

**Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life  
and Societies of Apostolic Life**

Vatican City  
28 October, 2019

Prot. n. A.136<sup>-1</sup>/2002

My Brothers,

During this General Chapter, you wanted to discern the place and role that should be given to the founder of your institute, Fr Marie-Dominique Philippe. You did this with courage and determination, based on the Gospel and the Magisterium of the Church. As you continue along the path of following Christ, this is indeed a necessary stage you must take.

As you requested, I shall recall the essential points I raised during our meeting on 24 October this week.

**1. The founder and identity of the Institute**

Fr Marie-Dominique Philippe is the founder of the Religious Institute of the *Brothers of Saint John*. In that capacity, he passed on to you a charism that was recognised by the Church. Nevertheless, Fr Philippe cannot be a charismatic reference point for you, in the sense that a charismatic reference point passes on a teaching and a pattern of life. Indeed, you are well aware that Fr Philippe cannot represent a pattern of life.

Moreover, your work to clarify and acknowledge matters relating to his life must continue. You must also continue an attentive discernment with regards to his philosophical teaching, with seriousness and patience in the light of the Gospel and the Magisterium.

From now on you must therefore, to a certain extent, distance yourselves from the person of Fr Philippe and avoid things that might be a source of confusion. For example, I would advise you to no longer offer his books for sale in your bookshops and to no longer hang photos of him in public places.

More profoundly, you must seek to better express your charismatic identity. You should do this by grounding yourselves first and foremost on the Gospel of Saint John, such as it is read, meditated upon and prayed by the Church, particularly the Second Vatican Council and the recent Magisterium of the Church.

You must also seek to better express the common charism of the Institutes of the Brothers, Contemplative Sisters and Apostolic Sisters, whilst maintaining what is specific to each.

**2. Formation of members**

You have understood that formation is an absolutely fundamental element of your future. The formation of a Religious cannot be solely grounded on philosophy; nor even can philosophy be a priority.

Above all, formation must be permanent, inasmuch as it is a continual process of conversion and an integration of the very sentiments of Christ. The formation of all the members of the Institute is the basis and ground for initial formation. It must especially take into account a human formation, as well as formation in religious life, placing particular attention on the specific features of that form of life.

From this perspective, the idea of affiliation with a Pontifical University is a measure of openness and genuine search for the Truth.

A deepening of permanent formation will help you to discern vocations in a serious and well-founded manner, as well as to accompany professed members. The work you dedicate to the *Ratio formationis* must take all these elements, which I have only briefly mentioned, into account.

You know that you can count on the confidence the Church has in you in the Lord, as well as the availability of the Dicastery to help you as much as it can. Do not hesitate to let those who hold pastoral responsibilities for you know of what you need.

I remind you once again of my confidence and hope for the Brothers and Sisters of Saint John. May you, my Brothers, be filled with Peace and Goodness.

Fraternally,

José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M.  
Archbishop Secretary