

## Excerpts for Reflection

### ARTICLES

■ **Marjory Gallagher, SC, “The Future of Small Religious Institutes: Merging and Other Issues”**

Canon Law Society of America (CLSA) Proceedings 57 (1995) pp 201-215

Generally, the difficulties can be grouped into four categories:

- ✓ response to mission,
- ✓ financial realities,
- ✓ questions of health care for aging members, and
- ✓ a lack of personnel for internal ministry, particularly for leadership and administrative positions.

These are the tangible ones; others, more subtle and often hidden, are

- ✓ a lowering of morale,
- ✓ a sense of loss,
- ✓ a polarization between a very small group of “younger” active members and a larger core of ill and older ones, and even in some cases, a quiet desperation. p. 204

Canon 578 The mind of the founders, and their dispositions concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute which have been approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority, together with its sound traditions, all of which comprise the patrimony of the institute itself, are to be faithfully observed by all.

■ **Margaret Stallmeyer, CDP, M.Ed., J.C.L. and others, “Religious Institutes in a Changing World: New Configurations: Parts I and II”**

Legal Resource Center for Religious March 16-19, 2000

Outline of the technical canonical dimensions of reconfiguration by six U.S. canon lawyers from the Legal Resource Center for Religious, Washington, D.C.

■ **Jackie Motzel, FSM “Reunification: A Ten-Year Reflection”**

LCWR Occasional Papers 1997

- ✓ **FACE THE LARGER QUESTIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE**  
Congregational charisms are a living reality and as such experience development and decline. Their life cycle is not meant to be forever. The charism of religious life, larger than any one congregation, is what endures. We had to face some central questions: Is preserving the institute more important than transforming the institute to make it effective

in the present era? How will the anticipated change bring new life to God's people and vitality to the gospel message expressed through the lives and ministry of its members?

- ✓ **BE REALISTIC**  
Reconfiguration does not solve all problems. Lack of personnel for ministry, aging and diminishment, lack of members willing to accept leadership roles along with other concerns can persist. Growth, meaning new members, may or may not occur. It is an illusion to place expectations on this endeavor that offer no guarantee for fulfillment.
- ✓ **INCLUDE EVALUATIVE PROCESS**  
It is important to be as clear as possible about why reconfiguration is a desirable pursuit, even if the purposes are purely pragmatic. This needs to be agreed upon by all members and clearly stated. Later progress can be measured against the agreed upon by all members and clearly stated. Later progress can be measured against the agreed upon purposes.
- ✓ **RECOMMENDATIONS**  
Congregational Identity – Growing into a new congregational name requires time, conversation, and a deeper understanding of its significance and symbolic capacity...For ten years members of the new congregation were unable to develop a congregational symbol that would speak to them of their deepest identity. Once the symbol evolved, a design came easily and quickly... sacred signs, which at a mythic/symbolic level underpin identity, need to be created but cannot be forced.

Cultural Integration – Besides relocating significant memorabilia, the integration of the women religious we know ourselves to be within our tradition of origin into the women of our new identity is ongoing, creating bit by bit a new cultural identity. This involves our style of living, ways of relating, prayer, and spiritual differences. It is in this ongoing exchange and sharing that cultures continue to mesh.

***Living for today and making decisions that are life-giving  
is what is essential.  
Choosing life at the core fans the flame into fire.  
Reconfiguration does not of itself bring new life;  
members bring new life.***

