

THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE ABBOT/ABBESS



Course for New Superiors

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Before starting, I would just like to remind you that you will be hearing two different speakers on the subject of the abbot/abbess. Dom Bernardo has been asked to deal with the topic of the abbot in terms of his “service through authority”. I, on the other hand, have been given the subject of the abbot’s pastoral care. Of course, the two perspectives will at times overlap, since any service based on authority necessarily involves paying serious attention to the pastoral dimension. Nevertheless, the way the subject has been organized allows me greater freedom for sharing with you some aspects of the function of the abbot which I feel are important, and which I have experienced personally while carrying out my own pastoral activities. The following classes will consist, therefore, of sharing with your various experiences in my own community, as well as in several other communities I have visited over the past years as abbot.

In our Constitutions we find two explicit references to the pastoral care of the abbot: **Const. 33** which speaks of the “abbot’s ministry” and **Const. 59** which concerns the abbot’s “pastoral concern” for those who leave the monastery. As a consequence, I shall divide my presentation into two parts: the abbot’s pastoral care in terms of the way he dedicates himself to the brothers, and then the topic of separation from the community in its various stages and manifestations. The first part will attempt to share experiences, by offering insights which may be helpful and by suggesting ways of approaching the task of how to stimulate community life. The second part has more to do with legal considerations and specific cases, often a time-consuming process, but something which we all need to be familiar with.

To conclude my introduction, I have also taken the liberty of offering you an appendix on different types of community dialogue. It is true that we are monks and nuns but at the same time we are also coenobites. The art of creating community covers a large number of aspects, ranging from the highly spiritual right down to the most basic considerations of civilized behaviour and good manners. Some of you have asked for the opportunity to share on aspects which can help to energize and consolidate our communities. One such aspect consists of being able to relate to others at different levels. For this reason I will talk about different types of dialogue, depending on the specific contexts or subject matter we wish to deal with, starting with the relationship with the abbot in the course of periodical meetings, and including occasions of fraternal correction or various ways of organizing meetings for community discernment or to share concrete experiences.

It goes without saying that whenever I use the word ‘abbot’ I am also referring to the role of the abbess, unless otherwise indicated.

I. THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE ABBOT WITH REGARD TO THE COMMUNITY

Empezamos con la C.33 donde se destacan las dimensiones señaladas de **padre, pastor, maestro y médico** que debe tener el abad.

C. 33 The Ministry of the Abbot

1

The abbot is elected from among the brothers. He receives his power from God through the ministry of the Church. He is believed to act in the monastery as Christ's representative. He ministers to the whole community as a father in both spiritual and temporal matters.

2

The abbot exercises pastoral care of the flock entrusted to him. He shows to all the goodness and kindness of Christ, striving to be loved rather than feared. He adapts himself to the character of each, encouraging the brothers to run with a cheerful and happy disposition along the way God has called them. He is to pray constantly to God for each.

3

As a master in Christ's school, the abbot is the guardian of his disciples' fidelity to monastic tradition. He sustains them with the food of God's Word and by his example. He does not neglect to renew himself with Sacred Scripture and the wisdom of the Fathers. He makes himself available to all the monks for conversation.

ST 33.3.A

On appointed days the abbot is to give a conference to the community and he is to explain the Rule of Saint Benedict frequently.

ST 33.3.B

The brothers should approach the abbot with confidence and be able to reveal to him freely and spontaneously the thoughts arising in their hearts. Nevertheless, the abbot should in no way induce them to manifest their consciences to him.

4

As a skilled physician, the abbot seeks to cure both his own wounds and those of others, and to bring healing in the name of Christ to those hurt by sin. He is to exercise great solicitude and to use all his skill and energy so as not to lose any of the brothers entrusted to him. When the situation warrants it, he calls on the help of spiritual seniors. Above all, he relies on the prayer of all to cure the infirmities of the brothers.

FATHER-MOTHER

These days we are particularly sensitive to anything which rings of 'paternalism', which can make it difficult for us to live out our abbatial dimension. The importance given to the individual and to personal independence in contemporary society inevitably makes the ideal of the abbot as a father-figure suspicious. The problem is widespread in Western society and in the religious world in general.

Nevertheless, the figure of the abbot as a spiritual father is central to the RB and the entire monastic tradition. It is not a matter of paternalism, but rather has to do with the idea of accompanying the brethren on their monastic journey. For this reason, the abbot must be willing to fulfill his role as father by offering leadership to his community, by protecting the well-being of each of the brothers, and by shouldering the problems of the weaker ones. An abbot who is not willing to assume this task should think seriously of resigning.

We all remember the scruples the fathers of monasticism such as Jerome and Pachomius felt about using the word *abba* which, in theory, should be applied to God alone. But it was precisely the embarrassment they felt at applying the term to themselves which led them to discern the presence of God in the charisma they had received. The term *abba* in the desert context had no connotations of rank or authority as such, but rather pointed towards the spiritual dimension: he was a spiritual father, not a mere administrator. The *abba* was an elder who, by allowing himself to be shaped and inspired by the spirit of God, **helped his disciples to bring forth ('give birth to') this same spirit. He was the pneumatóphoros** that is, he who bears or carries the Spirit, blessed with the grace of spiritual discernment. Unfortunately, we have to admit that before long the term began to be used as an honorary title.

In the RB too the abbot is presented above all as a spiritual father or diligent shepherd who accompanies the monk in his process of personal growth. His job is not simply to make sure that the rule is performed in all its details: the brothers are his prime concern, so he strives to adapt himself to each one according to his age and capacity, doing everything possible to avoid breaking the bruised reed. The abbot's task, then, is to accompany each monk without trying to do things for him. If we keep this idea clear in our heads it will help us to carry out our pastoral task responsibly, while at the same time making us aware that not everything depends on us, since each brother has to make his personal response and is responsible for his actions. It is a good idea to help the brethren to understand this fact when we talk to them.

Monasteries can easily produce infantile people because the members do not have serious responsibilities (for example: a family to take care of, perhaps while also being unemployed, or facing the problems associated with adolescent children or a son/daughter with problems relating to drugs, dealing with the burden of a mortgage or having to solve maintenance problems in the house, and so on). In a monastery there is always someone 'in charge of' whatever problems may occur and, if all else fails, there is always the abbot. It is this freedom from real responsibilities which can lead to a tendency towards infantilism and which can get worse depending on the

personal response of each brother, and also on how we superiors act. Our task is to let the brother know that we trust in him, give him responsibilities, and to accompany him in an adult way without attempting to solve his problems for him. We should communicate to the brothers the message that the more they keep themselves to themselves and dedicate themselves less to the community then the greater the risk they run of remaining at an infantile level of existence. I remember that when I first entered the monastery one of the monks used to say to me: "in community life avoid showing your capabilities..."; I say exactly the opposite to our novices: "if you really want to grow as a person and be happy then give it all you've got, even though people may take advantage of you." Those who accept responsibilities and behave accordingly will grow as persons. We also need to remind the brethren that they are in charge of their lives and that they are the ones who will reap the benefits of what they have sown. To help them with an example, we can invite them to look at the older members of our communities and draw their own conclusions. In our communities only those who really offer themselves and take on responsibilities mature, just like those who come to realize that they are the main protagonists in their spiritual progress.

Accompanying others in the course of their personal development involves recognizing that we are talking about a process, which inevitably includes making progress, perhaps coming to a halt, sometimes falling and even moving backwards. That is why it is so important to be patient and to believe in each brother. One of the most encouraging things is when we realize that our superiors believe in us, just as the opposite impression can only make us feel disheartened. We should attempt at all times to inspire others, since this is what activates the internal impulse, we all share and moves us to begin the process. Our task is to accompany others on their journey towards personal maturity, so we should not limit our efforts to ensuring that the brethren carry out everything laid down by the rules and regulations and avoid making mistakes. Constant nagging on our part would only "exasperate our children", as St. Paul tells us. We need to be able to distinguish between serious illnesses and common colds, as well as not to project our own fears and insecurities onto other people.

The role of the superior has an important effect on creating positive or negative attitudes in community, on helping a community to adopt a positive or negative self-image. That is why, when giving talks to the community, it is good to know how to emphasize **positive aspects** of the community, without exaggerating, but in an optimistic way. The positive things we may have to say about the community or a specific brother, should be expressed "unconditionally", i.e. with reference to concrete reality, to the way things are as a general rule. We should say things like: "our community is a praying community", "the brothers love one another", that we "we face our problems in a spirit of faith", even though we know there are times when we fall short of the mark, since all of us can make mistakes. To say to someone "you are a good cook" is not the same as saying "the lunch you prepared today turned out well". Both expressions are flattering, but the second one has a decidedly negative edge (along the lines of "today yes, but usually no..."). We should, therefore, limit negative things by tying them to specific moments and forms of behaviour. For example: "Today" we did not behave appropriately; we have not yet found an answer to "this"

problem; “yesterday” we lost our tempers for no good reason. It is one thing to say to a brother: “you made a mistake” and something entirely else to say “you’re totally useless”. When the superior transmits positive messages to the community, based on concrete reality, he makes it possible for the brethren to believe his message and to feel at home with themselves in community. To insist on a positive quality of a brother is a way of helping him to cultivate that quality (....). Drawing attention to something negative while limiting our attention to the fact in itself provides a stimulus to help us overcome such situations by enabling us to face our problems without feeling overwhelmed by them, because we see that we are trusted.

