

Brothers among themselves.

**Materials for beginning formation
in community life.**

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**3. ANTHROPOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS
AND CHARACTERISTICS
OF LIFE IN COMMUNITY.**

**WHO ARE ASSOCIATED TO CONDUCT,
TOGETHER AND BY ASSOCIATION...**

In order to be able to deal with this topic, we could begin by relating life in community with an image. But which one?

Let us imagine for a moment a community of Brothers seated at table. The main course is a stew: with chick peas, tomatoes, peppers, onions, celery, pieces of veal, salt...(always seasoned to "gourmet" taste).

The main course, the stew, is made up of a specific number of ingredients, each one with its own special flavor, its particular characteristics...And also there are many different ways of preparing the stew. First of all, we could prepare each ingredient alone and separated from the others. We could enjoy the specific taste of each dish. We could also eat the stew by combining two specific ingredients, or even three; perhaps we could prepare only these...Or we could cook all the ingredients together, where each type of food, without losing its own identity, contributes something to the stew (taste, color, texture...) while at the same time receiving traits from the other ingredients.

Something similar happens in community life: each person who makes up the community comes with his own history; each one's process is different; each brings with him a certain psychic, spiritual, somatic charge which is characteristic of him. And this is the asset that enriches the community, the individuality of each one, as a defining element of the community.

The individuality of each person springs forth now in his way of being and understanding of reality. Each person perceives it from the perspective of his own personality, from his own internal framework (aspirations, possibilities, ideals, defects, prejudices...).

Each individual tunes into reality and the surroundings from the perspective of his own attitudes, a constant, internal disposition which make him react in a certain way. Cultural factors may also come into play, based on his own interests, paying attention to subjective issues or based on his own value system (the importance he subjectively attributes to objects or events).

We should also not forget that many persons (perhaps we could say all persons) have their own prejudices, reactive attitudes, concrete judgments and criteria for approval based on isolated observations.

There are differences also in the way of being, acting and in the character of the individuals. Human differences create diversity which in itself is always enriching whenever it is used as an integral and constitutive element of community.

But as the old Congo proverb says - "if I tell people to live together, I am telling them to argue" - it happens that in every religious community, which is made up of human persons, diversity can turn into divergence, which will be transformed into polarization, opposition, with the resultant conflict.

But the problem in community is not the conflict itself, but the way of dealing with it. The problem will not be resolved if each one goes his own way or if small groups are formed, if there are repeated attacks or fights, double meanings are rampant or if people shield themselves or if they draw back from the affection of the community.

The solution to the problem is in dialogue, going directly to the root of the conflict. It is not enough to prune the contaminated leaves but you have to disinfect the roots of all possible infection.

Each member of the community, before dealing with the problem or conflict, must know how to empathize with, how to understand the rest of the members of the community. The awareness that this will not go on forever is an encouragement and an occasion for agreement for each individual. If one sees himself as capable of improvement, he will know how to be tolerant of the other Brothers. One has to be open to a continual review.

And...what about the attitudes of the members of a community?

We are often tempted to be opinionated, to judge or classify persons by their actions or behavior; but one thing must be made absolutely clear, that all behavior is the result of a motivation, whether conscious or unconscious. The same motivation in different persons can lead to the same behavior. Motivations, which are

basically for satisfying needs, are manifestations of the internal state.

We can classify them into two groups:

- a). Those which satisfy physical needs (hunger, thirst, sleep...)
- b). Those which satisfy the needs of a more interior-affective order of persons (self-acceptance, self-esteem, feeling that one belongs, is accepted, secure, successful...). The first and principal need of all persons is to feel cared for, to feel loved. Having a good friend helps one to know oneself.

If one can satisfy his needs, he will live in balance; on the other hand, if one is not successful in satisfying needs, he will live in a state of frustration. With regard to the latter case, one can adapt and go directly to the root of the problem and solve it at its base; or in a reactive way, one can correct the symptoms of the frustration without correcting their origin, by means of different defense mechanisms, such as reactive training, rationalization, running away, sublimation, regression, projection, repression, fixation, conversion...

Therefore, for the celibate religious the place, the environment in which he needs to feel welcomed, secure and loved is the religious community; in the religious community he should be able to speak clearly and openly about what concerns him. In the religious community he should feel that he is loved and he should feel happy.

The opposite being true, the religious may compensate his shortages using different escape valves: frenzied activity, outside relationships, setting up small areas of power, psychosomatic illnesses or escape to the spiritual life (praying is similar to irrigating, but one needs to irrigate that which has been planted). Spiritual life should not be an escape valve. To be able to express feelings and emotions within the community is a source of personal balance. One must pay attention to possible ruptures in our relationships (routine, lack of simplicity, unfounded fear, fear of insincerity...).

So success in community life, the ability to enjoy a climate of authentic fraternal life is based on successful relationships, knowing how to create connections, sharing among the different members of the community. You have to overcome the fear of opening yourself.

In dialogue you do not have to try to convince nor do you need to be convinced. But you do have to express ideas, feelings and know how to understand the speaker, understand the other.

In dialogue you must be simple, unpretentious and sincerely open to others without wanting to make yourself appear as something you are not.

Dialogue must be mutual; the contact needs to be reciprocated, there must be offering and acceptance.

Dialogue must be based on respect which is very well understood. To keep silent in order not to bother someone is false charity; but also there needs to be an awareness that we are all vulnerable. Therefore one has to risk being misunderstood and one must always be sincere. If there is true trust then messages will be accepted maturely. This is what it means to be assertive.

We are interested in the other, but we always accept his freedom.

And we always keep in mind the premise that all relationships have effects on persons; relationships help them grow. Having a good friend helps increase one's self-esteem.

So to be able to summarize in four words what every relationship should include, we will focus on the model proposed by Gibb, the TORI Model (1):

- * Trust: Creation of a climate which invites dialogue. Not a "questioning" of persons. Spontaneity, naturalness.
- * Openness: A sincere attitude so as to share feelings, opinions...
- * Realization: The self-realization of persons. Achieving the goals of the community and the goals of each person.
- * Interdependence: Achieving a person's realization in balance between help from others (dependence) and doing without helping others (interdependence).

And so by way of conclusion we can say that life in fraternity is a continuous process which continues to be created each day. The style of community is not that which marks community but the style and life of each of its members. And one should not try to create the ideal community, but one should try to work and improve the real community in which one lives.

(1) Gibb, J. R. TORI group and self-diagnosis scales. The 1977 Annual Handbook of group facilitators. California University Associates. Quoted by Jaume Filella. "Vida comunitaria y relaciones humanas". Union of Religious of Cataluña. Barcelona, 1991.