## **BOOK**

- **Jeanne Schweichert, SSSF Standing at the Crossroads: Religious Orders and Reconfiguration** Chicago, IL Convergence 2002
  - ✓ Congregational charisms are a living reality and as such experience development and decline. Their life cycle is not meant to be forever. The charism of religious life larger than any one congregation is what endures. p.20
  - ✓ Reconfiguration is a major movement and requires as much ownership and support as possible. The amount of time needed depends on the circumstances of the group. The process of discernment takes time and is critical to the outcome. p.20
  - ✓ The reconfiguration journey takes a community down roads it may not have preferred. Yet, transformation is not only a process of pain and anguish, but also of delight. We meet new people, learn about other's mission commitments, hear the insights of different folk, explore untried ways of doing things, and enter into unknown spaces. p.75
  - ✓ Community members are at different places in terms of the future desires for the congregation. From the beginning, some members find it energizing to be part of creating a new future for their congregation. Others are somewhat reluctant but commit themselves to the process. Still others resent having raised the issue at all. pp 75-76
  - ✓ A commitment to use discernment as a means of decision making calls for a common understanding of what is meant by discernment and the implication for each person if there is a corporate choice to enter a discernment mode. First and foremost, it requires an ongoing cultivation of a discerning heart in each person. It challenges each one to remain open to being influenced by the insights of others, believing that the Spirit speaks through each individual and the process. p.95
  - ✓ Some sisters grow impatient, some face new doubts and others feel that the group is moving too quickly... Fear and uncertainty are always part of walking into the unknown. Ownership results from participating in the process from the beginning, good communication and consultation at various stages, use of discernment, prayer, information sharing, small and large group discussion, participation on committees and the encouragement of honesty and openness. pp 45 & 51
  - ✓ One of the most difficult things experienced by the sisters was the fear that the movement would be divisive, at times experiencing what felt like polarization of "for" and "against" views, difficulty in staying open and

listening to different perspectives, concern about changes that would occur if reconfiguration happened – or if it didn't. They faced the dilemma that, whichever way they decided, some sisters will stay and some may leave.  
p.51

- ✓ Seeing God's providence in the movement engendered less fear for some, raised awareness of the presence of the Spirit leading and calling for personal change, and brought the realization that some situations can be worked out only by God. There was a constant challenge to patience, and to acknowledge that God has been present and will not leave now. p. 54

## **BULLETIN ON ISSUES OF RELIGIOUS LAW**

- **Melanie Bair, OSF and Jordan Hite, TOR, "The Merger and Union of Religious Institutes"**

Bulletin on Issues of Religious Law Volume 3 #1 April 1987.

This bulletin addresses the questions of why a religious congregation might consider merger or union. It outlines the elements that influence the decision and explains the canonical process.

- **Catherine C. Darcy, RSM, "Restructuring Religious Institutes: A Canonical Perspective"**

Bulletin on Issues of Religious Law Volume 15 Fall 1997

This bulletin gives an explanation of the elements corresponding to external and internal restructuring and an outline for the juridic preparation for an external restructuring.

"Institutes exploring their restructuring need to articulate clearly the reasons they are pursuing this path and what it is they expect to accomplish... That the church will be better served and that the quality of religious life will be enhanced in the vowed consecration, its prayer, its community living and its ecclesial witness reflect the church's motivating rationale."

- **Rosemary Smith, SC, "Looking to the Future: Alternatives to Consider"**

Bulletin on Issues of Religious Law Volume 18 Fall 2000

"...Religious institutes, acutely aware of the precious gift they hold in trust and cognizant of the particular expression of this gift in their history, desire earnestly to hand on this gift to future generations. This article attempts to gather the array of options available to religious institutes as they consider the future."

## ORIGINS

### ■ **John Paul II/Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata***

Origins Vol. 25, No. 41 April 1996

An apostolic exhortation by Pope John Paul II that examines consecrated life as it is today. “Among its points, the pope says that ‘new forms of consecrated life now taking their place alongside the older ones, bear witness to the constant attraction of its ideals’. We need to commit ourselves with fresh enthusiasm, for the church needs the spiritual and apostolic contribution of a renewed and revitalized consecrated life.”

### ■ **Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium**

Origins Vol 32, No. 8 July 4, 2002

This is an instruction written by the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life which says that “consecrated persons are called by the Spirit...to give new vigor to the prophetic dimension of their vocation.”

A main focus of the instruction is spiritual life.

Among its key sections, the instruction addresses action for peace and justice in traditional and newer forms of service.

#### **Reconfiguration Subcommittee members:**

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