

AN EXPLANATION OF THE

# Archconfraternity of Saint Stephen

## THE SUPREME PRIVILEGE

*“To serve at the altar... is next to the Priesthood the highest privilege which a layman can enjoy.”<sup>1</sup>*

## A SUMMARY OF THE ARCHCONFRATERNITY OF SAINT STEPHEN

*“No ministry, except that of those who by ordination are set apart for the service of the altar, deserves greater thought and consideration than the duty entrusted to those laymen and youths who have the office of assisting the priests of God in the discharge of their sacred functions. It is a ministry of minute detail which must be learnt gradually and fully, both in its external aspect and in the great mystical meanings which it sets forth.*

*“Too often this ministry is lightly undertaken and negligently performed, because care and opportunity have not been used to make our servers understand their duties, or the spirit in which they should be accomplished.*

*“The object of the Archconfraternity of St. Stephen is to make it easier for the Clergy to give their servers instruction suitable in all those matters which concern the service of the altar, and to inspire the servers themselves with a proper understanding and appreciation of the service which they desire to render to God and to Holy Church. We have confidence that the Archconfraternity will accomplish its object if it be carried on in the spirit in which it has been conceived. Francis, Archbishop of Westminster. Feast of St Casimir, March 4, 1907.”<sup>2</sup>*

The **Three-Fold Object** of the Archconfraternity is:

1. *“...the sanctification of the Altar-Server by teaching him that to serve in the Sanctuary is a great religious privilege,*
2. *“by instructing him the manner of observing the rites and ceremonies of the Church according to the rubrics and to the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Rites and the interpretations of the most generally accepted authorities,*
3. *“and by encouraging him to understand the meaning and the purpose of the ceremonies in which he takes part.”<sup>3</sup>*

Following from this Three-Fold Object, the Guild engenders organization, discipline and a spirit based on the supernatural through:

A. Adherence to its **Four Rules**:

1. *“To serve at the Altar reverently, intelligently and punctually.*
2. *“To make the short acts of preparation before, and of thanksgiving after, serving Mass.*
3. *“To observe silence in the sacristy, and great reverence in the Sanctuary.*



THE LOGO OF THE  
ARCHCONFRATERNITY  
& ITS MEANING

CUI SERVIRE REGNARE EST  
Latin for “He who serves reigns” or “To serve is to reign”. This is the motto of the Guild. It is in imitation of Our Lord, Who did not come to be served, but to serve. Blessed is he who serves the Lord at His Holy Altar.

### CROWN OF MARTYRDOM

One of the symbols attributed to the Martyrs. It is the crowning triumph of giving one’s life completely to Christ. Saint Stephen has the distinction of being the *Protomartyr*, or the first Martyr to shed his blood and die for Christ and His Kingdom.

### TWIN-SET OF PALMS

The Palm of Martyrdom is another symbol attributed to the Martyrs. The palm symbolizes the triumph of the spirit over the flesh in the earthly battle for eternal salvation.

### CHI-RHO

An ancient monogram for the name of Christ, which combines the Greek letters X and P. It was the symbol of victory that Christ revealed to Constantine: *In hoc signo vinces!* “*In this sign you shall conquer!*”

1. *Handbook*, PREFACE, pg. i.

2. PREFACE from the original 1907 edition of the *Handbook*, which can partially be found in the current *Handbook*, THE POSTULANT, pg. 8.

3. *Handbook*, OBJECT, pg. 1.

4. *Handbook*, RULES, pg.2.

4. "To recite daily the Guild prayer."<sup>4</sup>

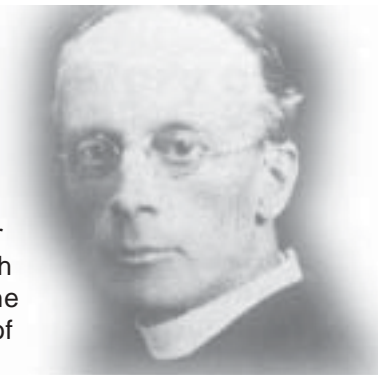
- B. Its rank system of promotion which encompasses the various serving positions of Low and High Mass, that is further marked by the distinct insignia worn by the members while serving. This rank system also assists in promoting the high standards of serving expected by the Guild.
- C. The various practical requirements of:
  - A regular serving schedule and its consequential demands of punctuality.
  - A code of dress and personal hygiene for those who are scheduled to serve.<sup>5</sup>
  - Assigned responsibilities for the servers before and after serving Mass.<sup>6</sup>

Through a careful study of the Archconfraternity's *Handbook*, the Three-Fold Object, Four Rules and other organizational and disciplinary items, the image that can be metaphorically compared to the Guild is a Swiss Army knife, which as a single and self-contained tool, has the ability to accomplish effectively the various tasks related to serving.

