

by FRANCINE GIKOW, SFO
STAFF EDITOR
gikows@yahoo.com

Fraternity Dialogue and Communication

“... 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.”¹

Did you notice that I began with an excerpt from the same quote as the last issue on peacemaking? But this article is on communication! Why?

I believe that all peacemaking begins with good communication and that includes life in fraternity. Have you noticed that sometimes we are much better behaved in ministry than with our own brothers and sisters? It seems that since we live so long with our brothers and sisters in community, we take them for granted. In fact, this should be reversed! We should reflect in our fraternities the “holy unity” of the Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit² so that others might see the goodness of the Lord reflected there.

It may seem unattainable! But we are called, by our vocation as Secular Franciscans, to become this unity. Many times I have observed fraternity reunions where people have “talked over” others, impatiently interrupting and not allowing others to speak. I have also seen Brothers and Sisters who do not listen to others, push forward their own ideas. They may even attempt to substitute their own agenda during the meeting.

When I see these actions, I am filled with sadness because this is not the courtesy and respect that Francis wanted us to have! Francis used to say that a good lesser brother would have the faith and love of Brother Bernard, the simplicity and purity of Brother Leo and the courtly bearing of Brother Angelo who was endowed with courtesy and kindness.³

I was once taught a method of communication and listening. We invited the other to share. We were not to speak while the other was talking and were to use our body language to show love and caring by turning toward the other using eye contact. We took turns sharing. We did not blame. We did not talk about others. We simply described our feelings with “I” statements” such as “I feel...” or “It makes me sad when....” We allowed the other to speak freely and we only spoke to reflect and confirm what they were describing until their turn ended. This takes discipline!

We held their confidences as precious: confident in the divine seed within him/her. Do we do this during our meetings and communications with other SFO’s?

Sometimes, I think we need to review how we communicate in our fraternities and not take our brothers and sisters for granted. Yes, we all have issues and needs which we want our Council to know, but this should be done privately and not during the monthly fraternity reunion. We should do this with the same respect and courtesy of Brother Angelo for we have elected our Council to serve the whole fraternity. In turn, the Council must listen and prayerfully consider issues which the brothers and sisters present.

But what is your response when a member of the Council comes to you with a concern? It might be a reminder of your promise to come to fraternity meetings when we have been absent for a time and have not communicated our reasons to

the Council. Do I answer with anger or do I see it as an opportunity to grow with a renewed sense of mission? This call of accountability to our consecration as a Secular Franciscan, is a call to conversion and the Council is only reminding us about what we have already promised to do.

Not only are we to show courtesy to our brothers and sisters but we are to truly love them! We show our love by always communicating with respect and gentleness.

**“WHEREVER TWO OR THREE ARE
GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME,
THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM.”**

MT 18:20

¹SFO Rule, 2 #17.

²The Tau-USA, Winter 2009,
#65, p. 26.

³*Collection of Sayings of the
Companions of St. Francis* in
Armstrong, Hellman & Short,
*Francis of Assisi: Early Documents:
The Prophet.*
New City Press, 2001. p.125.