Restructuring Canonical Governance in Fidelity to the Journey

National Conference of Vicars for Religious Sr. Sharon Euart, RSM, JCD Resource Center For Religious Institutes March 14, 2023

Focus of Observations

- Theological framework for restructuring
- Demographic reality
- Life Cycle of a Religious Institute
- Canonical Governance
 - Code of Canon Law
 - Other options
- Synodal Path

Renewal of Religious Life

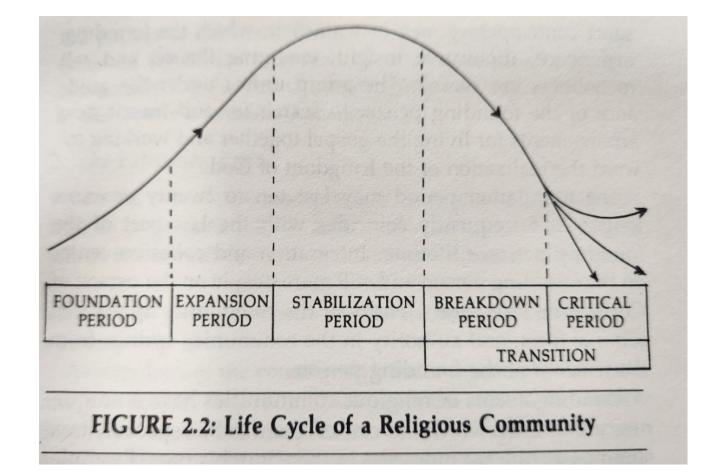


- Vatican II Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life (*Perfectae Caritatis*)
 - Gospel
 - Spirit of Founder
 - Adaptation to changed conditions
- Pope St. John Paul II Apostolic Exhortation Consecrated Life (*Vita Consecrata*)
 - Look to future with hope
- Pope Francis, New Wine, New Wineskins: The Consecrated Life and Its Ongoing Challenges since Vatican II
 - Do not fear making changes according to the law of the Gospel
 - Leave aside fleeting structures—they are not necessary
 - get new wineskins, those of the Gospel

Demographic Reality -Women Religious

- Mid 1960's 2021 (CARA)
 - 181,421 39,452 (minus 78%)
- 2022 Age Distribution NRRO
 - 390 Women's RIs
 - 20,969 of 25,909 (81%) = 70+
- 2021 Statistical Yearbook 630,099
 - Africa (+825), Asia (+599)
 - Europe (-7400), Americas (-5315), Oceania (-281)

Life Cycle of Religious Institute





1st Period: Foundation



2nd Period Expansion

- Significant expansion
- Institutionalization of charism
- Large numbers of new members
- New ministries established
- spiritual manuals
- Organizational crises
 - Delegation of authority
 - Membership and new ministries
 - Maintaining founding vision

3rd Period Stabilization

Lasts 2-3 generations

Successful

Purpose and goals being accomplished

Religious life has always been the way it is now and that it will always remain so in the future

Formation = conformity to behavioral standards

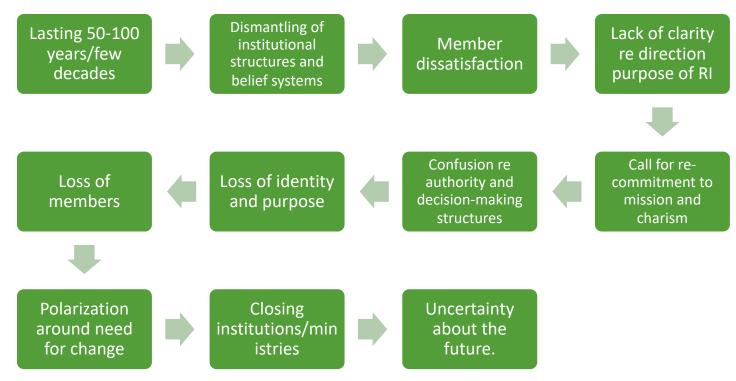
Crises – success and ministry replace centrality of Christ

High level of institutionalization

Not open to change



4th Period Breakdown



5th Period Critical

- Three Outcomes
 - Extinction
 - Minimal survival
 - Revitalization



Signs of Organization Decline/Breakdown

• Fewer members for leadership and compensated ministry

- RI and *ecclesial mission* of consecrated *Ecclesiae Sanctae* – indicators of decline as smaller numbers, lack of candidates, advanced ages of members
- Vita consecrata distinguished between historical destiny of an RI & ecclesial mission of consecrated life

Religious Life in Transition

"Times are changing, and we Christians must change continuously ...while remaining steadfast in our faith in Jesus Christ, in the truth of the Gospel, but moving forward according to the signs of the times."