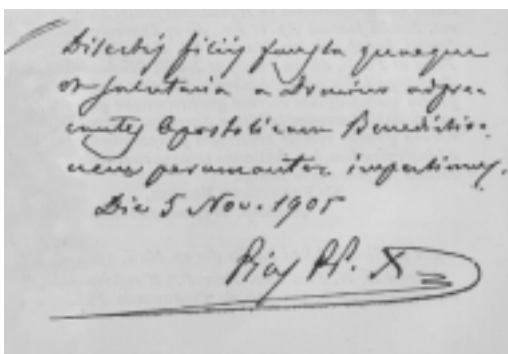
However, before we explain the apostolate of the Guild in any greater detail, let us first briefly explore and understand its humble origins and rich history.

## A HISTORY OF THE ARCHCONFRATERNITY OF SAINT STEPHEN

Father Hamilton MacDonald, who was the chaplain of the Sacred Heart Convent in Hammersmith (a borough of London), founded the Guild in England in March of 1905. Father MacDonald started simply by holding regular classes for the Altar servers of the convent with the intention of raising the standards of serving which even then were negatively effected by a lack of attention to accuracy and detail. The idea was so successful that he was soon holding similar meetings at the parish of Holy Trinity in Brook Green, which was near the convent.



Fr. Hamilton MacDonald  
Founder of the Archconfraternity



From the 1907 edition of the Archconfraternity's *Handbook*, Pope Saint Pius X's handwritten Apostolic Blessing for the Guild

The Archbishop of Westminster, Francis Bourne (later Cardinal), was so impressed by the Guild, that on October 1st of that same year, he petitioned the Holy Father, Pope Saint Pius X for his Apostolic Blessing for the infant Confraternity of Saint Stephen. Saint Pius X granted this in his own handwriting on November 5th, 1905. Archbishop Bourne then began a chapter of the Guild at Westminster Cathedral, which subsequently became the "motherhouse" for all chapters of the Guild<sup>7</sup>.

These matters of 1905 were very significant for three reasons:

- Westminster is the most important archdiocese in England, being the traditional cathedral where the kings and queens were anointed and confirmed in their office of state<sup>8</sup>.
- It appears that the saintly pope considered the Guild's object, as expressed in Archbishop's Bourne's petition, so well met his own desires for restoring the prominence and devotion due

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5. These first two items are explained in the *Servers' Rules* handout.  
6. These responsibilities are outlined in the *Duties Before and After Mass* sheets.  
7. Under normal circumstances, one would have to apply to the Archbishop of Westminster for permission to establish a new chapter.  
8. Before the English Reformation, Canterbury Abbey was actually the leading see in England. Though the Catholic Penal Laws were repelled in 1829, the Catholic diocese of Westminster could not be restored until 1850. Work began on the new Westminster in 1895 by the first restored Archbishop.

to the sacred liturgy, that he did not hesitate to confer his blessing upon this fledgling confraternity. This rather unique distinction alone places the Guild in an esteemed place of prominence that other server's organizations in the past have not enjoyed.



Francis Cardinal Bourne  
Archbishop of Westminster

- And as we shall see below, the sheer rapidity at which the Guild progressed from a mere "good idea" to a serving organization of unequalled status in the Catholic world is also nothing short of a phenomenon.

On May 22, 1906, upon the written request of Archbishop Bourne and after an audience with Pope Saint Pius X, the Pro-Secretary for the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith granted several plenary and partial indulgences to the Confraternity of Saint Stephen that its members could receive on certain feast days, at the hour of their death, and upon reciting particular prayers. The Guild now had the ability to specifically sanctify its members in a manner not usual with serving organizations.

On December 4, 1906, and once more upon the request of Archbishop Bourne, Pope Saint Pius X erected the Guild into an "archconfraternity" "prima primara"<sup>9</sup> and gave it the power to affiliate with itself guilds of a similar nature outside of the Archdiocese of Westminster, but within the British Isles (On February 19, 1934, Pope Pius XI extended this same privilege throughout the entire British Empire).

In 1907, the first edition of the Guild's *Handbook*, entitled, *Altar Server's Manual*, was published by the famous English Catholic publisher, Burns & Oats in London.

