

All social bodies, as living realities, establish structures which guarantee their continued life and smooth functioning. Religious orders, small and large alike - and God knows how many there are - fall into this category and cannot escape this reality. Over the centuries, Rules which founders composed, rules which regulate religious life, foresee gatherings of different types.

Certain of these, known as "chapters," are legislative gatherings. Their decisions have the force of law in every religious family. Major Superiors with the executive powers vested in them have to implement these decisions with concrete measures.

Given their importance, the composition of these gatherings is clearly spelled out. Certain delegates attend "ex officio," that is to say, thanks to their position of authority or service within the order. Others, who make up the majority of delegates, are elected on a representative basis from the entire body. In religious life, democracy exists to temper obedience by moderating, if necessary, an exercise of authority which is not sufficiently evangelical.

All religious families function in this way, several minor differences notwithstanding, in accordance with Canon Law. Every six years they hold a general chapter which is prepared, on a smaller scale, by provincial chapters, when they are large enough to be present in various parts of the world. These chapters, because they are of major importance, are always well prepared. Its very identity, its specific mission here and now in the modern world, must be revitalized in the light of the Gospel... if it is to be really open to the life of the Spirit and true brotherhood.





