

Tridentine Community News

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The Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter

Many of the rare bright spots in today's vocations-challenged Church come from orders of priests dedicated to the Classical Roman Liturgy. The next few columns will cover some of them.

Any discussion of these traditional orders must begin with the best known and fastest growing of the lot, the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter. Like Navy Seals, Fraternity priests are known for the precision of celebration of their Masses. Also like their military counterparts, FSSP priests regularly travel far and wide to meet the needs of the faithful, like circuit rider priests of old.

In 1988, shortly after Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre defied Vatican orders and consecrated four bishops on his own initiative, twelve priests and twenty seminarians from Lefebvre's Society of St. Pius X approached Rome about forming their own priestly society similarly dedicated to the traditional liturgy, but in full communion with Rome.



Intense negotiations between the group's leader, Fr. Josef Bisig, pictured at left, and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, led to the formation of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, more commonly known as the "Fraternity" or FSSP. The name "St. Peter" was chosen to emphasize the group's formation

by direct papal charter. Strictly speaking, the Fraternity is not an order of priests; its members do not take vows of poverty. It is rather a "Society of Apostolic Life of Pontifical Right." Then-Cardinal Ratzinger not only drafted the founding papers for Pope John Paul II's approval, but also arranged for the Fraternity to have a base of operations and (first) seminary in the Diocese of Augsburg, Germany. Cardinal Ratzinger and other Cardinals have visited this seminary, performed ordinations, and celebrated Pontifical High Masses there. Few groups of priests enjoy comparable support from top Vatican officials.

The Fraternity has enjoyed continual rapid growth since its founding: Today there are approximately 200 priests and 120 seminarians. Houses of Formation (pre-seminaries) have been established in Australia and France to handle potential vocations from those regions. In 1994, a second seminary was established for the North American district. This seminary has grown from a small operation in a former retreat house near district headquarters in Scranton, Pennsylvania; to taking over a nearby hotel; to constructing its own brand-new seminary complex near Lincoln, Nebraska. Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary was designed by architect Thomas Gordon Smith, who blended elements of traditional ecclesiastical design with aspects of a modern convention hotel, similar to the current incarnation of the St. John's Center in Plymouth, Michigan. Even though another wing was recently completed to house additional seminarians, many more men apply than can be accepted. Being selective about admissions is part of the reason the FSSP has been able to provide priests who are not only the best academically, but also at proper

stages in their lives to assume the responsibilities of the priesthood.

In October, 1998, a major celebration was held in Rome on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the papal motu proprio on the Tridentine Mass, *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta*, as well as the contemporaneous tenth anniversary of the founding of the FSSP. Cardinal Ratzinger himself led a distinguished panel of speakers at one talk. During a public audience, Pope John Paul II welcomed pilgrims from Tridentine Mass communities who had come to Rome for the event.

The Fraternity has had a lengthy association with the Windsor Tridentine Mass. Almost since the Windsor indult started, FSSP priests have visited on special occasions, with the blessing of the Diocese of London. Most notably, in October, 2003, North American District Superior Fr. George Gabet brought a deacon and several seminarians to celebrate the first Solemn High Mass in metro Detroit since 1970, to mark the move of the Windsor Mass to St. Michael's Church. The Christmas, 2004 Mass was celebrated by FSSP founder Fr. Josef Bisig, who also sat in choir at St. Josaphat for its Sunday Mass. In 2005, the Christmas Mass was celebrated by Fr. Charles Van Vliet, former pastor of St. Clement's, the FSSP parish in Ottawa. Plans are underway for another Solemn High Mass involving the Fraternity this fall.

Dioceses regularly send priests to Fraternity seminaries to learn how to celebrate the Tridentine liturgy. The Fraternity also runs a publishing operation that offers everything from calendars and missals, to spiritual reading and chant CDs recorded by FSSP seminary choirs.



Today, FSSP priests are in great demand throughout the world. There is a waiting list for dioceses who want Fraternity priests for various apostolates, ranging from Sunday Mass sites, to parishes where Novus Ordo and Tridentine communities share an active parish life, to fully Tridentine parishes. Close to home, the Diocese of London brought the FSSP in to run the Traditional Mass in the city of London, Ontario earlier this year.

Much more information about the Fraternity of St. Peter can be found at their web site, www.fssp.org. Call or write the FSSP to sign up for their free monthly newsletter, always filled with solid spiritual articles and encouraging news of growth of this dynamic group of priests.

Questions? Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail info@windsorlatinmass.org with your thoughts.