During World War I (1914-1918), most of the senior members of the Guild were drafted, and consequently the Guild declined in England existing in only a couple of active chapters.

After World War I, Fr. MacDonald worked tenaciously to re-establish the Guild on firm ground. So in 1925, with Cardinal Bourne's approval, a revised Constitution was instituted, and a Central Council and an Executive were established.

When Fr. MacDonald died in 1933, the Guild was firmly established and despite the drafts of World War II (1939-1945), the Central Council kept the Guild intact.

Many dioceses in England had a priest appointed as a Diocesan Director, and as a result, in September of 1945, a National Council of Priest Directors was formed to advise the National Director. This system, as well as the Central Council still exists in the *Novus Ordo*.

In 1955, the Guild celebrated its golden anniversary by organizing a pilgrimage to Rome. During an audience with Pope Pius XII, it was recommended and urged upon the Guild members by this venerable pope to adopt Saint Pius X (whom Pius XII had canonized shortly before), who had blessed, enriched and expanded the apostolate of the Guild from its beginnings, as a secondary patron. This suggestion was immediately adopted by the Guild.

In 1962, a revised edition of the *Handbook* was printed, which included the original contents of the 1907 edition but omitted some of the devotional items.

Vatican II then came, and in the wake of its destructive modernist spirit the Guild was unfortunately hijacked by the modernists, and its purpose mutated into a sad contrast of what Father MacDonald had intended. The revised 1981 *Handbook* has destroyed the original emphasis of the Guild and has even gone so far as to refer to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass as being merely a Eucharistic Meal, and includes the use of Altar girls in its various pictures! Many of the traditional goals, practices and prayers have also been dropped.

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9. An expression that means, *the first and primary*.

However, Divine Providence deigned that the Archconfraternity of Saint Stephen was not to fade out of existence.

In 1981, in Rockdale, Australia (a suburb of Sydney), the now Father Damien Carlile of the Society of Saint Pius X, along with several older members of the Guild who were enrolled in the early 1960's in England and in Australia, started a chapter of the Guild at the SSPX's Child Jesus & Saint Joseph Chapel.

In 1985, Archbishop Lefebvre, while conferring Confirmations in Rockdale, came into contact with the Guild. He was so impressed with the Guild, that upon his return to Ecône, he made a special mention of the Guild during the General Chapter of the Society of Saint Pius X. Thus, sanctioned by the founder of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X, it became a fitting apostolate for this priestly society of common life that is devoted to the Priesthood and all that pertains to the Priesthood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

During the late 1980's and the early 1990's, Fr. Todd Angele, who was stationed in Australia, spread the work of the Guild throughout the SSPX's District of Australia / New Zealand. Father Angele also found suppliers for the Guild's cords and medals and was thereby able to supply the other chapters in Australia / New Zealand with these necessary items.

In 1994, Fr. Peter Scott, the United States of America District Superior and a native of Australia, having former acquaintance with the Guild in his own country, introduced the Guild into the United States District, founding chapters simultaneously in Kansas City, MO, Cincinnati, OH and Fort Wayne, IN.

In 1997, the operations of the apostolate of the Guild were transferred to the Jesus & Mary Brothers' Novitiate in El Paso, TX, and the United States Chapters' Headquarters was officially founded, with Father Lawrence Novak as the National Chaplain and Brother Francis (*a.k.a.* Mr. Louis Tofari) as the National Secretary. During this transitional stage, the Chapter Headquarters was able to become self-sufficient in regards to the various supplies necessary for each chapter. This became providential, as Father Angele, due to his pressing duties as a school headmaster, was no longer able to continue supplying the overseas chapters with the necessary supplies. Hence, *de facto*, the United States Chapters' Headquarters became responsible for supplying the various traditional chapters of the Guild throughout the world!

In December of 1997, the first chapter in the history of the Guild founded in a non-English speaking country was introduced in the SSPX's chapel of Cristo Rey Y Sacerdote in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. A new era of the Guild under the auspices of the Society of Saint Pius X was truly beginning.

One year later, the Guild's apostolate was introduced into the Philippines, which with 80 members, instantly became the largest chapter of the Guild in the Society of Saint Pius X.

In November of 1998, the first issue of *The Acolyte* magazine was printed in Kansas City, MO and distributed to the various Chapters, both in the United States and internationally, making a long-time goal finally a reality.

In February of that same year, the Headquarters was moved back to Kansas City, MO, and made a lay apostolate, with Mr. Tofari continuing to act as the National Secretary. A staff was also recruited from the Saint Vincent's Chapter to assist with the various duties of the new office at Chapters' Headquarters.

