

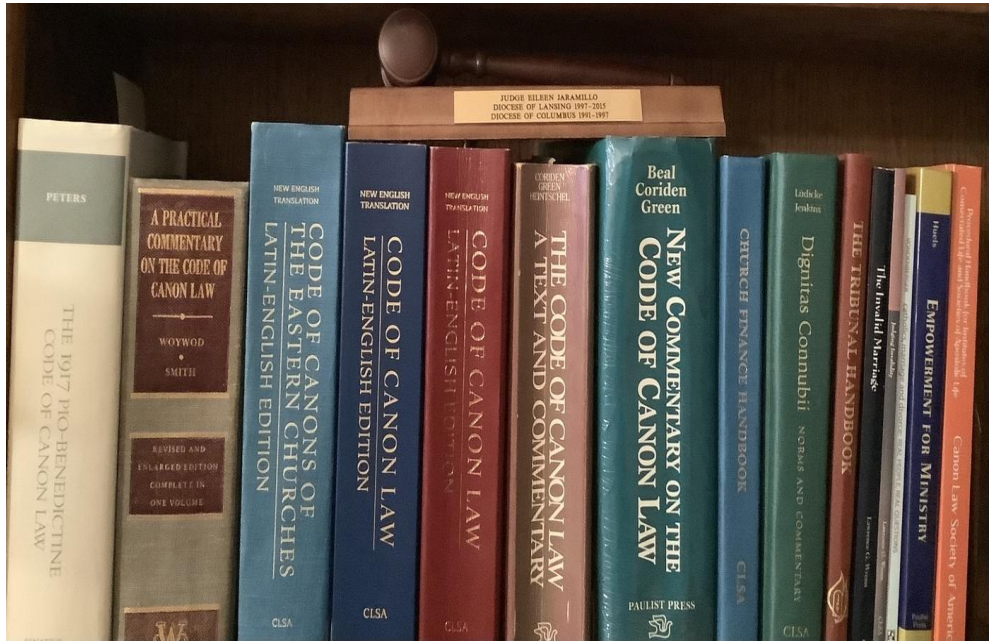
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Accountability in Religious Institutes

Webinar Presentation
Nov. 4, 2026

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Outline Of The Presentation



- Limitations of The Study
- Accountability Of General Chapter
- Accountability Re: Temporal Goods When An Institute Is Suppressed
- Case Studies: Real Life Situations (Permission Given)
  - No. 1: The General Chapter And Temporal Goods
  - No. 2: The Temporal Goods Of A Monastery of Nuns When It Is Suppressed

Limitation of the Study



Part III Of Book II Of CIC: The People Of God

- Treats Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life (Cc. 573–746).
- The Code Does Not Use A Single Umbrella Term For These Two Communal Categories.

The Code First Sets Out Norms Common To Institutes Of Consecrated Life (Cc. 573–606).

- It Then Distinguishes Two Categories Of Consecrated Life:
  - Religious Institutes (Cc. 607–709) And
  - Secular Institutes (Cc. 710–730).

Societies Of Apostolic Life Are Treated Separately In Cc. 731–746 And Are Described As Resembling Institutes Of Consecrated Life.

This Webinar Is Limited To Religious Institutes In The Latin Code Of Canon Law

A Few Examples of Religious Institutes

- Augustinians
- Basilians
- Benedictines
- Carmelites
- Christian Brothers
- Cistercians
- Congregation of the Holy Cross
- Dominicans
- Franciscans
- Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters
- Medical Missionaries of Mary
- Missionaries of Charity (Mother Theresa)
- Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
- Norbertines
- Oblates of St. Francis de Sales
- Passionists
- Redemptorists
- Salesians
- Servites
- Sisters of Mercy
- Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur
- Sisters of the Precious Blood
- Sisters of Providence
- Sisters of St. Joseph
- Society of Jesus
- Trappists



Religious Institutes Form A Broad Category

Both Congregations And Orders:

CIC No Longer Formally Preserves That Distinction

The Examples In The Chart Are Therefore Not Exhaustive

Additionally, Know That Some Institutes Have Distinct Branches But Different Aspects:

(e.g., The Dominican Order, Or Order Of Preachers, Includes: Friars-Priests As Brothers But Not All Brothers Are Priests, Nuns-Cloistered, Sisters-Apostolic)

Canon Law Recognizes These Related Structures As Aggregates (e.g., Cc. 94, 114, 121, 580, 1303 §1).

Some Can Have A Men's Communal Form That Is A Society Of Apostolic Life While The Women's Communal Form Is A Religious Institute.



In Canon Law Accountability Means:

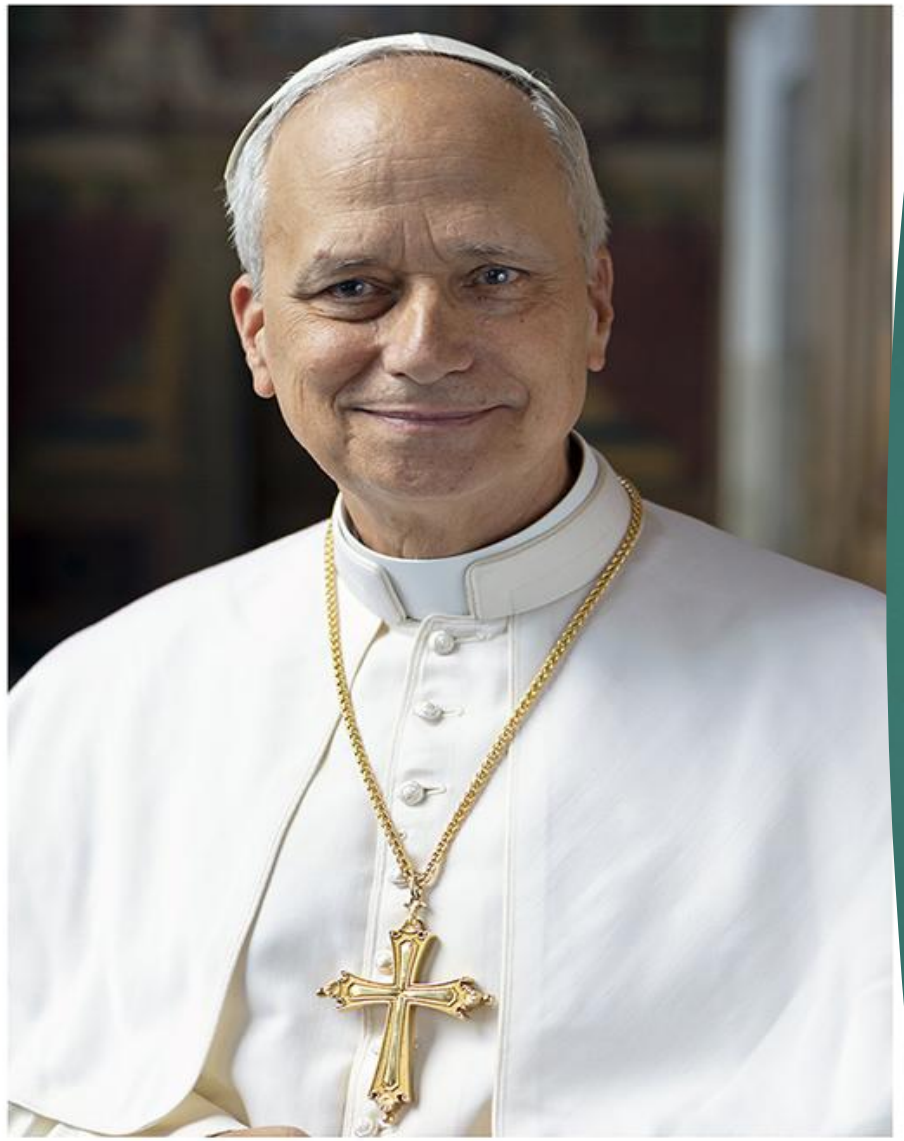
- Religious Institutes, And The Individuals Who Act Within Them, Must Answer For Their Actions And Decisions According to Church's Norms And Ethical Standards.
- This Obligation Helps Preserve Trust, Integrity, And Communion Within Ecclesial Structures.

