

# Tridentine Community News

August 20, 2006

## *The Institute of Christ the King, Sovereign Priest*

Like Avis to Hertz, and Ford (or is that Toyota?) to General Motors, the Institute of Christ the King is a rapidly growing #2 to the Fraternity of St. Peter among orders of priests dedicated to the Tridentine Mass. Also in great demand by dioceses, the "Institute" resembles the Fraternity in many ways, but has several distinguishing characteristics.

Founded in 1990 by Msgr. Gilles Wach of France, the Institute's original charter was to promote the celebration of the sacraments with great reverence. Msgr. Wach did not have the 1962 rites in mind at the beginning, but soon came to the conclusion that focusing on them would help serve his young group's purpose.

Unlike the FSSP, the Institute did not start out with direct Vatican ties. In fact, they had trouble getting established at all. Only after a sympathetic bishop in Gabon, Africa offered them an apostolate did things really begin to take off. Augustinus Cardinal Mayer, of the Ecclesia Dei Commission, helped the Institute to secure a headquarters and seminary location near Florence, Italy.

They found a key ally in Bishop Raymond Burke of La Crosse, Wisconsin. Bishop Burke was one of the first to offer the Institute a North American outpost. Soon, other dioceses in the upper Midwest also invited them in. Bishop Burke has traveled to Italy to perform ordinations for the Institute, and invited them to take over the Latin Mass in St. Louis, Missouri after he was transferred to be Archbishop there. The St. Louis location is now the largest exclusively Tridentine parish in North America.

In the United States, the Institute gained a reputation as restorers of historic churches, in part because of a generous benefactor who stepped forward at an early stage to fund several "unwreckovation" projects. Even though that benefactor no longer plays the prominent role he once did, the Institute still is called upon to restore prominent churches, including St. Francis de Sales in St. Louis; the former St. Gelasius in Chicago; and Old St. Patrick's in Kansas City, Missouri.

Former Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Allen Vigneron, now Bishop of Oakland, California, brought the Institute in to run the Tridentine Mass at St. Margaret Mary Church. A longstanding diocesan indulgent Mass, attendance jumped from about 100 per Sunday to about 330 per Sunday after the Institute's arrival, the establishment of daily Mass, and availability of all of the sacraments according to the old rite. Similar increases have been seen elsewhere when Institute and Fraternity priests take over existing Tridentine Mass sites, largely because of the expectation of consistently beautiful liturgy.

Possibly because they operate somewhat in the shadow of the FSSP, the Institute has created a strong marketing operation. They even have a dedicated marketing person on staff at their Chicago district headquarters. Many of their apostolates are named "oratories" instead of parishes, in part because that is the appropriate canonical term for a non-territorial, non-ethnic parish, and, in this writer's opinion, in part because it sounds unique. One is never in doubt that one is at an Institute location because of prominent banners, literature, and "branded" handouts that remind the observer of the Institute's presence. Their full-color newsletters in particular are works of art.

The North American District's best asset, however, is their charismatic Provincial (Regional Superior), Msgr. Michael Schmitz, pictured at left next to one of their ubiquitous banners. With the rhetorical abilities of Mario Cuomo, a passion for

promoting the beauty of the fullness of the Catholic faith, and careful never to offend anyone whose liturgical preferences lean toward the Novus Ordo, Msgr. Schmitz is one of the most compelling advocates of the Traditional Mass in the English-speaking world. Msgr. Schmitz is interviewed frequently and has appeared on EWTN Live, Relevant Radio, and in the pages of *The Wanderer*. (As a side note, Relevant Radio even broadcast the 2005 Christmas Midnight Mass live from the Institute's Green Bay, Wisconsin apostolate.) Curiously, Msgr. Schmitz never

uses the word "Tridentine," perhaps because he sees it as potentially inviting controversy.

So far, the Institute only runs full Tridentine, or shared Tridentine-Novus Ordo parishes. They do not administer Sunday Mass-only sites. With smaller numbers than the FSSP (presently approximately 50 priests and 60 seminarians), this may be an issue of happenstance rather than intent.

Gricigliano, Italy is the site of the Institute's seminary. They have one House of Formation (pre-seminary) in Germany, and intend to open another in St. Louis, to help men discern their vocations. Unlike the Fraternity, they have no plans to open additional seminaries, despite the excess of applicants to open positions, because they want Msgr. Wach to be involved in the formation of all seminarians.

A non-cloistered, contemplative community of affiliated nuns, the Sisters Adorers of the Royal Heart, has been formed and is based near the seminary in Gricigliano.

Read more about the Institute at [www.institute-christ-king.org](http://www.institute-christ-king.org)



Questions? Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail [tridnews@stjosaphatchurch.org](mailto:tridnews@stjosaphatchurch.org) with your thoughts.