

Transcription of the Questions and Answers from the
Las Vegas Congress summer 2004
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***Note that I could not hear the questions from the floor. Also SO is an abbreviation for Secular Order and SA is an abbreviation for Spiritual Assistant.

Q: How ought the Council function?

A: It would be almost universal to say that if the council functions as the council ought to function the community will probably function as a community ought to function. If the council does not function as the council ought to function the community will definitely not function as the community ought to function. In the Chapter VII of the Constitutions (it's the chapter on Organization and Government) there is a description in there in constitutional terms of the relationship between the friars, nuns, and the seculars, a description of the working relationship between the friars and/or the Spiritual Assistant (if the SA is not a friar) and the community and somewhat of a description of how the community ought to function. Remember that we come from a long history of the Secular Order and I'm sure many of you who have been around the Secular Order for a long time are familiar that at a certain time the term "president" of the community that we use now, which we've used since the introduction of the Rule of Life, the president of the community (before the Rule of Life) was referred to as Prior or Prioress (formerly in the Manual). Even though we have changed the term we haven't always changed the mentality of the approach of understanding how the president should function

There are a numbers in the Constitutions that I will make reference to as we look at the relationship between the friars and the Secular Order and the functioning of the Council.

#40. The Secular Order is basically structured on the local community as a visible sign of the Church.

The community is a visible sign of the Church and that is the basic structure.

#43. The Provincial Superior, usually aided by the Provincial Delegate, is the Superior of the SO within his territory. He is responsible for the well-being of the SO within the territory of his jurisdiction. He is to make visitations of the communities in his jurisdiction and after consultation with the Council, [of the community] appoint a Spiritual Assistant for communities. In all cases of disputes, appeal will be made in the first instance to the Provincial.

- #44. The SA to each community is **usually** a friar of the Order. His duty is to give spiritual aid to the community (not individuals) so that its members may be guided in their vocation and may correspond with it as perfectly as possible. He will also endeavor to promote solidarity between the secular community and the friars and nuns of the Order. **At the invitation of the council** he may attend meetings of the Council, without the right to vote (this is new) At the different stages of formation of the candidates, he will be available to interview them. The Council **may** consult him about the suitability of the candidate to assume the responsibility of the vocation to the SO. He will support the formation of the community by his availability to the director of formation. However, he may not be the director of formation. The SA must be well-versed in Carmelite spirituality and well-informed in the Church's teaching concerning the role of lay people in the Church.
- #46. The Council, composed of the President and three Councilors and the Director of Formation, constitutes the immediate authority of the Community.

Who is the superior of the community? The Council, not the president, not the Formation Director not the SA. It is the council. **This is not new.** This was in the Rule of Life. And the next sentence [in the Constitutions] is lifted right out of the Rule of Life...

The primary responsibility of the Council is the formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community.

The Council !! Not the president, not any one councilor, not the ex-president, not the foundress of the community.

- #47. The Council has the authority:
- a) to admit candidates to formation, the Promises and the vows.
 - b) to reduce, for adequate reasons, the period of formation before temporary Promises, with the permission of the Provincial;
 - c) to convene the community for the triennial elections;
 - d) to replace, for a serious reason, a member of the Council itself;
 - e) to dismiss a member of the community, should this be necessary after consulting the Provincial;
 - f) to receive a member transferring from another community;
 - g) if a matter should arise that is outside the competence of the Council, it is the obligation of the President to bring it to the attention of the Provincial.

The Council meets frequently and always and always when necessary in reference to taking care of formation programs and the growth of their own community.

I think the Rule of Life said the Council is to meet once a year. That seems awfully minimal if the Council is going to function as a good Council. If the primary responsibility of the Council is the formation and Christian Carmelite maturing of the members, meeting once a year will not help them to be responsible. No one person is responsible for this. The Council is responsible for the formation and the Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members.

- #48. The General Superior, the Provincial Superior and the Council of the community are the legitimate superiors of the SO.
- #51. The President, elected from among those who have made final promises, has the duty to convoke and preside over the meetings of the community. He should show fraternal service to all the members of the community; Foster a spirit of Christian and Carmelite affability, being careful to avoid any demonstration of preference for some members over others; coordinate contacts with those members of the community who because of age, illness, distance or other reasons, are not able to attend meetings; aid the Director of Formation and Spiritual Assistant in carrying out their responsibilities; in their absence, but only temporarily, he may take their place or designate another to do so from among those who have made definitive promises.
- #52. The responsibility of the three Councilors is to form, with the President, the government of the community and to support the director of formation. Generally they are community members with definitive promises. In particular circumstances, members with first promises can serve as councilors.