Because Canon Law Often Intersects With Civil Law:

- Accountability Practices May Also Vary By Jurisdiction.

The Topic Is Therefore Far Too Broad For Comprehensive Treatment In A Single Webinar.

This Presentation Focuses Instead On Selected Issues That Arise Regularly In The Life And Governance Of Religious Institutes.



Leo P.P. XIV

ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

We live in what many describe as a change of epoch, an age marked by rapid shifts in culture, economics, technology and politics.

In particular, artificial intelligence and other innovations are reshaping our understanding of work and relationships and even raising questions about human identity.

Ecological degradation threatens our common home. Political systems often fail to respond to the cries of the poor.

Populism and ideological polarization deepen divisions within and among nations.

Many are affected by consumerism, individualism, and indifference.

Yet into this world, Christ still sends his disciples.

(October 2025)

FROM CANONICAL NORMS TO SYNODAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- Canon law provides a framework
- It points toward synodality and
- Co-essentiality between hierarchical gifts and charismatic gifts in the church (Vatican II)

GOVERNING BODIES

Canons 631–633 (principal deliberative bodies within religious institutes):

- general and provincial chapters;
- community assemblies;
- general and provincial committees; and
- similar consultative or deliberative gatherings.

While these bodies are interconnected, this webinar focuses especially on the general chapter and its central role in the institute's governance and accountability



BALANCING PERSONAL AND COLLEGIAL AUTHORITY

Two Complementary Dimensions:

- The Personal Authority Of Superiors (C. 618) And
- Collegial Authority Of The General Chapter (Cc. 631 §1, 119).
- Accountability: A Proper Balance Between Them.



HIGHEST INTERNAL AUTHORITY

- While In Session, The General Chapter: Supreme Internal Authority
- Because Of Its Importance, It Gathers The Capitulars In Person
- Once The Chapter Concludes, The Capitulars No Longer Hold Office
- A Collegial Body, Chapter Places All Capitulars On Equal Footing During Its Sessions
- The Superior General Is Bound By The Decisions Validly Adopted By The Chapter

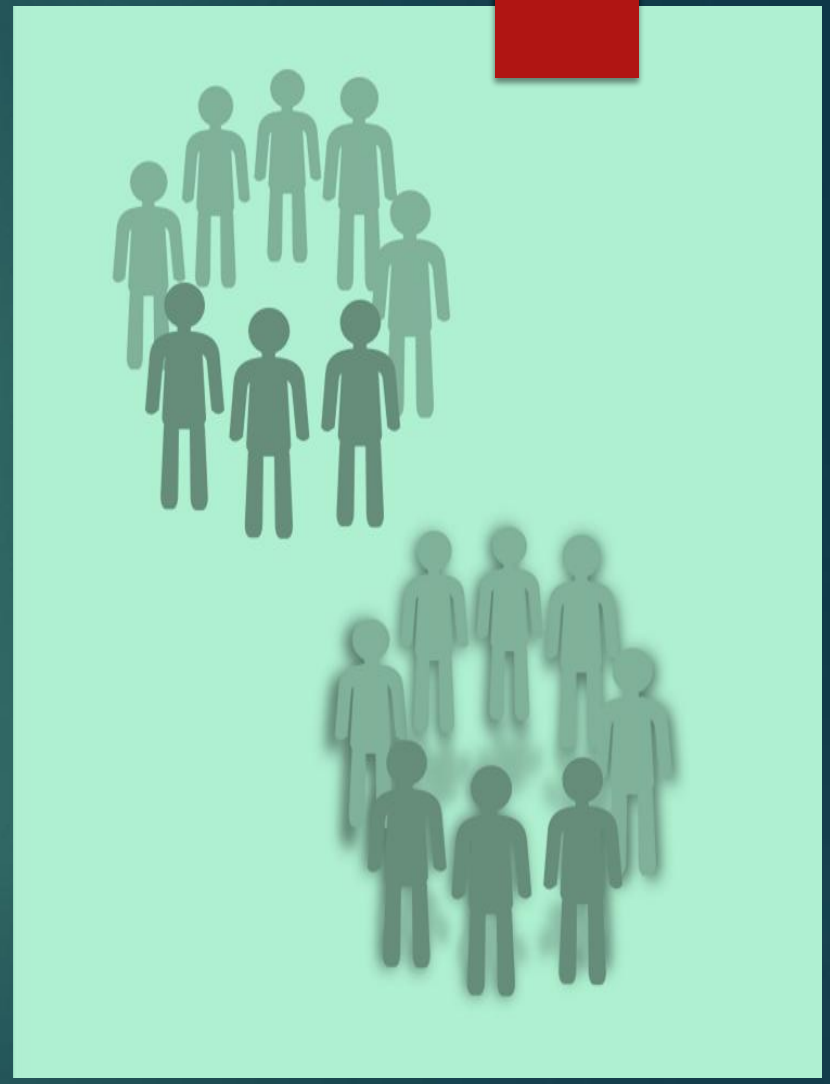
GENERAL CHAPTERS FALL INTO TWO CATEGORIES:

Ordinary General Chapters:

- Convoked At The Intervals Established In The Constitutions
- Usually In Connection With Elections.

