

3. REFLECTION OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL ON THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF MONTE SENARIO

BACKGROUND

1. In his address to the General Chapter (Ariccia, October 3-27, 1989) the outgoing Prior General, Fra Michel M. Sincerny, noted that during his time of service both our friars and all the members of the larger Servite Family considered *Monte Senario the most respected, venerated, visited and ideological center in the Order* [...] Fra Michel went on to write this was not simply sentimentality but a genuine and deep feeling in the hearts and souls of Servites. *It was our birthplace. The home of our first Fathers and Saints.*

He expressed *the hope that Monte Senario would continue as a special center of Servite and Marian spirituality for the whole Order and the entire Servite family* [...] For these reasons and because the Tuscan Province is having personnel and financial problems the General has called on all of us in this chapter to give serious consideration to the situation of Monte Senario. We must examine this situation with concern, love, respect and a spirit of collaboration. For this reason the General Council asked the Tuscan Province to prepare a brief study on Monte Senario.

In this study Fra Pietro M. Papini (the Tuscan Prior Provincial at the time) says *the Tuscan Provincial Council has learned of requests to the General Chapter coming from provinces and vicariates that Monte Senario be considered a "Center of Servite Spirituality"* [...] Fra Pietro goes on to say:

1. *He is pleased to learn of the interest in and proposals for Monte Senario. They are in accord with what the Tuscan Province has been thinking and proposing for some time (Provincial Chapters of 1969 and 1982); Tuscan proposals to the 1977 General Chapter; items to be put on the agenda of the next Chapter. The Provincial Council knows that the Province does not have the resources to provide enough friars to meet the needs of community life and service of the sanctuary on Monte Senario. The future promises to be even more problematic. We believe confronting these problems can be put off no longer. At the next General Chapter provision must be made; the Order must come to our assistance to restructure Servite life on Monte Senario if we are to carry out its recognized role as a Center of Servite Spirituality.*

2. *To make this possible several parts of the Order have suggested that Monte Senario be "internationalized." Some suggestions were even more specific: the Spanish Province believed Monte Senario should be under the direct jurisdiction of the Prior General. The Tuscan Provincial Council favored this solution for both ideological reasons (Monte Senario would belong to the whole Servite Family) and practical reason. The other suggestions did not seem feasible.*

3. *If Monte Senario was to be "internationalized" and placed under the direct jurisdiction of the Prior General, the Tuscan Council suggested the Priory's financial administration should also depend on the Prior General; the Tuscan Province would only retain "ownership" of the real estate – this would help eliminate legal problems. This arrangement would involve a distinction between "ownership" and "possession;" the use, administration, ordinary and extraordinary maintenance would pertain to the new entity: the priory.*

4. *To the extent it is able the Tuscan Province has every intention of continuing its fraternal collaboration with the Order for the well-being of Monte Senario. This*

collaboration would involve personnel, experience, etc. The Province believes that it can help – at least in the beginning – with its knowledge of the commercial activity that has supported the priory up to now. It further believes that Monte Senario’s location and importance in the region of Tuscany would warrant a fraternal and preferential relationship between the priory and our Province. The Province would be willing to perform eventual services for the priory.

5. The Tuscan Province is convinced that this new arrangement for Monte Senario would genuinely promote its religious growth. Monte Senario could become a “Center for Servite Spirituality;” a place where community life would be based on the best Servite spiritual traditions; a place where hospitality would be improved and local pastoral work not neglected; a place where cultural projects – already begun or about to be launched – could flourish. From this perspective we believe that Monte Senario would be the ideal location for the Italian novitiate.

6. The Tuscan Council also believes no discussion of Monte Senario should overlook our other “mother community” so closely linked in history and spirituality to Monte Senario: the Santissima Annunziata in Florence. We sincerely hope that any new arrangement of the Monte Senario community would maintain its profound sense of communion with the Santissima Annunziata which supported the mountain priory for so long a time. They belong together; their bonds are historical, territorial, diocesan – bonds of affection. This relationship must continue.

7. In the event that the General Chapter reaches precise decisions on Monte Senario the Tuscan Council believes a subsequent study commission should examine and determine the precise relationship that would exist between the Province and the Order. There should be a detailed contract drawn up “ad experimentum” initially, with a definite terminus ad quem.