Those numbers, 40, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 51 and 52 describe, in constitutional terms the relationship between the friars (the friars have a role and an obligation to the seculars). **Those numbers also describe the responsibility of the seculars to take charge of their part of the Order.** It bears repeating over and over again, that the council is the superior of the community and any one member who speaks, who is a member of the council, speaks for the council. But that person can only speak for the council **IF** that person speaks what the council thinks. The president doesn't speak and then say to the council, this is what we are doing. That's not functioning as a Council, it's not working that way.

The president primarily is the spokesperson for the authority of the community which is the council. Now, again, we have come from this tradition where we have had this Prior/Prioress mentality, that the person who was the president was the superior of the community. As a matter of fact, I have had many experiences of being asked (and remember in 1974 when the Rule of Life was issued and finally approved in 1979 and this structure was present in the Rule of Life, that the Council is the superior of the community) who is the superior of the community and being answered with "the president" and this is after 30 years. It takes a long time for us to understand change and to put change into practice.

Now sometimes it is true because some presidents have acted as superiors of the community. And sometimes it is true that ex-presidents act as superior of the community. I don't know if that is true or not true of your communities, but I suspect it is true in some places because this happens. It happens in monastery's of nuns, it happens in provinces of friars and it happens in communities of the Secular Order, where people who had authority don't let go of authority. **They understand authority as control of the community and not as service of the community.**

If the Council is going to function as a council then they might have to meet frequently because decisions have to be made. So that's why we put in there rather than once a year or whenever necessary...it says the council meets frequently and always when necessary in reference to talking about the care and formation and growth of their own community. So if there are decisions that have to be made in the name of the council the council has to meet in order to arrive at that decision. The council must meet and discuss and when the president speaks, the president speaks in the name of the council. **Not for the council** and I make a distinction here, I (the president) am going to speak for them and afterwards tell them (the council) what I said. I (the president) am going to speak in their place. **But** if I (the president) speak in their name then I speak what our (the councils) decision has been.

When I was provincial I had three different councilors, and hopefully, in our province, when we decided things we decided things in the council by voting on things. And sometimes the vote was 5 to zero and sometimes the vote was 4 to 1 and I was the 1. But the decision was always announced that "this is what the council has decided".

I made reference yesterday to the fact that sometimes it happens that people (councilors) are afraid to speak at a council meeting. The reason they are afraid to speak at a council meeting is because they are somehow going to be punished by what they think. How are they going to be punished by saying what they think...because it is going to be repeated. Anybody who is capable (we are all capable) of repeating what is said in council meetings in order to divide the community should not be a council member. They don't have the necessary qualities for being a council member because they are not there for service to the community. And that prevents the council from being able to speak. It prevents the council from being able to function.

Another point in this relationship, and this is why I read the section on the SA, many times councils were very dependent on the decisions or opinions made by the assistant. It's not the Spiritual Assistants community. It's your community. If I'm the assistant you can ask me anything and I am not afraid to give my opinion. If you don't ask me, I have no right to give it. I have a right to give it in my community to which I belong as a Carmelite, which is the friars. That's where I have the obligation to express my opinion. But if I am the assistant to the community I may be able to say something personally to people but I don't have the right to interfere in the decision of the community. I think that the people who were handling the SO before me will be able, also, to testify, that one of the most frequent complaints received either in provinces or generally are about SA who become dominators of communities. No one has the right to impose on any community any person.

There is a case in the Philippines where every Christmas (the community met at the monastery of nuns) Mother Prioress handed a list of people to the president of the SO telling them to enroll them, as members of the SO because they were their benefactors for that year. So they just enrolled them in the SO, she just handed them the list and they enrolled them in the SO. They had something like 180 members on their list and the majority of them were benefactors who had never seen the inside of the SO meeting. There are other ways that people impose members and this happens with assistants. My cousins, brother-in-laws aunts uncles niece, she is very holy, goes to Eucharistic Adoration every day.....Your council has to decide this.

What are the responsibilities of the person who is the assistant to the community. He does not interfere with the council. The council has the obligation to look after the good of the community. The council can only function if the council is able to speak to each other. Anything that prevents a councilor from being honest in expressing his/her opinion there is a question there as to whether or not the council is a good council. There is the necessity for confidentiality in the council is number one. If I go to a council meeting, whether I am a councilor in my province or the Provincial, and have to weigh what I am going to say because I am afraid somebody is going to repeat it then the Holy Spirit is prevented from working in the council. And if somebody comes to the council and is afraid I am going to take it personally that if they don't agree with me therefore they don't like me. Or if I am going to be hurt because somebody disagrees with me there is something wrong with me. And because there is something wrong with me in that sense I don't have the qualities necessary to be a good member of the council.

Number 47 gives the a to g of responsibilities but number 46 it says that the primary responsibility of the council is the formation of the Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community.

