

IMAGINE, COMMUNITY LIVING

IMAGINE, Brothers that you belong to a community that really walks our talk.

There are five of you, when everyone is at home – though it often happens that someone is away for a course or meeting or retreat or sabbatical. And it really *is* a home, a place where you all feel comfortable in each other's company. You can see this clearly at your meal-table. But it has been hard work getting to this point. You have had to commit a considerable amount of time to community gatherings; these are basically of three kinds...

Firstly, you have growth meetings, sometimes with the help of a facilitator. You started by simply sharing your family story with one another, and as time has gone on, you have become increasingly free to share, even your vulnerability. You are learning to trust each other enough to accept honest feedback and challenge, even when the truth is painful to hear. You have consciously worked to face and overcome your prejudices and stereotypes that used to colour how you saw one another, and each of you feels that your culture is respected by the others. You are progressively sharing your personal God-search, and that helps you to pray together. And you have been deliberately working at mastering relevant skills together – currently you are working through a book entitled *Non-Violent Communication*, taking a chapter at each fortnightly meeting put aside for this.

Secondly, you have business meetings, with the agenda put together in advance by all of you. This kind of meeting sometimes handles problems and conflicts that arise among you, and it is sometimes an opportunity to make a community decision together, with the emphasis on listening and discernment. A standard opening item on the agenda is a check-in, when you tell each other how you are and what's going on in your lives; sometimes this takes the form of a review of the past week. And the closing item on the agenda of all these meetings is an invitation to express thanks and appreciation to each other for anything specific that any of you want to mention.

And thirdly, of course, you gather each day for prayer. You have worked out that the time that suits all of you best is just before the evening meal, and you are flexible about the starting-time of this meal. Your community prayer is always prepared by someone, it involves breaking-open the Word together, and embraces whatever is of significance in your individual or shared lives. For instance, yesterday was one member's birthday and your community prayer focused specially on him. A sign of how far you've come is that at times you can even shed tears as you share with your brothers. And when you want music, you often make it yourselves, instead of just turning it on at a switch. The high-point is your weekly celebration of Eucharist as a community: when you can't actually have Mass at home, you nevertheless break bread together in a simple, meaningful way. Of course, you also all frequently join the wider community for Mass.

You also do individual growth work that enriches your community. Each of you takes time for individual prayer each day, and has someone you go to for accompaniment – someone who

allows you to talk freely and listens so deeply that you are helped to express even what you did not know was in you. And you each belong to some kind of support group – in some cases, groups of Brothers of about the same age and stage, in other cases mixed peer groups. These periodic groups give you another chance to open up and both find and give support.

As a community you have a common mission focused on the needs of marginalised people, a mission you can all name clearly, but though your individual ways of contributing to this mission vary, carefully matched to your individual strengths and talents, two of you work on one project and three on another, both being expressions of this common mission. You have reviewed these projects in the critical light of the community-engagement model and adjusted them accordingly. Your ministries come into your community prayer, which gives you a sense of having the whole community behind you as an individual. Balancing the demands of ministry and community and prayer is sometimes messy and tough, but you keep up the effort because all three are important: mission is why you are there, while prayer and community are what sustain your energy for ministry. You have connections with other groups that take inspiration from Edmund, and you welcome each other into your homes from time to time.

As to leadership of the community, you all have particular leadership functions for which you are accountable to the community, and you rotate other functions such as the chairing of meetings. So your designated leader's main functions are to ensure that all the other leadership functions are running smoothly, and to act when gaps open. He is regularly brought together with other designated community leaders, to help skill them for their role. IMAGINE.

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