

The Modesty Crusade



Modesty – Circa 1930 of modesty.

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The word “modesty” has fallen out of usage. We don’t say, “You look so modest today.” We don’t hear it in the news; it is not used in movies – style, fashion and other similar words have shoved aside the word modesty. One can say that the word modesty is not in vogue - pun intended. That is not to say that we are not modest; it is in our God given DNA. Our present day culture has other things on its mind. The media has exploited un-modesty, and we now have words such as x-rated, porn, etc. Also, the internet, a wonderful tool for communicating, is not always a friend

My intention, here, is not to preach but to surreptitiously segue into a little bit of SFO history. What is written here was taken from the Franciscan Herald and Forum; years 1954 – 1963.

In the mid fifties, prompted by a request from Pope Pius XII that all organizations develop a Modesty Crusade, the Executive Board of the Third Order of St. Francis in North America, as we were called at the time, did meet in September 1954 at the Alverna Retreat Center in Appleton, Wisconsin to initiate a Modesty Crusade. “Think Smart, Dress Smart” was the official slogan of the Crusade. Tertiary parents were especially asked to inculcate the principles represented by this slogan in their children, and youthful Tertiaries were requested to refer to it and live up to it religiously. Leaflets published by *Archconfraternity of Christian Mothers*¹ (ACCM),

¹ This Confraternity exists today and is conducted under the auspices of St. Augustine Capuchin Province, Pittsburgh PA.

“Modern yet Modest” and “Modesty and Charm,” were to be read by all Tertiaries.

The Tertiaries were encouraged to sign the modesty pledge, “I believe that modesty in dress safeguards the virtue of purity. I pledge myself to set the example of Mary-like modesty for my family and associates at all times.”

The Modesty Crusade was in process for about a decade - from the mid fifties to the mid sixties. It was the theme for the 1955 Youth Congress held at St. Bonaventure University, Olean, N.Y. - 750 youth were in attendance.

A related story was found in the June, 1955 issue of the Franciscan Herald. “Miss Minnesota for 1954 – 1955 is Miss Jeanne Reince, former prefect of the Third Order of St. Francis, College of St. Teresa, Winona, Minnesota. Miss Reince conducted herself with dignity, avoiding the shoddy displays usually connected with the “Miss” contest. In fact, she is held in such esteem that the Winona Council of Catholic Women featured Miss Reince in a pamphlet published by the Council entitled “Miss Minnesota Models Modesty.”

The June 1960 issue of the Franciscan Herald urged fraternity leaders to push the Modesty Crusade using the following directives: 1) Place the slogan “Think Smart – Dress Smart” in your bulletins; 2) Have a conference on the importance of the Modesty Apostolate; 3) Publish the Modesty Pledge; 4) Distribute pamphlets obtained at the ACCM; 5) Present fashion shows at youth fraternities; 6) Pictures of modest fashions can be placed on school bulletin boards; 7) Have panel discussions on modesty; 8) Appoint a chairman and a committee to promote modesty in fraternity.

It is apparent to me that the Modesty Crusade was directed mainly towards the young – remember that in those days, the fifties and sixties, one could be professed at fourteen. Considering the demographics of today’s fraternities, and the spiritual astuteness of the members - for the most part, modesty abounds.