Another thing, about elections. We are human beings, we are Teresian Carmelites and St. Teresa of course, reminds us that it is stupid to think that we are angels as long as we have these bodies. And so we are going to be subject to anything that is human. Remembering that, elections are not popularity contests. If you are elected it is not because you are the most popular, hopefully it might be because you are the most

capable. The most popular person in the community may not be the most capable person in the community for certain positions or certain jobs. And if you are not elected it is not because you are not popular. I can give you an example of someone who was at the Congress in Mexico in the year 2000 who returned to her province and was not elected president and left the Secular Order and left the Church, became a Presbyterian as a matter of fact. We are capable of anything. Remember that. Election to a position in the community are for the purpose of doing a service to the community. No one is emperor or empress of the Secular Order. In the religious life no one has a vocation to hierarchy. We are (a councilor or president) and then we go back to being (a regular member). The hierarchical structure belongs to the bishops and all that stuff. That's their structure. Our structure is completely on a rotation basis. **You are and then you are not and you might be again or you might not be again but you are always a member.** You are always a visible sign of the Church because you are a member, not because you are president or a council or the formation director. If your community is only capable of having the same person as president or the same person as formation director something is not working because part of the job of being a good community is preparing people to be president and formation director. If you have a perpetual president or there is only one person who can do the formation and your council is always the same people (they just switch places) it's not working. The Holy Spirit is not able to breath in circumstances being so confined. The Holy Spirit is able to work because we are flexible enough to do what God wants, all of us, together in the community. One of the virtues of living in community is **"holy flexibility"**. We need this in the structures of our communities. I have seen in some communities a rigidity about a community because it is the same people all the time. And the community reflects those personalities instead of the one personality that we all owe allegiance, we have personalities taking the place of Jesus and that is because the councils do not function as councils. They function as positions and not in service but in control. Control is not service. Guidance, instruction, leadership that is service but not controlling. The relationship that then exists between the friars and the (nuns) and the Secular Order is then this flexible one of service and support. We (the friars) are not always clear on how we are working this out but we are working this out. And you have to be clear to. Your councils have to be able to take this responsibility and for this to happen there has to be communication among the council members. It is true that the Spiritual Assistant can help but it is a mistake for you to look to the Spiritual Assistant to give you the answer. He can help, guide, support, he may be able to correct certain things but if you always have him give the answer to your questions you will not function as a council. You will be five dependent people, members of the secular order, sometimes dependent on someone who is not even a Carmelite. This is not talking about spirituality, this is talking about governance and organization. This is a Carmelite organization. One of the main reasons why we had to redefine the role of Spiritual Assistant is because we were very close to having at least half of the Secular Order communities in the world having someone who is not a Carmelite for a Spiritual Assistant because of the way the Secular Order is growing in places around the world where there are no Carmelite friars. That's why it says the Spiritual Assistant is **usually** a friar of the Order. So we can't have the structure depending on someone who is not a member of the Order.

In the Ritual where it spoke of the SA was a representative of the Order...and that is all well and good in Italy or Spain practically all of the SO communities meet in the monastery of the friars where the friar can roll out of bed and into the meeting. For many of your communities to have a friar come he has to take a plane to get there or drive for a long time or in the Philippines take a boat ride for hours to get from one place to another to attend a meeting. **The SA cannot be the depending point for your function as a council.** What I am trying to describe is how the council should function, the type of people who should be on the council and how important confidentiality is for the council to function.

I was asked a lot of questions yesterday and this morning about councils from different areas. How the council functions, how things should be decided. And this is new. Where it says in one place that I read (number 43) about the responsibility of the provincial superior usually aided by the provincial delegate, is the Superior of the Secular Order within his territory responsible for the well being of the Secular Order within the territory of his jurisdiction. He is to make visitation to the community. When the Provincial through his Delegate makes visitations he has certain canonical responsibilities and abilities to decide things. One of the things I suggest when I speak to the friars, especially the Provincial Delegates is for the formation of the communities as communities concentrating specifically on the formation of the leaders and the formation people and the council. If the council begins to function with this kind of flexibility then it is the most capable person who becomes a rotating superior or member of the council, changing, then the community begins to form itself as a community not just a collection of individuals because what happens when the council is fractured, when its three against two against three or five all person shows. Then everyone in community just becomes an individual and the community doesn't function.

Q:

A: It should be the responsibility of the three councilors to form with the president and the Formation Director because the director of formation is part of the council. One of the things that the Provincial Statutes are to determine is the procedure for election and the responsibilities of the three councilors. The Presidents responsibilities are in number 51 and I want to underline one line of that, "...to foster a spirit of Christian and Carmelite affability being careful to avoid any demonstration of preference for some members over others."

It sometimes happens sometimes that presidents, especially if they do not have this mentality of the Constitutions, consult with other members of the community who are not on the council and they are the ones that decide and the president brings their decision to the council.

