



STATUTES

OF THE PRAYER GROUPS OF PADRE PIO

PRESENTATION

The International Convention of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups was opened on 4 May 1986, with a concelebrated Mass in front of the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace. The occasion was the thirtieth anniversary of Padre Pio's hospital, the *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza* (Home for the Relief of Suffering). At that opening I was able to announce to those present the news of Pontifical approbation of the new Statutes of the Prayer Groups of Padre Pio. It had been communicated to me by a letter dated 3 May 1986, from Cardinal Casaroli, Secretary of State of His Holiness.

The crowd present received the news with prolonged applause, a sign of joy and of great gratitude toward the Holy Father, who had deigned to approve the new Statutes. He had already referred to them in the address which he delivered on 1 October 1983 to twenty thousand Prayer Group pilgrims gathered from all over the world.

The new Statutes confirm the basic principles and aims which Padre Pio had given to his Groups from the beginning of their establishment.

The Prayer Groups have to distinguish themselves for their fidelity to the Church, to the Pope, and to the Bishops. They must aim at an integral Christian formation through prayer and a generous charity towards the suffering, according to what Padre Pio indicated.

The structure of the Prayer Groups is in full harmony with the Church's hierarchical structure. It is absolutely necessary that each Group have a Priest Spiritual Director, appointed by the Bishop and the guarantor of the Group's spiritual formation and adherence to the doctrine and directives of the Magisterium of the Church.

Appointment of the Group Leader is reserved to the Bishop, after the members vote in the presence of a Priest appointed by the Bishop. This ensures fidelity to the Hierarchy. To the Bishop is likewise reserved the appointment of the Priest to be Diocesan Coordinator of the Groups, whereas the appointment of the Regional or National Coordinator falls within the competence of the Regional or National Episcopal Conference.

The Certificate of affiliation with the International Centre, which has its headquarters in Padre Pio's Foundation, the *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza*, is the visible link of the Group's union with the Centre instituted by Padre Pio. All Groups will periodically send reports to the Centre of their activities, so that the General Headquarters may be able to draw up an annual report of such activities, to be sent to the Cardinal Secretary of State.

This special link with the Holy See and with the Holy Father is a very high honor for the Prayer Groups. It should also constitute a constant commitment on the part of the General Headquarters, with the General Council, and all Prayer Groups spread throughout the world, to cooperate fully with the Holy Father's directives.

It is our great hope that promulgation of the new Statutes will be a fresh stimulus to Padre Pio's Prayer Groups to advance in the Christian formation of their members, through prayer, together with an active participation in the Church's liturgical life, and with an active charity towards those who suffer, according to what Padre Pio has taught us.

All members of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups will accept the new Statutes with enthusiasm and joy; they will reflect on the principles inspiring them and the aims indicated by the Padre; their activities and initiatives will conform to the new Rules, and they will remember that, when acting in full adherence to the pastoral directives of their own Bishop and in full harmony with the directives of the Pontifical Magisterium, they will be better able to achieve their own Christian formation through liturgical and community prayer out of love for the Lord and the suffering brethren.

Monsignor Riccardo Ruotolo
President of the Work 1978-2003



THE HOLY SEE'S LETTER OF APPROVAL

The Vatican, 3rd May 1986

The Most Reverend
Monsignor Riccardo Ruotolo
President of the Foundation
Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza

Most Reverend Monsignor,

I am pleased to answer your letter No. 8994/85 of the 5th November 1985, with which your good self sent the project for the Statutes of the Prayer Groups of Padre Pio. These were edited by yourself after consulting the Congregation for the Clergy, the Council for the Laity and the Secretariat of the Italian Episcopal Conference.

As Secretary of State, I have not failed to examine with due attention the above mentioned text, submitting it again to the Congregation for the Clergy, who has sent to this office certain alterations in this regard.

I am anxious to inform your Reverence that the above said observations, as written on the attached sheet, should be inserted, in the final text, which, with the said additions, has been approved.

