

**GUIDE FOR BROTHER DIRECTORS,
A GUIDE FOR ALL THE BROTHERS**

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The **GUIDE FOR BROTHER DIRECTORS**, prepared by the Center of the Institute, has recently been published. This was in response to proposition number 8 of the 42nd General Chapter. The very first pages of the document give evidence that it is not exclusively for Brother Directors but that all of us Brothers should make use of it. It is about a **GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP** and, although it is known that the Brother Director is the one primarily responsible for this, nevertheless it does not replace the co-responsibility of each one of the Brothers in the exercise of this ministry.

Why a Guide for Brother Directors

We know well the importance that the founder gave to the office of the Brother Director. The Guide correctly underscores this. And the 42nd General Chapter (1993) thought it necessary to give some attention to the topic: *“The Chapter re-affirms the importance of the role of the Brother Director in the life of the community as an animator and a guide”* (page 55) and it formulated proposition 8 that alluded to the *preparation of the guide in question and the organization of training programs for Brother Directors* (cf. Circular 435, page 56). It is true that it would be difficult to say more or in a better way than what the Rule has to say about the Brother Director in articles 61 to 63 but it should also be acknowledged that the objectives may perhaps not always have been sufficiently operative. The Guide endeavors to be an effective means for making community leadership more operative.

We also know very well that new times have brought us both advantages as well as disadvantages (1). Everywhere the necessity to make “orbit corrections” or “improvements” in terms of *“the ministry of*

community leadership” is discussed. If, on the one hand, *“it is generally agreed that the evolution of recent years has contributed to the maturity of fraternal life in communities...the climate of life in common has improved”... “the positive developments in some places have risked being compromised by a distrust of authority. The desire for deeper communion among the members and an understandable reaction against structures felt as being too rigid and authoritarian have contributed to a lack of understanding of the full scope of the role of authority; indeed, some consider it to be altogether unnecessary to community life, and others have reduced it to the simple role of coordinating the initiatives of the members”* (cf. the document *Fraternal Life in Community*, numbers 47-48). The tendency of our society toward individualism which has also affected us religious, tends to obscure the mission of authority which the Church considers as a *“function which is both necessary for the growth of fraternal life in community and for the spiritual journey of the consecrated person”* (*Fraternal Life in Community*, number 48).

Also the recent Bishops’ Synod on the consecrated life dealt with the exercise of authority in religious communities, and the Pope seized upon this in *“Vita Consecrata”*, number 43: *“In the consecrated life the role of Superiors, including local Superiors, has always been of great importance for the spiritual life and for mission...In these years...the need to revise this office has sometimes been felt.”*

But it should be recognized that those who exercise authority cannot renounce their obligation as those first responsible for the community, as guides of their brothers and sisters in the spiritual and apostolic life”. This reflects very well the same content as expressed in article 61 of our Rule.

For what purpose?

For the purpose of making the *ministry of community leadership* effective (Guide, pages 7, 13, 13, 27, 29) in the community, within the double dimension of fraternal service to be of help in spiritual growth and in accomplishing vocation as persons and as community and to foster growth in the apostolate (Rule 61 and Guide, page 10).

And so the GUIDE asserts that *“the building up of community is the responsibility of all its members”* since we are all united in the same call to follow Christ, which is presumed by ongoing community discernment (cf. Guide, page 10). And it is through the ministry of the Brother Director who is called to accompany the personal and community journey of each Brother, especially those who are infirm or elderly, those undergoing special tribulations or those who are

marginalized. He also it the promoter of community participation and unity, he encourages the community in its apostolic mission, he leads the prayer life of the community, he guarantees community involvement in the work of vocation ministry. Therefore he is the one primarily responsible for the drawing up of the community annual program (CAP), in facilitating community attendance at District retreats and in community meetings and days of recollection as well as the personal interviews for each Brother. In short, as the Guide says, *“The Brother Director’s ministry of leadership consists, above all, in helping each Brother to become aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit, as a source of life and unity, in him and in the community”* (page 13).

For whom?

The GUIDE FOR BROTHER DIRECTORS CONCERNS ALL THE BROTHERS. In fact, the Guide begins with a letter from the Center of the Institute addressed to all the Brothers (pages 6-7). It states: *“The continued existence of a community which never ceases to be built depends on each and every one of us”* (page 6). In the exercise of the ministry of community leadership the Brother Director *“is not alone; he has the support of Brothers, who are also responsible for the life and witness of the community, and who are called to share with him in the mystery of the life of the Trinity”* (page 7). It would be a serious error to think and to act as if this responsibility were solely the charge of the Brother Director. The obedience of collaboration that is being talked about today insures that the Director can rely on all the Brothers and that they are in need of a leader and guide.

But, in order for this GUIDE to be effective it is necessary that all the Brothers make use of it, not just the Brother Director. To my way of thinking, even if each Brother does not have his own copy, at least one copy should be within the easy reach of all since it is a GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP in which all are involved. In this way it might serve as an object of exchange for community meetings. Furthermore, it asks us to *faithfully and creatively adapt it to the specific circumstances of each District* (page 7) as well as to those of the *community reality* (page 9).

Finally, what will change or improve?

Someone has written that today not a small number of communities suffer from, in general, the lack of *“prophetic strength, charismatic utopia and community mysticism”* (cf. the CONFER document, 1986), which are precisely the characteristics necessary for the future of consecrated life. Revitalizing community life certainly involves a return to its origins, as the GUIDE reminds us: *“Since the origins of the Institute, communities have always organized their life through the discernment and participation of all the Brothers. This practice resulted in a deep sense of solidarity among them”* (page 12). The Center of the Institute has now complied with Proposition 8 as so charged by the General Chapter. Now the real work begins as the ways for carrying it out have already been indicated to us. We are not without support nor means. *“Vita Consecrata”* urges us to be faithful to the foundational charism, employing creative fidelity and boldness in the respective areas of our own foundational charism, that is to say, in mission, in the prophetic sense of the consecrated life, in community discernment since consecration and community are included in the concept of mission, etc.

On the other hand, we are preparing for the year 2000 and this brings us certain challenges. We are currently in the year dedicated to Jesus Christ, the Christological year as the Apostolic Letter *“Tertio Millennio Adveniente”* indicates to us. *“Vita Consecrata”* corresponds to the goal of this year when it tells us that *“the consecrated like eloquently shows that the more one lives in Christ, the better one can serve him in others, going even to the furthest missionary outposts and facing the greatest dangers”* (VC 76).

(1) In the Apostolic Exhortation *“Vita Consecrata”* number 13 it points out that we have gone through a *“difficult and trying period”* which has been a period full of hope, programs and proposals...but it has also been a period of tensions and struggles, in which well-meaning endeavors have not always met with positive results.