Extraordinary General Chapters:

- Convened By The Superior General To Discern Important Emerging Questions,
- Matters Affecting The Rights And Obligations Of All Members.



AGENDA, ELECTIONS, AND CONSTITUTIONAL REVISIONS

CIC No Longer Distinguishes Between:

- Chapter Of Elections And
- Chapter Of Affairs

Each Religious Institute

- Establish The Chapter's Agenda
- Determines The Order In Which Matters Will Be Considered

Many Religious Institutes Have Decided:

- That Elections Will Occur Only

  After Significant Issues And Proposals Have Been Resolved.



REPRESENTATIVE MEMBERSHIP

Canon 631 Requires General Chapter To Represent The Entire Institute:
Capitulars Should -- Drawn From A Broad Range Of Members

- Different Geographical Regions,
- Linguistic Groups,
- Age Groups,
- Apostolates, And
- Other Relevant Circumstances

Balance *Ex Officio* Members — with Elected Members.

Constitutions: The Governing Principles For Representation

Institute Must Carefully Safeguard:

- Freedom Of The Members And
- Secrecy Of Voting (C. 172)





FIVE FOUNDATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Evaluate Fidelity To The Charism And Mission

2. Foster Appropriate Renewal (Canon 578)

3. Elect The Superior General And Council (Cc. 625 §1, 636)

4. Address Matters Of Greater Importance

5. Issue Norms

SUBMITTING RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CHAPTER

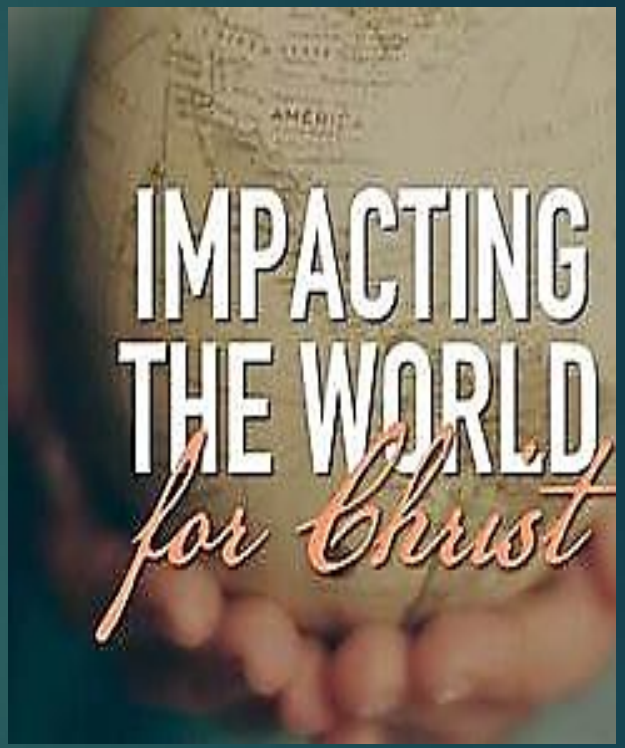
Canon 631: Permits Any Member, Province, Or Local Community To Submit Suggestions

- A Procedural Directory Can Explain:

  How And When Submissions Should Be Made

- To Prevent Arbitrary Inclusion Or Exclusion:

  Provide Capitulars With All Submissions



THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING AND COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT

Juridical Norms, Theological Principles, Holy Spirit

- Chapter Does More Than Contemplate Realities Unfolding In World
- Its Members Respond With All That They Are And All That They Have

PROMULGATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Enactments, Once Promulgated:

- Provide Direction Until The Next General Chapter Is Convoked.
- Method Of Implementation (Canons 631–633)

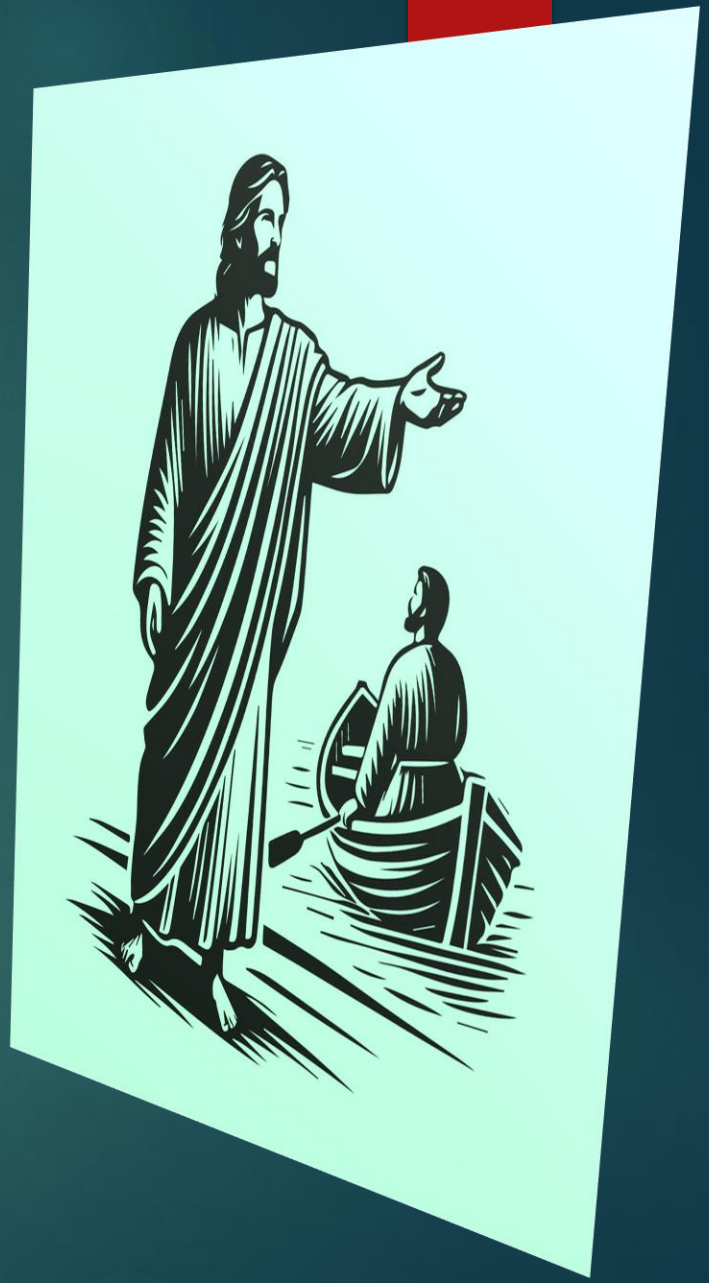
SUMMARY: COMMUNION, TRANSFORMATION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The General Chapter:

