

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: «Accompanying, discerning and integrating frailties»

In the month of April, 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

APRIL 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?

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) Enlightenning ourselves**
- 3. On committing ourselves ...(Act)**

Reading: (choose a person who reads calmly)

Accompanying, discerning and integrating frailties (*Article 291 from the Exhortation*)

The Synod Fathers stated that, although the Church realizes that any breach of the marriage bond “is against the will of God”, she is also “conscious of the frailty of many of her children”.

Illuminated by the gaze of Jesus Christ, “she turns with love to those who participate in her life in an incomplete manner, recognizing that the grace of God works also in their lives by giving them the courage to do good, to care for one another in love and to be of service to the community in

which they live and work”. This approach is also confirmed by our celebration of this Jubilee Year devoted to mercy. Although she constantly holds up the call to perfection and asks for a fuller response to God, “the Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and troubled love, by restoring in them hope and confidence, like the beacon of a lighthouse in a port or a torch carried among the people to enlighten those who have lost their way or who are in the midst of a storm”.³¹³ Let us not forget that the Church’s task is often like that of a field hospital.

Reflection:

What situations of frailty do our families experience today?
Take the necessary time to share your reflections.

The discernment of "irregular" situations (*Article 296 of the Exhortation*)

The Synod addressed various situations of weakness or imperfection. Here I would like to reiterate something I sought to make clear to the whole Church, lest we take the wrong path: “There are two ways of thinking which recur throughout the Church’s history: casting off and reinstating. The Church’s way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement... The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone for ever; it is to pour out the balm of God’s mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart... For true charity is always unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous”. Consequently, there is a need “to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations” and “to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition”.

Reflection:

How can we assist in these situations?
Take time to fully consider, then share your thoughts on the content.

The divorced who have entered a new union (*Article 298 of the Exhortation*)

The divorced who have entered a new union, for example, can find themselves in a variety of situations, which should not be pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for a suitable personal and pastoral discernment. One thing is a second union consolidated over time, with new children, proven fidelity, generous self-giving, Christian commitment, a consciousness of its irregularity and of the great difficulty of going back without feeling in conscience that one would fall into new sins.

The Church acknowledges situations “where, for serious reasons, such as the children’s upbringing, a man and woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate”. There are also the cases of those who made every effort to save their first marriage and were unjustly abandoned, or of “those who have entered into a second union for the sake of the children’s upbringing, and are sometimes subjectively certain in conscience that their previous and irreparably broken marriage had never been valid”.³³⁰ Another thing is a new union arising from a recent divorce, with all the suffering and confusion which this entails for children and entire families, or the case of someone who has consistently failed in his obligations to the family. It must remain clear that

this is not the ideal which the Gospel proposes for marriage and the family. The Synod Fathers stated that the discernment of pastors must always take place “by adequately distinguishing”, with an approach which “carefully discerns situations”. We know that no “easy recipes” exist.

Reflection:

How can we assist in these situations?

Take the necessary time to share your thoughts.

The logic of the integration of the baptized and civilly remarried

(Article 299 of the Exhortation)

I am in agreement with the many Synod Fathers who observed that “the baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more fully integrated into Christian communities in the variety of ways possible, while avoiding any occasion of scandal. The logic of integration is the key to their pastoral care, a care which would allow them not only to realize that they belong to the Church as the body of Christ, but also to know that they can have a joyful and fruitful experience in it. They are baptized; they are brothers and sisters; the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts gifts and talents for the good of all. Their participation can be expressed in different ecclesial services, which necessarily requires discerning which of the various forms of exclusion currently practised in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional framework, can be surmounted. Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church and experience her as a mother who welcomes them always, who takes care of them with affection and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel. This integration is also needed in the care and Christian upbringing of their children, who ought to be considered most important”.

Reflection:

What situations of frailty do our families experience today?

Take the necessary time to share your thoughts.

Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions

Rule 19

Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.

General Constitutions

Article 24.2

In the fraternity:

- the spirituality of the family and of marriage and the Christian attitude towards family problems should be a theme for dialogue and for the sharing of experiences;
- they should share the important moments of the family life of their Franciscan brothers and sisters and they should give fraternal attention to those — single, widows, single parents, separated, divorced — who are living difficult situations;

- they should create conditions suitable for dialogue between generations;
- the formation of groups of married couples and of family groups should be fostered.

Engaging Reflection ...

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

1. After having been enlightened by the teachings of the Church and our sharing, what attitude can we change in the presence of these situations of frailty?
2. May brothers and sisters in irregular situations participate in our fraternity?
3. What concrete contribution can we make to the pastoral initiative of our Church and community?

Life-Objective:

During the month of April, let our meetings open us to the message from Pope Francis. May we discover even more evangelical means to enrich our family and fraternal relationships

Events and Information from the Church and the Order

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

End of the meeting: Prayer to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendour of true love;
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division;
may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth, make us once more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the
family, and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Graciously hear our prayer.

Amen.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, on 19 March, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, in the year 2016, the fourth of my Pontificate.

Franciscus