

VTMS News: **FSSP General Chapter**

New FSSP Superior General

The FSSP Chapter meeting in Rome from July 4th. through July 14th. has so far produced some very unexpected turns of events which were until now unforeseeable. We all remember the situation that existed just prior to the Chapter meeting as Fr. Bisig had announced that Fr. Devillers would be replaced as the North American Superior General.

At the start of the Chapter meeting Msgr. Camille Perl read a six page letter, to the Chapter, from Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos which to say the least caught the traditional world by surprise:

- Fr. Bisig was being deposed and Fr. Devillers was nominated, in his stead, as the FSSP Superior General;
- Fr. Du Fay was being deposed as the Superior of the Wigratzbad seminary because “he did not teach his seminarians a true love for the Church”;
- The rector of the North American Seminary was also deposed;
- The compromise of February 2000, authorizing the FSSP to concelebrate the Novus Ordo only on Holy Thursday, was revoked and Priests of the FSSP are authorized to concelebrate the New Rite as often as they wished;
- The FSSP policy was also changed so that a Superior General can only serve twice i.e. for two 6 year terms.

With Holy Mother Church we all pray:

“Ecce ancilla Domine fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum et fiat voluntas tua sicut in caelo et in terra.”

Letter of Dario Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos, President of the Papal Commission "Ecclesia Dei", to the General Chapter of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter

My very dear Brethren:

Your Fraternity is holding at the moment its General Chapter. In my position as the new President of the Papal Commission "Ecclesia Dei", I would gladly be with you, in order to speak to you personally. Because this is not possible, due to obligations, which I assumed quite some time ago, I am writing you this letter.

The General Chapter of your Fraternity is a privileged moment [in which] to look, together as brethren, upon the exalted Person of our Redeemer and only Lord, Jesus Christ. It is a privileged moment of Trinitarian communion, in which the unity of the Church of Our Lord and the unity among us as brethren strengthens itself. As disciples of Jesus, we must strive for perfection, but with the priorities, which the Master has Himself revealed to us. The absolute priority is the love of God and the

love of our brethren, as distinguishing characteristics of our Family of Faith. The love of God expresses itself in prayer, in the celebration of the Faith, in holding firm to certainties, which concern the moral life, and in the disciplinary manifestations, which protect and guarantee them. This is the special field of your particular place in the Church. Holding fast to the noble traditions in the celebration of the Divine Cult is its characteristic mark.

Since my appointment last April, I have studied the acts [or: archives] of your Institute. I have spoken with several of you, and I have read numerous letters which have reached me. Likewise, I have informed myself through people in Rome who have been familiar with your situation for years. After all of this, I would like to communicate to you my reflection and my decisions.

One cannot possibly deny that your Institute has been living through a severe crisis for a certain amount of time. A first attempt to solve this crisis was undertaken in February with the General Convocation held at Rocca di Papa. This Convocation, as you know, worked out a compromise, which attempted to reconcile the demands of the General Law of the Church with the particular character of your Institute, and so to overcome your divisions. This compromise, unfortunately, has become the object of new controversies between those who accept it, and those who reject it. In spite of this, the Superiors requested that the Papal Commission approve this compromise, and to make it a particular law for you. After mature reflection, and questioning of the experts, I ascertained that this is not possible. The ground for this is the clear circumstances of the legal situation in this matter, namely: A priest, who enjoys the privilege to celebrate the Mass according to the old Missal of 1962, does not lose the right, likewise to use the Missal of 1970, which is officially in force in the Latin Church. No Superior beneath the Supreme Pontiff can hinder a priest from following the General Law, which was promulgated by the Supreme Legislator, namely, to celebrate in the reformed Rite of Pope Paul VI. A limitation of the exercise of this right can be freely decided upon, perhaps, by a priest, but it can never become the general rule of an Institute. It [i.e., the limitation or restriction] also cannot be imposed upon seminarians, or be the reason for denying them ordination.

