

# Church Approval Questions and Answers

In this document, we will address the question of the Flame of Love Movement being officially approved by the Church as well as several related questions.

## Is the Flame of Love Movement Officially Approved by the Church?

Unequivocally yes. There are several different levels of associations of the faithful with different levels of approval and ecclesial oversight.

1) De facto associations are rooted in Christians' right to assemble together. These are private agreements between Christians (as opposed to Private Associations) and require no review or oversight.

2) Private Associations of the Faithful must have its statutes reviewed by the "Competent Authority." The statutes do not need to be approved. Effectively, this is to let the competent authority know about the activity. Competent Authority is defined as in Canon 312:

- The Holy See for universal and international associations
- The conference of bishops in its own territory for national associations
- The diocesan bishop in his own territory

3) Private Associations of the Faithful with Juridic Personality. To achieve this, the association's statutes must not only be reviewed but approved by the Competent Authority and accompanied by a formal decree granting juridic personality. This is one difference between a Public and Private Association of the Faithful. Public Associations automatically receive Juridic Personality while Private Associations must apply for it. At this stage, the Competent Authority has not just been made aware of the activity but has officially approved the Association.

This is the current status of The Flame of Love Movement as promulgated by the Primate of Hungary and the local ordinary for the headquarters of the Flame of Love Movement, His Eminence Peter Cardinal Erdo after several years of investigation:

"With these words, I establish in the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest the 'Movement Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary', as an ecclesial association of the faithful in Christ. It is a private association enjoying a juridical personality."

4) Public Associations of the Faithful are "erected" by the Competent Authorities and may extend those functions reserved to their authority such as public worship and official teaching (Canon 301). They are directly under the authority of the erecting Competent Authority.

## **Juridic Personality is the key**

The status of the Flame of Love Movement with *Juridic Personality* is the key to official Church approval. It is different than a simple Private Association precisely because it requires approval:

Canon 322 - § 1 . A private association of the Christian faithful can acquire juridic personality through a formal decree of the competent ecclesiastical authority mentioned in can. 312. §2. No private association of the Christian faithful can acquire juridic personality unless the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in can. 312, § 1 has approved its statutes.

Note this important section from the commentary at the conclusion of Canon Law Book II: The People of God from NEW COMMENTARY ON THE CODE OF CANON LAW, Copyright © 2000 by The Canon Law Society of America. p.420:

“the faithful are invited to join ‘especially those associations which competent ecclesiastical authority has erected, praised, or commended’ (c. 298, §2). Here is where the juridic status of associations of the faithful becomes a question.

Besides reminding us that every association of the faithful is not necessarily erected, praised, or commended and that de facto associations can exist, canon 298, §2 clarifies the meaning of the recognition of associations of the faithful by the competent authority. For their potential members, this recognition provides, at least in principle, a guarantee of their doctrinal authenticity, their communion with the leaders of the ecclesial community, and the conformity of their activities with the Church 's mission.

In the very act of recognizing an association, the episcopate exercises its role of vigilance by a means which is proper to it. From the viewpoint of the association, recognition brings a confirmation of its validity, and sometimes this is an important element reassuring the faithful desiring to join it.”

## **What Is The Difference A Private And Public Association Of The Faithful?**

Public associations are “erected” by Competent Authorities and may extend those functions reserved to the authority such as public worship and official teaching (Canon 301). Only a public association can receive a mission to teach Christian doctrine in the name of the Church, promote public worship, or pursue a purpose which by nature is reserved to ecclesiastical authority They require explicit approval and thereby receive Juridic Personality.

Once erected in one diocese, a Public Association does not have to be erected again by the bishop of another diocese in order to work there, since it has already been erected. But it obviously must obtain the agreement of the local bishop before beginning to work or to establish itself there, somewhat like religious institutes (cc. 678--683) and personal prelatures (c. 297). (Adapted from NEW COMMENTARY ON THE CODE OF CANON LAW. p.409).

The Competent Authority appoints the Public Association’s Chaplain and may appoint its Moderator.

Private Associations are not “erected”. They are recognized by the Competent Authority. This recognition does not imply approval. However, private association can request approval and then be granted juridic personality.

Private associations are not directly supervised by the Competent Authority and may choose their Moderators. However, the choice of Moderator must be approved by the local ordinary in each diocese.