Fear paralyzes while positive desires energize us. The abbot has to know how to employ both these emotions by adapting them to the different types of people in community, though definitely preferring the second option, that of stressing the joy of living the monastic life as a way towards personal fulfilment. If the novice-master has to be able to lead souls to God, much more so the abbot!

The RB tells us that the abbot is the **father** of the monastery because he **acts in the person of Christ**. To “represent” means to “stand for”, which means that for St. Benedict, the vicar of Christ in the monastery is, above all, the abbot. This detail should not surprise us, because in ancient times the term ‘vicar’ had a much wider range of meaning than for us at present and was used to express the spiritual presence of the Lord in the midst of us. The biblical reference alluded to by the Rule is Rom 8,15 which seems a little difficult to justify, since the context is that of the Holy Spirit and God the Father. However, we now know that many early Christian writers such as St. Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. Athanasius, Evagrius Ponticus and even St. Augustine also referred to the “paternity” of Christ. The logic behind this approach was based on a rather curious exegesis involving identifying Christ – the new Adam – as the spouse of our mother the Church, and logically the spouse of our mother can rightly be called “father” by us.

The first thing an abbot must do is **to believe firmly that he represents Christ**. This will help him to behave like Christ. To represent Christ does **not mean to replace Christ**, but rather to stand for him, especially in our personal lives. No-one can seriously think they are Christ. That may sound like an exaggeration, but we sometimes tend to forget this fact. If an abbot does not believe in his call to paternity how can we expect him to put it into practice?

Whoever listens to the abbot hears the voice of Christ, not **because** Christ does the abbot’s will, but rather because the abbot strives to do the will of Christ. **The abbot must do all he can to discover what Christ wants** so as to transmit this to the brothers. It is impossible to do this unless we also **listen carefully to the individual brothers and to the community as a whole**, so as to discern what the Spirit is saying to them. This is the way Vatican II understands religious **obedience**: that all of us should seek God’s will by listening carefully, bearing in mind that it is always the superior who takes the final decision (PC 14).

Even though the superior has received his institutional authority through the ministry of the Church, his **moral authority** is something he has to earn. This can only happen when the superior **dedicates himself wholeheartedly to the brethren**, when he **lives coherently**, when he focuses on what is essential and actively **faces problems** as they crop up, rather than looking the other way. He must be able control his own emotions so as to avoid reacting emotionally to possible negative attitudes among the brethren. **Self control** is not easy to achieve, but it is necessary. If we cannot deal with our own emotions then, rather than correcting others, we will simply be expressing our own anger or frustration.

To use moral authority constructively means **avoiding the misuse of power** by not imposing unnecessary obligations and encouraging reflection rather than demanding silence. It distances itself from forms of over-protective **paternalism** which prevent the brother from facing reality when appropriate. It avoids **egalitarianism** which rejects institutional authority, as well as manifestations of **childishness** which do not take into account the maturity and autonomy of the brethren. Moral authority seeks to stimulate **prompt and joyful obedience**: when authority is imposed it is generally the quality of our obedience which suffers. For this reason, the superior needs to have a great **capacity for listening** and for connecting with the reality of the brothers.

One characteristic of all living creatures is their capacity to transmit life, their paternal/maternal functions. We find ourselves immersed in the constant flow of life which we give and receive. Not to be able to exercise the function of paternity boils down to self-castration. Paternity is not simply an honorary title: for an abbot, paternity is above all a form of service for stimulating life in the brethren – simply being in charge is not enough. The abbot is called upon to transmit the very life of Christ to others, while dying to himself (which does not mean that he expects others to become his clones). The abbot has to act as a sort of spiritual ‘midwife’ by helping the brethren to give birth to the new life they have received from the Spirit.

All parents transmit something of themselves to their children, but the child is also something different and is autonomous, with a life of its own. That is why any desire to make a son or daughter into an image or likeness of ourselves is unjust, and creates obstacles to life rather than promote it. To achieve this is not always easy since, in our desire to preserve the unity of the community, we can be tempted to suppress our differences. That is why all forms of dominant or protective paternalism are potentially dangerous, though of course we have to teach and be supportive. A true father transmits life to others while accepting that they are different. Stimulating life in the brethren means nurturing it, **accepting them sincerely just as they are**, doing all we can to ensure that this new life continues to develop in them by offering motivation and guidance, without stifling it or despising it because of its imperfections. Our task is not to judge the lives of others, but rather to stimulate life in them. It is far better to **make the most of a brother’s qualities** than to smother them under the pretext of humility (which may in fact be an attempt by the abbot to conceal his own envy or distrust). **The truly humble person is someone who makes good use of his**

personal qualities as a form of self-giving, of self-transcendence. The more mature the abbot is, the more willingly he will take pleasure in the progress of his brothers.

I insist, we should never forget that **the most we can do is to help the brother to grow**: without his collaboration we cannot do anything. Accepting our own limitations will help us not to lose hope.

As I have already mentioned, paternity has to do with life. **Being a parent has to do with transmitting life**. It is impossible to be a father without having children, as though it were merely a matter of having a nice sounding title (“outgoing abbot”). Spiritual paternity presupposes a vivifying and on-going relationship. In this respect the abbot-brother centred dialogues have a special nature which should not be confused with other relationships. When, for example, someone goes to see a psychologist, he chooses freely to do so and he also has to pay, which normally means he tries to speak as much as possible, so as to make the most of the available time. No serious psychologist is going to force anyone to speak, though he will certainly demand payment for his time and services. **A father cares for his children, come what may**. A father cannot refuse to speak to his son simply because his son doesn’t actively seek him out. The father goes out to look for his son and does everything he can to draw him to himself and, what is more, he doesn’t charge anything for it.

There is a **great temptation among abbots for them simply to fold their arms** if the brethren do not approach them. We will always find excuses, especially in cases where we need to correct something (always an unpleasant prospect): “the monks already know what they have to do, there is no need for me to step in and correct them”; “the monks are all grown-ups, so let them come to me when they want to, I don’t have to run around after them”; “Canon Law and our Constitutions say that we mustn’t oblige anyone to open their conscience to the superior” etc. These affirmations are all true up to a point, but they all lead to the wrong conclusion if they make us forget the responsibility all abbots take on when they accept the office. The abbot is not a paid professional, but rather a father who accepts the obligation to transmit life to the brethren and to protect them should they begin to lose their way.

For this reason, **individual and periodical dialogues with the brothers** are important because they help the abbot immensely in his task of establishing relationships with the community, and they make the brethren feel that they are important to their abbot. The frequency of such dialogues will depend on the age and needs of each person. More often than not it is the abbot who proposes when to have such meetings, bearing in mind that the brothers are always free to go to see him when they so desire. An abbot who simply sits there waiting for the monks to come to see him spontaneously can run the serious risk of never actually talking to some of them.

Personal dialogue does not attempt to force other people’s consciences, nor does it try to invade the interior life of the brethren (Stat.33.3.8), but it does offer **the possibility for establishing a relationship based on frankness**, if that is what the other person desires. The usual process is to begin by asking the brother about his health, his family, how he tackles his job(s) in the community, the difficulties he may have to

face, how he gets on with the other brothers, how he sees the community situation, how to improve things, and so forth, while bearing in mind that in this way the brother can express his needs and the abbot can hear about them. It is also useful to ask them “what they would ask of the abbot” concerning them and his presence in the community.

SHEPHERD

What makes a shepherd stand out is his being a guide, his experience in choosing the best pastures and his zeal in looking after each and every member of his flock

The abbot is expected to show the same pastoral care as the Good Shepherd towards his flock. That is why, as Pope Francis tells us, the shepherd should smell like the sheep entrusted to his because he is in daily close contact with them. **The abbot has to make his presence felt in the community** so as to encourage it to grow. **This presence should be seen in terms of availability rather than invasiveness.** This positive presence strengthens his moral authority, which has a more solid basis than the institutional type. Avoiding the brothers is not the way to transmit life. A positive presence expresses itself through the abbot’s concern for each and every one of his brothers both by approaching them as they perform their various activities (official jobs and various types of work), and also by **talking to them personally on a regular basis.**

The shepherd is the one who guides and leads his flock. In the final analysis everything depends on God, but it also depends on us. At times we attribute to bad luck or to God’s hidden plans things which in fact spring from our own laziness, our being paralyzed by personal fears or our lack of confidence. Things don’t just happen. A group will never make progress if nobody leads it. If we do not make efforts then we cannot expect results. If, after doing all we can, we do not obtain the desired results, we can perhaps then say that God is interested in increasing our humility, but we should not say this without having dedicated ourselves wholeheartedly to the task beforehand.

