

# Philippine bishop warns of 'fake' congregation

MANILA, Philippines – A Philippine bishop has warned that an unregistered religious congregation based in his diocese has been recruiting seminarians and “unscrupulously” soliciting funds.

The 23-year-old Sons/Sisters of Mary Adorers of the Holy Eucharist congregation, headed by Father Alejandro Galias, was “not correctly erected according to the rules of canon law,” Bishop Arturo Bastes of Sorsogon told the Asian church news agency UCA News July 17.

Bishop Bastes issued a decree in April warning his diocese against the group. He also sent warnings to the bishops’ conferences in the United States and Canada, where Father Galias is believed to visit to raise funds.

He said he learned last October that the congregation was “fake” when a secretary at the apostolic nunciature in the Philippines called to ask the bishop if the congregation was of “diocesan right.” Bishop Bastes told the nuncio the diocese does not have records of its registration.

According to canon law, an institute of consecrated life is of diocesan right if it has been established by the diocesan bishop but has not obtained a decree of approval from the Holy See. Those of “pontifical right” have been established or approved by the Holy See.

Bishop Bastes said Father Galias solicits funds from government agencies and travels to other countries to raise funds for his three schools, seminary and orphanage. He said most of the recruits in his schools and seminary are poor girls and boys from Northern Samar and Leyte provinces in the central Philippines.

Bishop Bastes recalled that after he was installed as bishop of Sorsogon in 2003 priests complained to him that the congregation was a nuisance and asked him to abolish it.

When he discovered that his predecessor, retired Bishop Jesus Varela, had not “properly erected” the group as a religious community the question of abolishing it ceased to exist, because “there is nothing to abolish,” Bishop Bastes said.

However, Bishop Varela, who was bishop of Sorsogon from 1980 to 2003, told UCA News July 16 that he recognized Father Galias and his congregation about 15 years

ago because they did nothing “scandalous or wrongful.”

The retired bishop said he does not “see anything wrong” with Father Galias’ fundraising activities. He remembers ordaining two of the congregation’s seminarians, who eventually left their congregation and became diocesan priests. In the 2006-2007 Catholic Directory of the Philippines, Father Galias is listed as “not assigned” to a parish. Bishop Bastes said the priest can say Mass unless he is suspended.