Also in December, members of the newly founded Ireland Chapter were enrolled into the Guild, which introduced the Guild into this country that had given so many priests to the Church in the past. This chapter was established on a *national* basis, rather than on a *per-chapel* basis, due to the small number of boys and men in each chapel.

In the fall of 2001, the Guild was finally reintroduced into the land of its origin, the Isle of Our Lady and Merry Olde England through the efforts of the District Superior, Father Emily and his assisting priests, who, coincidentally, were mostly Americans. These American priests had come into contact with the apostolate of the Guild in their own country. Could not a greater act of gratitude be given, than to return the good which had been received?

To this date, the Guild continues to grow and flourish throughout the world, being introduced into countries where it had never existed before.

## **THE SUPERNATURAL NATURE OF THE GUILD**

The first and foremost goal or object of the Guild is supernatural: to sanctify the server. This aspect of the Guild is quite obvious through a brief overview of the *Handbook* which is inundated with this supernatural spirit. It is this strong and public supernatural emphasis that places the Archconfraternity of Saint Stephen in a rank above other server organizations that have existed in the past.

This emphasis is especially seen expressed through the Four Rules of the Guild, which present some very unique, yet important disciplines, for instance, the prayers that the server is required to say before and after serving Mass. Through this singular practice, the server truly learns:

- how important the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is and hence the immense privilege of serving it,
- the need for interior preparation before taking upon such august duties,
- and the necessity of thanking Almighty God for the great gift of Holy Communion and for the privilege of serving Mass.

One can see just how easily this rule alone can strengthen the server's spiritual life and to increase his means of sanctification while serving Mass.

Even the Guild's second part of the Three-Fold Object, which insists upon giving close attention to the various details of serving<sup>10</sup>, especially in regards to adhering to the Church's decrees on the various rubrics<sup>11</sup>, ultimately has a supernatural end. As these details serve as a spiritual means of discipline, these natural actions of the server are then raised to the supernatural plane, which in turn serve as a means of sanctification.

So, through the combined effort of spiritual and disciplinary means of the Guild, the reverence, awe and sacred approach due to the mysteries in the Liturgy are strengthened and deepened in the mind of the server.

In a word, the Guild covers all of the aspects that are related to serving which serve as a means of sanctification, some through unique means (e.g., the wearing of a blessed medal, prayers before and after Mass, etc.) and some that would normally be expected (e.g., an emphasis on serving well and reverently).

## **BUT HOW DOES THE ARCHCONFRATERNITY PROMOTE SANCTITY OUTSIDE OF THE SACRISTY?**

Cardinal Griffin (who succeeded Cardinal Bourne as the Archbishop of Westminster) wisely answers this question in his admonition to members of the Guild in his PREFACE to the later editions of the *Handbook*:

*"But the value of your service will be measured and indeed enhanced by your own sanctity and by the personal love you have for our Blessed Lord and devotion to His sacred mysteries."*<sup>12</sup>

One of the ways in which the Guild accomplishes this aspect, is by requiring its members to recite the Guild's prayer on a daily basis for two reasons:

1. To keep the server spiritually prepared to serve;
2. To remind the server that he is indeed an Altar server, and therefore must provide a public example to others in his daily actions.

## **WHAT DOES THE ARCHCONFRATERNITY PROVIDE ON THE PRACTICAL LEVEL?**

Building on the First Rule of the Guild in regards to serving punctually, a serving schedule is required of every chapter, which is made out by the President. This alone guarantees a certain amount of stability to the liturgical life of the parish and ensures that qualified servers are fulfilling the various serving positions,

which in turn ensures that God is being glorified through dignified service at the Altar of God.

There are also responsibilities in regards to a dress code, personal hygiene, and punctuality with corresponding penalties for tardiness when scheduled to serve, which are explained in the *Servers' Rules* handout and various duties before and after Mass which are outlined in the *Duties Before and After Mass* sheets.

The Archconfraternity also provides standards, not only in the method of serving, but also in disciplinary and spiritual matters, which in turn provide stability and consistency throughout its chapters.