One of the marks of the shepherd leading a community is that **he can sense what is coming** and is able to face the future firmly and with great patience, knowing how to support fear and resistance when change is necessary, capable of acting *with* the community and not just *on behalf of* the community (through consultation, discernment, allowing the time needed for assimilation, while at the same time not interrupting the process,).

The good shepherd loves his brothers. Loving my community just as it is, accepting that we make up a community of different people with their failings and weaknesses means recognizing the powerful presence of God in the midst of us which supports us all (my community..... “is the Lord’s army”). To love the brethren

means dedicating ourselves to them, as well as patiently bearing whatever offences we may receive, and not letting our attempts to correct things be interpreted as vindictive ways of getting our own back because of our resentment for any injustices we may have suffered.

The good shepherd knows his brothers individually, as unique people. It is the abbot who has **to adapt himself to the brethren** (RB). Only then will he find them well-disposed, by inspiring love rather than fear in them. It is extremely positive to transmit to the brethren the feeling that “I am happy to be living with you”, not just on the part of the abbot, but each member of the community. If we can create this type of situation, we will generate a highly enjoyable atmosphere of fraternal life.

Someone who **really listens** does not simply hear what is being said; he also notices what the person speaking to him feels at the same time, and this makes him feel truly alive and important for the other person. In order to listen we need to know, to know what the brother in question is going through, the things which worry him, whatever may be disturbing him. Really listening to someone means adopting a receptive attitude also in physical terms. It is one thing to listen to a brother when we happen to bump into him in the corridor, or in the room where we leave our cowls, or in our office while we constantly rummage through our papers or sneak glances at the computer screen, and it is something totally different for us to put everything else to one side, to sit down in front of him in a relaxed way, as though right now there were absolutely nothing more important than to listen to him. This type of closeness can help the brothers to speak from the heart, but if they feel they are being pressured they will probably try to wriggle out of the situation.

When **relations between the abbot and the brothers are not good**, they will try to avoid him, and he will look for every possible excuse to distance himself from the community. A situation of being close to or distant from the brethren does not just happen all of a sudden: it is the consequence of earlier forms of behaviour or relations. I have on occasions heard the complaint “it’s that the brothers don’t come to see me, they don’t trust me, they seem to be avoiding me!” I am sure that when this happens, we can improve things by looking at our own behaviour, rather than falling into the temptation of cocooning ourselves in our own occupations and looking for other alibis outside the monastery.

In our relationships with the brothers **we need to empathize** without getting involved to the point of total **confusion**. When we get emotionally involved, when we show **insufficient emotional maturity**, it is not possible to offer authentic guidance, and we can also create difficulties with the other members of the community. The ability to put ourselves in the other person’s shoes, while at the same time keeping the necessary distance, is of fundamental importance if we wish to offer lucid guidance. Communication is not simply a matter of exchanging ideas and words: **the emotions** also have a significant role to play, and for this reason it is necessary to be unambiguously welcoming at the beginning and end of the dialogue in question.

The good shepherd watches over each member of the community and also **prays for each and every brother**, which presupposes a **profound love for all the brethren** by avoiding favouritism and negative comparisons. An attitude of love towards everyone gives us the necessary perspective to avoid falling into the trap of behaving unfairly by seeking to integrate each brother into the community, rather than allowing them to live set apart. There is a real temptation for us to depend exclusively on those who are better inclined or with whom we get on better. Any abbot who openly shows his preference for certain brothers to the exclusion of certain others will end up by dividing the community. Scripture tells us that through envy sin entered the world. Given that envy turns up without being invited, let us do everything we can not to provoke it.

We need to promote the idea that all together we make up one single body, blessed with different charismas and individual weaknesses. In this body the weakest members find support and are encouraged to give the best they can, while at the same time the stronger members have the opportunity for developing without having to worry about envy which blocks all growth. The good shepherd supports the first group and inspires the second group to grow. It is very sad when the envy of the other brothers, or even of the abbot himself, prevents better qualified brethren from developing their potential (“if I can’t make progress myself then I will make sure I drag the others down to my level”). Any normal mother feels proud when her child reaches objectives that she herself was not able not reach. Feeling proud of the qualities of our brethren is a way of showing clearly that we really believe we all belong to one single body.

Jacob will walk at the same speed as his flock so as to ensure that no-one gets left dawdling behind. Life develops slowly. We must never stop hoping for the day when maturity will finally arrive. **Prudence** is one of the distinctive features of the good shepherd because it constantly helps us to discern the right moment to intervene. Just letting things happen without actually doing anything is negligence, not prudence. On the other hand, making rash decisions indicates that we are not in control of own emotions or that we do not have a clear picture of the situation.

The prudent shepherd **knows how to help the brothers to give the best they can** by offering them feasible responsibilities, by trusting in them, giving more importance to people than to things, and by accepting the fact that they may make mistakes while respecting the principle of subsidiarity, without going over their heads.

The shepherd’s authority is considerable, especially in a Benedictine monastery. For this very reason we need **to be particularly careful** with our authority, because the more powerful the machine we are using, the more skilful we need to be in the way we use it. Brusque movements can lead to disastrous results, so it is important for us not to exercise this authority if we are in an emotionally altered state. When a monk does not want to listen to us or responds negatively, we need to distinguish between correction and what may perhaps be the expression of our own

malaise. The difference lies in whether we are really seeking what is best for the brother and whether we are in a serene, calm frame of mind when we intervene.

MASTER (TEACHER)

In the monastic life, spiritual teaching and spiritual paternity go hand in hand, for which reason it is absolutely essential to **speak regularly to the community** (Stat. 33.3.A), as well as providing for one-to-one dialogue. The abbot as teacher seeks to preserve the community's fidelity to the monastic tradition and to our call to follow Christ by favouring greater cohesion in the monastic orientation of the community. Strange though it may seem, **the influence** of an abbot who talks to his community is much greater than we probably imagine. Little by little what he says penetrates more deeply because everyone recognizes that the role of the abbot goes far beyond his personal qualities and limits. If we do not speak to our communities then how are we going to help them to make progress?

We need **to avoid any fears** which may assail us at the prospect of having **to speak to the community**. Though other brothers may know more than we do about the subject in question, it is the abbot who has received the mission to speak to them as well as the charisma to teach them. We should not pay attention to the fact that some brothers may start yawning while we are talking. This does not necessarily indicate lack of interest: it could just as easily be because they are feeling tired. We must not be over-sensitive, nor should we take any comments personally. There is no reason to presume that the questions we are asked in public are aimed at putting us on the spot: a simple, direct approach helps to put things in perspective, in the sense that we also have the right to make mistakes and do not claim to know absolutely everything.

It is not enough to transmit information through our teaching: the main aim is **to form and transform others** in their task of following Christ through our monastic charisma. The secret of successful teaching lies in **knowing how to motivate others** by stimulating their interest and the desire to respond.

The formation we give should, therefore, be **understandable, organized and practical**, offering relevant examples from real life or models worth emulating. **Brevity, simplicity and authenticity** are characteristics which will help our message to penetrate and be understood, leaving more technical and encyclopaedic types of formation for other contexts. The more the person speaking enjoys what he is saying (perhaps with a judicious touch of wit) the better the experience will be for those listening.

We should not be afraid **to repeat ourselves** when teaching: repetition is the foundation of learning. If we are dealing with aspects of real-life there will always be new details to talk about because, although our spoken words are easily forgotten, if what we are communicating has to do with real experience, then things will always be changing.

In order to teach, we first of all need **to learn**. An abbot who neglects his own formation neither nourishes himself, nor is he in a position to feed others satisfactorily. An abbot who is responsible for a community faces the same task with regard to himself. The superior must first of all follow the spiritual path. Any teaching which is not supported by an **exemplary life-style** will sound sterile for the weak and will irritate the stronger members. The first teaching we must offer is that of being authentic disciples of the one and only Master. To ask others to accept our teaching ministry without being faithful disciples of our Master simply does not make sense. Our discipleship stimulates us to seek first and foremost a constant process of conversion of the heart, rather than a plan for living absolutely perfect lives. At the centre of the disciple's life we find the Master, whereas the perfectionist places himself at the centre. Given that the abbot has considerable freedom and possibilities, he must constantly ask himself whether his office gives him the right to live differently from the brothers and to enjoy certain privileges which he does not allow them to have

The abbot cannot monopolize all teaching activities in the monastery, so it is healthy to allow other brothers to participate in the formation of the community. This can be done by means of community talks, organizing retreats, inviting the student monks to share a summary of one of the subjects (or part thereof) they have been studying, etc.

