executive responsibility for carrying it into effect. This means that as need arises, and as experience suggests, the Congregation should legislate for Secular Institutes in general and in particular cases by way of interpreting *Provida Mater* or by supplementary and practical legislation (Art. II, 82.2).

2. Complete and fixed legislation is not at present feasible - it would restrict the development of the Institutes - but there are points which have in fact been imperfectly understood or interpreted, and these need to be clarified and settled taking into consideration the *Motu Proprio Primo feliciter*. The present document is intended to give the broad lines, the fundamentals, which will keep Secular Institutes on the right lines.

3. 1. In accordance with Art. V, 2 and Art. VI of *Provida Mater*, approval and foundation of a Secular Institute is reserved to Bishops, after consultation of the Sacred Congregation for Religious. It is not therefore possible for an association to assume the title of a Secular Institute on the grounds that it has the requisite qualifications, viz. that it is an association professing Christian perfection and devoted to apostolate in the world, and that it conforms with Articles I and III of *Provida Mater Ecclesia*.

4. 2. All associations which qualify as Secular Institutes, including those in Mission territories, come under the Sacred Congregation for Religious (Art. IV, 1 and 2) and the provisions of *Provida Mater Ecclesia*. As laid down in *Primo feliciter* (no. V), they may not continue as simple associations of the faithful (as in the *Codex Book 2, Part IV*). But see no. 5 below.

5. 3. By "Bishop" in par. 2 above, is meant exclusively the Local Ordinary. The petition for leave to make the foundation must

be accompanied by the information listed in the Norms for the founding of a Congregation (S.C.R. 6 March 1921, 3-8) as these may be applicable to Secular Institutes (Art. VII). Six copies of the draft Constitutions are also required, in Latin or one of the languages accepted in the Curia, and Directories and other documents relevant to the spirit and way of life and organization of the Institute. The Constitutions should contain and express the nature of the Institute, the kind or categories of members, the government, the form of consecration (Art. III, 2), the bond arising from membership (Art. III, 3), the house of residence (Art. III, 5 4), training methods and devotional customs.

6. 4. Associations canonically founded or approved by Bishops before the promulgation of *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, as also those which had received some form of pontifical approval as lay associations, may apply for recognition as Secular Institutes of diocesan or pontifical right. Each case will be considered on its own merits in the light of Art. VI and VII of *Provida Mater*. The following documentation is required: The original documents of foundation or approval; the Constitutions so far observed; a brief account of the beginnings and of the subsequent history of the Institute; the regulations they have followed in their way of life, of their apostolate; besides which, particularly if they are of diocesan right, commendatory letters from the Ordinaries in whose dioceses they have centres.

7. 5. It is not considered opportune to present to the Sacred Congregation, with a view to foundation as a Secular Institute, Associations of comparatively recent foundation, or those not sufficiently developed, or the new groups continually coming into existence. Such Associations may have all the marks of a good solid future Secular Institute, but as a general rule to which exception can only be made for grave reasons subject to close scrutiny, they are to remain in the care of the Bishop as simple Associations existing “*de facto*” rather than “*de jure*”, then, in consecutive stages gradually be given status as Pious Unions, Sodalties or Confraternities until after a time of testing by the Ordinary they clearly qualify.

8. 6. During this period of development and testing (no. 5) to see whether such Associations really mean to reach full consecration to perfection of life and apostolate, and really have the requisite features of a Secular Institute, care must be taken not to grant concessions, private or public, of essentially Secular Institute features not warranted by the stage they have reached, particularly such as would be difficult to rescind if the application for Secular Institute status were eventually to be turned down. Such premature concessions would give the appearance of pressure on the Authorities to grant or facilitate the permission.

