

The following interview was conducted at [Notre Dame de La Salette Boys Academy](#) on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 8, 2018:

CFN: Father, thank you for taking the time to help our readers understand the upcoming General Chapter and the organization of the Society of St. Pius X's authority structure. First, can you tell us a bit about yourself? Where are you from? How did you first learn of the work of the SSPX? When were you ordained? What offices within the Society have you held?

Father Pfluger: I was born in Switzerland in 1958, a country that has been so important in the life of the Society. My Family always looked for traditional and conservative priests, and we learned about the Archbishop in 1974/75 when he gave some conferences in Swiss towns. From this time, "the priests from Ecône" started to become known in the German part of Switzerland. My brother entered the new German Seminary of the Society at Zaitzkofen (Bavaria, Germany) in 1975, and I followed in 1978. I was ordained by [Archbishop Lefebvre](#) on July 1, 1984, at Zaitzkofen. Over the past 34 years, I have been called upon to serve at various times as District Superior of the districts of Switzerland and Germany, Rector of the Seminary in Zaitzkofen, Germany, and, since 2006, the First Assistant to Bishop Fellay and his Vicar General.

CFN: Can you tell us why you are visiting La Salette Boys Academy this weekend (June 8-10, 2018) and share some of your impressions of the work of formation that the Academy has been accomplishing for the past 13 years?

Father Pfluger: Of course, this visit is not my first! On the contrary, I have been happy to visit La Salette several times since its founding in 2005. It is important for those of us in positions of authority to get to know firsthand the houses in which our priests and brothers live and exercise their apostolate. I am visiting this weekend for the graduation of the school and a celebration of Headmaster Father Michael McMahon, who has led the Academy for 13 years. After graduation, he will hand on this great work to his well prepared successor, Father Timothy Sick. Many priests, friends, and benefactors from around the world have come to celebrate the extraordinary success of La Salette in forming the next generation of Catholic men under Father McMahon's guidance these past 13 years.

It's particularly important to encourage our houses who cooperate in a very profound way for a true Christian education. At La Salette, they are forming a new generation of Catholic families and religious vocations. I believe the "secret" of La Salette Boys Academy is a magnificent balance between nature and the supernatural, soul and body, the unity of Christian life, knowledge and physical exercise.

CFN: Turning to the topic of the [upcoming General Chapter](#), could you explain the source of the rules providing for the governance of the SSPX? Were they written by the Archbishop? Have they been changed significantly since the Archbishop's death?

Father Pfluger: The Archbishop wrote the rules of the Society in a very particular time. He had the experience of a missionary priest, bishop and Superior General of the largest missionary Congregation at that time (The Holy Ghost Fathers). And he was urged by young seminarians to "do something" in the huge crisis of priestly formation after the Second Vatican Council. The rules express perfectly the spirit of the Church; but they also contain some important characteristics of our Founder's personality. The rules are an excellent instrument for a true reform of the Church for our time. They are essentially a response to overcome the deep crisis in the Church, namely, by fostering a true understanding of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, a lively faith, and a missionary spirit.

Of course, the spirit and the essentials of the rules have not changed since they were written by the Archbishop. The last three General Chapters modified only some practicalities regarding the administration and organization of the Society.

CFN: What is the role of the Superior General?

Father Pfluger: The rules of the Society, which express the intention of the Founder himself, Archbishop Lefebvre, give us an excellent definition of the Superior General and his Council, the two Assistants: "The Superior General governs and administers the Society. He consults his Assistants for important decisions... (They) will do all they judge useful to preserve, foster, and increase a great generosity, a profound spirit of Faith, and a burning zeal in the service of the Church and of souls in the hearts of all those in charge and of all the other members of the Society" (Statutes, 5.5).

The Society has an excellent structure and organization with the General Council, the Seminaries, Districts, Priors, *etc.* The Superior doesn't perform the job of all the different superiors and priors. He must work to increase generosity, the spirit of Faith and a zeal in the service of the Church among all members of the Society. After twelve years serving as First Assistant, this definition also serves for me as an excellent examination of conscience.

CFN: Was it the Archbishop's intention that the Superior General be responsible for relations with the Roman authorities?