The subject of community dialogues can adequately be placed within this context of formation seen in terms of a transformation process (Cf. Appendix).

DOCTOR

Pope Francis talks to us about the need to impregnate the Church with a family spirit.¹ What characterizes a family is that it accepts all its members, helps them to grow and shows them mercy. Mercy is the most healing of attitudes. It is not just a matter of putting up with things or being tolerant. The members of a family are

¹ "A close look at the everyday life of men and women today immediately reveals the general need for a serious injection of *family spirit*. This is because the style of our relationships – civil, economic, juridical, professional, and as citizens – has become extremely rational, formal and organized, but at the same time "de-hydrated", arid and anonymous. There are times when the situation becomes unbearable since, even though it claims to be inclusive in its manifestations, in reality increasingly large numbers of people are abandoned to solitude and marginalization.

That is why the family can offer a more human perspective for the whole of society: it opens the eyes of its children to life - not just their eyes but all of their senses – by presenting a vision of human relationships founded on a freely accepted alliance of love. The family introduces us to the need for bonds of fidelity, sincerity, trust, cooperation and respect. It encourages us to plan a habitable world and to believe in trusting relationships, even in difficult conditions. It teaches us to honour our promises, to respect everyone, to share our mutual limitations. And we are all aware of how essential family care and attention is for the smallest members, the most vulnerable, the wounded and even those most affected by unhealthy life-styles. In society, those who put these attitudes into practice do so because they received them thanks to the family spirit, not through competitive values or the desire for self-realization (.....). We could say that the *family spirit* is a constitutional document for the Church, it is the way Christianity should express itself and this is the way things should be (....). The Church is, and is called to be, God's family (.....). Families are well aware of the dignity which springs from the feeling of being sons and daughters, not slaves or simply the number on an official identity card. (General Audience 7/10/2015).

merciful to each other because they share genetic and emotional bonds which make them feel comprehensive towards the other members, in the awareness that they all make up one family. This idea is a real challenge for our communities.

One of the difficulties for healing fraternal relations in our communities is that **we live in a very ‘vertical’ way**, from the standpoint of what must be done, plus our own experience of vocation, which varies according to individual perceptions. We therefore tend to judge others depending on how they seem to correspond (or not, as the case may be) to this ideal, rather than trying to accept others as they are. What is more, we tend to mix this ideal up with other aspects which we personally find attractive, while at the same time considering those who do not measure up to this ideal, mixed with our preferences, as simply not belonging.

If we wish mercy to flourish in our communities then we need to cultivate the horizontality of the family, including Christian communities, not because we are blood relatives, but because of the living presence of Christ in our midst. The allusion, as our Cistercian fathers remind us, is to the horizontal beam of Christ’s cross. The monastic family is based upon sincere bonds of fraternal love which express themselves in countless details of closeness. It is only by living in this way that the brothers will spontaneously accept each other, be patient with each other’s weaknesses and peculiarities, and show mercy when they stumble. When we are able to consider our community in terms of a welcoming family, we can always have hope of being able to pick ourselves up and start again without feeling rejected by the other members. The Pope too encourages us along these lines.²

The experience of our own fragility or infirmity helps us to be **merciful**, and normally makes it easier for us to understand and help others who are going through a similar experience. Recognizing our fragility leads us to the humble acceptance of our own personal miseries. Many things we find humiliating can help to make us more humble. On three occasions St. Paul prayed to be freed from the thorn in his flesh which was tormenting him, until he discovered that the power of grace is far greater and more effective than our personal efforts: grace supports us without letting us fall into the proud illusion that we have overcome our difficulties by ourselves. Of course, it is important for the abbot to be virtuous, but that does not mean that he has to be perfect. St. Benedict says that the abbot should be ‘worthy’. Who can regard himself as worthy of being abbot? If the gifts we receive really are gifts, then we have to admit that everything in our lives is grace and mercy. Our “dignity” does not come from us,

² “The Gospel continues to be the *good news* which always offers a basis for a new start (.....). The Church as family knows how to make its presence felt through a parent’s intimacy and love, by living out the responsibility of looking after its members, protecting them while respecting their independence, correcting them without humiliating, educating them by example and with patience and sometimes even through the simple silence of prayerful and dedicated hope. A Church made up of children who recognize each other as brothers and sisters, which never falls into the trap of considering other people as dead weight, problematic, an expense, worry or risk: the other person is essentially a gift and will never stop being so even if he chooses a different path in life”. (Allocution by Pope Francis during the Vigil of preparation for the Synod of Bishops on the family, 3/10/2015).

but from the One who dwells in us. The best we can do is not to “put obstacles” in his way.

The realization of all this only becomes effective when we face our fragility in a spirit of conversion. If not, **if we try to come to terms with our sinfulness**, we will obtain the opposite result. **Mercy can turn into harshness** when we project our own weaknesses onto others, letting ourselves be carried away by a strictness which we do not apply to ourselves, as though we believe that by correcting our brother excessively we hope to compensate somehow for our own guilty feelings, and seek self-assurance in the fact that others put into practice what we ourselves do not. It is rather like when some parents overburden their children by forcing them to do all the things, they would have liked to have done themselves (but didn't), such as learning foreign languages or an instrument or how to dance, or martial arts and so on. Poor children!

We have to be very careful not to project when we have to correct someone, because very often **what irritates us most in other people's behaviour are things that we ourselves tend to do**, and this can seriously cloud our discernment.

Strictness can also be the result of our own fears, when we think that we are losing control of the situation. All of these factors invite us to consider exactly how much we really trust in the Lord, and also just how detached we are from the image other people may have of us. Our own suspicions may also have something to do with it....

Any doctor who is about to operate needs to be emotionally calm. When a certain brother's attitude has managed to irritate us that should be enough to convince us that any attempt at correction must be postponed because in that situation, we would be **unable to correct** and would probably end up by simply **giving vent to our anger**. At the very least we should avoid acting in the heat of the moment. It is also true that we cannot wait until we have completely recovered our calm before acting, especially in the case of some superiors who find it personally difficult to establish relationships. I am referring to those with insufficient self-control, or who feel inhibited or intimidated when dealing with a specific brother. The result can be that we suffer an emotional awkwardness which can either lead us not to do anything at all or to over-react. Problem of this type should make us reflect to what extent they constitute a serious obstacle to our pastoral service.

We must never forget that we are not all-powerful. We have to do everything we can, responsibly accepting the mission we have received and without avoiding difficult situations, but at the time bearing in mind that we neither can nor should attempt to solve every single problem which may arise. There are situations which do not depend on us, and each brother is called to respond to them at a personal level - something we cannot do for him - and there are also circumstances we cannot claim to control. If the brother in question does not accept the power of grace into his life, there is nothing we can do to oblige him. This experience of our limitations also helps us to grow in humility. At the same time it is also useful not to take ourselves too

seriously and to face problems with a certain amount of humour, based on the awareness of our limits.

When a brother comes to see us to complain about someone else we should avoid taking sides and never enter into a discussion about the other person. It is much better to help the brother we are talking to recognize his own feelings and emotions, by asking him how he thinks he should react to what he is going through. Only by facing this problem and by looking for well-founded motivations based on faith (the centrality of Christ in my life) will it be possible to discover the correct way to proceed. The sick person as a whole is more important than the illness in itself. In the medical field, it is possible to cure a specific illness but at the same time to kill the person involved, because the healing process destroys the general health of the patient as a side effect.

When problems crop up or when we have to correct a brother, people very often try **to change the subject by referring to other** people and what they do, or by talking about the community as a whole using generalizations such as “nobody can put up with this community”, etc.). Whenever this happens we need to bring the brother back to the subject, reminding him that I (the abbot) will talk to the others when the time comes, but right now *he* is the one I am talking to about *his* attitudes and how *he* deals with conflicts. Any attempt to react to his complaints or to justify his accusations means that we are letting him lead us away from the subject, and the only result is increased anger and zero conversation. We also have to know how to resist forms of blackmail such as: “the thing is you don’t understand me”; “you don’t want to face up to the problems we have in community”, etc., all of which are tricks to distract our attention from the matter in hand.

When we don’t deal with illnesses because they appear not to be causing problems, they generally get worse and come back in a big way in the future. Illnesses, like successes, do not just happen all of a sudden, but in fact develop slowly over time. The negative situations we have to face today result from unjustified laxity in the past. A doctor has to prevent illness beforehand, and he knows that any real cure takes time. Those who seek rapid solutions are acting out of self-interest. The superior who creates the foundations for a solid solution is seeking what is good for the brethren, in the awareness that he himself may not live to see the final result.

The best form of correction is prevention, the sort which is rarely necessary because the brothers have received a solid orientation. It avoids making interventions which inevitably leave scars.

