

SECTION I

ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMON LIFE

CHAPTER I

DWELLING-PLACE

Article I

What Our Houses Should Be

In the construction and organization of the houses of the Congregation we should follow what the Constitutions prescribe relative to the general lay-out of the buildings, and the separation of the quarters for the religious from those of the retreatants.

With the exception of the chapel for which nothing is too beautiful because of the Majesty of Him who dwells therein, the houses of the Congregation should bear the stamp of religious simplicity even in the quarters destined for the use of retreatants. In the community quarters all should conform to the exigencies of poverty.

The buildings, however, should be sanitary and well ventilated. The interior walls will be ordinarily of white plaster or a light color. The employments, rooms and common rooms will be arranged in the manner most conducive to perfect observance; for the end in view must always be that in each house of the Institute the religious life may flourish in all its beauty.

As much as possible the windows of the convent should not look directly on a public street, and even more care should be taken that retreatants and externs should not be able to see into the dwelling of the religious. It will be useful to have near the entrance or elsewhere, halls for catechetical instruction, for retreat and guild meetings, etc., and a chapel for the retreatants in order that "nothing may disturb recollection and that all may tend to foster prayer." (Constitutions Sec.3, Chap.1, #7), and that the order of choir exercises may be faithfully guarded.

The principal rooms of regulation are the refectory and the community room, in which most of the common exercises take place and in the latter the choir religious work in silence when they are not in their employments. It is in the library that the religious have permission to speak about the works and the employments.

As much as possible each religious shall have a small room or cell, named for a saint. However, the younger ones may sleep several in the same place, the beds being so separated that each may have suitable privacy. As far as arrangements permit, those who are in good health will be lodged in the same section; the more secluded rooms are reserved for the infirm. A statue or picture of the Blessed Virgin may be placed in the corridors near the cells and dormitories.

The garden serves a double purpose, first of preserving the health of the well and of being beneficial to the sick; secondly, if space permits, it supplies vegetables and fruit for the table of the community, and flowers for the chapel.

Where the laws of the country and circumstances permit a cemetery for our religious may be on the convent property, under the shadow of a cross, on the base of which will be inscribed: "Sorores Congregationis a Beata Maria Virgine Coenaculi." (1)

In the archives of the Congregation will be kept the plan of a house adapted for regular observance; and the erection of new houses will conform to this plan, always taking into consideration the differences of climate, countries, and materials in use, etc. As for the houses already existing, no considerable repairs, improvements, or notable changes shall be made without the permission of the superior general. Usually such business will be planned with the provincial during the annual Visitation and submitted to the procurator general; at the same time the means by which these proposed expenses may be met will be considered.

Article II

Foundation of Houses

"The aim of the Congregation, which is to extend the Kingdom of God by laboring for the salvation of souls, requires that its houses be situated only in populous centers, or in places frequented by gatherings of people -- that is, in large cities or renowned places of pilgrimage." (Constit. Sec.3 Chap.1, #3.)

As recommended by the Constitutions, no house shall be founded where prayers, penances and new observances or works "foreign to the spirit and aim of the Congregation" must be established. (Constit. Sec.3, Chap.1, #7) Burdensome or constraining stipulations which would impede the action of superiors and prevent them from disposing freely of the religious under their authority must never be accepted.

When with God's help, the foundation of a new house of the Congregation is to be undertaken, Canon Law and our Constitutions prescribe that before all else the authorization of the Ordinary must be asked and obtained in writing (Constit. Sec.3, Chap.1, #4) Our Congregation, especially devoted to Holy Church, should distinguish itself from the outset by respect and obedience toward the Bishop, deference towards the clergy, secular and regular, and humility in its relations with other religious families "preventing them with honor," (Rom. 12:10) according to the teaching of the Apostle, bearing a sincere affection for them and esteeming itself least of all.

In principle it is not expedient to place a house on too small a tract of land, nor to limit the dimensions too much. When the locale is defective or insufficient and the personnel necessarily limited in number, the vigor of discipline, fervor and joy of spirit are endangered. In effect, it is then very difficult for a small number of religious to be faithful to the

1) In public cemeteries a vault or plot will be reserved for the religious and there also will be placed a cross bearing the same inscription.

regular life without neglecting the exercise of zeal, or to give themselves to the practice of zeal without abandoning regularity. In general the houses of the Institute should not count fewer than twelve choir religious, and this number may be augmented according to need. It will be more advantageous not to multiply houses too rapidly, and to have only regularly constituted ones, because, said our Blessed Mother Therese, "when one is too overburdened with work the spiritual suffers."

Most often we can begin with a provisional installation; then with the help of time and experience, seek a site and work towards the building of the house of God.

The foundresses shall be mindful first of all of installing the chapel or at least a temporary oratory as soon as possible. When this dwelling of the Lord is ready the bishop is notified so that he personally or his delegate may assure himself that all is duly appropriate, and may bless it. A temporary chapel is usually blessed privately, the solemnity is reserved for the final sanctuary. As often as possible the blessing is followed by the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice, by which the Blessed Sacrament is placed in the tabernacle. From that moment the foundation is considered as accomplished, and the regular life will be installed little by little, as also the apostolic works.

It is to be noted that permission to erect a house includes that of exercising the works proper to the Institute, unless the bishop has imposed some restricting conditions in his authorization of the foundation.

Even for a private blessing of the chapel or of the house there should be a written record signed by the one officiating and several witnesses. A single record is sufficient for the chapel and house if they have been blessed the same day.

At the beginning of the foundation we should ask of the Ordinary a chaplain for the religious service of the house and the confessors required by Canon Law.

For deeds and contracts the services of a good lawyer must be procured; a wise, conscientious and influential man will be sought, and the religious will try to secure his devotedness to the community, being mindful of these words of Holy Scripture: "A faithful friend is a strong defence, and he that hath found him hath found a treasure; and they that fear the Lord shall find such a friend." (Eccl. 6:14 and 16)

Article III

Those Chosen to Make Foundations

Those chosen to make foundations, especially at great distances, should be loyal and courageous religious, of exemplary virtue and invincible patience; religious animated with limitless devotion toward the Congregation, zealous for common life, capable of establishing regular observance promptly and maintaining it in spite of difficulties.

They will follow the guidance of Divine Providence which manifests its will to upright hearts. They will hope in God for it is written: "For thy name's sake, O Lord, thou wilt lead me and nourish me." (Ps. 30:4)

They will always bear in mind what is said by the prophet: "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." "Although natural means should not be despised but employed prudently and religiously according to need, it will be more expedient to use principally supernatural and divine means, and the religious should place more trust in these, while they pray God to make all efficacious." (Constit. Sec.3, Chap.3 #18)

They will love poverty to the extent of enduring with joy hunger, thirst, cold, heat, and all sorts of labors and privations. They will keep closely united to God by prayer and mortification, to superiors by humility and obedience, and among themselves by charity.

The foundresses should know thoroughly the Constitutions, the Directory, the Ceremonial, and the Book of Customs. They should loyally observe not only the things written down, but also those taught by tradition, for uniformity of customs helps very much to maintain in the various houses of the Congregation that unity of spirit and union of hearts which the Rule commands, saying: "Let all have but one soul and one heart in God." (Rule of St. Augustine.)

They will be attentive to maintain and increase the benevolence of friends of the Congregation; and endeavor to gain by prayer the affection of enemies, or at least to prevent them from doing harm.

With regard to persons who assist the foundation spiritually or materially, the duty of gratitude must be faithfully fulfilled, and the suffrages prescribed by the Constitutions must be faithfully discharged.