Pope Francis, 2015

Addressing challenges and transitions, Pope Francis urges religious to "be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hopefilled commitment"

Joy of the Gospel

Canonical Governance

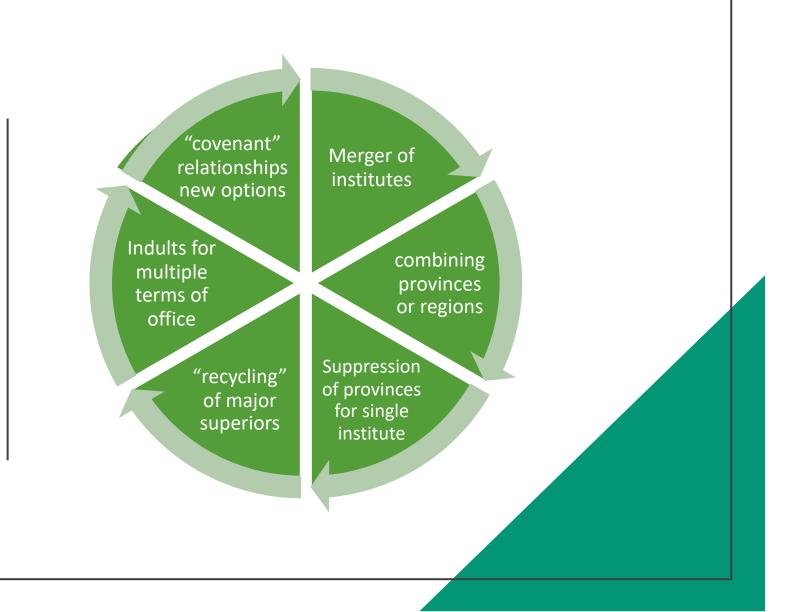
Constitutions

- Institute's identity, charism, purpose, traditions
- Approved by church authority (c. 576)
- Legitimate autonomy for internal governance (c. 586 §1) and exercise of the apostolate (c. 677 §1)

Superior General and Chapter

- Responsibility for sustaining life of the institute and protecting its identity
- When unable to provide for life of the institute and needs of members, general government should seek assistance (c. 578)

Response of Institutes in the U.S. & elsewhere to signs of the times multifaceted



Options for Canonical Governance in the Code of Canon Law

- Some do not require permission from Holy See or Diocesan Bishop
- May require constitutional changes and approval by competent church authority
 - Division into parts
 - Single institute divided into provinces/regions
 - Canonical house with local superior
 - Establishing new parts (c. 581)
 - Creation of new units regions, province, local community

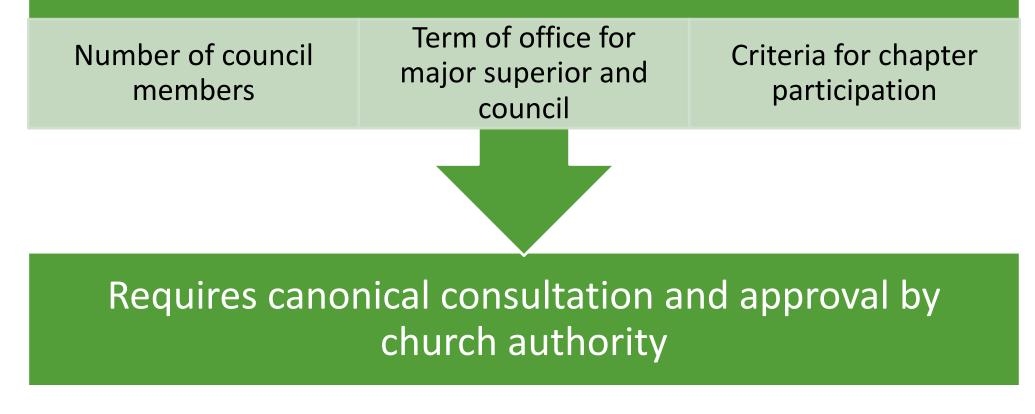
Options Requiring Changes in the Constitutions

- Mergers of institutes (c. 582)
 - Two or more institutes form a new institute
 - Parts of the same institute combined
 - Several provinces merge to create a larger province
 - Small institute absorbed into a larger one – change in identity
- Consultation with all members
- Desire to maintain identity