- Significant Expression Of Communion (*Communio*)
- Its Preparation, Deliberations, And Implementation:
  - Synodality,
  - Disciplined Procedure,
  - And Self-giving Commitment

Accountability:

- Confront And Dismantle Dehumanizing Situations And Structures



ACCOUNTABILITY RE: TEMPORAL GOODS WHEN AN INSTITUTE IS SUPPRESSED

The Evangelical Counsels As A Foundation

Foundational Element Of Religious Institutes:

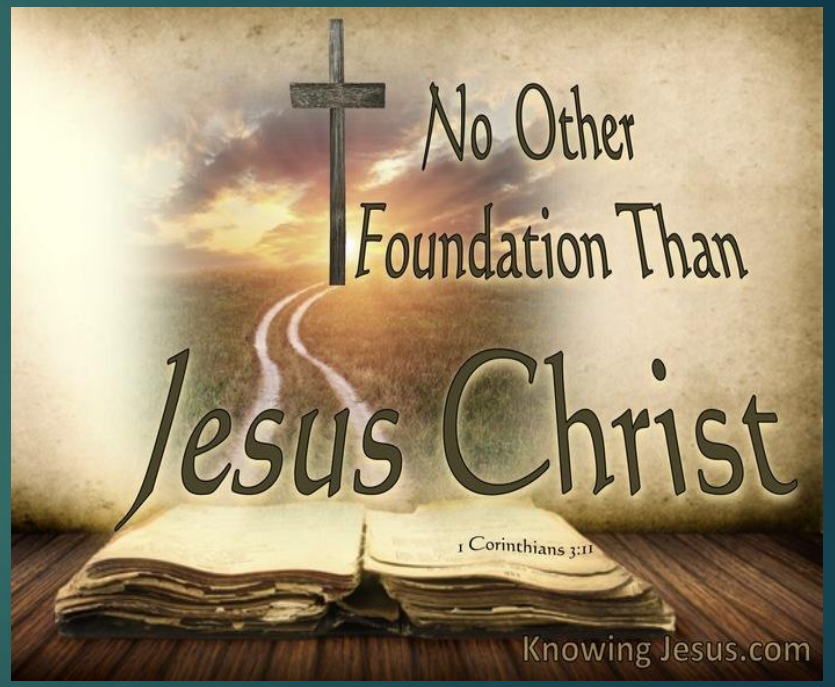
- Public Profession Of The Evangelical Counsels Of Chastity, Poverty, And Obedience

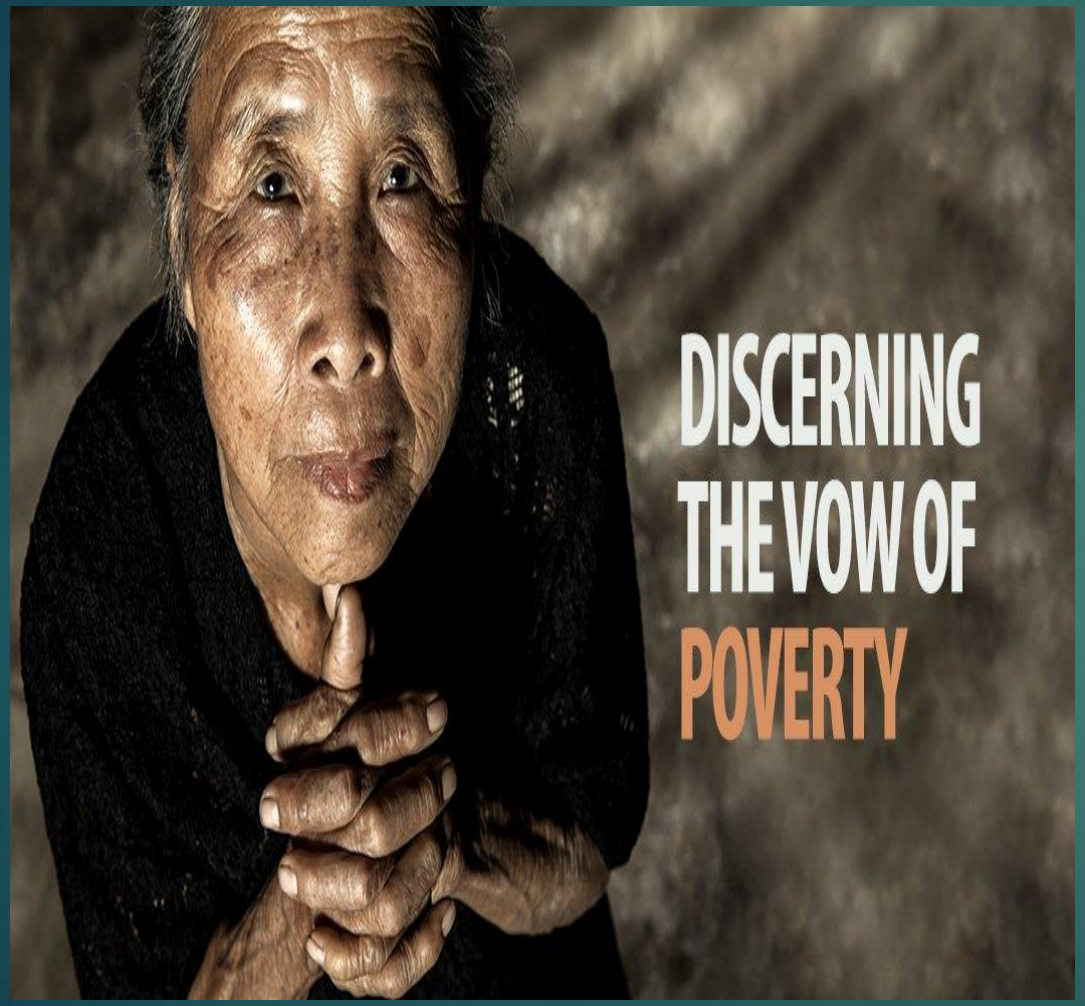
  (Cc. 573, 607 §2)

- Constitutions: Understands And Observes The Obligations Flowing From The Counsels.

