

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: «Accompanying, discerning and integrating frailties»

In the month of May, during our fraternal meetings, we are proposing excerpts from the work by the Family Commission, CIOFS, on the theme for 2017 «Caring of frailties: Mercy and Discernment». The Commission used the Papal Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* in its reflection on the actual situation in our families.

Recall: At the monthly meeting, members should have at their disposal a Bible, at least one copy of the General Constitutions, a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and at least one copy of *Living with Christ*. Also, members should have in hand their own copy of the Rule.

Good preparation – Good meeting

MAY 2017 MONTHLY MEETING

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

Biblical Reflection in answer to Article 4 of our Rule:

As Article 4 of our Rule proposes *Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel*, thus we propose a sharing of the gospel, be it the today`s or next Sunday`s.

Afterwards, share your thoughts, using one or two of the following questions:

1. What does this gospel teach us?
2. To whom does it speak?
3. How does it reach us personally?
4. Is it a message of hope? Is there another kind of message? Why and how is it?

Reading: (choose a person who reads calmly)

Presentation of work proposal

The Commission conceived a work dynamics made up of three parts:

- 1. On questions to share ... (See)**
- 2. On material for reflection ... (Judge) Enlightening ourselves**
- 3. On committing ourselves ... (Act)**

The elderly (*Article 191 of the Exhortation*)

“Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent” (*Ps 71:9*). This is the plea of the elderly, who fear being forgotten and rejected. Just as God asks us to be is means of hearing the cry of the poor, so too he wants us to hear the cry of the elderly. This represents a challenge to families and communities, since “the Church cannot and does not want

to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age. We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elderly feel like a living part of the community. Our elderly are men and women, fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road, in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life". Indeed, "how I would like a Church that challenges the throw-away culture by the overflowing joy of a new embrace between young and old!"

Reflection, now take the time required to fully share.

What are some situations lived by the elderly in our areas of everyday life?

Give some concrete examples.

What is our share of responsibility regarding the abuse to some elderly persons?

How can we improve the situations?

The attention given to older persons ... (Article 192 of the Exhortation)

Saint John Paul II asked us to be attentive to the role of the elderly in our families, because there are cultures which, "especially in the wake of disordered industrial and urban development, have both in the past and in the present set the unacceptable ways". The elderly help us to appreciate "the continuity of the generations", by their "charism of bridging the gap". Very often it is grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren, and "many people can testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents". Their words, their affection or simply their presence help children to realize that history did not begin with them, that they are now part of an age-old pilgrimage and that they need to respect all that came before them. Those who would break all ties with the past will surely find it difficult to build stable relationships and to realize that reality is bigger than they are. "Attention to the elderly makes the difference in a society. **Does a society show concern for the elderly? Does it make room for the elderly?** Such a society will move forward if it respects the wisdom of the elderly".

Sharing:

Answer the questions presented (in bold script) at the end of the paragraph.

Take the time required to share your answers.

The lack of historical memory ... (Article 193 of the Exhortation)

The lack of historical memory is a serious shortcoming in our society. A mentality that can only say, "Then was then, now is now", is ultimately immature. Knowing and judging past events is the only way to build a meaningful future. Memory is necessary for growth: "Recall the former days" (*Heb* 10:32). Listening to the elderly tell their stories is good for children and young people; it makes them feel connected to the living history of their families, their neighborhoods and their country. A family that fails to respect and cherish its grandparents, who are its living memory, is already in decline, whereas a family that remembers has a future. "A society that has no room for the elderly or discards them because they create problems, has a deadly virus"; "it is torn from its roots". Our contemporary experience of being orphans as a result of cultural discontinuity, uprooting and collapse of the certainties that shape our lives, challenges us to make our families places where children can sink roots in the rich soil of a collective history.

Reflection:

Do you agree with what is presented in the paragraph?
Take the necessary time to share your ideas.

The logic of mercy ... (*Articles 311 and 312 of the Exhortation*)

The teaching of moral theology should not fail to incorporate these considerations, for although it is quite true that concern must be shown for the integrity of the Church's moral teaching, special care should always be shown to emphasize and encourage the highest and most central values of the Gospel,³⁶³ particularly the primacy of charity as a response to the completely gratuitous offer of God's love. At times we find it hard to make room for God's unconditional love in our pastoral activity. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel. It is true, for example, that mercy does not exclude justice and truth, but first and foremost we have to say that mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God's truth. For this reason, we should always consider "inadequate any theological conception which in the end puts in doubt the omnipotence of God and, especially, his mercy".

This offers us a framework and a setting which help us avoid a cold bureaucratic morality in dealing with more sensitive issues. Instead, it sets us in the context of a pastoral discernment filled with merciful love, which is ever ready to understand, forgive, accompany, hope, and above all integrate. That is the mindset which should prevail in the Church and lead us to open our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society". I encourage the faithful who find themselves in complicated situations to speak confidently with their pastors or with other lay people whose lives are committed to the Lord. They may not always encounter in them a confirmation of their own ideas or desires, but they will surely receive some light to help them better understand their situation and discover a path to personal growth. I also encourage the Church's pastors to listen to them with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view, in order to help them live better lives and to recognize their proper place in the Church.

Reflection:

How are we involved in this initiative of our Church today?
Take the necessary time to share your thoughts.

Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions**Rule 13**

As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn 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 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 with movements which 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.

Engaging Reflection ...

Now, let us take the time to reflect on the following questions:

1. Are we «judges» of our brothers and sisters living in situations said to be irregular?
2. Do our brothers and sisters living in such «irregular situations » feel fully welcome in our fraternity?
3. Can they fully participate in our fraternity both locally and regionally?
4. What concrete contribution can we make to the pastoral initiative of our Church and community?

Life-Objective:

During the month of May, let our meetings be privileged moments of listening and sharing towards all persons seeking fraternity and joy

Events and Information from the Church and the Order

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

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

Suggestion: Song to the Virgin Mary, as the month of May is the month especially dedicated to her.

At home

Being brothers and sisters (*Article 194 of the Exhortation*)

Relationships between brothers and sisters deepen with the passing of time, and “the bond of fraternity that forms in the family between children, if consolidated by an educational atmosphere of openness to others, is a great school of freedom and peace. In the family, we learn how to live as one. Perhaps we do not always think about this, but the family itself introduces fraternity into the world. From this initial experience of fraternity, nourished by affection and education at home, the style of fraternity radiates like a promise upon the whole of society”.