## **Do I Need Local Permission For The Flame Of Love?**

Surprisingly, no. However it is wise to seek such permission. We specifically asked this of Reverend Monsignor Gerard C. Mesure, J.D., J.C.D. of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. He replied:

The main issue seems to be can such an association function in a diocese other than the one in which it was approved. Basically I think the answer is yes. I don't think the association needs the permission of the local bishop to do this - any more than an individual would need the bishop's permission to promote a particular devotion. However if the group is setting up a formal structure or operation in a diocese it would probably be wise to ask the bishop if he has any objections.

There are limitations. If the group wants to highlight that it was approved by a church authority, it should make clear that that authority is the original diocesan bishop that made it an association. The group cannot collect funds in churches without the approval of the Local diocese. The group would not be included in the local diocesan directory or in the Official Catholic Directory - unless an American bishop gave approval (which would effectively require formal recognition as an association by an American diocese.) As such it is not tax exempt and donations are not deductible (unless it gets its own IRS recognition as a charity). The group can only call itself “Catholic” if a diocesan bishop gives approval.

Collecting funds does not apply to something such as being reimbursed for Diaries and other materials or fund raising outside of church. The Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Movement Philadelphia is an IRS registered non-profit.

## **Private Prayer and Cenacles**

One does not need permission to live and pray the Flame of Love Devotion privately. One does not need permission to gather privately in cenacles to pray the Flame of Love Devotion. The right of the faithful to assemble privately is guaranteed by Canon 215:

“The Christian faithful are at liberty freely to found and direct associations for purposes of charity or piety or for the promotion of the Christian vocation in the world and to hold meetings for the common pursuit of these purposes.”

## Public Prayer and Activities

There are two different factors at play here which should not be confused. One has to do with jurisdiction (international versus diocesan associations) and the other with status (public versus private associations).

### Jurisdiction

A Diocesan Association of the Faithful such as The Flame of Love (headquartered under the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest) may operate in other dioceses. However, even though the Competent Authority has authorized them, the local ordinary does have the right to intervene or suppress the activity according to Canon 305.2:

“Associations of any kind are subject to the vigilance of the Holy See; diocesan associations and other associations to the extent that they work in the diocese are subject to the vigilance of the local ordinary.”

The NEW COMMENTARY ON THE CODE OF CANON LAW (p.406) adds, “Concretely, the Holy See constitutes the authority competent to exercise vigilance over any association of the faithful, whether it be public, private, diocesan, national, or international. The local ordinary exercises vigilance over diocesan associations, "and other associations to the extent that they work in the diocese" (§2). The local ordinary can thus intervene, if this is needed, not only when a diocesan association of the faithful has its headquarters in his own diocese, but also when an association--which may or may not be diocesan--carries on its work in his diocese even though it has its headquarters elsewhere . The manner of intervention as well as the situation calling for such intervention can vary according to the case and the nature of the association.”

### Status

A public association of the faithful officially speaks in the name of the Church and may exercise functions proper to ecclesial authority such as public worship and official teaching. Private associations such as The Flame of Love do not. Thus, if we want to pray the Flame of Love devotion publicly such as having a cenacle in a Church or praying the Flame of Love Rosary publicly in Church, we should obtain someone’s permission. For a parish, this may be the local Pastor. For a cluster or deanery, it may be the leader of the cluster of deanery. For a diocese, it would be the local bishop.

Thus, when organizing activities such as prayer, retreats, missions, and seminars, please engage the appropriate level of authority (with prayer and fasting beforehand). When wishing to publicly spread the devotion such as handing out pamphlets or books in a church or Adoration Chapel, please seek appropriate permission.

## Conclusion

Let us conclude with several points:

- 1) The Flame of Love devotion is officially approved by the Church by virtue of its juridic personality.
- 2) No permission is needed for private prayer or private cenacles.
- 3) Because of its jurisdiction as a diocesan association of the faithful, a local ordinary may suppress the *public* exercise of the Flame of Love devotion.
- 4) Because of its status as a private association of the faithful, we should seek the appropriate level of permission for public propagation and practice of the Flame of Love Devotion.
- 5) We expect both the jurisdiction and status limitations to change as we are currently being examined to change our status to an International Public Association of the Faithful.

Thank you for your interest in the Flame of Love. May you be greatly blessed by the great outpouring of grace associated with the fully approved devotion.