This Consecration Is A Form Of *Sequela Christi*

- Canon 662: The "Supreme Rule Of Life"





Freely Chosen Poverty

Canon 600:

- A Life That Is Poor In Fact And In Spirit;
- Productive Work Carried Out With Moderation; Without Attachment To Earthly Riches;
- Limits On The Use And Disposition Of Goods, According To Proper Law Of Each Institute
- Vatican II: More Than Subjection To Superiors In Matters Of Property

Communal Poverty And Temporal Goods

Vatican II: Evangelical Counsel Of Poverty

- Visible In The Communal Life Of The Institute.

Canon 634: As Juridic Persons

- Acquire,
- Possess,
- Administer, And
- Alienate

The Code: Principal Areas Of Temporal Administration

- **Acquisition:** Canons 1259–1272.
- **Administration:** Canons 638 §§1–2 And 1273–1289
- **Alienation:** Canons 638 §§3–4 And 1290–1298

Canon 634 §2: Caution

- Avoid Any Appearance Of Excess
- Immoderate Wealth,
- Or Accumulation Of Goods



Canon 635 Identifies The Norms:

- Applies The Principle Found In Canon 1257: Temporal Goods Of Religious Institutes Are Ecclesiastical Goods, Regardless Of How They Are Structured Under Civil Law
- This Is A Very Important Concept
- Ecclesiastical Goods: Governed By The Principles Of Book V Of The Code Of Canon Law, Unless The Law Provides Otherwise.

Institutes Must Clearly Distinguish Between Two Kinds Of Goods:

- **Goods That Belong To The Religious Institute.** These Are Ecclesiastical Goods And Are Ordinarily Subject To The Norms Of Book V.
- **Goods Entrusted To The Institute For A Limited Purpose Or Period Of Time.** These Do Not Imply Ownership And May Not Be Ecclesiastical Goods.



CHARITABLE GIFTS

Canon 1285: Gifts For Charitable Purposes,

Canon 640: A Parallel Norm For Religious Institutes.

- First Responsibility: Safeguard The Security And Well-being Of The Institute's Members.

Pope Leo XIV: "…are from our surplus, or if we are giving generously and as a sacrifice from our poverty."

SUPPRESSION OF AN INSTITUTE

Canon 584: Suppression Of A Religious Institute

- Exclusively To The Apostolic See
- Same Principle Extends To Juridic Acts:
  - Coming To Completion
  - Union Or Fusion Of Institutes (C. 582)



DISPOSITION OF GOODS AFTER EXTINCTION



Canon 123: Governing Principle

- Its Goods, Patrimonial Rights, And Obligations Are Regulated By Law And By Its Statutes
- If Neither The Law Nor The Statutes Specify What Is To Happen, Those Goods And Obligations Pass To The Juridic Person Immediately Superior.
- Accordingly, When No Other Provision Exists, The Apostolic See Has The Exclusive Authority To Dispose Of The Goods. In Every Case, However, The Following Must Be Respected:
  - Intention Of Founders And Foundresses;
  - The Intention Of Donors; And
  - Any Acquired Rights.

The Special Situation of Monasteries of Nuns

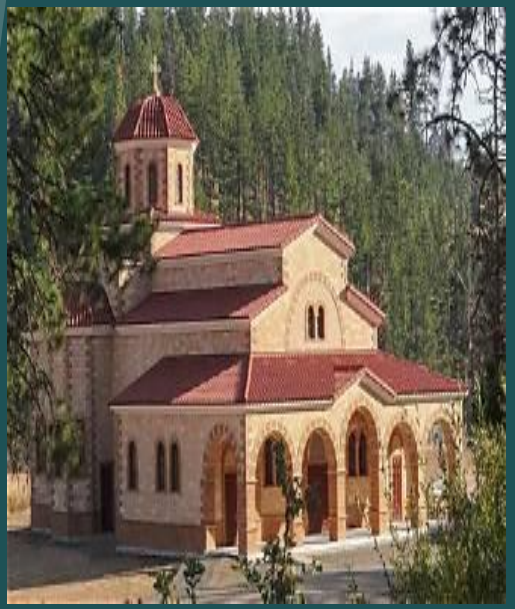


Cc. 609 §2 and 616 §4

- The Same One Who Erected It Is Competent To Suppress It
- Constitutions May Or May Not Have Foreseen For The Disposition Of Goods
- Norms Of Cor Orans Followed: Monastic Assets
- Particularly In Nos. 15, 47, 66, 72, 73, 97, 100, 102, 108, And 109

No. 72 of *Cor Orans* Particularly Important

The Assets Of The Suppressed Monastery, Respecting The Will Of The Founders And Donors, Follow The Surviving Nuns And Go, In Proportion, To The Monasteries That Receive Them, Unless Otherwise Provided By The Holy See Which May Dispose, In Individual Cases, Of A Portion Of The Assets To Be Given To Charity, To The Particular Church Within Whose Boundaries The Monastery Is Located, To The Federation, And To The '*Fund For The Nuns*'.



No. 73 Cor Orans: Important Point

- In the event of the suppression of a totally extinct monastery, when there are no surviving nuns, unless otherwise provided by the Holy See, the destination of the suppressed monastery's assets, in compliance with canon and civil law, go to the respective higher juridical person, that is, to the Federation of monasteries or to another structure of communion among the monasteries equal to it or to the female monastic Congregation.



