

## Necessary Civil Management Preparations Prior To Being At The Point Of Needing To Change Your Congregation's Canonical Governance

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- I. Your congregation, like any religious institute, needs to pay attention to essential indicators of its immediate and long-term reality and thus viability as clear, verifiable evidence of where it is in the cycle of evolution (of life).
  - A. An institute's reality, especially when facing decline, is primarily shaped by its membership demographics, its finances, and specific significant administrative matter(s) it may have – all these elements make up its viability.
  - B. Historically, religious institutes are called into existence in particular situations, cultures, and societies.
    1. Over time, circumstances change and an institute's reasons for being founded, in particular certain ministries for which it was established to address, may not be needed any longer or may have been taken as far as your current members' capacities are able to take them.
    2. Recognition that your congregation's reasons for being founded or its Mission may be completed or has gone as far as the current members can take it is not negative or an indication of failure but rather an acceptance of the Paschal Mystery and can be a source of much fruitfulness,
      - (a) Leaving your members
        - i. Freer to live their consecrated life for all their days.
        - ii. Filled with a strong sense of gratitude for what has been.
        - iii. More able to accept the necessary steps civilly and eventually canonically your congregation needs to take.
      - And
      - (b) Leaving your congregation
        - i. Primarily focused on how best to provide long-term for the spiritual, pastoral, and physical well-being of all the members.
        - ii. Open to identifying how best to pass its legacy on.

II. An institute facing the reality of decline and the gradual emerging impact of it needs to shift its focus into a 3-part decision-making process.

A. It is crucial to move into this 3-part decision-making process while an institute still has many members with sufficient capacity to contribute to the consultation and implementation of the communal decisions, big and small.

1. This means having a critical mass of the members able to understand and willing to move entirely through the decision-making process, recognizing how the three parts are interconnected and have implications for the membership.
2. Education of the members on the implications of your congregation's reality and the 3-part decision-making process needs to include numerous opportunities for the members to learn, share, and come to readiness to accept necessary changes in your congregation's civil management and eventually canonical governance.

B. The 3-parts of the decision-making process are these areas which could be happening simultaneously or separately:

Part One: Planning for and putting your congregation's affairs, both civilly and canonically, in order in the near and the long-term future

-- This entails

- **particular areas of communal letting go**, esp. in properties/ ministries, down-sizing administrative practices/personnel, putting in place long-term financial and housing decisions, etc.,  
**and**
- **identifying a collective expression of what is most essential for sustaining the relationships of the members** in living their vocations with quality as fully as possible for all their days

NOTE: PART TWO AND THREE WILL NOT BE FOCUSED TODAY BUT IMPORTANT TO BE AWARE OF THEM AS WORKING ON PART ONE

Part Two: Owning when your membership will no longer have sufficient capacity communally to continue to exercise the canonical governance of your Congregation competently **by identifying the date of your congregation's last chapter** even if it may be several chapter cycles away

Part Three: Choosing which of the options is best for making a change in your congregation's canonical governance **by naming the governance option your congregation wants to pursue by when**

### **Examples of what to include in your congregation's planning chart**

#### **In Closing:**

1. In our times the primary global development among a large number of religious institutes is the work of setting a direction, including the 3-part decision-making process, before it is too late to act responsibly.
2. This requires hard, honest, committed work by the leadership and members, letting go possibly of spending communal time and energy on less threatening topics.