You know very well, that this last point is of great importance for you in this moment, when not a negligible number of seminarians and even priests have the intention to depart from your Institute, if this rule were imposed upon them--- which, however, is in fact not possible.

It is therefore urgently necessary to render certain decisions, in order to avoid the falling apart of your Fraternity, and [to avoid] the loss of vocations, which are so precious in our time.

1. The first decision is of juridical nature. Your Constitutions, which were approved "ad experimentum" [i.e., experimentally, temporarily], leave open the question of the possible number of terms of appointment for a Superior General. It appears appropriate to restrict these to two terms of six years each -- that is, a maximum of twelve years -- to bring the Fraternity into harmony with the majority of other religious Institutes. The competent authority of the Holy See hereby limits the term of office of the Superior General of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter to two successive terms of six years each. This Papal Commission thanks Father Bisig, who has exercised this function for twelve years, for everything, which he has done for the Fraternity, which owes to him its consolidation and its expansion into several countries during the initial period of its history, as the fruit of his burning zeal and his desire for personal and collective sanctification. He will always be, through his experience, a pillar and support for your Fraternity and will, I am certain, help his successor through his good advice.

2. The second decision is the following: It is known to you that in 1991, Cardinal Innocenti, who was then President of this Papal Commission, named Fr. Bisig to a further term of three years as Superior General, despite a differing vote of the General Chapter. The conflict-ridden situation of your Fraternity presently demands a similar intervention of superior authority, in view of the danger that an election could become the source of even more profound divisions. For this reason, I name Fr. Arnaud Devillers as Superior General of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter for a term of six years. Fr. Devillers fulfills the necessary conditions and knows your Fraternity well from the inside. He has long experience as the one responsible for the North American District, which he founded, and which he has firmly implanted in several American dioceses -- always in good co-operation with the respective bishops. His first assignment will be to re-establish peace in your Fraternity, by working to maintain your common spirituality, and even to strengthen it; likewise to reinforce your family spirit.

3. The third decision concerns the Seminary at Wigratzbad. Together with the one in the United States, it is the cradle of future vocations. One must therefore give it the possibility to form priests in all peace and calm, and to provide a solid theological and pastoral formation. For this reason, a new Rector will be named for the International Seminary of St. Peter at Wigratzbad. He will dedicate himself to the task of priestly formation, together with the college of professors, whom he will select with the consent of the Superior General. It is important that the seminarians find here a spiritual atmosphere, a good spirit, professors adequate to their assignment, and an exemplary ecclesial spirit, which carefully avoids all extremism. You know quite well that your Seminary is observed by many people in the Church, and that it must be exemplary in all respects. In particular, it is required to avoid

and combat a certain spirit of rebellion against the present-day Church, which spirit easily finds followers among the young students, who -- like all young people -- already incline to extreme and rigorist positions. It is necessary, on the contrary, to cultivate love for the Church and Her Supreme Pastor, and to listen to Her Magisterium. One cannot live in the Church and at the same time distance himself from Her. The Superior General will likewise select a Rector for the American Seminary, for which the same findings are valid as for Wigratzbad.

I wish that all members of the Fraternity accept these decisions with submission and humility. May they all keep themselves from again forming pressure-groups or groups of resistance against the line of the Superior General. I promise that the Papal Commission will be from now on more present in the Seminaries and other Houses of the Fraternity, and will watch more diligently over their good condition. It may also come about, that the Commission will intervene anew, if this is necessary.

What concerns the Liturgy remains, as it should: Your Fraternity has the privilege to celebrate according to the liturgical books from 1962 in its own chapels and churches. The priests of the Institute normally celebrate according to this Rite, but they have the right -- it is unnecessary to repeat -- to celebrate also according to the books presently in use, in particular cases, which will not be frequent, but which nevertheless remain dependent upon the reasonable and tactful decision of the priests. I encourage you to concelebrate with the diocesan bishop, particularly on Maundy Thursday. In this way, you will visibly demonstrate your unity with the Pastor of the local Church---who is also your Pastor -- and with his clergy, to whom those priests also belong who are members of Institutes of Consecrated Life or -- as your Fraternity -- of Communities of Apostolic Life, which have a pastoral charge in the diocese.