9. 7. For a practical, safe, positive assessment, namely that the Association really leads its members, as secular men and women, to a full consecration and dedication recognizable as a complete state of perfection, substantially that of Religious, the following must be carefully weighed:

10. a) Whether those who are enrolled as members in the stricter sense of the word “over and above the general habitual piety and self-denial” without which a life of perfection would be empty and illusory, are making firm and real profession of the three general evangelical counsels in one of the various forms admitted in *Provida Mater* (Art. III, 2). But in a broader sense there may be members, attached and incorporated in various degrees, who aspire to the perfect life of the Gospel, and try to live it in their own situation but do not, or cannot, rise to a commitment to all three counsels at the higher level;

11. b) Whether there is a stable, full, mutual bond between members in the specific sense of a) above, and the Association, i.e. whether the member gives himself over completely to the Association and the Association is actually or foreseeably, able and willing to take charge and be canonically responsible. (Art. III, § 3,2);

12. c) Whether the Association has, or is making efforts to acquire, the houses mentioned in Art. III, § 4 of *Provida Mater*, and under what terms, for the purposes there mentioned.

13. d) Whether they are steering clear of things incompatible with a true Secular Institute life, e.g. clothing and common life of a Religious type (Tit. XVII, L. II, C.I.C.) (Art. II, 1; Art. III, 4).

14. 8. As provided in Art. II, 1, 2 of the Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, without prejudice to Art. X, and Art. II, 1,1, Secular Institutes are neither obliged nor allowed to follow the legislation general or particular, proper to Religious or Societies of Common Life. But the Sacred Congregation may adapt and apply to Secular Institutes, by way of exception, some of the rulings proper to those bodies which are equally in place in a Secular Institute context, and may, due allowance being made for all circumstances, require of Secular Institutes some well-tried, more or less general, standards which in the nature of the case apply to both kinds of life.

15. 9. In particular: a) Can. 500, 23, strictly interpreted, is not concerned with Secular Institutes and does not, as it stands, necessarily apply to them, but it will not be unreasonable to see in these rulings a reliable criterion and a clear guideline for the approval and the framework of Secular Institutes.

6. b) Secular Institutes may (Can. 492 §1) by special concession be aggregated to Religious (be they Orders or other kinds of Religious) and accept their help including a degree of real though not canonical direction. Requests for closer dependence than this, implying a diminution of the self-government proper to Secular Institutes, or the assumption by Religious of any degree of patronage or jurisdiction in this respect, shall not, in principle, be favorably considered. If an Institute (particularly of women) positively wishes to accept such dependence and approaches Religious with this in view, such a request shall not be granted except with appropriate safeguards and after careful consideration of the good of the Institute itself and of its spirit and of the nature and manner of the apostolate to which, as a Secular Institute, it is committed.

7. 10. Profession of a state of perfection, in the complete sense of the word, and total consecration to apostolate - these are the obligations assumed by members of a Secular Institute. From both

points of view they are in the same field - perfection and apostolate - as members of lay associations and Catholic Action, but it is clear that more is expected of an Institute member than of workers - excellent though these may be - in such associations. Their call is to greater things. But while bearing this in mind they must, without prejudice to their own internal organization, so fulfil their apostolate and give their services, in accordance with the purpose for which they were founded, as to avoid all confusion in the ranks, and to give as far as in them lies a shining example to the faithful, whose eyes are upon them, of selfless, humble and reliable collaboration with the Pastors of the Church (cf. *Primo Feliciter* no. VI).

18. 11. a) On receipt of permission from the Holy See the Ordinary may proceed to raise the existing association (or Pious Union or Sodality) to the status of a Secular Institute. The status in the Institute of each of its members is to be established and the existing situation vis-à-vis the Constitutions of the Institute. In this connection the Ordinary in his discretion may decide whether steps already taken, in training for instance or acceptance for consecration, should be taken into account.

19. b) For the first ten years, as from the date of canonical foundation, the Local Ordinary may, for the purpose of Office or position of responsibility or seniority or other canonical effects in the Institute, dispense from constitutional requirements - general or proper to a given Institute - as to age, period of probation, or years of consecration and so forth.

20. c) By the act of canonical foundation of the Institute, houses or centres previously established with consent of the Ordinaries (can. 495 § 1) are incorporated as houses and centres of the Institute.

Rome, at the Office of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, the 19th day of March, feast of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1948.

ALOYSIUS Card. LAVITRANO, Prefect
Fr. LUKE ERMENEGILD PASETTO, Secretary