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6 January 2011
The Epiphany of the Lord

My dear Fathers and Brothers, and, in a special way my dear brothers and sisters of the Secular Order,

The Order is in the time of celebrating Provincial chapters. Some few have already taken place, but most will be celebrated sometime over the next six months. At the beginning of this new year I would like to take the opportunity to reflect on the place and importance of the Secular Order in the world we are facing as we go forward.

In December of 2006, Father Luis Arostegui sent to the Provincials a document on the Pastoral Assistance of the OCD Friars to the Secular Order. In the preface to that document it stated the following:

“The Secular Order of the Mendicant Orders is not just an associated laity. Through the connection to the friars of the different Orders, the Secular Order communicates the spirituality of the Orders to the world around it.”

In other words, the reason for the permission given to the Mendicant Orders to have Secular members is to bring the spirituality of those Orders to the homes and lives of people who identify with the Order.

Indeed, the greatest difference between the Secular Order and other movements or groups of associations that might be attached to a convent, monastery, parish, or particular friar is that while those in the later groups are dedicated to the spirituality of Saint Teresa, or Saint John of the Cross, or Saint Therese, etc., the members of the Secular Order have made a commitment to the Order, to its life and its mission as well as to its spirituality. They have expressed this commitment through the Promise which they made.

In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, paragraph 54, Pope John Paul II wrote: *Today, often as a result of new situations, many Institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity. The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes. We may say that, in the light of certain historical experiences such as those of the Secular or Third Orders, a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity.*

Many congregations of religious are today searching for ways to invite lay persons to identify with the life and mission of those congregations. The Holy Father used precisely what the Mendicant Orders have had for centuries, namely, Secular Orders, as the model or example for what they might do.

The relationship that exists between the friars and the seculars is a grace and a responsibility for both branches. The grace is found in the mutual enrichment of the vocation that each person lives. The relationship of the friars with the seculars reinforces the friars in their desire to live seriously their commitment as consecrated religious. The relationship of the seculars with the friars helps them to live the demands of a serious spiritual life in the midst of a secular environment which is not always friendly to religion.

The responsibility of the friars to the seculars is exercised in two ways, governance and formation. These two ways must go together for either one to be effective. When governance and formation go together it is an experience of guidance, not control. Guidance illuminates the mind and makes the burdens of the Christian life lighter to bear. Indeed, the greatest emphasis in the renewal of the Secular Order since the Second Vatican Council is that of the responsibility for an adequate formation of mature members of the Church and Order. This emphasis is inspired by both *Apostolicam Actuositatem* of Vatican II and *Christifideles Laici* of Pope John Paul II. In many parts of the Order this renewal in the area of formation has been well on the way. In other parts it is still in planning stages. In every part of the Order it is necessary.

The responsibility of the seculars in relation to the friars is exercised in the availability of the seculars to collaborate with the friars in planning the mission of the provinces. The 54th paragraph of *Vita Consecrata* quoted above stated that “the laity are invited to share more intensely in the spirituality *and mission*” of the religious. This also applies to us as an Order. It is necessary to recognize the place of our lay members of the Order in the development of our presence not only because of demographical changes taking place in certain places, but because the very nature of lay participation in the Church has developed to a new state. The presence of competent and well formed secular members of the Order may be a great help in planning eventual new structures of our presence.

It has already been the custom in many Provinces to invite members of the Secular Order, usually represented by the OCDS Provincial Council, to participate in the Provincial Chapters, dedicating some time to dialog about the relationship that exists between the friars and the seculars. This highly recommended dialog is increasingly important in planning the future projects of our Provinces and addressing the needs and desires of the seculars as we together as an Order seek to make our presence more effective in bringing the message of the Discalced Carmel to the world around us

The spiritual relationship that exists among the friars, the cloistered nuns and the secular members of the Order is a source of great riches to each of us as individuals and as an Order. It also is a source of grace and energy to the Church we serve and to the world in need of the knowledge of the presence of God.

I ask the Provincials to please communicate this letter to the Secular Order members in your Province.

Fraternally in Christ our Saviour,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Fr. Saverio Cannistrà". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Saverio Cannistrà, OCD
Superior General