Father Pfluger: Our Statutes indicate clearly that the Superior and his Council has to work for a so-called papal recognition. That's a normal process for a new Institute which begins

only as a canonical foundation in a particular diocese. This process is typical for any Institute in the Church. Well, it's precisely the role of the Superior to guide and to govern the Institute. That's why the Archbishop himself went to Rome to talk with Popes Paul VI and John Paul II and their Curia. With the unjust condemnation of the Society arose the indispensable need for our Founder to keep up the contacts with Rome so as to remove this unjust condemnation. Although the Archbishop established in good time a successor as Superior General (Fr. Franz Schmidberger, who served from 1983 until 1994), as the founder of the Society and the Superior General when the unjust action was taken, he remained intimately involved with the contacts with Rome. We can understand that, for the Holy See, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre was the man with whom to talk about a canonical solution. He was the founder, known in the whole Catholic world; while he was alive, he led the contacts with Rome even though he was no longer the Superior General. He intended after being recalled to God that this role would be continued by the Superior General, Father Schmidberger, and his successors.

During a priest meeting in Switzerland in June 1988, Archbishop Lefebvre told us why he didn't choose Fr. Schmidberger, the Superior General, to be consecrated as an auxiliary bishop for the Society: to facilitate the contact and this process of regularization of the Society. He believed, at that time, that it might be easier for Rome to work with the Superior General if he were not one of the new bishops.

It is not exceptional or unusual for the Superior of any Institute in the Catholic Church to be responsible for the legal process of formal recognition by the authorities of the Church. Neither the people, nor the Chapter, nor the majority should deal with the Roman authorities. That's only the duty of the proper Superior, because the Catholic Church is not a democracy.

CFN: For how long does a Superior General serve?

Father Pfluger: According to the statutes, a Superior General is elected for a term of 12 years.

CFN: Are their limits (legal or by custom and practice) on how many times a Superior General may be elected?

Father Pfluger: The practice in the last centuries in the Church is rather to minimize the term of elected superiors, normally to six years with no possible re-election. Even those elected *ad vitam*, for life, have normally to be limited in some ways. The Archbishop believed such a young Institute needed more stability and continuity, particularly in the time of such a crisis in the Church. That's the reason why he chose a term for the Superior and his

Assistants for twelve years without a specific limit on re-election.

CFN: Must the Superior General be one of the bishops?

Father Pfluger: According to the statutes of the SSPX, the Superior General does not need to be one of the bishops consecrated by Archbishop Lefebvre. In fact, the Archbishop made clear that although the bishops could be elected Superior General, the office need not be filled by a bishop. The Archbishop did warn that if a bishop were to hold the office that fact might confuse some people into thinking that the Archbishop had conferred some sort of jurisdiction (legal authority to govern a portion of the Church) on the bishops when in fact he made clear that he made no claims to do so and merely ordained them as auxiliary bishops (a bishop having the power to confer sacraments proper to a bishop but not holding a specific governing authority). The Archbishop made it clear at the time of the Consecrations that he acted only out of necessity to preserve the traditional priesthood but that only the Pope could confer governing authority upon a bishop. The authority that Bishop Fellay has exercised as Superior General derives from his election as Superior General by the two General Chapters and not by virtue of the 1988 Consecrations.

CFN: In that case, is any priest of the Society eligible to be elected Superior General or are there other qualifications?

Father Pfluger: Actually, 462 priests are candidates! According to our Statutes, the Superior General must be a priest who is at least 30 years old and who has already made his final engagement in the Society of St. Pius X. But of course, that's only the minimal legal requirement. What is needed for a Superior General? Perhaps the proverb in the old times was not so bad, they said: "An Abbot should not be too intelligent, too holy, too healthy..." That means, he must be above average in prudence, the most important virtue for a leader, and he needs common sense and pastoral experience. He should have demonstrated qualities of leadership, social competence, and last but not least a rooted spirit of the Church. He must be the "good Pastor" like our Lord Jesus Christ.

CFN: What is the role of the First and Second Assistants? How are priests selected for these roles?

