

Review of our Fraternal Life

(Scrutinium Fraternitatis)

A Suggested Process

Set aside an evening as Day of the Community (minimum an hour)
Have copies of the Review made for all (at least the handout on pg 4)
Pray the Vespers and in the place of Scripture Reading have **The Review**

1. **Read** – from Scriptures
2. **Reflect** – Listening to the Constitutions and the Letter of the Rector Major
3. **Respond** – by common sharing especially on the 2nd part of the Review
4. **Resolve** – Prayerfully asking: *What is the Lord asking me / us to do?*
5. **Receive** – the grace of mutual love by praying for the one next to you.

1. READ

Scripture Reading from Romans on Brotherly Love

Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute [you], bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Rather, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good. (Rom 12, 9-21)

Silent Pause

2. REFLECT

A. Reflections from the Constitutions (49-59) on the Importance of life of Communion

To live and work together is for us Salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation. The community is a reflection of the mystery of the Trinity: there we find a response to the deep aspirations of the heart, and we become for the young signs of love and unity.

The community receives each confrere with an open heart. It accepts him as he is and fosters his growth to maturity. The confrere pledges himself to build up the community in which he lives. He loves it, despite its imperfections, and knows that in it he finds the presence of Christ. He accepts fraternal correction, fights whatever he discovers in himself which militates against the community, and gives his own generous contribution to the community life and work.

The rector represents Christ who unites his followers in the service of the Father. He is at the centre of the community, a brother among brothers, who recognises his responsibility and authority. His first task is to animate the community so that it may live faithful to the Constitutions and grow in unity. He coordinates the efforts of all, bearing in mind the

rights, duties and capabilities of every member. He also has a direct responsibility toward each confrere; he helps him realise his own personal vocation and carry out the work entrusted to him.

The community surrounds its **sick and aged confreres** with care and affection. They in their turn, accepting their condition and serving the community in whatever way they can, are a source of blessing for it; they enrich its family spirit and deepen its unity.

The memory of **departed confreres** unites, “in a love that will not pass away”, (1 Cor 13, 8) those who are still pilgrims with those who are already resting in Christ.

B. Further Reflections From the Letter of the Rector Major, Angel Fernández Artime: Let Us Bring to Life the ‘Utopia’ of Fraternity According to the Gospel, 16 Aug 2014

‘Home’ and ‘family’ – we read in number 48 of our GC27 – are the two terms frequently used by Don Bosco to describe the ‘*spirit of Valdocco*’ that must be clearly visible in our communities.

We recognise that *community life* is one of the ways of having *an experience of God*. Living “mystical fraternity” is an essential element of our apostolic consecration (n. 40). Living *the spirituality of communion*... and building community, presupposes shifting from life in common to communion of life (n. 45).

Our community life, *while potentially having the greatest prophetic force, is certainly that which has the ‘most fragile health’ across our Congregation.*

In the light of our GC27, the question is: **to what do we need to devote our attention, what do we need to change, what do we need to continue to do and what not to do** so that *in a real way our community life may have all the attraction that Fraternity lived according to the Gospel has, to the point of being ‘irresistible’* ?

Community life has “all the charm of what is difficult and what is possible, of grace and of weakness. Only with the grace of God does one remain in community and deepen this experience... And it is a penance and an asceticism that purifies and provides an exercise in collaboration, in participation and in communion. But it is also, and above all a charm. People are in community in order to be happy and there are many who succeed in this (...) and if we want to speak about the charm of community life it is necessary to say something about the short cuts to fraternal love. This presupposes presence, shared affection and fraternal correction, taking care of one another, helping each other: in short fraternal love in all its manifestations. The heart needs and demands it. **Community life in the future will be fraternal or it will not exist at all.** This is one of the ingredients that today’s candidates are mostly looking for, and for the most part it is not always something they encounter.”

Nowadays this aspect of religious life certainly has great witness value. Just as in most of our social contexts there exist, beside the positive aspects, **a growing lack of communication, isolation, an ever-increasing individualism and loneliness** which in many cultures is the great malady of our time together with its twin-sister depression. The witness of religious communities, our own included, should constitute a real gospel proclamation, good news, a genuine challenge or invitation.

For this reason I can tell you that one of my greatest worries is that of our thinking, seeing, imagining, telling ourselves that we can carry on in this way going in the right direction in the face of this weak situation in not a few of our presences. **Confreres, so often our communion of life is sacrificed for other things!** I ask myself, for example, why is it that we who are supposed to be *experts in humanism*, have at our side in our communities, sometimes in our dining rooms or the rooms next door some confreres who are wounded in their hearts, by loneliness and disillusion, brothers who wanted to be

happy as Salesians and are not. It is true that this is not the whole picture of our Congregation, far from it, but it is something real, and a single example of a single wounded confrere should be enough for all of us to be genuinely concerned. In our case I think it would be a sin if by words or deeds or by our silence we were like Cain answering the Lord's question: "Where is your brother?" I don't know – he replies. – Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gn 4,9). **Yes, we are! Not his keepers but his carers.**

The great challenge, dear Confreres, for every Provincial, Council, Rector and every confrere in each of the communities in the Salesian world **is this: To make our Community a real place of a life of communion. How do you move from a life in common with a fixed timetable, regulations, plans – which certainly can be a help to us – to a life of communion?** This certainly presupposes personal and even community conversion, it requires an affective and effective commitment to achieve this; it is a question of a process that requires us to accept that every stage of our lives is an opportunity for growth, to open ourselves to the new experience of a more authentic meeting with Confreres and with the strength that God gives to make His presence among us more visible.

SILENT REFLECTION:

What are three points that touched my heart today as I listened to these readings?
Silently reflect on our fraternal life

- a) How do we move from a life in common with a fixed timetable, regulations, plans – which certainly can be a help to us – to a life of communion?
- b) Do certain forms of individualism (preference for more gratifying and remunerative works) and regionalism alienate me from the community?
- c) Do I work with the spirit of co-responsibility and of collaboration?
Do I participate faithfully and actively in the community meetings?
- d) Do I avoid criticism and grumbling?
Do I forgive, taking when needed the first step towards reconciliation?
Do I love even those for whom I have an antipathy and who have offended me?

3. RESPONSE (common sharing)

- a) Is there in our community the effort not only 'to inform' but also to involve individuals and groups in initiatives and decision-making? Have we drawn up the community plan and SEPP (cf. AGC 413, p. 53). Do I have a copy of it?
- b) How can we make our hospitality more cordial?
- c) How could we form platforms to listen to our dependants and collaborators, and thus avoid authoritarian attitudes and counter witness?
- d) How do we meet the needs of sick and elderly confreres?
How could we involve them more in our common life and mission?
- e) "Our communities are often a Federation of individuals who have signed a treaty of non-aggression" joked Fr Fabio Attard. Do we agree?
What is one thing that can help create in our community a true spirit of a family?

4. RESOLVE – Prayerfully asking: *What is the Lord asking me / us to do?*

5. RECEIVE – the grace of mutual love by praying for the one next to you.

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