In this form the Statutes may be considered valid as from the date of the International Convention of the Prayer Groups, to be held at San Giovanni Rotondo on the 4th May 1986.

It would also seem opportune for this office to recommend that the offerings given to the Foundation Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza by the separate Groups should be noted and presented in the annual report of the Director General.

It should also be remembered that in the case of the Association ceasing to exist, should this same be in possession of a patrimony, it is the responsibility of the Cardinal Secretary of State to establish where it should be assigned, according to Can. 326 of the Code of Canon Law.

I was anxious to inform you of this, and take this occasion to send my best regards.

**to Your Reverence
Your most devoted
† A. Card. Casaroli**



THE STATUTES

FOREWORD

The Prayer Groups are a response, to the spiritual needs of our times, as perceived by Padre Pio of Pietrelcina. Their purpose is to promote the spreading of the teaching of Christ, who repeatedly insisted on the necessity of Prayer.

They are a response in obedience to repeated invitations to prayer issued by the Supreme Pontiffs and the Hierarchy, in accordance with the tradition so admirably expressed by the Ecumenical Councils, especially by the Second Vatican Council. The Groups propose to follow the general principles of the Franciscan spirituality of Padre Pio — which includes:

A. Total and unconditional adherence to the teaching of the Catholic Church, guided by the Pope and the Bishops.

B. Obedience to the Pope and the Bishops whose representative, in each Group, is the Spiritual Director. This representative is a priest nominated by the Bishop.

C. Prayer with the Church, through the Church and in the Church. By this is meant an active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church as an essential means of intimate union with God.

D. A willingness to share in the sufferings of Christ, as an effective means of reparation, according to the teaching of St. Paul.

E. Generosity and self-sacrifice in undertaking works of charity, especially for the suffering and needy, as a practical demonstration of the members' love of God.

CENTRAL OFFICE

Art. 1 - The INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE PRAYER GROUPS is guided by the norms set out in these Statutes. The central administrative offices are housed in the *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza* [Home for the Relief of Suffering] (Work of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina) in San Giovanni Rotondo, Foggia, Italy.

This International Association of the Prayer Groups is subject to the Holy See.

THE PRAYER GROUPS

Art. 2 - The Prayer Groups are composed of members of the faithful, who try to respond to Christ's invitation to pray, as reiterated by various Supreme Pontiffs. They are to be erected in a church, or oratory or a place approved by the local Ordinary. They assemble at regular intervals under the guidance of a Spiritual Director to pray and to draw others to pray in communion with the Hierarchy and in accordance with the spirituality of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina.

The members of the Groups shall consider the study of Catholic doctrine in groups, as part of their spiritual formation. They shall also take the initiative in promoting and assisting the work of evangelization and play their full part in the various pastoral activities of the local Church.

Art. 3 - Laity, as well as priests and religious, can be members of the Prayer Groups. Their names are to be inscribed in a suitable Register by the Spiritual Director.

GENERAL DIRECTION

Art. 4 - The International Association of the Prayer Groups is under the control of the Director General. He is the President for the time being (pro tempore) of the Foundation *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza* [Home for the Relief of Suffering] (Work of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina). He is nominated by the Cardinal Secretary of State, according to the statutes of the Foundation and has the rights and duties as specified in these statutes.



Whenever the President for the time being (pro tempore) of the Foundation is not a priest, then the Office of Director General of the Prayer Groups will be confided to a priest, nominated by the Cardinal Secretary of State.