Father Pfluger: The First and Second Assistant assist and advise the Superior General. As the Church is monarchical in her governance, the Superior General holds the personal obligation to make decisions for the common good of the Society. Yet, the Church has long taught that, as a matter of fostering good and prudent government, monarchs should take counsel and seek the advice of trusted counselors in making decisions. The two Assistants serve the Superior General in this way, as well as assisting him in any particular tasks that

he entrusts to them.

CFN: Some critics of the Society from the so-called and self-proclaimed “Resistance” have claimed that Bishop Fellay has conceded to the Roman authorities that, if a canonical recognition would occur, the SSPX statutes would change so that Rome would appoint the Superior General and the Assistants and that they would not be SSPX priests. Is this claim true?

Father Pfluger: On the contrary! In the so-called Prelature, which on several occasions has been proposed by Rome, the Prelate and further bishops will be taken from the Society! No, this claim is a bold lie, the kind you often find being circulated by people who are outside the Society but who are quick to judge what is going on inside the Society. Such claims, rather than being serious arguments, are groundless. You see, that’s nothing but a con-trick. These people are speaking contrary to justice and truth and oppose any form of canonical regularization for our Society, because they have lost the spirit of the Archbishop. The spirit of our Founder is “the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Church, of the Gospel”. In fact, their worries and visceral opposition to any contact with Rome or a canonical regularization is based on fear and is a lack of supernatural hope.

CFN: Who participates in the General Chapter?

Father Pfluger: The General Chapter is composed of 41 priests designated by their “office” within the SSPX. This group includes the current Superior General and the First and Second Assistant, the bishops, the former superior generals, the Secretary General and the Bursar General, the district superiors, the rectors of the major seminaries, and the superiors of the autonomous houses. It also includes some of the most senior priests who do not hold one of these offices. The number of this group of senior priests is equal to one-third of the number of priests who participate by virtue of their office (so, for example, if there are 31 priests holding these offices, there would be 10 senior priests).

CFN: What is the format of the General Chapter and the minimum vote required to elect a Superior General and to approve other matters?

Father Pfluger: The General Chapter opens with a brief report from the departing Superior General. Then the participants elect the new Superior (who can be the same as the departing Superior) by a two-thirds majority of all votes. Then follows the election of the First and the Second Assistant, both requiring a simple majority (at least 50 percent plus one of the votes).

CFN: Will this General Chapter be discussing the state of relations with the Roman

authorities?

Father Pfluger: Again, if we try to be faithful to our Statutes, then we have to accept the particular role of the Superior General handling the contacts and the regularization with the Holy See. The General Chapter has also a precise role, namely, to elect the General Council and to check and examine the carrying out of the Statutes in the life of the Society.

In preparation for the Chapter, all the members of the Society have the opportunity to submit in writing, by December 31 of last year, their wishes, criticisms, and concerns. The General Secretary then circulates these submissions to seven different Commissions within the Chapter for review. In the beginning of the Chapter, the Capitulants review these submissions to determine if these so-called “vota” are truly a matter for the Chapter (not every particular or personal issue is a proper subject for the Chapter). Then the seven Commissions that review these issues propose items to the full Chapter for consideration.

Of course, the Superior General is motivated by a sincere interest to listen to the different views and opinions of all the Capitulants.

CFN: Are there any other important issues that this Chapter will be discussing?

Father Pfluger: Many issues are important and will be discussed: the priestly formation and life, the common life and the sanctification of our members, the importance and rapidly changing nature of modes of communication in the modern world. I guess the most important is the delicate balancing act between what we are (priestly society with common life) and what we do (our works, the apostolate). How can we do all of the works we are asked to do when there are so many serious needs in the Church and the whole world with our limited resources?

CFN: What can the faithful do before and during the Chapter to support the work of the Chapter?

Father Pfluger: Thanks for this question! For six months prior, we pray in all our houses the Invocation to the Holy Ghost (“Come, Holy Ghost, fill the hearts of Thy faithful...”) and an invocation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and our patron, Saint Pius X, for a fruitful and effective Chapter. All the faithful are invited to offer their own prayers and sacrifices for this intention so that Almighty God may bless and foster the Society founded by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre as a work of the Catholic Church.