Options Early in the Process

Request permission from Holy See or Diocesan Bishop for changes in the constitutions



Other Options for Canonical Governance

- Transitioning to Historical Completion/Fulfillment
 - Canonical Principles
 - Covenant relationship
 - Collaborative Governance Models
 - Canonical Commissary

Covenant Relationship (c. 580)

- Relationship of accompaniment
- Respects autonomy of each institute
- Non-juridical relationship
- Agreement or memorandum of understanding re services
- Each institute retains identity
- Service contingent on needs and resources
- Short or long term, on needs
- When needed, requests commissary

Collaborative Governance Model

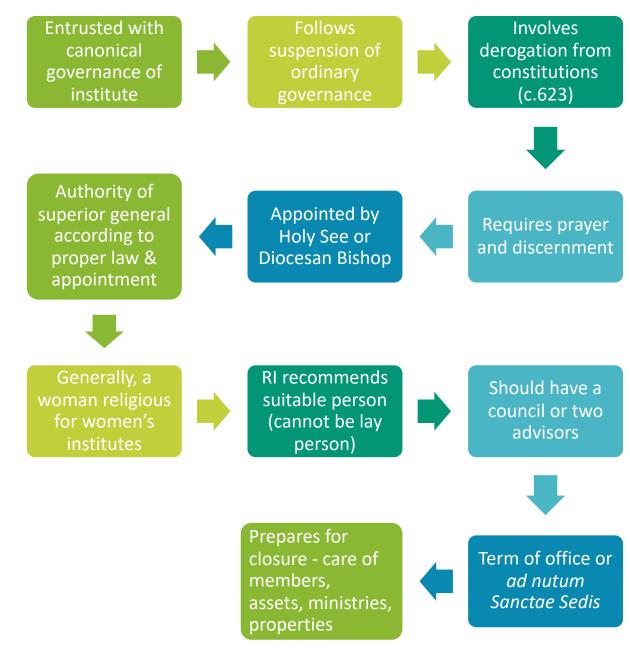
Collaborative Governance

- Civil Structure
- Management Structure for HR property, legal, sponsored ministries
- Two member Institutes retain identity, governance
- When no longer provide governance, request commissary from the board members of civil corp.

• Wisconsin Religious Collaborative

- Nine institutes with an executive director
- Address stewardship of resources, collaboration in programs, personnel support
- Different need and stages of transition
- Network with institutes with similar experiences

Canonical Commissary



Description of a Commissary's Journey

Gratitude and Hope are sisters and we who journey to completion are challenged to bring Hope: To look forward with active hope; acknowledging our pain; letting go of what hinders us; viewing life with new eyes; moving forward to all God calls us to be.

Sr. Ann Lacour MSC

Now is the Time...to Consider...

- Define goals for restructuring
- Ensure participation of members in discernment and assessment
- Utilize advisory/consultative bodies
- Define authority & levels of decision-making
- Draft decree for competent authority
- Develop timeline for implementation/evaluation
- Communicate plan with diocesan bishops
- Communicate changes to relevant groups

Now Is the Time – move forward.....

- Spirit of faith, joy, hope
- Time of unanticipated challenges
- Time of spiritual growth & renewal
- Time for strengthening communion
- Experience of synodality



Witness of religious to Synodal Process "...Has the potential to once again transform and strengthen our Church...Religious communities have much to teach us – laity, clergy even Bishops - about how to be synodal."

> Cardinal Wilton Gregory RCRI 2022 Annual Conference

Women Religious: **Essential Role** in a Synodal Church

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"....You are teachers not with words, but with deeds, with a history of concern for...the elderly, sick, marginalized with the tenderness and compassion of God...You are a living presence in the Church, participating in communion and mission."

Pope Francis, 2021



In the Midst of Breakdown...

"The Lord never fails to give us signs that invite us to cultivate a renewed vision of consecrated life... We cannot pretend not to see these signs and go as usual...drifting back to forms of the past, paralyzed by fear of change...Let us open our eyes: the Spirit is inviting us amid our crises to renew our lives and our communities...He will show us the way. Let us open our hearts, with courage, without fear...Let us not waste today by looking back at yesterday or dreaming of a tomorrow that will never come; instead, let us place ourselves before the Lord and ask for eyes to see goodness and discern the ways of God..."

Pope Francis, World Day of Consecrated Life 2022