

# Vatican warns on splinter group devoted to angels

VATICAN CITY – The Vatican's doctrinal office has asked the world's bishops to be vigilant over the activities of a "wayward movement" of members of the Opus Angelorum church association.

The Vatican said the splinter movement was trying to revive practices banned 18 years ago, including liturgical ceremonies that focus on angels.

The organization, whose name is Latin for "work of angels," was reformed after a 1992 Vatican decree and today is a "public association of the church in conformity with traditional doctrine and with the directives of the Holy See," wrote Cardinal William J. Levada, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and Archbishop Luis Ladaria Ferrer, the congregation's secretary.

The group "spreads devotion to the holy angels among the faithful, exhorts them to pray for priests, and promotes love for Christ in his Passion and union with it," said the letter sent to the presidents of the world's bishops' conferences.

The letter, dated Oct. 2, was released to journalists Nov. 4 and was published the same day in the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano.

The letter said that after its successful normalization, Opus Angelorum is in communion with the church, and "there are no remaining obstacles of a doctrinal or disciplinary kind which would prevent local ordinaries from receiving this movement into their dioceses and prompting its development."

But it said bishops should be aware that there are a certain number of members, including priests who left or were expelled from the Order of Canons Regular of the Holy Cross, who "have not accepted the norms given by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and seek to restore what, according to them, would be the 'authentic Opus Angelorum.' "

The splinter movement "professes and practices all those things which were

forbidden” by earlier Vatican documents, it said.

The congregation said that “very discrete propaganda in favor of this wayward movement, which is outside of any ecclesial control, is taking place, aimed at presenting it as if it were in full communion with the Catholic Church.”

For that reason, it said, it was urging bishops to be “vigilant with regard to such activities, disruptive as they are of ecclesial communion, and to forbid them if they are present within their dioceses.”

The organization was founded in Innsbruck, Austria, and stems from the alleged 1946 private revelations received by Gabriele Bitterlich. She reported visions of the world of angels in which their individual names and specific tasks were revealed.

In 1983, the doctrinal congregation released a letter ordering the group to end some of its practices and beliefs. However, the letter’s orders “were not interpreted and executed correctly,” the congregation said in a follow-up decree released in 1992.

The 1992 decree said that the angel beliefs and practices of the organization “are foreign to Holy Scripture and tradition and therefore cannot serve as a basis of spirituality and for the activities of a church-approved association.”

Theories springing from the “presumed revelations” of Mrs. Bitterlich “can be neither taught nor in any way utilized, explicitly or implicitly,” by Opus Angelorum, it said.

“The different forms of consecration to the angels practiced by Opus Angelorum are prohibited,” the 1992 decree said, adding that the group was to follow strictly all liturgical laws, especially relating to the Eucharist.

Other prohibitions included the practice of exorcisms that did not follow church rules and the administration of sacraments from a distance.

A Vatican-appointed delegate was named to oversee compliance of the 1992 decree and to regularize the relationship between Opus Angelorum and the Order of Canons Regular of the Holy Cross.

In 2000, the doctrinal congregation approved the formula of a consecration to the Holy Angels for Opus Angelorum and the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life approved the statutes of the Opus Sanctorum Angelorum.

Opus Angelorum is under the direction of the Order of Canons Regular of the Holy Cross, whose central government was named by the Vatican in 1993 and was able to elect its own superior general and general council members in 2009.

The Bishop of Innsbruck approved the Constitutions of the Sisters of the Holy Cross.

The group is active in Austria, Germany, Brazil, Portugal and the United States.