

## NEW PJP MODEL 'A LEAP OF FAITH'

Over the past 20 or so years, the Holy See has taken practical steps to ensure the continuity of various ministries carried out in the name of the church, especially ministries originally sponsored by religious institutes. One of the more popular ways to do this is by establishing pontifical public juridic persons (PJPs) to assume institutes' sponsorship responsibilities in the areas of health care, social services and education. This mechanism has been used particularly in the United States, Canada, Ireland and Australia. In other countries, it is more common for the church to establish foundations and trusts to look after the temporal goods involved.



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While creative steps have been taken in regard to the continuity of the apostolic works, little has been done to assure the life and continuity of the institutes themselves, as well as the appropriate care of their members. In a certain number of instances, we have seen fusions and unions of various institutes, but this method has not always worked out as expected. At times, it almost had the characteristics of a forced marriage. Not every community has been ready and willing to give up its heritage and the practical expressions of its charism.

There are a number of smaller institutes in Canada that share similar needs — a mechanism to:

- Assure that the members of these communities will be well protected
- Provide good stewardship of their temporal goods
- Organize care for their sick members
- Oversee and respect all applicable labor laws
- Carry on apostolic works that are not part of a new PJP but that still respond to a need in society and in the church.

On their behalf, conversations were undertaken with the Holy See to see what could be done

for communities that did not feel called to merge with another institute, and to determine how best to protect their assets, particularly when it became opportune or necessary for them to divest themselves of properties and buildings that were no longer in use or were too large for present-day needs.

A selected number of institutes — male and female, pontifical and diocesan, English- and French-speaking, priests, brothers and sisters, communities with provinces and those that were directly under a superior general — presented a joint request to the Holy See for the establishment of a new pontifical PJP to assume some responsibilities and to assure proper stewardship of church assets.

After lengthy discussions, and with the constant assistance of the Holy See, the Congregation

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for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on Dec. 8, 2010, granted pontifical juridical status to a new PJP, the Canadian Religious Stewardship. It appears to be the first such juridic person, and time will tell whether it was established by the appropriate canonical means and whether it meets its intended goals expeditiously.

## **PARTICIPATION VOLUNTARY**

Because of the civil ramifications of such an undertaking, the Canadian Religious Stewardship carries out its apostolic works through various civil entities, particularly through a civil corporation known as Canadian Catholic Congregational Management.

One of the PJP's particular characteristics is voluntary participation. A community that wishes to become a participating entity can choose which of the Canadian Religious Stewardship's services to use, and for how long.

The PJP has five major purposes:

- To assist religious institutes by managing and safeguarding their ecclesiastical temporal goods and assuring their proper administration in accordance with canon and civil law

- To provide personal care programs and services for the membership of these institutes

- To accept ownership of ecclesiastical temporal goods in those instances where the institute wishes to divest itself of property, in accordance with the requirements of canon law

- When opportune, to accept governance responsibilities for any or all health care, educational, religious and social service ministries presently supported by the institute

- With the consent of the relevant diocesan bishop, and, if appropriate, to accept sponsorship of an institute's ministry

It is notable that the PJP can accept governance responsibilities for an institute's religious services that do not fit into any of the more traditional categories — health care, education, social services. In particular, thought was given to retreat houses, publication works and similar undertakings.

## **ROLE OF THE BISHOPS**

It is obvious that the Canadian Religious Stewardship will have to keep one delicate point in mind when it takes on one or more of these responsibilities: establishing good relations with the diocesan bishop, since, in many instances, we are dealing

with apostolic works carried out in the name of the church. Indeed, a number of bishops who had motherhouses or provincial houses in their dioceses included supporting letters as part of the PJP proposal presented to the Holy See.

A participating entity also can avail itself of one or more of the PJP's services for only a given period of time. There is no question of the institute itself becoming integrated into the PJP. It is a

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stewardship entity, not a new religious institute or a part thereof.

Because the new entity's focus is on supporting religious institutes, their members and their mission, we should not be surprised to see the statutory provision that the president of the members shall be a perpetually professed member of an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life. The other members are to be in full communion with the Catholic Church, but they may be religious or lay persons.

## **FORMATION REQUIRED**

The statutes also provide that members of the Canadian Religious Stewardship shall satisfactorily complete an initial formation process and participate in continuing formation with content the participating entities determine. This has been one of the best outgrowths of all the new PJPs for health care and social services — a continued emphasis on members' and sponsors' formation. We now have a very significant pool of committed people who have completed such formation processes and, by virtue of their baptism and confirmation, are willing to assume additional responsibilities in the church and carry them out faithfully.

As is also the case with other PJPs, the Holy See asks for an annual report of the activities of the Canadian Religious Stewardship. It is especially important for the PJP to present clear and precise

reports, as it is a new type of undertaking.

#### **MODEL FOR ELSEWHERE**

Although the foundational documents do not specify that the Canadian Religious Stewardship can operate anywhere or that its activities are restricted to Canada, the documents refer consistently to institutes carrying out their ministry in Canada. Therefore, it might be possible for religious institutes elsewhere to consider requesting a similar type of entity.

The major advantage of such an undertaking is that it protects and provides for members of religious institutes that are diminishing or are even in their final stages. Even if certain institutes are no longer able to find qualified treasurers to oversee the proper administration of their temporal goods, there will be another mechanism available to assure that these responsibilities are carried out in an appropriate manner. Tax and employment laws are becoming more and more complicated. It is opportune and even necessary for institutes to make certain they are observing all applicable legislation so that their ownership of goods, their civil status and the status of their lay employees is not jeopardized.

The Canadian Religious Stewardship entity constitutes a leap of faith. It is a sign of the Holy See's concern for the well-being of institutes and their members, and it provides a possible model that could be considered elsewhere.

Obviously, it will take some time to have all the new PJP's internal mechanisms in place, but time may well show this decision was a most appropriate one.

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