

II-Presbiterju Parrokkjali - 2

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The Parish Presbyterium as a means to encourage theological and pastoral formation

Another important responsibility of the parish presbyterium is that it should encourage the theological and pastoral ongoing formation of its members. The encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* exhorts priests to "the practice of having frequent meetings with a fraternal exchange of ideas, counsel and experience." (n.80) There are several ways in which this can be done. The *Direttorju tal-Kleru* (1979) suggests: the setting up and running of a small library at the service of the priests of the parish so that they can remain continually up-to-date by means of theological and pastoral reviews; the regular meeting of priests for homily preparation and planning for spiritual exercises and other important parish occasions which can be of spiritual benefit for the parishioners; planning to attend *aggiornamento* courses; inviting experts to present and discuss specialised topics which serve to

study problems encountered in the ministry and to discuss ways of making pastoral activity more efficacious in a particular parish. All these are communitarian methods of permanent formation. Consequently the members of the parish presbyterium can be of mutual help in their formation and can exchange experiences in a reciprocal inter-enrichment of ideas, theological reflection, pastoral proposals and the like. Giuseppe Cenacchi explains that "l'autodidatta o il genio isolato rischia di chiudersi in se stesso..." Hence he suggests "una formazione di un tipo comunitario, in modo che i sacerdoti si aiutino vicendevolmente e si scambino le proprie esperienze per un reciproco arricchimento." (CENACCHI Giuseppe, "Il presbitero e gli altri presbiteri", in CONCETTI Gino, *Il Prete per gli Uomini d'Oggi* [Editrice A.V.E.; Roma 1975] 586-687).

The *Direttorju tal-Kleru* also mentions meetings for priests of a parish of a particular district to

discuss problems which pertain to the area or pastoral context in question. (Appendici II, B.n.10a)

Recreation and Relaxation

In an effort to strengthen fraternal unity, the *Direttorju* (1979) also suggests (Appendici II, B,n.10b) that priests meet to relax and recreate themselves together, in a spirit of friendship and brotherly love. This is occasionally done either on the level of the parish presbyterium or else, more recently since 1992 by a commission set up for this purpose within the Secretariat for the Clergy and for Members of Institutes of Consecrated Life (the *Kummissjoni Attivitajiet Rikreattivi u Soċjali*). Priestly loneliness can be overcome, therefore by the “mutual co-operation, common life or fraternal dealings between priests” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n.74i) especially within the parish presbyterium or on the wider level of the diocesan presbyterium. In his encyclical letter *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Pope Paul VI affirms that priestly fellowship helps to safeguard the dangers which assail priestly chastity (cfr. n.79). The recent *Direttorio per il Ministero e la Vita dei Presbiteri* (published by the Congregation for the Clergy and bearing the date of Holy

Thursday 1994) refers to the inestimable value of cultivating friendship between priests. This friendship is described as a source of serenity and joy in the exercise of the priestly ministry, and a means of mutual support (n.28).

The presence of religious priests in the parish presbyterium

To instil further unity and co-ordination within the parish, the *Direttorju tal-Kleru* (1979), states (in Appendix II,C,n.11b) that wherever male priestly religious communities exist within a parish (led by members of the diocesan clergy), the head of the religious community, accompanied by one or two members of his community who are involved in the pastoral life of the parish, is to be a member of the parish presbyterium. The Decree *Christus Dominus* mentions the “organised co-operation” (n.35[5]) between diocesan and religious priests “inasmuch as they share in the care of souls and in the practice of apostolic works” (n.34) within the diocese, and by analogy, on the parish level. In fact, a greater degree of communication is to exist between religious and diocesan priests - as affirmed by the document following the 1971 Synod on the ministerial priesthood

Ultimis temporibus - "so that truly priestly fraternity may exist between them and that they may provide each other with mutual help, especially in spiritual matters." (Part II,ii,n.2d) In one of his talks to the Maltese clergy in June 1992, Fr Paolo Longo said: "If the local clergy and religious do not mix together, do not pray together, do not organise together, do not talk together, do not go together, do not go sometimes to dinner together and do not show friendship together we are a counter-example, and a bad example to our own people, and we are destroying the community spirit." (LONGO Paolo, "The Kerygma in our Catechesis", Għall-Qadi tas-Saltna: Il-Missjoni tal-Knisja Llum [Atti tal-Kors ta' Agġornament tal-Kleru 1992] [Edizzjoni IK; Malta 1992] 46.)

In 1978, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes issued a document entitled *Mutuae Relationes*, containing directives for mutual relations between bishops and religious in the Church. Iterating the above-mentioned reflections from *Christus Dominus*, the directives call for "ways and means, including simple and informal ones, as may serve to increase mutual trust, apostolic solidarity and fraternal harmony."

(n.37; cfr.also PAUL VI Apostolic Letter *Ecclesiae Sanctae* I,28) This suggestion can be applied to the parish presbyterium where religious and diocesan priests work side by side within the same parish.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* affirms the presence of the religious clergy who live and offer their services in a particular Church (and analogically in a parish) as "a source of enrichment for all priests." (n.74h) By means of their different charisms, they help diocesan priests to grow in the understanding of the priesthood and "encourage and promote ongoing priestly formation." (n.75h)

The sharing of responsibilities and duties

Priestly fraternity and collaboration are emphasised (Direttorju, Appendix II,C,n.12) when coming to the concrete running of the parish: this is experienced when it comes to share responsibilities within the parish, to agree on a just division of duties and to work together as a team. (Direttorju, KapII,n.24) The parish presbyterium is to study the presence of groups which could be present within the parish (these could be geographical zones within

a parish, or fastly developing housing estates which are receiving new families within the parish, or nascent lay movements in the parish). The priests in the parish presbyterium discuss how they can divide between themselves - in unity with and under the direction of the parish priest - the pastoral service which they can offer to these groups. (Direttorju, Kap II, n.25a) It is the responsibility of the priests entrusted with the pastoral care of these specific groups to enhance within them a sense of belonging to the parish.

While keeping in mind the specific competencies and responsibilities of the parish pastoral council, the parish presbyterium is also to reflect upon the various aspects of pastoral life within the parish, such as liturgy, catechesis and other important matters which need to be discussed. Administrative and economic responsibilities of the parish presbyterium have now fallen within the ambit of the parish pastoral council and the parish economic council, respectively.

In my opinion, this provision can allow the parish presbyterium more time and energy to find ways and means how to strengthen priestly

fraternity, collaboration and communion by means of prayer, discussion, theological and pastoral formation and recreation.

Conclusion

Doing one's utmost to put into practice the suggestions offered in the *Direttorju tal-Kleru* (1979) and in other conciliar and post-conciliar documents on priestly fraternity, witness to the lay members of the Christian faithful who can rightly apply the words of the psalm "How good, how delightful it is to live as brothers all together!" (Ps 133 (132), 1), as well as Christ's exhortation, "It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognise you as my disciples" (Jn 13,35). May we recall Pope John Paul's first speech during his pastoral visit to Malta; on that occasion (25 May 1990) while addressing priests and religious at St John's Co-Cathedral, he stated that the exercise of the priestly ministry "can never be lived as an exclusively private affair. The 'presbyterium' should clearly reflect the communion which is the very nature of the Church, the one body of Christ." □