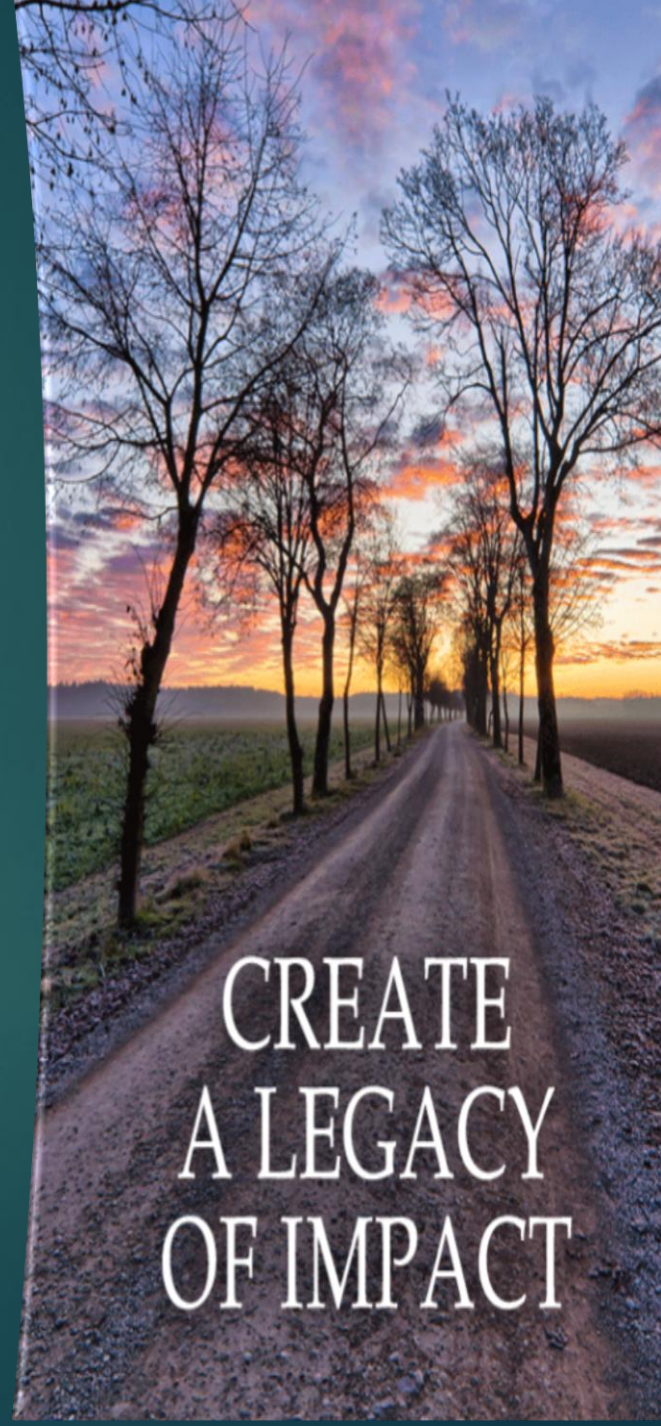
(I Will Come Back to Cor Orans nos. 72 and 73 in the second case study).

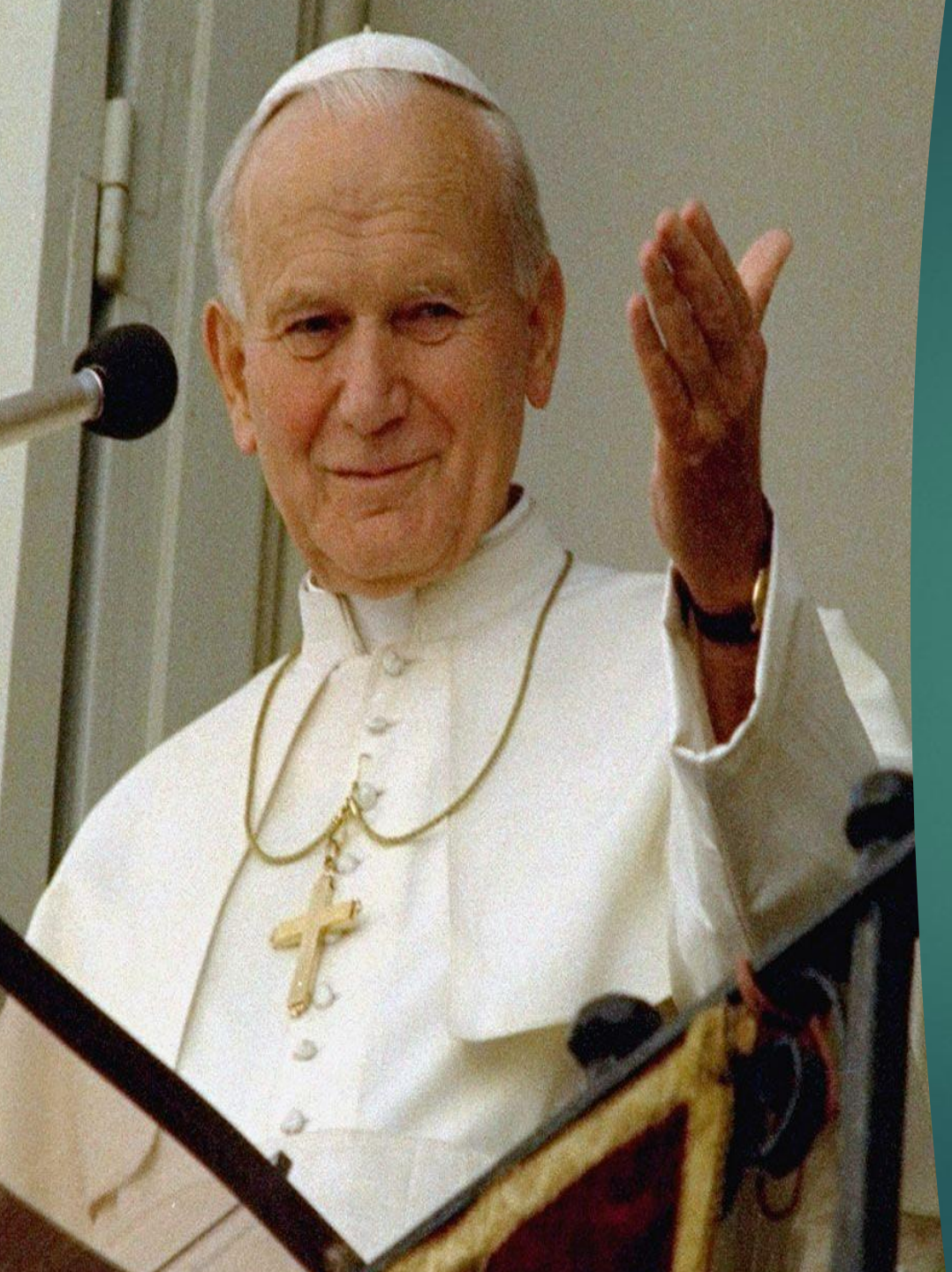
Charity, Poverty, and A Continuing Legacy

- Canon 640 Directs Institutes
  - According To Local Circumstances,
  - A Collective Witness Of Charity And Poverty
  - Contribute From Their Resources To The Needs Of The Church And The Support Of The Poor.