Patience is a fundamental part of any healing process. A patient and persevering attitude means that we believe in the brethren and we do all we can to work in harmony with them.

Putting problems into perspective is a healthy approach to take. This does not mean to say that problems do not exist, but rather to avoid making mountains out of molehills. When we make something trivial into a problem, we end up by promoting it

to a higher category, but without finding a real solution, because it was never really a problem in the first place.

Correction becomes a challenge when the superior himself is the offended party. It is extremely hard to be an impartial judge in one's own cause. In such cases it is useful to make use of the help of other people by consulting, for example, with members of the council.

Where the healing of the community is concerned, then the community itself should be involved. For this reason it is important to organize regular meetings (once a month, for example) so that all the brothers **can express in community their complaints** or corrections. This helps to reduce tensions within the community, because everyone will realize that they have at least a moment when they can make themselves heard. There is an element of risk here because the abbot himself could find himself being questioned, there could be a series of trivial complaints, people trying to get their own back, heated exchanges between various people, and so on. We need to be wise enough not to react to unimportant provocations, to propose possible solutions for deserving problems, to recommend patience with regard to insoluble problems, to invite the brothers to try to listen to each other generously so as to respond in the best way possible to other people's concerns, to postpone dialogues to a later date if the discussion is not leading anywhere, or if the atmosphere becomes overheated, to invite those concerned to apologize if they have offended anyone, etc. Despite all the risks which community dialogues may entail, the benefits to be reaped far outweigh them because they help us to live together in an authentic way and serve to defuse countless potential conflicts.

Community correction also helps us to reflect on exactly **why we came to the monastery**, because if we are not able to accept correction serenely and tend to reply with a "you-are-worse-than-me" attitude then how can we imagine we are going to accept the insults our Master suffered and be able to follow his example? At the very least we will come to realize that we are not such perfect monks as we thought we were. An abbess once said to me that sometimes our monasteries give the impression of being boarding schools, where the people seem to be there against their will and reject the positive stimuli which correction can provide. In cases like this the community is only thinking of itself, its own rights, its own future. **It is quite normal for us to think of our future, but it would be much more useful for us to centre our attention on how to transmit to others the Cistercian charisma we have received because we find it attractive and we put it into practice in our daily lives.**

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

It is good for the abbot to exercise **his pastoral care also with regard to himself**, not only while he is abbot, but also for the time **when his service will cease**. While he is abbot he must take care of his own spiritual health by living in community, following the rhythm of the monastic timetable, experiencing the love he gives to and receives

from the brethren, while at the same time finding moments for himself and his own formation (at weekly/monthly intervals), for sharing details of his progress with a spiritual elder, and humbly allowing himself to be questioned by his community.

It is also necessary to prepare ourselves from the very start of our service as abbot for **the time when we shall leave it**. This will help us to keep our feet firmly on the ground, as well as avoiding pointless suffering in the future. We should not forget that if people at present treat us in a certain way, if we currently occupy a prominent position, if people consult us and we make the final decisions, etc., all of this is simply because we are abbots. The time will come, however, when our time of abbatial service ends, and we need to keep this fact in mind. When this happens, our role in the community will be different, depending on our experience and spirituality. This new phase will force us to go through an experience of dying to ourselves, a sort of crisis, which will serve to purify us. It will involve realizing that people no longer consult us so frequently as before, or indeed that things are done in community without our being consulted at all, that our criteria are not always taken into account or that certain things we dedicated a lot of time and energy to are now done differently, if they are done at all. When an abbot coming to the end of his service to the community does not face up to all of this, considerable suffering results at both a personal and a community level. There is the risk of not accepting the new situation, and of justifying this attitude for the sake of the community's well-being. In such cases the best thing is to move out of the community for a prudent length of time.

II. The abbot's ON-GOING PASTORAL CARE for those who leave the monastery

C. 59 Pastoral Solicitude

1

The abbot is to act with pastoral solicitude towards those leaving the monastery. Above all he is to act with disinterested concern for the welfare of the one who is leaving as well as for that of the whole community.

2

Those who leave or are dismissed are not entitled to claim anything from the monastery for services rendered. Nevertheless, the abbot is to observe the norms of equity and evangelical charity towards members who depart.

ST 59.2.A

To safeguard the welfare of members who leave or are dismissed, as well as that of the community, the abbot is to have a sound knowledge of the social legislation of the place where the monastery is located.

C. 60 Transfer of a Brother to another Monastery of the Order

A grave cause is required if a *professed brother* is to change the monastery of his stability. Furthermore, the consent of the abbots of both monasteries is required and that of the conventual chapter of the monastery that receives him. The consent of the chapter is not required, however, in the case of a monk who had changed his stability to a foundation when this became autonomous and later returns to the monastery of his previous profession.

Nuns: A grave cause is required if a *professed sister* is to change the monastery of her stability. Furthermore, the consent of the abbesses of both monasteries is required and that of the conventual chapter of the monastery that receives her. The consent of the chapter is not required, however, in the case of a nun who had changed her stability to a foundation when this became autonomous and later returns to the monastery of her previous profession.

ST 60.A

In the case of a solemn professed, the presence for one year at least in the new monastery is required before consent is sought from the conventual chapter. A two thirds majority is needed. The change of stability is marked by a suitable liturgical ceremony.

In the case of a temporary professed, when the vows are to expire they will have to be renewed, but this time for the new community. This renewal of vows by the candidate is made with the consent of the conventual chapter. An absolute majority is needed. A probationary period of at least three years in the new monastery is required, at the end of which the abbot, if he considers him suitable, with the consent of the conventual chapter, admits him to solemn profession.

ST 60.B

The Abbot General can oblige a brother for the sake of peace to transfer temporarily to another monastery, having heard the brother himself and with due consideration for the community that receives him. This is done at the request of the abbot and with the consent of the abbot's council and of the Father Immediate and for not more than five years.

C. 61 Transfer to another Institute

If a monk wishes to transfer to another institute of consecrated life, *to a secular institute* or to a society of apostolic life the norms of can. 684 and 685 CIC are observed.

C. 62 Exclaustration

1

The Abbot General with the consent of his council and for a grave cause can grant a monk an indult of exclaustration, but for not more than three years and, in the case of a cleric, only with the consent of the Ordinary of the place in which he is to live.

Nuns: The granting to nuns of an indult of exclaustration is reserved to the Apostolic See

ST 62.1.A

The Abbot General with the consent of his council can, for a grave cause, request the Holy See to impose exclaustration on a monk, equity and charity being maintained. This is done at the request of the abbot and with the consent of the abbot's council and after consulting the Father Immediate.

2

The exclaustrated monk is released from those obligations that are incompatible with his new state of life. However, he remains dependent on his superiors and under their care. He is also dependent on the Ordinary of the place, especially if he is a cleric. He can wear the habit of the Order, unless it is stated otherwise in the indult, but he loses both active and passive voice.

C. 63 Departure of the Temporarily Professed

1

One who, for a grave cause, asks to leave the monastery during the time of temporary profession can obtain an indult to leave from the Abbot General with the consent of his council.

2

At the end of the period of temporary profession if just causes exist, the abbot can, after consulting his council, exclude a brother from making further profession.

3

If a brother in temporary vows contracts a physical or psychological illness the abbot is to observe can. 689.2-3 CIC.

C. 64 Departure of the Solemnly Professed

A monk in solemn vows is not to request an indult to leave except for very grave causes, weighed in the presence of God. He is to give his request to his abbot who is to discuss it with his council and send it with his comments to the Abbot General. The Abbot General is to forward this with his opinion and that of his council to the Holy See. In the case of a cleric the norms of can. 693 CIC are followed.

C. 65 Dismissal

In the case of the dismissal of a professed monk, whether in temporary or solemn vows, cann. 694-704 CIC are to be followed with regard to causes, procedures and effects. The competent superiors in these cases are the abbot with his council, as Major Superior; and the Abbot General with his council, as supreme moderator.

C. 66 Readmission to the Monastery

One who had legitimately left the monastery at the end of the novitiate or after *his temporary or solemn* profession can be readmitted by the abbot with the consent of his council, without the obligation of repeating the novitiate. It is for the abbot to determine the form and duration of a new term of probation, according to the norm of universal law and particular circumstances.

ST 66.A

To determine the form and duration of a new term of probation the abbot needs the consent of his council.

SEPARATION FROM THE COMMUNITY

Separation from the community can be:

- I. **TEMPORARY SEPARATION** (brief absences, studies, illness, service to the Order, eremitical life, imposed separation, or exclaustation)
 - A. Absence from the monastery
 - B. Imposed transfer to another monastery
 - C. Exclaustation
 - (D) *Loss of active and passive voice*

- II. **DEFINITIVE SEPARATION**
 - A. Novices
 - B. The temporary professed
 - C. Change of stability
 - D. *Transitus* to another institute
 - E. Dispensation from solemn vows

If the monk is a cleric

- F. Expulsion
Obligations toward those who leave

I. TEMPORARY SEPARATION

A. Absence from the monastery³

☒☒ Brief absences for just cause

- *Monks*: abbot's permission suffices.
- *Nuns*: abbess' permission suffices.