## **WHO MAY JOIN THE GUILD?**

*"Membership of the Guild is open to any boy or man, without any limit of age, who can serve Mass, and who has shown proof of a desire to conform to the object of the Guild."*<sup>13</sup>

## **THE SYSTEM OF PROMOTION**

Through the promotion system of ranks, the server realizes how important each position is, and will regard them with greater importance and reverence. How quickly one obtains each rank is dependent upon the personal efforts and aptitudes of each server. These ranks and their corresponding requirements are described on pages 3 and 4 in the *Handbook*. There are two important aspects of this promotion system:

1. It ensures that each server is highly trained and qualified to serve the various positions as he progresses through the ranks.
2. It shows the server how important these positions are by their ranking.

## **TO SERVE CORRECTLY**

The Guild also wishes to sanctify the server ". . . by instructing him the manner of observing the rites and ceremonies of the Church according to the rubrics and to the decrees of the Sacred Congregation of Rites and the interpretations of the most generally accepted authorities . . ." as expressed in the second part of the Three-Fold Object. As mentioned before, this is indeed a matter of spiritual discipline, as it is no easy task to perform the ceremonies meticulously.

In addition to the aforementioned quote, the Guild also has this to say regarding the server at Mass: He:

*"represents the faithful and takes a most intimate part in the rich treasures of the Church's liturgy and ceremonial. Those sacred ceremonies should be carried out with devotion, dignity and attention to detail . . . The success and the rhythm of a parade is secured by the attention given by each member to the minutest detail. So pay the greatest attention to every small detail."*<sup>14</sup>

Another quote that also helps to put these important rubrical matters into their correct perspective is from L. O'Connell's *Book of Ceremonies*:

*"The Liturgy decorously done even in the humblest chapel. What is the Liturgy? It is the Church at prayer. Of its very nature it is public and social. Into it there goes the beauty of language, music and art. It is not a drama in the sense of a performance for an audience with the sanctuary for the stage. But it is a drama in which clergy and people unite to offer Christ, Our High Priest, sacrifice, praise, and supplications to God. This offering we must try to make in every detail the outpouring of the heart and mind of the Church to God. Therefore we must put into it not our personal expressions but the exact ceremonies prescribed by the Church. Even in the village church there is no excuse for slighting the Sacred Ceremonies."*<sup>15</sup>

Both of these quotes should be quite convincing in regards to the necessity of serving correctly. Since the

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13. *Handbook*, MEMBERSHIP, pg. 2

14. Excerpt from Cardinal Griffin's PREFACE to the 1962 edition of the *Handbook*, pg. i.

15. Excerpt of Cardinal Strich's (Archbishop of Chicago) PREFACE to the *Book of Ceremonies*, Very Rev. Laurence J. O'Connell, 1958.

liturgical ceremonies are sacred public actions, the greatest care and attention should be given to their execution. A great devotion and appreciation towards the Liturgy can only serve to foment an increase of love for Holy Mother the Church and for some of Her greatest treasures.

Also much research on these rubrical matters has recently been done, and so in the future in order to facilitate the fulfillment of the second part of the Three-Fold Object easier, the Guild will produce a manual that will comprehensively, yet simply explain the principles of ceremonies for parish use as expounded and agreed on by the competent rubrical authorities. In the meantime however, serving notes are available from the Chapters' Headquarters that cover the various positions of Low, High and Solemn High Mass. Teaching the meaning and purpose of the Mass and other ceremonies of the Church

Having an understanding of the rich ceremonies of the Roman Rite serves three purposes:

1. It deepens the server's love and devotion to the ceremonies, which enables him to serve them more reverently.
2. Understanding the history and symbolism surrounding the various actions assists the server in remembering why he is performing those actions in a particular manner.
3. The various symbolisms that surround the ceremonies help to practically and concretely transmit the Catholic Faith through the tradition of ritual.

Teaching these historic and symbolic actions can be done rather briefly and easily, the most effective method being during the training of the positions themselves. However, one must have knowledge of these things first before being able to pass them on, to quote the old adage, "*One cannot give what he does not have.*" Most books concerning the Mass have explanations concerning the significance of the ceremonies<sup>16</sup>. Also, the Chapters' Headquarters may be contacted should one desire a list of recommended books on this subject. With such sources, either the Director or the President can easily open up the vast, spiritual treasures of the Mass to the servers and thereby fulfill the last part of the three-fold Object of the Guild.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

It should be quite clear by now, that the Archconfraternity of Saint Stephen is not just a Guild which somehow organizes those who serve, but is an organization whose purpose is to assist in the life of grace by centering the server upon those things which are most important: the glorification of God and the sanctification of one's soul to obtain the goal of Heaven.

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16. The upcoming ceremonies manual spoken of before, will also contain some brief explanations about the significance and symbolisms of serving the Mass to facilitate this task.