Q:

A: The secretary is not a member of the council. Mute. But again, confidentiality extends to her and when the treasurer is at the meetings, again, confidentiality.

Q:

A: I talked about community when I got to the 5th “M” meetings and I talked about formation, information, and fellowship. The actual sharing/wasting time together. If somebody has too many important things to do to spend time relaxing with you they are not going to be good members of the community. The community prays together when you come to meetings, you receive instruction and you discuss together important aspects of the community but there also has to be a fellowship part. This is taking a hint from St. Teresa, when she was forming St. John of the Cross to be a discolored Carmelite in chapter 17 (I think) in The Book of Foundations, talk about taking him to Valladolid and she said, although there were many things that he could teach me about prayer the only thing I could really teach him was recreation, our style of community. So we take that hint that fellowship is actually part of formation or community. Recreation is a very Teresian term. We are going to recreation....we are going to waste time together. And for some people it is a waste of time and they are not very good members of community. If you don't know how to waste time together you are not building a relationship. It's really not wasting time, it using time to relax together. So the fellowship part is an integral part of your community meetings. It's not just to get information, to do serious things and it is also time to do what you do so well, chit chat.

There are 3,500 secular order members in Korea and they were in nine communities. They didn't even know each others names. So when I went there I divided them into 31 communities. They did not have the understanding of community. They had the understanding of going, praying, listening to a lecture and going home. They know a lot about Carmelite spirituality but they need to develop into communities.

So there are two things, the leadership must be the council that functions as a council and there must be fellowship in the community because that is what gets over divisions, if you get to know everybody.

Q:

A: A council member is always free to talk to another council member or the president about something, but if they think a decision must be made with regards to a certain issue in the name of the community, which is the councils responsibility, then the president is obliged to call a meeting of the council to discuss it.

Remember no one thing has to be decided by the end of each meeting. You can continue to discuss it at another time, maybe you need time to look at the Constitutions in regard to the issue and to think about things before arriving at a decision. It's better to arrive at a good decision late than a bad decision on time.

Q:

A: It is the responsibility of the President to convoke and preside over the meetings of the council. It is the responsibility of the Delegate when making visitations to the community to see how the council is functioning and to correct the president if the president says well they are going to arrive at a decision I don't agree with. The president is not the boss. It is important for you to study the whole structure that is in the Constitution. It is the responsibility of the Delegate, when visiting communities, to pay attention to how the council is functioning.

If we can make sure that the council is functioning as a council we are doing our job of forming the community. Because everything else falls in line if the council functions properly. Both the councilors and the community feel themselves to be a part of the community, that they are not under the dominance of one person. If the council members feel that way the community feels much more that way. If the president is not there then the formation director can call a council meeting.

Q:

A: Minutes should always be kept of the council meetings.

Q:

A: I will be going to India to visit all five provinces in India and sent ahead, a letter to ask them to organize, as the first meeting in each province, a meeting with the friars who are assistants to the communities. It is a very difficult meeting to have because some have been spiritual assistants for 20-30 years and have done things in a certain way and they are used to doing things that way and they don't know the Constitutions and don't appreciate the change. Many times out of good will they say 'I know they are going to try this, but I know it's not going to work because I remember 15 years ago they tried it and it didn't work.' So the SA will step in and say 'don't do that, you cannot do that you have to do this.' And this response from the SA is out of good will. The unfortunate by product of that response is that you (president and councilors) don't LEARN that is doesn't work because you have to do what he says. Whereas, allowing the council to make the wrong decision and having to correct it is the idea in these Constitutions now that the council has the authority and the Spiritual Assistant doesn't have the veto power, so the council is responsible for it's decisions good or bad. If you admit the wrong person to the community to make promises it is your own fault. It's not the Spiritual Assistants responsibility any more. You have to develop the courage to say NO to people. Which is not an easy thing to do. It has nothing to do with like or dislike, it has to do with 'do they belong'. Will they be good members of the community. Now that is your decision to make in your communities. The whole council decides yes or no. And they have to inform the person, that's the hard part.

(He goes back to the subject of meeting with Spiritual Assistants) I like having meetings with assistants because it gives them the chance to ask questions apart from the seculars because they don't always know if they are doing good or not, 9 . 9 times out of 10 they are doing what they think is right. But they don't always understand that you have to do it on your own.

Q:

A: The secretary of the council has the responsibility of keeping an update to date register of the community, recording the elections, admissions, promises and dismissals. The Constitutions say that “The Secretary attends the Council meetings and records the minutes of the meeting without the right to vote”.

Q:

A The secretary is subject to the same confidentiality (as the members of the council). The minutes have to be kept so that the next council knows what has transpired before.