Art. 5 - There is a Director General's Council. This is composed of the Director General and one or two Assistant Directors General, together with the Secretary General. The Director General, is free to nominate the Secretary General and designates the Assistant Director General, having sought advice from the members of the General Council. Included among the members of the General Council, by right, is the Father Guardian, for the time being (pro tempore), of the Monastery of the Capuchin Friars "Our Lady of Grace" of San Giovanni Rotondo. The other Councilors are designated by the General Direction which chooses them from among the members of the more numerous groups from the various nations and Continents. Like the Assistant Directors they remains in Office for five years and may be reappointed for a further five. The vote of the General Council is only consultative. It ought, however, be requested by the Director General when important work or initiatives are to be undertaken by the Prayer Groups. The General Council is to meet once a year, and whenever the Director General supervises the normal functioning of the Prayer Groups. He will take particular care, to see that all adhere strictly to the teaching and directives of the Church, admonishing those who manifest attitudes that are opposed to ecclesial communion. Where necessary, he will propose to the Bishop responsible for the territory, the disbanding of any Group that fails in its duty of ecclesial communion.

The Director General, in so far as is necessary, can confer particular regional and national offices. In the conferring of these offices, and in their eventual revocation, he shall act in accord with the Competent Ecclesiastical Authorities. The duration of these appointments is to be indicated in the letter of nomination. At the end of each year, the Director General shall present to the Holy See a report of the Association's activities, together with comments and suggestions that may seem opportune.

CERTIFICATE OF GROUP AFFILIATION

Art. 6 - The Director General issues a certificate of affiliation to the International Association of the Prayer Groups to individual Prayer Groups. He must be satisfied that the Group has a sufficient number of members and is capable of functioning as a Prayer Group, with the approval of the Competent Diocesan Ordinary.

Prayer Groups should make it their concern to maintain and foster relations with the General Direction through regular reports of the Group's activities. These ties should be further strengthened during visits and pilgrimages to San Giovanni Rotondo.

RELATIONS WITH THE DIOCESAN BISHOP

Art. 7 - The Prayer Groups are subject to the jurisdiction of the Diocesan Ordinary according to the Norms of Canon Law. The members of the Prayer Groups, in complete communion with their own Bishop, will follow the pastoral directives both at diocesan and national level. They will accept, in complete fidelity, the instructions of the General Direction, as an essential means of preserving unity.

DIRECTION OF THE GROUP

Art. 8 - The Group Leader, the Spiritual Director, the Assistant Leader and the Secretary are responsible for the administration of each Group. They regulate and organize works and initiatives to be undertaken by the Group.

When circumstances indicate a need, the Group can organize and undertake projects for children and young people, etc.

THE GROUP LEADER

Art. 9 - Each Prayer Group is presided over by a Group Leader, who is elected by an absolute majority of the members, in a plenary meeting, in the presence of a priest delegated by the Bishop. If no one obtains an absolute majority in the first ballot, the person who obtains even a relative majority in the second



ballot is to be deemed lawfully elected. This election must be confirmed by the Bishop and the Director General. The Group Leader is elected for a period of five years, but can be reelected for a maximum of three periods of five years.

THE ASSISTANT GROUP LEADER

Art. 10 - The Group Leader is assisted by one or two Assistant Group Leaders, elected by an absolute majority in a plenary meeting of the members. If an absolute majority of votes is not obtained in the first ballot, a relative majority will suffice. They remain in office for five years and can be reelected for a further five years.

If, for any reason, the post of Group Leader becomes vacant, in the course of a five year period, the senior (older) Assistant Group Leader assumes the direction of the Group. It is the duty of the Assistant Group Leader to arrange a meeting of the Group members within thirty (30) days, order to elect a Group Leader in accordance with the Norm of Art. 9.

THE SECRETARY

Art. 11 - The Group Leader nominates a Secretary who remains in office for five years and can be reappointed. The Secretary shall keep a register of the members of the Group and a record of the decisions of the Direction of each Group. The Secretary will assist the Group Leader in all matters required for the proper functioning of the Group itself.

THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Art. 12 - Each Prayer Group has a Spiritual Director who is a priest nominated by the Diocesan Ordinary. His special task is the religious instruction and formation of the members. To this end, he will organize Retreats, or courses of spiritual exercises and initiate other ways he may deem useful and suitable.

The Spiritual Director, ordinarily, presides over liturgical celebrations and sacred functions organized by the Group, in agreement with the Parish Priest or the Rector of the church.

