

March, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in St. Francis,

Your Region Executive Council has been stepping up and working very hard in the New Year. We meet once a month which is, in itself, a sacrifice in time and travel. Add to that Cluster gatherings, elections and visitations, committees, phone calls and emails, and you will see that our schedules are quite full. However, we serve you with great joy because this Council is a real fraternity—we enjoy being together, praying together and collaborating on the business that will make our region strong.

In thinking about what makes a council or an entire fraternity healthy and strong, I began to think about communications and communication--(*No, that's not a typo.*). What type of **communications** does your fraternity use? In my experience (and from what some of you have told me), fraternities communicate through:

- Phone calls
- Newsletters and e-mails
- Opinion and planning surveys
- Cards, notes and visits to sick and homebound members
- Facebook pages, websites and picture sharing
- Face-to-face conversation at our fraternity gatherings

Most of us have gotten pretty good at communications, although at times the news still doesn't get to everyone. I encourage Ministers and Councils to be sure that any news you receive from the Region, either by e-mail or surface mail, gets to all of your members. Please be judicious with your use of email. Our members are more likely to read what we send if they know that it is truly fraternity business.

Perhaps even more important, however, is **communication** with no s. One of my favorite saints (right after St. Francis and St. Clare), St. Teresa of Ávila, expressed the importance of **communication** beautifully: "*Christ has no body now but mine. He prays in me, works in me, looks through my eyes, speaks through my words, works through my hands, walks with my feet and loves with my heart.*"

Following this idea, true communication then, is how others encounter the person of Jesus through us. We encounter Jesus in prayer, but we should be looking for him everywhere and in everyone. How would Jesus communicate with us if he were here now? How did he communicate with those he met while he was here on earth? He reached out to others; he invited them to be with him and to collaborate in his work. He LISTENED. I am sure that when Jesus listened to those who spoke to him, they felt like they had his complete attention. He showed empathy for those he encountered, even when they were people who were not accepted by society.

As Catholics and Secular Franciscans, what communication skills should we be aware of and utilize?

- Focused listening & eye contact
- Collaboration & sharing
- Prayer with and for one another
- Body language
- Invitation & outreach
- Personal example
- Empathy & mutual support
- No private agenda in discussions
- RELATIONSHIP

We must remember that Communication is a two-way street. When we think someone is not listening to us, let's be sure that we are listening to them. Sometimes needs are not being met on either side.

Our Seraphic Father St. Francis was a great communicator in word and example. He reminds us that sometimes it takes great humility to listen to someone with whom we might not agree or someone who might be criticizing us. The story Francis told Brother Leo about "perfect joy" is an excellent case in point. In the account, Francis arrives at the monastery wet and cold and the porter turns him away. No matter how he begs, the porter abuses him verbally and turns him away. Yet Francis calls this perfect joy. Brother Bill Short, OFM, in his lecture on the Spirituality of St. Francis* tells us that the perfect joy of St. Francis arises, not in what we would consider joy or happiness, but in having humility and patience enough to listen and endure.

If we are quick to get angry when a discussion is not going our way, we need to remember the humility of Jesus and Francis. We should often remind ourselves that we need to be civil to one another both out in the world and in our fraternities. As St. Augustine said, *"Let us, on both sides, lay aside all arrogance. Let us not, on either side, claim that we have already discovered the truth. Let us seek it together as something which is known to neither of us. For then only may we seek it, lovingly and tranquilly, if there be no bold presumption that it is already discovered and possessed."*

I would like to share with you an excellent item to meditate upon during Lent. It comes from the Franciscan Action Network** and is called: "Franciscan Pledge: Commitment to Civility in Discourse."

Facilitate a forum for difficult discourse and acknowledge that all dialogue can lead to new insight and mutual understanding.

Respect the dignity of all people, especially the dignity of those who hold an opposing view.

Audit myself and utilize terms or a vocabulary of faith to unite or reconcile rather than divide conflicting positions.

Neutralize inflamed conversations by presuming that those with whom we differ are acting in good faith.

Collaborate with others and recognize that all human engagement is an opportunity to promote peace.

Identify common ground such as similar values or concerns and utilize this as a foundation to build upon.

Support efforts to clean up the provocative language by calling policymakers to their sense of personal integrity.

Please remember the following "*communications*" items:

1. The local fraternity statistics report, updated rosters and Fair Share should be returned to Richard Spana as soon as possible.
2. The local fraternity Minister's Report and the Demographic Survey is due to me by March 31st.
3. Convivenza is April 25th at Most Holy Name Parish on 96th Street in Manhattan
4. Our Region Retreat will be held at Mt. Alvernia in Wappingers Falls, NY, on July 31st to August 2nd.

Thank you for all you do in your fraternities, your workplaces and your families. For some folks, you and your actions are the only message about Jesus and Francis that others will hear and see.

May our Lord bless you and keep you each and every day.

Diane

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References:

***The Treasure of a Poor Man: St. Francis of Assisi and Franciscan Spirituality** #7 Brother William Short, OFM
<https://www.nowyouknowmedia.com/franciscan/the-treasure-of-a-poor-man-st-francis-of-assisi-and-franciscan-spirituality.html>

**<https://franciscanaction.org/franciscancommitment>

**https://lcwr.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/rta1-12_0.pdf