☒☒ Prolonged absences for just cause

- ***Monks***: *consent* of the council is needed, and not for more than one year. There is no time-limit in cases of illness (in the wide sense), studies or eremitical life. For hermits, the council must first be *heard* in order to allow them to continue living the eremitical life (ST 13.3.A), and its *consent* is needed in order to live outside the monastery, as well as that of the Ordinary of the place where they reside. Hermits remain under the authority of the Abbot.
- ***Nuns***: for more than 15 days but less than one year, the permission of the Abbess and the *consent* of the Council are required, having also *consulted* the Father Immediate or the Bishop⁴. There is no time limit if the absence is due to illness or studies. For women hermits it is first necessary to *consult* the Council to allow them to live the hermit life, and its *consent* is needed for them to live outside the monastery, as well as the *consent* of the Ordinary of the place where she resides. Hermitesses remain under the authority of the Abbess⁵.

B. Imposed transfer to another monastery⁶

"For the sake of peace" (even though there may be no fault), the A.G. can require a brother or sister to go to another monastery under certain conditions:

- For no more than 5 years
- At the request of the abbot or abbess and with the *consent* of his or her council

³ Est. 13.3/m; 13.3.A/m; 13.4/f; C.29.2/m; C.28.4/f.

⁴ This is what *Cor Orans* says, 174-176. In the new legislation we are studying for adaptation to *Cor Orans*, we will request that the consultation of the bishop be removed and, if desired, that there be included the obligation of consulting the Father Immediate for monks also so as to equalize our law.

⁵ Text proposed by the Law Commission, harmonizing with the prescriptions of *Cor Orans* (Est 13.2.A).

⁶ Est. 60.B.

- After listening to the brother or sister
- With the *consent* of the F.I.
- Having due regard for the community receiving the brother or sister.

C. Exclaustration⁷

- Exclaustration is different from leave of absence⁸. For example, when parents have to be cared for, the Holy See (and not the A.G.)⁹ can give permission for a lengthy absence, without need to request an exclaustration.
- **Nuns** (but not monks) have been granted a prerogative: the abbess, with the *consent* of her Council, may grant an indult of exclaustration to a solemnly professed nun, for a period not exceeding one year, having obtained the *consent* of the Ordinary of the place where the nun is to live, and after having consulted the Father Immediate¹⁰.

Exclaustration granted by the A.G.

- The A.G. can grant an indult of exclaustration for a maximum of 3 years
- The A.G. can extend for two more years the indult of exclaustration of a nun who had already requested it from her abbess for one year.
- The monk himself, or the nun herself must request the indult in writing from the A.G., explaining his reasons; normally he does it through his abbot or her abbess, who must give his opinion and that of his Council to the A.G.
- The petition must be based on a grave reason
- The A.G. grants the indult with the *consent* of his council
- If the monk is a cleric, consent is needed from the bishop of the place where he will reside

Exclaustration granted or imposed by the Holy See

- The request must be made from the Holy See when it is for longer than 3 years, and the steps outlined above are followed
- The A.G. offers his opinion and that of his council to the Holy See
- Imposed exclaustration is requested by the abbot or abbess with the *consent* of his or her council, after consulting the F.I.; the A.G. requests it from the Holy See with the *consent* of his council

The most frequent reason for imposing exclaustration is the case of a monk or nun suffering from a serious psychiatric illness who refuses treatment at a specialized center.

⁷ C. 62.

⁸ La exclaustración conlleva una cierta mitigación de las obligaciones regulares, pues se dispensa de aquellas que no se puedan realizar razonablemente en la nueva situación. La ausencia no implica ninguna mitigación de las obligaciones regulares. La primera suele estar motivada por alguna situación de crisis, mientras que la segunda no necesariamente.

⁹ Aunque resulte paradójico, el A.G. puede dar el indulto de exclaustración por tres años, pero no un permiso de ausencia (cf. P. Jesús Torres, "L'assenza dalla casa religiosa", *Informationes SCRIS* 1993, p. 100, n. 86).

¹⁰ Text proposed by the Law Commission, harmonizing with the instructions of *Cor Orans*, 177-178.

??Situation of the exclaustated monk

- He is freed from obligations that are incompatible with his new state of life
- He continues to depend on his superior
- He also depends on the Ordinary of the place, especially if he is a cleric¹¹
- The indult can impose certain particular conditions (e.g. not wearing the habit)¹²
- A requested indult (but not an imposed one) can be set aside before its term expires

D. Loss of active and passive voice¹³

- Those absent from the monastery—except for illness, study, service to the Order (chaplains) or eremitical life—lose both their active and passive voice once they have spent 6 months outside, even if they have permission for the absence.
- Those who receive an indult of exclaustation lose their active and passive voice from the outset.
- Both categories can recover their active and passive voice once they return *definitively* to the community.
 - It is returned to them by the abbot or abbess with the *consent* of his or her council, but they can be required to first live a certain period of time in community.
 - The president of an election, after first consulting the conventual chapter, can return the right to vote to a brother who is already living habitually in the monastery and who had lost it by his absence.

II. DEFINITIVE SEPARATION

A. Novices¹⁴

- They can leave voluntarily as desired
- They can be sent away before the novitiate is completed, or at its conclusion
- Their novitiate can be prolonged for a maximum of 6 months¹⁵
- If a novice leaves legitimately at the end of the novitiate, either voluntarily or because he or she has not been admitted to profession (which is different from being sent away¹⁶), he or she can be readmitted by the abbot or abbess with the *consent* of the council, with no obligation to repeat the novitiate¹⁷. If he or she goes to another monastery under these circumstances, the A.G., with the

¹¹ c. 687; C. 62.2

¹² Si expresamente se desea que el monje/a exclaustado no lleve hábito, hay que solicitarlo en la petición del indulto, pues luego el superior no se lo puede exigir.

¹³ c. 687; C. 62.2; C. 36; Est. 36.3.A.B.a.b.

¹⁴ c. 653 § 1 y 2.

¹⁵ Cuidado con los trucos, no suelen dar buen resultado: Mandar un tiempo fuera al que ha terminado su noviciado para que lo comience de nuevo...

¹⁶ Por los motivos que indican los cánones 694 y ss.

¹⁷ c. 690 § 1 y 2; C. 66; Est 38.B.a.

consent of his council and at the petition of the local abbot or abbess, can exempt him or her from repeating the novitiate¹⁸.

B. The Temporary Professed¹⁹

- During the period of temporary vows, the junior can obtain from the A.G., with the *consent* of his council, an indult of departure²⁰. It is advisable that the A.G. listen to the opinion of the local abbot or abbess and of his or her council
- The junior can also “not be admitted” to the next profession by the abbot, after *listening* to his council, if there is just cause, and the general reasons should be explained to the junior.
- Concerning a junior who contracts a physical or psychiatric illness during the period of his or her vows, and this illness incapacitates him or her for solemn profession: such a person may be kept from solemn profession, unless the illness was contracted through the monastery’s negligence or while the person was performing work for it²¹.
- A junior who goes insane during his or her vows cannot make solemn profession, but neither can he or she be sent away from the monastery²².
- When the period of simple profession is ended²³, the junior can freely leave, with the possibility of not repeating the novitiate should he or she return²⁴. The same is true for those who have not been admitted to vows, or who have obtained a dispensation from temporary or perpetual vows²⁵. In such cases, before making solemn profession, the person should spend a prudent length of time in the community and finish a minimum of 3 years of temporary profession, counting the time he or she completed on the first occasion.
- If the person goes to another monastery under these circumstances, the A.G., with the *consent* of his council and at the request of the local abbot, can exempt him from repeating the novitiate²⁶. But in any case he will have to achieve a minimum of 3 years of temporary profession in the new monastery.

C. Change of Stability²⁷

- For a change of stability, the following are required: serious motive, *consent* of one’s own abbot and *consent* of the abbot and the conventual chapter of the receiving monastery.
- If a monk changes stability to a foundation when it achieves autonomy, he can return to his community of origin with the *consent* of both superiors involved, but he does not need that of the conventual chapter.
- A monk who left his community in order to become abbot of another monastery may reclaim his stability in his monastery of origin within *one year* of having

¹⁸ En virtud del c. 690 § 1 y 2. Cf. *Vademecum* I, “Readmisión del que ha abandonado la comunidad”.

¹⁹ c. 688 § 2; C. 63.1; Est 84.1.C.j –i-.

²⁰ c. 688 § 2; C. 63.1; Est 84.1.C.j.

²¹ c. 689 § 2.