COORDINATION OF THE PRAYER GROUPS

Art. 13 - Where there are a number of Prayer Groups in a Diocese, the Bishop can appoint a Priest to coordinate the activities of the various Groups. In this way the Groups in each diocese form part of the pastoral plan, so as to serve the needs of the Apostolate, under the direction and guidance of the Bishop.

The Diocesan Coordinator, nominated by the Bishop, may be assisted by a diocesan Council composed of five or six Councilors. They are nominated by the Bishop as designated by the Diocesan Coordinator. These Councilors are chosen from among the Spiritual Directors and Group Leaders of the Prayer Groups existing in the Diocese.

The Diocesan Priest Coordinator of the Prayer Groups shall maintain contact with the International Centre, or General Direction. He shall receive printed communications and literature from the Centre for all the Padre Pio Prayer Groups in the Diocese.

The International Centre can designate a Priest Coordinator as national or regional coordinator. He will then be presented to the National or Regional Episcopal Conference for the necessary approval.

ACTIVITIES OF THE PRAYER GROUPS

Art. 14 - Each Group shall normally hold a monthly meeting. The Holy Mass will be celebrated with a suitable homily, preceded and followed by other prayers, especially the liturgy of the hours and the Rosary.

Retreats, spiritual exercises, days of recollection and other works of piety as seem opportune can be arranged, in accordance with the directives of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Art. 15 - The following general intentions are recommended to the Prayer Groups. The Church, the Pope, the Bishops, Ecclesiastical and Religious Vocations, the sanctification of the Clergy, zeal in living the



Christian life, the conversion of sinners and of atheists, the sick, especially the incurable, the old and other intentions which include the needs of the Church and society at any particular time.

Art. 16 - Members of the Groups shall dedicate themselves to the Prayer of Reparation and following the teaching of the Apostle Paul shall offer their suffering, as their share in the Passion of Christ, Redeemer of the world.

The members of the Prayer Groups shall perform works of Penance and Reparation, so that their prayer be more acceptable to God. They shall seek to be an example through accepting the sufferings and sacrifices which form part of their daily lives and by the sincere practice of the Christian life.

They shall dedicate themselves, in a special manner, to works of charity, especially towards the sick, the old, the marginalized.

Art. 17 - The members of the Prayer Groups are not obliged to contribute financially. Whenever the Groups desire to contribute to the expenses of organization and to help the Foundation *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza* [Home for the Relief of Suffering], they are free to do so and can forward their contributions to the Foundation. They can make collections for this purpose with the permission of the respective Diocesan Ordinaries and where it is prescribed, with the permission of the competent civil authority.

MEETINGS

Art. 18 - Local, regional, national and international meetings of Prayer Groups are to be held with the prior consent of the Director General. There are no fixed times for these meetings. The Diocesan Ordinary, in whose territory the meeting is to be convened must be informed beforehand. The Director General is to give adequate instructions, if there is question of meetings being held in important cities. This also applies if there is question of regional, national or international meetings.

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

Art. 19 - The Magazine "La Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza" with a supplement for the Prayer Groups is the only official publication of the Prayer Groups.

RULES SPECIAL TO EACH GROUP

Art. 20 - Each Group can draw up a specific rule which is deemed useful for the good of the members of the Group, and which is in conformity with the present Statutes.

Such a Rule must be approved by a plenary meeting of the members of the Group. A copy of this Rule, when approved by the Group, must be sent to the Director General. Rules already in use are to be adapted to the present Statutes within six months of their coming into force.

CONCLUSION

Art. 21 - All other Statutes or Rules now existing, lapse with the coming into force of the present Statutes with due regard for the prescriptions of Art. 14.

Art. 22 - Any modification of the present Statutes can be proposed by the Director General, having consulted the General Council. It becomes binding only after approval by the Holy See.

Vatican City, 3 May 1986

Statutes approved by the Holy See, through letter from the Secretary of State, Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, dated 3rd May 1986, n° 160.977/A.

It came into force on 4th May 1986