- Given An Institute's History In A Particular Diocese, It Is Reasonable For The Institute To Make A Meaningful Contribution To The Diocese.

- It Is Equally Reasonable For The Diocese To Request From DICLSAL In Accordance With No. 72 That Some Of Funds Be Used To Establish An Entity That Preserves The Institute's Legacy By Continuing Its Ministry Of Prayer And Sharing The Fruits Of Contemplation With Others Who Are In Need. Ultimately, That Decision Rests With DICLSAL.





Vita Consecrata

While Individual Institutes Have No Claim To Permanence, The Consecrated Life Itself Will Continue To Sustain Among The Faithful The Response Of Love Towards God And Neighbor.

It Is Necessary To Distinguish The Historical Destiny Of A Specific Institute Or Form Of Consecrated Life From The Ecclesial Mission Of The Consecrated Life As Such.

The Former Is Affected By Changing Circumstances, The Latter Is Destined To Perdure (§63).



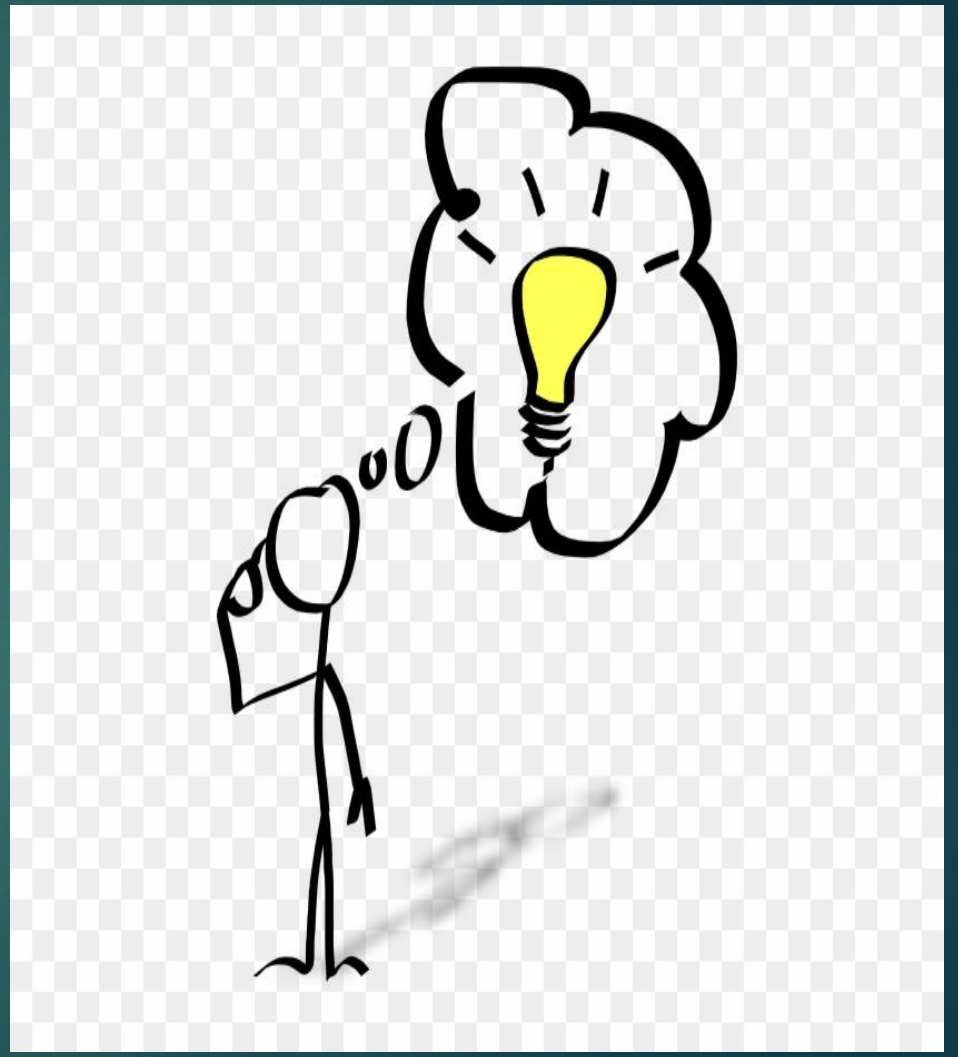
REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS
(permission given)

INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDIES

- Lecturing Remains A Valid Methodology
  - Master-apprentice Relationship
  - Makes The Transfer Of Knowledge Its Primary Objective
- Case-Study Method
  - Develops Additional Qualities Such As Sensitivity, Cooperation, And A Zest For Discovery
  - Invites Learners To Participate Actively In Their Own Formation
- Deep Roots In Canonical Tradition:
  - Case Studies Have Been Part Of The Methodology Since Gratian Of Bologna Introduced Them In The Twelfth Century

TWO TYPES OF CASE STUDIES

- **Exemplar Cases**
  - Generally Brief
  - Follow A Defined Process That Leads To A Particular Response
  - Help Learners Practice A New Skill
  - Considered "Closed-ended" Cases.
- **Open-ended Cases**
  - Used For Analysis, Inquiry, Problem Solving
  - Prepare Learners For Interpretation And Decision-making
  - Requiring Them To Examine Complexity Connect Facts To The Principles Explained in Lecture



Case No. 1:
General Chapter Decision and Temporal Goods

- Apostolic Religious Institute Of Women Of Pontifical Right (USA)
- General Chapter: Chapter Of Affairs And A Chapter Of Elections
- Chapter Of Affairs, The Capitulars Discussed, Voted:
  - Decided Not To Merge With Another Congregation
  - By Unanimous Vote: Coming To Completion (many years away)
- The Chapter Proceeded To Elections:
  - Elected A Superior General And Council
  - In Very Good Health, Two Had Expertise In Finances
- The Chapter Officially Concluded
- Nothing About Eventually Being Suppressed Was Communicated



Case No. 1:
General Chapter Decision and Temporal Goods

Ten Days After the Conclusion of the General Chapter:

- Donor Left The Institute $70 Million.

