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CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF
CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF
APOSTOLIC LIFE

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

*FIRST STEPS IN THE FOUNDATION
OF A SECULAR INSTITUTE*



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PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

FIRST STEPS IN THE FOUNDATION OF A SECULAR INSTITUTE

1. According to the praxis established by this congregation, before beginning the canonical erection of a secular institute, the interested diocesan Ordinaries are advised to proceed in the constitution of a public association, according to canon law 312, par. 1, 3°.

2. It is important to define clearly the charism of the founder and the association's spirituality and apostolate.

3. After confirming the nature of the charism, the authenticity of the life lived, the usefulness, vitality, efficacy and stability of the group, the bishop can erect a public association even with just a few people. In the association's constituting decree it is important to insert the following phrase: "ahead of its eventual elevation to the status of a secular institute by diocesan law". With this phrase in the decree, members can live a life similar to that of members of secular institutes.

4. From the start the association must have the same hierarchical structures that it intends to have when it becomes a secular institute, following the rules of the Code of Canon Law in the part devoted to the same (canons 710-730), and taking into account, obviously, the present number of members in the association and its diffusion.

5. The members can then:

1) take private vows (promises or other bonds) which, within the association, are similar to the vows (promises or other bonds) offered in secular institutes, but they are not considered sacred and lapse as soon as the member leaves the association authorised by the local bishop;

2) organise and receive their own training;

3) set up their own administration, taking into account the number of definitive members;

4) be accepted as such in other dioceses.

6. The procedure for leaving the association follows canons 729, 694-704, with the necessary modifications; canons 726, 727 and 730 are not applied to an association.

7. This way of living in the association will facilitate the transformation into a secular institute erected according to canon law.

8. The bishop who erects the association has the right to approve its statutes, and if he sees fit, to do so *ad experimentum*. In the writing of the statutes it is advisable to procure the services of a canon law expert specialised in this area.

9. When the association has about 40 definitive members, the bishop of the diocese where the main headquarters is located can consult the Holy See, according to canon 579, and move ahead with the association's elevation to secular institute by diocesan law.