

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: «Becoming experts in communion »

In September, we are looking at the third document which Pope Francis proposes to the religious for the Year of Consecrated Life. He speaks of communion, but we must read here communication, listening, sharing. By going through this document, we can see that its content can be applied to our secular vocation..

Recall: At the monthly meeting, we would suggest a deepening of the Gospel, our Way of life, by **taking a good moment of time to share the texts of the Word of God for the day or for the Sunday to come.** Thus the fraternity will make good use of the Bible at its disposal.

Good preparation --- Good meeting

SEPTEMBER 2015 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening Prayer and Song: (According to the Ritual or chosen by the Fraternity)

Reading: (choose a person who reads calmly)

Excessive individualism, living on my own and for my own interests characterizes large sections of our society. The possibilities of digital communication are fascinating, yet often remain superficial and unfulfilling. Increasingly people have a longing for deeper communion, for mutual acceptance, for personal encounter. Do our communities respond to this desire?

Fascinated by the unity

Our founders and foundresses were **fascinated by the unity of the Apostles with Christ and by the fellowship** which marked the first community in Jerusalem. In establishing their own communities, each of them sought to replicate those models of evangelical living, to be of one heart and one soul, and to rejoice in the Lord's presence.

Reflection and Sharing:

Are our fraternities fascinated by this unity?

Let us attempt to see if we are, if we can say yes and how we can.

Afterwards take some time to find examples of what our founder has left us and how it brings us close to the Apostles experience, then continue the reading.

Experts in communion ...

Living the present with passion means **becoming “experts in communion”**, witnesses and architects of the ‘plan for unity’ which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design. In a polarized society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters.

Communion is lived first and foremost within the respective communities. I would ask you to think about my frequent comments about criticism, gossip, envy, jealousy, hostility as ways of acting which have no place in our fraternities. It is the “mystique of living together” which makes our life “a sacred pilgrimage”.

Relations with people from different cultures

We need to ask ourselves about **the way we relate to people from different cultures**, as our communities become increasingly international. How can we enable each member to say freely what he or she thinks, to be accepted with his or her particular gifts, and to become fully co-responsible?

Reflection:

1. Share our ideas on the question presented in the preceding paragraph.
2. Continue the reading.

Live the mysticism of encounter, which entails the ability to hear, to listen to other people; to seek together ways and means. Live in the light of the loving relationship of the three divine Persons (cf. 1 John 4:8), the model for all interpersonal relationships.

Reflection and answers to share:

1. How good am I at the art of listening – in community and in my daily encounters?
2. How can we improve our « being together » during our meetings?
3. Visitors feel quickly where there is an atmosphere of mutual affection or irritation and tension between persons or at certain moments during the meeting. If there exists any, what are they? When? Why?

Deepening of the Word of God:

Let us take the necessary time to listen to the reading, then with the help of the following questions, afterwards, share a moment to answer the questions:

1. What is the teaching in this Gospel: what is happening?
2. Who is implicated? How?
3. What do I notice about these personages?
4. Where is the action taking place?
5. What is being said? Asked for? Offered? Refused? Contradicted? Discussed?
6. What is Jesus' attitude? His behavior? What is his reaction?

In the footsteps of Francis

(Excerpt from 1st Rule, Chapter 7, verses 13-15, Claire et François d'Assise, Écrits, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2003)

That the brothers taken care, wherever they are in hermitages or in other areas, to appropriate any area and to defend it against anyone. And whoever comes to them, friend or foe, robber or brigand, be received with kindness. And everywhere where the brothers are and in which ever area they meet, they must meet again spiritually and with affection and honor one another without muttering.

Questions for sharing:

- What are Francis' recommendations to his brothers (and sisters)?
- How can we improve the relationships that exist between us?

Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions

Rule

Article 13

As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the first-born of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ..

A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

General Constitutions

Article 18.2

They should deepen the true foundations of universal kinship and create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others.

Article 18.3

They should work together to promote the building of fraternity among peoples: they should be committed to "create worthy conditions of life" for all and to work for the freedom of all people.

Life – Objective:

In the month of September, let us practise our sense of welcome and listening, as to better live a true fraternal life in monthly meetings as well as in our relationships in general.

Events and Information from the Church and the Order

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

End of the meeting: (a prayer or song chosen by the fraternity)

At home

We suggest that you have a look at what CIOFS has given itself as a priority in the field of communications.

Communications

Work groups concurred on the importance of having good communication at all levels.

This demands an effort, not only in the publication of formation material, documents and

Circulars on the part of the CIOFS Presidency, but also in creating a well-structured communication network reaching out to brothers and sisters at local fraternities. Translating documents has always been a very important challenge for the CIOFS Presidency. Strong communication efforts will also reinforce vocation outreach.

The Chapter recommends that:

1. The CIOFS Presidency establish a team to work on getting brothers and sisters with translation skills to help with this important task.
2. The CIOFS Presidency develop an official form, which would serve as a template for the annual report National Councils have to present. This will make it much easier for the National Councils and improve the likelihood of the completion of the report.
3. The CIOFS Presidency assess the possibility of producing an international magazine.
4. The CIOFS website be dynamic. This would be accomplished by:
 - Establishing parameters to manage the web page and social media
 - Updating the webpage more frequently
 - Including prayer intentions on the website
5. Secular Franciscans are encouraged to use social media to improve communication at all levels: Internet, Skype, Facebook, etc., mindful of their high responsibility, as members of the OFS, to be watchful for the content that they publicize on behalf of the Order, (cf. *Can.* 823.1)
6. Communication among national fraternities be strengthened by:
 - Better communication among International Councillors
 - Promoting activities among National Fraternities from the same geographic area to build stronger relationships among them
 - Producing a Directory of National Ministers, Formation Directors and International Councillors
 - Twinning: Sharing the diverse gifts and talents of our fraternities.