On the other hand, it is clear that no priest is obliged to make use of this right. In this way, an atmosphere of freedom and trust can arise in this area, which stands in opposition to every exclusivity and every liturgical extremism. The "Fraternity of St. Peter", as its name already says, can only be a family of brethren, who mutually accept each other with fraternal love, and who are united wholly into the great family of the Roman Catholic Church, where there is a legitimate place for Catholics with a traditional sensibility, which I will defend with all my power.

I entrust to you one more personal reflection: You must not view the aspect of the Rite [of the Liturgy] as the central point of the whole Church, or place this aspect on the same level as the fundamentals themselves, such as unity in the true Faith, common discipline under the Apostolic Hierarchy, and the Liturgy, which is the celebration of the Mysteries of the Faith. The Rite is not the celebration itself, but it is only one of the possible forms of the latter. Apart from that, do not forget

that the Rite reformed by Pope Paul VI the common Rite of the Church. It is not your task to alter this state of things, or so to speak about this Rite, as if it were of lesser value; but rather to aid the Faithful who have an attachment to the old Rite better to find themselves once more in the Church. If it is true that the aspect of the Rite is an important help for the permanence of the Sacred, which in today's Church is so threatened by secularisation, this occurs not only through one single form of the Rite, as some might like to believe; but one must preserve the Holy in all relations with God. It is your task to do this, in that you celebrate according to your aptitudes. Nevertheless, you must not assign a priority to the form of the Liturgy, in which you have the privilege to celebrate. But rather, it is much more necessary to see this as the particular contribution of your Institute to the common work of the Church. Your contribution must fit itself into the harmony of the sanctity of the Church, where there is certainly a place for that which completes -- not, however, for that which contradicts. Insofar as you behave thus, you contribute at the same time to the New Evangelization, to which the Holy Father calls all of us.

I invoke upon all of you the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of the Apostles, and the plenitude of heavenly graces, which God wishes to confer upon you: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Rome, the 29th June 2000

Dario Card. Castrillon Hoyos

Press Release From The Office Of Communications The Priestly Fraternity Of St. Peter North American District Headquarters

ELMHURST, Pa--

Father Arnaud Devillers, F.S.S.P, who has presided over a decade of remarkable growth for the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter in North America, has been named the Fraternity's new Superior General. Father Devillers was formally installed at the Fraternity's General Chapter at Wigratzbad, Germany on July 6. He succeeds Father Josef Bisig, F.S.S.P. who has served appointed and elected terms as Superior General since 1988.

Father Devillers said, "I am honored and humbled by this enormous responsibility and trust which has been placed in me. In this Jubilee Year, it seems especially appropriate that we renew our commitment to the Fraternity's original mission, to participate in the "new evangelization" animated by our loyalty to the Holy Father and attachment to the ancient liturgical tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. The challenges we face are real ones, but they can be overcome by faith in Christ and the Church He founded. Above all, I ask our supporters throughout the world for their prayers."

Under Father Devillers' leadership the Fraternity's presence in North America has grown from its original apostolate to twenty-five parishes and apostolates in twenty-two dioceses. Today, just over half the Fraternity's apostolates worldwide are in North America.

The Fraternity's North American seminary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, established in 1994 in the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania, has grown rapidly and will move this Fall to its permanent home in the Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska. This Spring, seven priests and seven deacons were ordained for the Fraternity in North America.

Father Devillers' broad international experience is expected to serve him well in his new position. A native of La Celle-St-Cloud, near Versailles, France he was ordained in 1985. Following ordination Father Devillers served four years in Kansas, as president of a junior college. He then completed studies at the Catholic University of Strasbourg where he received a Licentiate in Sacred Theology.

