

WHAT IS THE SECULAR ORATORY?

Perhaps from time to time you have heard us make reference to the “Secular Oratory” and wondered what we were talking about. This week’s article aims to shed some light on this mystery!

When St. Philip Neri began his work of evangelistic outreach in Rome, he quickly gathered a sizeable following. Each day, they would come together to pray, to reflect on God’s Word, and to learn. Often, they would visit the sick, and they would visit pilgrimage sites and have picnics together. This community which naturally gathered around St. Philip was the genesis for what we now refer to as the Secular Oratory.

The term “secular” carries a very negative connotation in common parlance. It is often used to refer to those who are against a role for religion in public life and espouse principles contrary to faith. However, this is not how “secular” is being used when we refer to the Secular Oratory. We simply mean that this is a community of lay people whose vocation is lived in the world. Secular Oratorians exercise their vocation as disciples of Jesus and spiritual children of St. Philip primarily through their family life, their work, and their social and civic involvement, just as all lay Catholics do. What sets them apart is their intentional dedication to follow the spirituality of the Oratory and to promote devotion to St. Philip. Since 2002, over 50 people have been formally enrolled in the New Brunswick Secular Oratory, after completing a process of formation.

The Secular Oratory came first in the history of the Oratory. The community of priests and brothers known as the Congregation of the Oratory developed from the need to serve the Secular Oratory as it outgrew St. Philip’s capacity to serve its needs. Our Constitutions remind us that the Congregation “was instituted from the beginning for the service of the Oratory” (n. 5). The ongoing support and formation of the Secular Oratory remains the primary reason that the community of priests exists.