Conversation with Superior General:

- Institute's Constitutions And Any Related Civil Documents;
- Donor's Wording Regarding The Gift; And
- Health Care Needs Of All The Sisters Were Fully Provided



Conversation with Civil Lawyers:

- Found It Difficult To Understand The Vow Of Poverty.
- Questions About The Diocesan Bishop And The Holy See Re: Assets
- Review Of Institute's Constitution, Civil Incorporation and Donor's Wording
- Requested That I Write A Brief

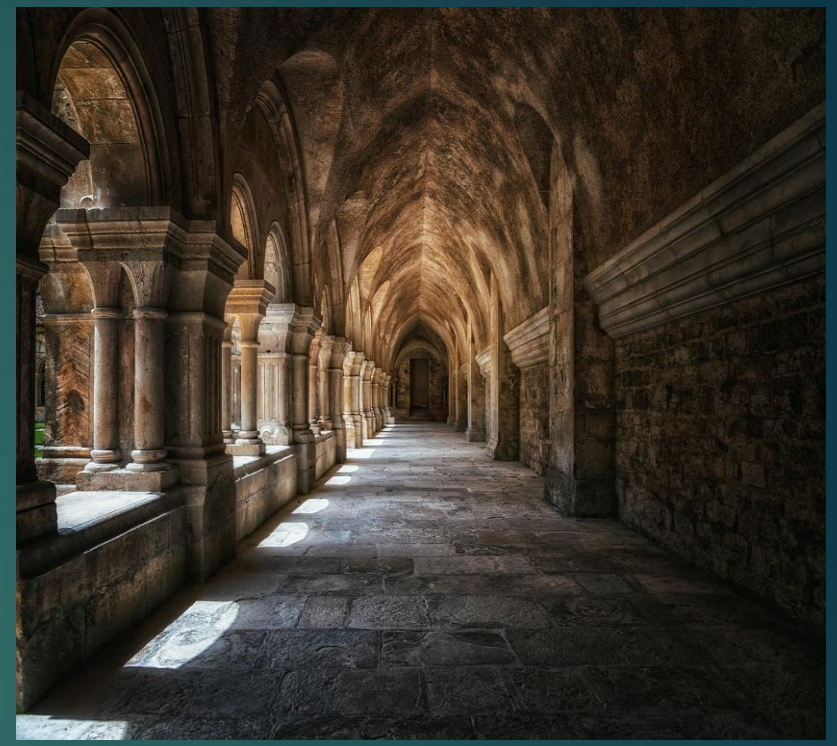
Case No. 2:
The Temporal Goods of a Monastery of Nuns When It Is Suppressed

Process Includes A Formal Visitation

- Visitators Prepare Report, Submit It To DICLSAL
- During The Visitation, The Nuns **Must** Be Heard

Some Significant Canons

- Cc. 635,1257: Temporal Goods Of Religious Institutes
  - -Are Ecclesiastical Goods
  - -This Is A Fundamental Point
  - -Governed by Book V Unless The Law Provides Otherwise
- A Few Points From Cor Orans no. 72:
  - - Assets Follow Surviving Nuns
  - -Unless Otherwise Provided by the Holy See Which May Dispose, In Individual Cases, Of A Portion of the Assets
    - -To be Given to Charity,
    - -To the Particular Church Within Whose Boundaries The Monastery Is Located,
    - -To the Federation,
    - -And To The 'Fund for the Nuns'



Case No. 2 (Continued-1): The Temporal Goods of a Monastery When It Is Suppressed

Some Civil Law Canons:

- C. 22: Canon Law Yielding To Civil Law At Certain Times
- C. 1284 §2, 3°: "Observe The Provisions Of Canon And Civil Law, And The Stipulations Of The Founder Or Donor Or Lawful Authority; They Are To Take Special Care That Damage Will Not Be Suffered By The Church Through The Non-observance Of The Civil Law"
- C. 1290: Similar To Canon 22
- C.1292 §1: Maximum and Minimum Amounts - Alienation
- C. 1296: Alienation Has Taken Place Without The Prescribed Canonical Formalities, But Is Valid In Civil Law Can Vindicate Rights Of Church



Case No. 2 (Continued-2): The Temporal Goods of a Monastery of Nuns When It Is Suppressed



I Recommend The Following:

- If You Have A Monastery In Your Diocese, It Would Be Important To Review The Civil Incorporation And Align It With Cor Orans Long Before A Decision Is Made About Suppression
- When The Monastery Is Suppressed And There Are Disagreements About Where The Assets Should Go Because There Are Conflicts Between Civil Law And Canon Law, You May Need To Do Mediation
- Based On The Amount Involved (c. 1292 §1) And Other Factors You Will Have To Submit All Of This To DICLSAL
- The Following Is A Sample Of What Could Be Submitted to DICLSAL Since We Are Dealing With Assets Which Exceed The Maximum Amount And The Assets May Be Going In Different Directions

Case No. 2 (Continued-3): The Temporal Goods of a Monastery When It Is Suppressed



- **Preamble & Canonical Context After Working Together**

- WHEREAS, The Monastery, An Autonomous Public Juridic Person Of Diocesan Right Situated At [address, state/other/country], Has Been Ordered Suppressed By Definitive Decree Of The Apostolic See Pursuant To The Apostolic Constitution Vultum Dei Quaerere And The Implementing Instruction Cor Orans; And

- WHEREAS, Under Instruction No. 73 Of Cor Orans, The Residual Temporal Goods And Real Property Of A Suppressed Autonomous Monastery Canonically Devolve To The Federation As The Higher Juridic Person, Unless Otherwise Provided By The Holy See; And

- WHEREAS, Instruction No. 72 Of Cor Orans Explicitly Permits The Holy See, In Individual Cases, To Dispose Of A Portion Of The Assets To The Particular Church (The Diocese) Within Whose Boundaries The Monastery Is Located Or A Charity; And

- WHEREAS, All Parties Desire To Honor The 100-year Spiritual Legacy Of The [Name the Order] Nuns In [Name State] While Executing All Transfers In Strict Compliance With The [Name of State] Nonprofit Corporation Code (Specify);

- NOW, THEREFORE, The Parties Mutually Agree To The Following Framework For Canonical Petition And Civil Execution and Request Your Permission To Proceed:

- (List What You Are Asking and Submit It As Part of the Package)





Questions or Observations