2. The 1989 General Chapter issued a decree (no. 68).

1. At a date to be agreed upon between the Tuscan Provincial Council and the General Council, no later than the next Tuscan Chapter of elections, the Monte Senario Priory should be placed under the direct jurisdiction of the Prior General.

2. The General Council and the Tuscan Provincial Council should draw up a detailed contract between the Order and the Tuscan Province which defines their legal relationship. This contract would initially be “ad experimentum” for a time both parties agree upon.

3. This new legal entity would be entrusted to the Prior General, the symbol of the Order’s unity and Servite Communion. It should not be seen as a new responsibility for the General and his Council alone but rather as a collective responsibility of the whole Order. The General Chapter calls upon the whole Order to collaborate actively with the Prior General by sending friars. The Order believes that the vitality and spiritual well-being of the Monte Senario community will contribute to the vitality and spiritual welfare of all the Order’s communities.

3. During the next six-year term, 1989-1995, the General Council carried out the General Chapter decree. While the contract between the Provincial Council and the General Council was being drawn up the question of Monte Senario’s ability to support itself arose. Both parties agreed that *as long as the present (Tuscan) friars are working on Monte Senario the problem would be relative. Difficulties will arise later when it’s a question of asking Provinces for friars with specific abilities. It will not be easy to find or have these friars. If the community is*

beset with too many problems it will find it difficult to respond to all the General Chapter decree requires. The contract was signed and the Regional Conference (FIES) was also involved.

4. During the subsequent six-year term (1995-2001) the Contract between the Order and the Tuscan Province regarding the Monte Senario Priory (Cf. *CG 1995*, no. 80/1b) was renewed – with some modifications:

- it was determined that friars who fell sick on Monte Senario could be transferred to the Santissima Annunziata “in the event that the sickness cannot (for technical reasons) be taken care of” in their own community (art. 6).

- in the event of unforeseen and burdensome financial emergencies (e.g. earthquake damage, land subsidence endangering the buildings or other disasters not covered by insurance) financial assistance from the Tuscan Province would be requested;

- free hospitality on Monte Senario should be extended to the friars of the Tuscan Province for courses of *aggiornamento* organized by the Order or events organized by FIES.

5. During the next six-year term (2001-2007) the Contract between the Order and the Santissima Annunziata Province was modified primarily by substituting “Province, Provincial, Council of the Santissima Annunziata Province” for the previous “Tuscan Province, Tuscan Provincial and Tuscan Council.”

It is important to note that the make-up of the Monte Senario Community has changed considerably. What was brought up in our earlier discussion of the first Contract about Monte Senario’s ability to support itself is relevant.

6. During the 2007-2013 six-year term the precarious state of Monte Senario’s finances made it impossible to renew the Contract between the Santissima Annunziata Province and the General Council. The principal point of disagreement concerned finances: the Monte Senario community is not able to cover extraordinary expenses and the Santissima Annunziata Province is not willing to assume them.

In spite of this certain extraordinary expenses are absolutely necessary. They have been determined by the Order’s Financial Council and the General Council in collaboration with the Santissima Annunziata Province (Cf. *Const.* 76b).

Urgent expenses:

- *repair of large sections of the priory roof to eliminate the “miracle” of water in many rooms;*

- *updating the electrical wiring in areas open to the public or used for hospitality;*

- *updating the heating system and compartmentalizing it to cut down cost;*

- *renewing our anti-lightning devices;*

- *waterproofing parts of the corridor and the Aula Sette Santi (Hall of the Seven Saints);*

- *maintenance of the woods and the private road that goes from Bivigliano to the priory;*

- *decision on the safe future use of the “Ghiacciaia” [icehouse];*

These are all extraordinary expenses which the Monte Senario community cannot afford.

7. In the General Council’s last meeting with the Priors, Vicar and Delegates Provincial (Trois-Rivières, September 3-12, 2012) the majority of Priors, Vicar and Delegates Provincial (11 for, 3

against) was in favor of the General Council's proposal that the Monte Senario Priory be returned to the Santissima Annunziata Province promptly.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

8. After the proposal to return Monte Senario to the Santissima Annunziata Province we received several suggestions for resolving the problem. Two themes emerged from these suggestions:
- a) resolution of financial and administrative problems;
 - b) recognition of the importance of Monte Senario as our *spiritual motherland*.