²² c. 689 § 3

²³ c. 688 § 1

²⁴ c. 688 § 1; c. 690; C. 66.

²⁵ c. 688 § 2; 690 § 1 y 2

²⁶ En virtud del c. 690 § 1 y 2. Cf. *Vademecum* I, “Readmisión del que ha abandonado la comunidad”.

²⁷ C. 60.

resigned from office or completed his mandate²⁸. In this case, no one's consent is needed.

D. Transitus to another institute²⁹

- To transfer to another religious institute, the *consent* of both Superiors General and their councils is needed³⁰.
- To transfer to a secular institute or a society of apostolic life, the permission of the Holy See is needed³¹.
- The first thing advisable is to spend a trial period living in the new community to which the transfer is sought, and for this the local abbot has to give a leave of absence for up to one year.
- The trial period for a *transitus* is of at least 3 years³².
- During the trial period the laws of the new institute are to be observed, with previous rights and obligations being suspended, but not the vows³³. If the person is not accepted to profession and returns to his community, he recovers all of his rights and obligations, taking into account what was already said concerning active and passive voice.

E. Dispensation from solemn vows³⁴

- Only the Holy See can grant it, and for very serious reasons³⁵.
- It requires³⁶:
 - the applicant's written and signed petition, indicating his motives, and addressed to the Holy Father, to the A.G. or to his abbot. The monk hands it to his abbot.
 - The abbot studies it with his council and must obligatorily send it to the A.G., adding his own perspective.
 - The A.G. sends it to the Holy See, together with his own opinion and that of his council.
 - The abbot receives the dispensation, which he then communicates to the applicant. The dispensation comes into effect only when the monk is notified of it and does not explicitly reject it. He does not have to sign it³⁷.

- ***If the monk is a cleric:***

²⁸ Est 40.C.

²⁹ C. 61.

³⁰ c. 684 § 1; C. 61; Est 84.1.C.g.

³¹ c. 684 § 5.

³² c. 684 § 2.

³³ c. 685 § 1.

³⁴ C. 64.

³⁵ c. 691 § 1 y 2.

³⁶ c. 691 § 1 y 2; C. 64; Est 38.C.f.

³⁷ c. 692.

The indult of the Holy See cannot be granted until the monk has found a bishop willing to incardinate him in his diocese, at which time he becomes a member of the secular clergy. If the bishop receives him only on a trial basis, the indult will be temporary, and the monk will live on exclaustation until he is incardinated. After 5 years, if he is not expelled from the diocese, he will be automatically incardinated³⁸ and the indult will be fully in force.

- **Dispensation from the priesthood:**
We omit this topic here because the process is very complex³⁹.

F. **Expulsion**⁴⁰

- **Expulsion occurs *ipso facto* when**⁴¹
 - A person abandons the Catholic faith, or contracts marriage, or attempts to do so.
 - A person is illegitimately absent from the monastery for twelve uninterrupted months, provided the monk or the nun cannot be located.⁴²
 - The abbot must gather up the evidence and make a formal declaration together with his council.
- **The following persons should or could be expelled**⁴³:
 - A person living in concubinage
 - A person who commits certain sexual offenses with violence, or threatens to do so, or does so in public, or against minors

³⁸ c. 693.

³⁹ 1. Carta del sacerdote interesado firmada de propia mano.
2. Un *curriculum vitae* del sacerdote.
3. Un documento donde se resumen todas las tentativas pastorales llevadas a cabo.
4. Un documento en el que se haga presente que el interesado ha sido suspendido del ejercicio del Orden.
5. El decreto de nombramiento del Juez Instructor y del Notario.
6. El interrogatorio del Interesado.
7. El interrogatorio o declaración de los testigos.
8. Posibles pericias médicas, psicológicas, psiquiátricas o psicoanalíticas.
9. Copia de los "Escrutinios" precedentes a las Ordenaciones y otros documentos.
10. Voto personal-reasuntivo del Instructor sobre la causa.
11. Voto personal del Obispo y del Superior Mayor.
12. Voto personal sobre la ausencia del escándalo.
13. Copia autenticada del posible matrimonio civil o declaración de nulidad o de divorcio.

⁴⁰ C. 65.

⁴¹ c. 694 § 1 y 2.

⁴² The Motu Proprio of Pope Francis of 03/19/19 "Communis Vita" adds this third reason for the ipso facto expulsion in c. 694 § 1. The point is to facilitate the juridical process for the religious Order in cases in which nothing is ever heard from the absent person, who either disappears without further ado or who, after receiving a permission of absence, never returns. This provision provides greater legal security both for the absent member and for the religious institute itself since, as long as the religious belongs to it, the institute is liable for possible criminal acts committed by the absent religious. It is necessary, however, to follow the procedure described in 694 § 2, that is, first to collect all the evidence. Then, with it in hand, the major superior and his Council must issue a statement of the fact so that the expulsion is juridically recorded. Finally, it is sent to the Holy See for confirmation.

⁴³ cc. 695 § 1, 1395, 1397 y 1398.

- A person who commits homicide, kidnaps or holds another under restraint with violence, ...
- A person who seeks an abortion and carries it out.
- A person who gravely and in an external, imputable and verifiable manner fails to perform certain obligations of consecrated life, or is guilty of obstinate disobedience in grave matter, or of illegitimate absence for more than 6 months....⁴⁴

All of these cases of expulsion require that a very complex process be followed, which is conceived to protect the rights of the religious⁴⁵. The steps to be followed, in brief, are:

- The abbot should listen to his council before initiating the process⁴⁶
- The abbot should gather up the evidence and give the monk the required warnings, and also send all minutes and documents to the A.G. The accused monk can defend himself and appeal to the A.G.⁴⁷.
- The A.G. studies all the material with his council, and if expulsion is decided upon by secret ballot, the decree of expulsion is issued⁴⁸.
- The decree must be confirmed by the Holy See, and the accused monk can appeal to it.

G. **Obligations toward those who leave**

- The abbot should continue exercising pastoral care for the person leaving the monastery, and also for the benefit of the community.
- Those leaving cannot demand anything from the monastery, but the abbot should act with equity and charity⁴⁹, taking into account the amount of time the person has spent in the monastery, his age and possibilities, and also the situation of the country.
- We should be well-informed concerning the social laws in force in the country where the monastery is located⁵⁰.

⁴⁴ cc. 665 § 2, 696 § 1.

⁴⁵ cc. 694-704.

⁴⁶ c. 697; C. 65; Est 38.C.g; Est 84.1.E.

⁴⁷ cc. 697 y 698.

⁴⁸ c. 699 § 1.

⁴⁹ c. 702; C. 59.2.

⁵⁰ c. 702; C. 59.1.2; Est 59.2.A.

APPENDIX

DIALOGUES

To help us organize this course invited by the General House to inform us about any doubts, difficulties or queries, with a view to discussing them during our sessions. Some of the material we received centred on how to deal with conflicts in the community and also on how to develop fraternal bonds. That inspired me to look more closely at the subject of community dialogues, presenting certain modalities depending on circumstances and specific goals, so as to help create a fraternal atmosphere in the community.

When looking at the abbot's pastoral care, it is important to do all we can to improve our fraternal relations, not only in terms of spiritual growth, but also by providing a set of simple tools to promote self-knowledge and encourage positive dialogue experiences. Perhaps it would be a good idea to seek professional assistance, but in any case the community itself can make real progress by using simple techniques which will gradually improve community bonds. At this point I shall indicate only a few of the various possibilities available. None of these tools will work automatically because everything depends on the way people respond, but they can certainly be useful.

Before going any further, we need to remind ourselves of the different levels of communication which can crop up in the field of human relations.

FIVE LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

- First level: **conventional conversation** which can be summed up in terms of **greetings** and formal expressions. Generally speaking, it is a matter of conventional rituals. The people involved do not know each other and the communication in question does not change this fact. This level is often widely found in "observant communities".
- Second level: regarding **information** or **ways of killing time**. The person involved reveals or shares very little about himself and makes no attempt to obtain personal information from the other person. Those involved frequently speak about people who are not present but make no reference to themselves. It is possible to talk about everything or nothing because the aim is to kill time rather than to communicate. At this level there is a serious risk of speaking ill of our brethren or even complaining.
- Third level: our **intelligence** becomes involved. There is an **exchange of ideas**, of opinions. We talk about values and we may even fear that others will criticize us for our opinions. This level requires a certain degree of maturity and freedom for

self-expression without being easily offended by other people's opinions, while respecting our differences. "Value-based communities" function at this level.

- Fourth level: communicating feelings. This level is both risky and attractive: risky because when trying to share our **feelings and emotions** we may feel vulnerable and attractive because it opens the door to friendship and leads us to deeper self-knowledge. It is, nevertheless, important to bear in mind that communicating feelings should be done in narrative way, excluding value judgements or the tendency to blame others for causing our emotional suffering.
- Fifth level: **communion**. That is, when we communicate our very being. When two separate people abandon their solitude so as to meet each other freely. This implies being fully oneself and at the same time being willing to accept the other person just they are and in the way, they offer themselves to me, creating the possibility of mutual transformation. What is being shared at this level is our personal experience of our relationship with God. It is also the level at which the community can authentically grow in God-centred communion.