He taught for two years at St. Peter's Seminary, Wigratzbad, Germany, prior to being sent in 1991 as the representative of the Fraternity for North America. Father Devillers was named District Superior for the United States and Canada in 1994.

Declaration of the General Chapter of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter

(gathered in Wigratzbad July 4 - 14, 2000)

Knowing that the Lord afflicts those whom He loves with crosses and trials, the General Chapter, which holds within the Institute the supreme authority according to the constitutions (CIC, can. 631), wishes to transmit to the faithful the measures which the Ecclesia Dei Commission has taken with regard to the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter, and which were communicated to it in a letter from Cardinal Castrillón-Hoyos read by the Secretary of the Commission, Msgr. Camille Perl.

In his letter, the Cardinal decides to limit the terms for the Superior General to two successive terms of six years. He declares that he himself will name the new Superior General in the person of Fr. Arnaud Devillers, Superior of the North American District, in the hope of resolving the current situation of conflict. "His first task will be to bring about peace for your Fraternity by working to maintain and even reinforce its common spirituality and to strengthen its familial spirit." The Cardinal also asks that the new Superior change the rectors of the two seminaries. He leaves to the Chapter the work of electing the General Council of the Fraternity, that is, at least two assistants and two counselors.

The General Chapter must admit that it received the news of these measures with stupefaction and great concern. Consequently, it has decided to put forward an Administrative Recourse to the competent authorities. It acknowledges the concern of the Cardinal for the unity of the Fraternity. Nevertheless, this Chapter wishes to manifest its will to see the Fraternity conserve the line present at its foundation. For

those who disagree with this line, the General Chapter has officially asked for a peaceful separation. For this reason it has given to the new Superior General the directive to make use of all measures available to him - in the juridical cadre given by the Cardinal - to remain faithful to its proper specificity and to realize its end by the faithful observance of the liturgical and spiritual traditions, in conformity with the dispositions of the *Motu proprio Ecclesia Dei* of July 2, 1988, and in the spirit of the Protocol of May 5, 1988, signed between the Cardinal Ratzinger and Archbishop Lefebvre.

The Chapter has elected the assistants and counselors of the Superior General Fr. Patrick du Faÿ, Fr. Jean-Marc Fournier and Fr. José Calvin-Torralbo as assistants, Fr. Bernard Deneke, and Fr. John Berg as counselors.

In the spirit of obedience to the Church which it has always maintained - most notably in its seminaries - and because of the clear threats which weigh upon the Fraternity of Saint Peter, the General Chapter, well aware of the legitimate worries of its friends, asks for their prayers and their sacrifices in order that during this particularly difficult time, our Institute will remain faithful to the intentions of its founders.

Response From Fr. Devillers

My nomination by the Holy See as Superior General of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter seems to open the gates of the wildest rumours.

Editor's comment:

It was rumoured that Fr. Devillers had celebrated a Novus Ordo Mass last year.

I must protest vehemently against this lie. I have never celebrated or concelebrated the new Mass to date. Actually I said so to Cardinal Castrillon-Hoyos, President of the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*, a few days before I was asked if I would accept this responsibility. It did not seem to bother him at all.

If the truth must be said, I have been chosen by the Holy See in order to try to heal the division between FSSP priests in Europe as the General Assembly of last February did not achieve this goal. Not an easy task! Also, there has been almost no growth for the Fraternity in Europe in the last five years and I have a fairly good track-record in this matter... Should the Holy See leave the Fraternity to self-destruct and thus not to be able to help the faithful or should the Holy See make a last attempt to unlock the situation? I am not for one side or the other. I was appointed to bring peace, I shall try my best. Please pray that I may succeed. This is not the first time the Commission has appointed a

Superior General. In 1991, the chapter elected a Superior General who was not approved by the Commission who instead appointed Fr. Joseph Bisig.

Una Voce International

The International Una Voce Federation has been granted an audience with the Ecclesia Dei President, Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos to discuss the FSSP situation and other matters. This meeting will take place within the first week of September.