

FRANCISCAN LIVING

Expectations and Forgiveness

By Francine Gikow, SFO

Ever find yourself hypercritical of how your fraternity is run? Are you constantly finding the negative, rather than the positive in your community? If you are a past member of the Council, are you critical of how things are “not as good” rather than celebrating a renewal of life in fraternity? Are you vocal in broadcasting your dissatisfaction rather than going through the correct channels of positive feedback to the servant leaders in the fraternity? Complaints, negativity and power struggles become the norm and our life in fraternity suffers.

Unfortunately, conflict is not uncommon. Since we live in a life-long community, we are bound to experience tensions and challenges in our life with others. It is how these interpersonal challenges are met that makes the difference between a joyful, caring community or one so negative that it dies.

Nevertheless, if we look at these feelings as a spiritual journey, it is through prayer and solitude that we can examine ourselves and learn that God’s way is not our way. We learn that our issues about our fraternity life have to do with our own *expectations* about living in community? Do I *really expect* to always enjoy peace and joy with others without conflict or hard work? What *need* do I find in myself that is not being fulfilled to make me so critical? Do I have to be *in control* during an unstable period in my life? Do I think I am being ignored or undervalued?

It is important for long time fraternity members to examine our motives, approaches and expectations we have about life in community. Questioning in prayer, can lead to a conversion of heart and deeper life in the Spirit.

Are my expectations based in reality or are they merely wishes? Can we let go of our expectations and embrace change? Often our expectations can even exceed what is possible. After all, aren’t the people who we expect to be perfect, imperfect like ourselves? In the words of the gospel, can I remove the wooden beam from my eye before I complain about the splinter in another’s eye (Matt. 7:3)?

Consequently, can we forgive others for not fulfilling all our needs and desires? Can we forgive someone for not loving us in a way that only God can? In other words, *can we forgive someone for not being God?*

Yes, we can! We have to desire it and eventually we can forgive. Jesus instructed us to forgive “seventy-seven” times (Matt. 18:22). This ability to make the decision to forgive underlines our belief that we are not perfect. It reflects humility when we “let go” and give ourselves to God. We can become like the poor Christ who envisioned himself as a servant among servants. Christ did not get angry when someone did not believe in him. On the contrary, Jesus, repeatedly invited, loved and forgave those who opposed him.

A fraternity’s healing from division doesn’t just stop at forgiveness however. We must heal the woundedness of negativity by reconciling with each other. Through forgiveness and reconciliation, we can begin to celebrate each brother or sister as a reflection of God’s unconditional love. God loves us perfectly even though we are imperfect in our own eyes, but not in His!

Fraternal reconciliation really is a gift! It cements the bonds of fraternity, which become stronger than ever! Reconciliation celebrates seeing how God sees and values each person’s unique contribution to fraternity. Celebrating our uniqueness means to lift up, affirm, and rejoice in each person’s grace and gifts.

Negativity, criticism and blame are serious concerns in a fraternity. We, as Secular Franciscans, must have the courage to examine ourselves *first* to see if we are the cause of dissension in the fraternity before we accuse others. We have to practice forgiveness, reconciliation and the rejoicing in each person’s gift and grace. Then, and only then, can our fraternity truly become a reflection of God’s love to others.



Wanted: Executive Director for **The Dwelling Place**, a small Franciscan retreat/prayer center in rural Mississippi. The Dwelling Place, founded on the charism of St. Francis, offers both hospitality and prayer opportunities for renewal of spirit, mind and body. These occasions are provided through private or directed retreats, prayer and spiritual counseling and weekend retreat experiences for those who seek peace, joy and healing. For more information, contact Mary Horrell at www.dwellingplace.com, email address: dwellpl@gmail.com or telephone 662-738-5348.