In the Heart of the World
what prophecy of hope?

Consultation with Priestly Secular Institutes

Over the years, Priestly Secular Institutes and priest members of mixed Secular Institutes have found their place within the great family of Secular Institutes. From the very beginning of Secular Institutes in 1947, with the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, the existence of Priestly Secular Institutes and the presence of priests within Secular Institutes were fully recognized. The various interventions of the Magisterium have affirmed that these priests are fully secular and fully consecrated.

Naturally, throughout history, the understanding of the vocation of Secular Institutes has continued to deepen. As this vocation has matured, each Institute has been able to define its own identity more clearly at the heart of the Church and the world. This has also been true for Priestly Secular Institutes.

During the 2022 Congress and General Assembly held in Rome, a few interventions addressed the reality of Priestly Secular Institutes. Although these exchanges were brief, the Executive Council, at its first meeting in November of that same year, decided to undertake a consultation with the leaders of the various Priestly Secular Institutes.

According to its current membership list, the World Conference of Secular Institutes (CMIS) presently includes 21 men's Secular Institutes with priest members: 10 composed entirely of priests and 11 mixed Institutes of lay members and priests. Of these, 11 Institutes were represented at the 2022 General Assembly in Rome.

Key Questions to Be Clarified

In January 2023, a letter was sent to the leaders of these Institutes informing them that the Executive Council of CMIS wished to undertake a reflection on their specific contribution to the vocation of secular consecration. The letter also expressed the Council's desire to receive the reflections that had been shared during the most recent General Assembly.

Although the responses received from the various Institutes were limited, they nevertheless highlighted several key issues. Some of these concern all Secular Institutes, while others relate more specifically to the life and mission of Priestly Secular Institutes.

For example, some Priestly Institutes expressed the desire for further reflection on the theme of **secularity**, recalling that Pope Francis, in his message to the 2022 Assembly, stated that *"the word secularity is not fully equivalent to laity."* Since the concept of secularity continues to develop, it deserves ongoing reflection in all its dimensions. For Priestly Secular Institutes, the Code of Canon Law illustrates this evolution: the 1917 Code referred to priests incardinated into a diocese as *"secular priests"*, whereas the 1983 Code refers to them as *"diocesan priests"*. Nevertheless, the question of secularity concerns all Secular Institutes.

Another key issue for Priestly Secular Institutes is **formation according to its three essential dimensions: diocesan identity, the specific demands of the Institute's charism, and consecration**. Such formation cannot take place in isolation; these three dimensions must be integrated. Consequently, the Institute must necessarily play an active role in the formation of members preparing for the priesthood and in their ongoing formation. The challenge of formation therefore requires close harmony and mutual collaboration between those responsible for formation in the diocesan seminary and those responsible for formation within the Institute. Collaboration in a spirit of communion and mutual respect for each other's proper responsibilities is the key to accomplishing this important task.

Finally, another important issue that emerged concerns **the service of governance.** Although the Code of Canon Law clearly states that a bishop must release a member of a Secular Institute to serve in the governance of his Institute, the practical needs of an Institute extend well beyond the office of General Responsible or Moderator. One need only consider responsibilities such as formation or the establishment and accompaniment of communities in another country. Should such service depend solely on the goodwill of the bishop in deciding whether to release a priest for this ministry or specific mission?

A Process of Listening and Sharing

Following these initial communications, two virtual meetings were held by language groups, one in April 2024 and another in April 2026. These meetings were open to several members from each Institute, with the responsible generals invited to encourage members of their Institutes to participate. A fraternal gathering also took place during the Jubilee of Consecrated Life in Rome in October 2025, bringing together representatives of a few Institutes who were present for the celebration.

During the first meeting, held in April 2024, participants reflected together on the specific contribution of Priestly Secular Institutes to the vocation of secular consecration, while also describing in concrete terms how this consecrated secular vocation is lived. They sought to identify the principal challenges that must be addressed if the contribution of priests belonging to Secular Institutes is to have a greater impact. Finally, they explored possible proposals for the future.

At the second meeting, held in April 2026, participants first reviewed the conclusions of the previous gathering before deepening their reflection on the priest as a **"vocation at the frontier,"** called to be a bridge, a prophet, and a brother. Having identified the principal challenges and difficulties, they then worked together to formulate practical avenues for action and concrete proposals for moving forward.

Several documents were shared with participants throughout this process. Of particular significance was the chapter devoted to priest members in the publication *Secular Institutes – Consecrated Life at the Heart of the World*, issued by the French Episcopal Conference. This document presents a clear and concise synthesis of the vocation, enriched by several compelling personal testimonies that illuminate the distinctive identity of priest members of Secular Institutes.

A Task to Be Continued

At the conclusion of this reflection, we give thanks for the journey already accomplished. The experience of Priestly Secular Institutes reminds us that the richness of our vocation to secular consecration is expressed through a diversity of charisms and forms of life, all of which are called to bear witness to the Gospel at the heart of the world. The exchanges of recent years have brought important questions to light, but above all they have revealed a profound desire for communion, mutual listening, and collaboration in the service of the Church's mission.

During these virtual gatherings, the priest members unanimously expressed the desire that such meetings should continue. Sharing experiences in a spirit of fraternity enables each participant to be strengthened in living the vocation of priestly secular consecration. Beyond our cultural and linguistic differences, we are united by the same Spirit, who leads us forward with joy and confidence.

While continuing this work within the World Conference of Secular Institutes (CMIS), several participants suggested that it would be valuable to enter into dialogue with officials of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in order to clarify several important questions. These include the relationship between secularity and diocesan identity for priests who belong to Secular Institutes; the faculty of incardination within Secular Institutes; the scope of service in governance beyond the office of President or Moderator; and questions concerning the formation of candidates for the priesthood within our Institutes. It might also be beneficial to engage in dialogue with the Dicastery for the Clergy so that it may gain a deeper understanding of the distinctive vocation of priests consecrated within Secular Institutes.

The work is not yet complete. It now falls to us to continue this discernment together by fostering opportunities for encounter, deepening theological and canonical reflection, and strengthening dialogue with the relevant Dicasteries. In this way, we will be better able to accompany the vocation of consecrated priests in Secular Institutes, for the benefit of the entire family of Secular Institutes and of the Church herself.

May this General Assembly be an opportunity to renew our commitment to journey together in trust under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. May he grant us the courage to open new paths, the wisdom to recognize the calls of our time, and the joy of serving the Church while remaining fully consecrated and fully present at the heart of the secular realities to which we are sent.