

PRIESTLY FRATERNITY OF ST. PETER — NEWS

FSSP sees seminarian, membership growth

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The traditionalist Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP) has more seminarians and members than ever before, according to newly published statistics.



A Mass celebrated by a priest of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter in Zagreb, Croatia. Servus Tuus via Wikimedia (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Annual figures released Nov. 1 showed that the society of apostolic life — a community of priests who do not take religious vows — has more than 200 seminarians for the first time since it was founded in 1988.

Among the 201 seminarians in 2023, there are 22 deacons and 179 non-deacons, including postulants. This is an increase of 15 on the year before, when there were a total of 186 seminarians, including 17 deacons.

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A breakdown of the 179 non-deacons in 2023 showed that they included 58 candidates from the United States, 36 from France, 10 from Germany, 9 from Spain, 8 from Portugal, 7 from Italy, and 6 from Poland.

FSSP seminarians train at the International Seminary of St. Peter in Wigratzbad-Opfenbach, Germany, Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary, in Denton, Nebraska, and Ezechiel House, a house of studies for first-year candidates, in Sydney, Australia.

Annual FSSP ordinations

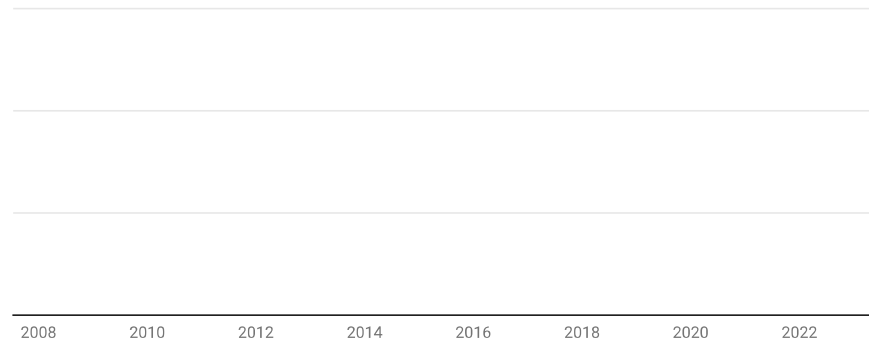


Chart: PillarCatholic.com • Source: fssp.org & fssp.org.uk • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Total FSSP membership has increased from 542 in 2022 to 569 in 2023, including 368 priests, who account for 65% of all members.

The Confraternity of St. Peter, a sodality for FSSP supporters, has 9,546 members, more than two-thirds of whom are English speakers.

The continued growth of the FSSP comes amid a worldwide crackdown on the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM), also known as the Tridentine Mass, the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, Mass according to the 1962 Roman Missal, or the *usus antiquior*.

In the 2021 document *Traditionis custodes*, Pope Francis imposed restrictions on the celebration of the older Mass, saying in an accompanying letter to bishops that its use had become associated with “a rejection not only of the liturgical reform, but of the Vatican Council II itself.”

But the restrictions were directed principally at celebrations in parish churches, rather than the use of the TLM by religious institutes such as the FSSP.

The FSSP expressed “surprise” at the restrictions, as well as its “unwavering fidelity to the successor of Peter on the one hand, and on the other, our desire to remain faithful to our constitutions and charism, continuing to serve the faithful as we have done since our foundation.”

Pope Francis confirmed in a 2022 decree that FSSP priests could continue to “celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass, and to carry out the sacraments and other sacred rites, as well as to fulfill the Divine Office, according to the typical editions of the liturgical books ... in force in the year 1962.”

The FSSP is the largest of the societies of apostolic life which principally celebrates sacraments and liturgies according to older liturgical rubrics. Others include the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest (ICKSP) and the Institute of the Good Shepherd (IBP). ICKSP had more than 100 seminarians in 2021-2022. The IBP’s St. Vincent de Paul Seminary is currently training 45 seminarians.

Joseph Shaw, president of Una Voce International (FIUV), said that the expansion of the FSSP’s membership and apostolates had accelerated since the publication of *Traditionis custodes*.

“The Fraternity is becoming ever more international. Looking at the breakdown of the nationalities of seminarians, we can expect increasing numbers of Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish priests, for example, where they will be available to serve in countries where developing apostolates serving the traditional faithful was for a long time more difficult,” he told *The Pillar* Nov. 7 via email.

“Similarly, with 10 seminarians from Germany, the Fraternity must have more than many German dioceses combined.”

A total of 48 new seminarians began training for Germany’s 27 dioceses in 2022.

Shaw added: “The success of the Fraternity and the other traditional priestly institutes and communities is a reminder to bishops and superiors who see nothing but decline in their vocations, that there is another way.”

British sociologist Stephen Bullivant said that a growing body of research, notably in the U.S. and Australia, had identified a shift among young

priests toward “the conservative end of the spectrum on doctrine, morals, liturgy.”

“The FSSP (like the ICKSP) have carved out an attractive ‘brand,’ as being resolutely within the universal Church, while also offering something distinctive — and doing it well,” he said via email Nov. 9.

“So you can see why they appeal to traditionally minded young men who have — or hope to have — genuinely pastoral hearts.”

Bullivant, a professor of theology and the sociology of religion at St Mary’s University, Twickenham, suggested that stereotypes about traditionalist clergy being “obsessed with Latin and lace” missed the “avowedly pastoral, practical nature” of groups such as the FSSP.

“Another factor here might be that the recent restrictions on the TLM have understandably made some young men think that they only places it’ll still be possible are on FSSP/ICKSP ‘reservations,’” he said.

“One of the very positive things after [Pope Benedict XVI’s 2007 *motu proprio*] *Summorum Pontificum* was we were starting to see the TLM integrated into normal parish life — there’d be one Extraordinary Form Mass on a weekday, for those who wanted it, or one on every third Sunday or something. That kind of thing is becoming less and less possible.”

“So if the TLM is something important to you (and it is for plenty of young people, especially the sorts of young people who think about vocations), then that might well be a factor in deciding for the FSSP rather than your local diocese.”

The FSSP was founded on July 18, 1988, in Switzerland by 12 priests and 20 seminarians who previously belonged to the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), a traditionalist priestly fraternity established in 1970 by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.

The SSPX, which is considered a canonically irregular group in imperfect communion with the pope, reported in 2022 that it had more than 700 priestly members. The number of its priests has grown consistently since 1975.

The FSSP’s first superior general was the Swiss priest Fr. Josef Bisig and its current leader is the Polish priest Fr. Andrzej Komorowski.

Today, the FSSP has 112 priests working in 54 apostolates in 39 dioceses in the United States and 7 in Canada.

In June this year, FSSP member Fr. James Jackson pleaded guilty to a felony count of receiving child pornography. The fraternity said it had been unaware of Jackson's action until his arrest in 2021.

Editor's note: This report was updated November 9, 2023, to include comments by sociologist Stephen Bullivant.

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Andrea Nov 8, 2023

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Evan Cowie Nov 8, 2023

Thanks for the article! I regularly attend a TLM in Ocala served by FSSP priests, and I have a friend who's a seminarian with them. The priests I've known were fantastic, very dedicated and very pastoral. I've got nothing but good things to say about the Fraternity, and I'm hopeful that they'll continue to grow!

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