Finances and administration

9. The main reason it was impossible to renew the Contract between the Order and the Santissima Annunziata Province for the 2007-2013 six-year term was the question of administration and finances. We must take financial measures to meet our financial problems:

a) *Planning structural work*. We must have a clear idea (time and cost involved) of necessary structural work before we can ask the Order for contributions. We must bear in mind the importance of the building if we are gradually to make the Monte Senario Project a reality. Together with the Prior and Treasurer of Monte Senario, the Santissima Annunziata Provincial Treasurer should prepare a report for the 213th General Chapter (2013). The paper should describe the repairs needed, the time involved and an estimate of cost. This sort of report was asked for in December 2011 for repair of the roof. The report should include a method for sharing the expenses with the whole Order including a suggested percentage for each jurisdiction.

b) *Contract between the Order and the Santissima Annunziata Province*. Since it was a decision of the 2007 General Chapter the Contract between the Order and the Santissima Annunziata Province is not a contract between two equal parties. There is an element of obedience. The General Chapter can require that a Contract between the Order and the Annunziata Province be signed (October 2, 2014) that includes the following:

- extraordinary expenses foreseen by the Order's Financial Council and the General Council in collaboration with the Annunziata Province (see the list above);
- assumption of responsibility by the Annunziata Province of all extraordinary maintenance expense needed in coming years; the possibility of selling land not absolutely necessary for community life in accord with the *mandate* of the General Council.

c) *Administration*. Financing urgent repairs:

- Examine the possibility of using part of the capital fund and levying a "Tax for Monte Senario" that would reimburse the Order (within a reasonable period of time) for the expenses it has incurred (Cf. *Const.* 302c);
- Monte Senario needs a competent administrator (perhaps a layman, a professional) who can oversee the entire administration of the Monte Senario Enterprise;
- Explore the possibility of a lay fundraiser to look for financial sponsors;
- Explore the possibility of creating a "Monte Senario Fund" to handle extraordinary expenses in the future.

d) *Transfer of ownership*. Explore the possibility of transferring ownership of the entire Monte Senario Enterprise (priory, lands, rents) from the Tuscan Province to the Order; study the

possibility of a “conditioned donation” defining what cannot absolutely be sold because it is essential to the Monte Senario Project.

Monte Senario, spiritual motherland

10. All the friars of the Order rightly think of Monte Senario as our spiritual motherland. This feeling has grown over the twenty-four years Monte Senario has been under the direct jurisdiction of the Prior General, the sign of unity and communion in the Servite Order.

The General Council reaffirms the importance for the Monte Senario Community to be international in composition. In accord with the “Mandate Letter” the Prior General wrote at the beginning of his six-year term (2007-2013) the community must:

- be committed to an intense experience of spiritual and fraternal life;
- it must make elements of the contemplative life widely available (Cf. *Const.* 4);
- it should be a place for permanent formation (Cf. *CG 2007*, no. 28a) for the Order, eventually collaborating with the Marianum Pontifical Theological Faculty, the St. Alexis Falconieri Formation Community and the Community of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence;
- in agreement with the Regional Conference it should be a common novitiate for the European Provinces (Cf. *CG 2007*, no. 28c).

Returning Monte Senario to the Santissima Annunziata Province

11. If the Contract between the Order and the Annunziata Province is not renewed by the time indicated (October 2, 2014) Monte Senario should be immediately returned to the Santissima Annunziata Province.

Since the Sacred Priory of Monte Senario is considered the *Spiritual Motherland of the Entire Order*, the jurisdictions of the Order can be asked to support the Santissima Annunziata Province - in personnel and funds ¹ - so that the make-up of Monte Senario will actually be international and the community be able: to engage in an intense experience of spiritual and fraternal life; to make contemplative aspects of life widely available (Cf. *Const.* 4); to host permanent formation sessions (Cf. *CG 2007*, no. 28a) and in collaboration with the Regional Conference to become a common novitiate for the European Provinces (Cf. *CG 2007*, no. 28c).

¹ The Monte Senario Community writes (April 25, 2013): *The Order's unwillingness to share the problems we experience here at Monte Senario, the need for urgent repair and restoration, makes us think the provinces are closed in on themselves and concerned only with their own problems. This is not something that occurs only in our own time. At the 1533 General Chapter in Siena the Prior General, Fra Girolamo of Lucca, decried two great obstacles to restoration at Monte Senario: "poverty .. disagreement in the Order ... Each one is concerned only with himself and his own affairs. He shows little or no interest in the problems of other people."* (*Fonti storico-spirituali OSM III/2*, p. 201).