DIALOGUES

We read in our **Statute on Formation**: *Dialogues and community sharing, reflecting together on the Gospel and fraternal correction are all important elements of community formation. The members of the community learn how to listen to each other, how to express their points of view and to develop their communication skills. They are also encouraged to face problems and learn patiently to follow the gradual development of the community. They get to know one another better and are more inclined to forgive each other when conflicts inevitably arise.* (Statute on Formation, 13). The Magisterium of the Church, for its part, teaches us that:

In the renewal process over these past few years it has become apparent that communication is one of the human factors which is becoming increasingly relevant in the life of religious communities. The strongly-felt need to deepen the fraternal life of a community automatically involves the corresponding need for greater extensive and intensive communication (.....). Without dialogue and the ability to listen to others, there is the risk of creating a series of juxtaposed or parallel existences, which is a far cry from the ideal of fraternity (CIVCSVA, fraternal life in community, 29, 32).

However, not all forms of sharing automatically count as "dialogues", and much less so heated discussions or debates in which only a few people dominate while the others look on in astonishment. Being able to engage in dialogue is an art, which means that it needs to be learnt through exercise and self-discipline. At this point I will include some of the requirements for dialogue proposed by Dom Bernardo Oliveira:

- A. Listening
 - With our ears and our hearts: understanding and loving

- With interest and respect: respecting other people and allowing them to express themselves
- B. Speaking
- Clearly: truthfully
 - Serenely: peacefully
 - Confidently: without fear
 - In a practical way: without theorizing
 - Prudently: choosing our words carefully
 - Keeping to the subject: with precision
- C. As well as by
- Not dominating the proceedings
 - Not interrupting somebody else who is speaking
 - Not contradicting other people's opinions
 - Accepting that my opinion is personal and therefore relative
 - Answering questions which may be asked
 - Accepting the moderator
 - Proposing feasible solutions
 - Listening, listening and more listening!

DIFFERENT TYPES OF DIALOGUE

There are various types of dialogue which can usefully be employed in our communities, depending on the circumstances and the goals we are aiming for. In the following section I will talk about some of the most important types.

ONE-TO-ONE DIALOGUES WITH THE ABBOT/ABBESS

We quite frequently come up against a certain reluctance to have periodical meetings with the brothers for three main reasons: laziness or shyness on the part of the superior, the lack of such a custom in the community, a feeling of respect towards others and not wanting to force their consciences.

Our Constitutions and the Code of Canon Law are very clear on the matter: *The brothers should approach their Abbot confidently, knowing that they can freely and spontaneously reveal to him their most intimate thoughts. However, under no circumstances will the abbot try to make them open their consciences to him.*⁵¹

⁵¹ Statute 33.3.B, Can. 630.5.

On the other hand, the monastic tradition centres the figure of the abbot on his spiritual paternity. St. Benedict is fully aware of this when he says: *The fifth degree of humility is that he humbly confesses and conceal not from his abbot any evil thoughts that enter his head, and any secret sins that he has committed. Scripture exhorts us to do this when it says: "reveal your ways to the Lord and hope in him". And again: "Confess to the Lord for he is good, for his mercy is for ever".*⁵²

At the same time we have to remember the freedom Benedict wishes the monks to enjoy when it comes to receiving spiritual guidance, allowing them to turn to other elders apart from the abbot himself: *"However, should the matter be a secret sin of the soul, let him tell such a thing to the abbot alone, or to a spiritual father: for they know how to cure both their own wounds and the wounds of others without disclosing and publishing them".*⁵³

For this reason, we must be absolutely clear about the fact that a dialogue with the abbot:

- Is not necessarily a matter of spiritual direction.
- A monk can never be forced to open his conscience to the abbot or to make his confession to him.
- We cannot limit the role of the abbot to that of granting permission, listening to our complaints or correcting behaviour. Neither can our relationship with him be reduced solely to functional and administrative considerations.
- When the abbot invites the brother to share a few minutes talking with him in a friendly atmosphere he is showing that the brother is important to him.
- There are several topics which can be discussed without entering the personal sphere if the brother does not want to, even though there is no reason not to offer him the opportunity, though without forcing him. We can ask him about his health, family, his work or studies, how he sees the community or what sort of things he believes could be improved. We can also give him the opportunity to make proposals or suggest new initiatives, ask him his opinion as to what he thinks of the abbot's way of exercising his function in the community, etc. This type of dialogue improves our relations, creates a climate of trust and mutual understanding, offers the possibility for reconciliation, helps us to get to know the brethren and community dynamics better, as well as being a source of important insights.
- When engaged in this type of dialogue, we should try to focus on the brother in front of us. There is often a tendency to talk about other people, what they have done to me, about their shortcomings and mistakes (which often simply boil down to things that bother me personally), and so forth. We constantly need to bring the conversation back to the subject of the brother's reality and to his hopes and problems, by reminding him that our conversation is concerned with him. If reference is made to a conflict with another person we need to help the brother in

⁵² RB 7, 44-46.

⁵³ RB 46, 5-6

front of us to reflect on the best way for him to face the situation, what exactly he can do about it, how to deal with the matter in a spirit of faith and the desire to follow Christ, without simply blaming the other person and asking the superior to punish him. In this type of situation, I always answer that I will tell the other monk what I need to when I talk to him, but not right now because he is not there with us.

PLENARY DIALOGUES ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMUNITY

This type of dialogue is straightforward and is of great usefulness in maintaining a relaxed atmosphere of the community, by providing a safety valve for tensions, rather than letting them build up within the community itself.

- **A good time:** once a month, for example when we have a community day of recollection, in the afternoon – though avoiding the time just before Compline – the community meets to reflect on the way things are going, to discuss one of our monastic values, or indeed any other topic we think is appropriate.
- **Aim:** to avoid the build-up of tension in the community as a result of not being able to express opinions or because certain problems are not being dealt with. Some problems, in fact, cannot be solved, but the mere fact that we can talk about them and accept that they cannot be solved will help us to put up with them patiently.
- **Modality:** We begin the meeting by asking whether anyone has something to say and allow a little time for people to think. There is no reason to get worried about a couple of minutes' silence. The important thing is for all those present to have the opportunity for bringing up whatever they may feel uncomfortable with in the way the community is functioning, and which could perhaps be improved. We should respectfully let people speak freely, trying to be receptive, accepting what the brother is describing, even though we may not agree with him, bearing in mind that there will be more than enough time in the future to clear up anything which needs it.
- **Development:** More often than not, it is sufficient to listen to the brother without needing to reply. On other occasions we can try to look for a solution or invite the other brethren to express their opinion on the matter. If the initial observation is obviously unjust or selfish, the brother concerned may find, thanks to listening to the others, that what he needs to do is to face up to his own reality. If the subject is important, it can be used in later community reflection sessions. Should what is said be ridiculous, or is simply a case of somebody needing to let off steam, then the best thing is not to react, and take it in terms of a letting the brother get something off his chest.

- **Moderator:** The best thing for the abbot to be the moderator, but another monk could be chosen for the task. The abbot needs to show considerable self-control, avoiding interpreting complaints as personal attacks, even when these comments have to do with his pastoral or administrative service. To receive criticism serenely, while trying to see what may be true in it, to recognize our limitations or to apologize for our possible mistakes does not mean losing our authority, but rather serves to increase our moral authority and offers a practical model for the brothers to imitate. Afterwards the abbot will be able to take what he considers to be the appropriate action. He should stimulate the dialogue ensuring that all the brothers respect and listen to each other, avoiding confrontations if not all forms of tension, interrupt a discussion or postpone it if things become too heated.

- **Participation:** We should avoid worrying about whether a dialogue will “be a success”. Any dialogue involves a certain amount of risk, and it is an art which requires constant practice. Excessive worries about the outcome can destroy dialogue and create tension in the moderator. If no-one wants to speak, then we can move on to discuss the theme announced for the meeting, such as reviewing the state of the community or any other subject. If the general participation begins to pick up, then it is better to allow the brethren to continue expressing themselves, even if that means postponing the chosen topic to the following month’s meeting.

DIALOGUE FOR COMMUNITY DISCERNMENT

From time to time an important topic may come up which it is convenient to reflect on at a community level. It may also be that the matter is causing a certain degree of tension among the brothers, or among some of them at any rate, thus creating constant unease in the community. The following method I wish to share with you has produced good results in my own house (examples):

1. **In the course of a preliminary meeting** all of the brothers are invited **to express their reasons and points of view** positively, that is, without ridiculing or judging other people’s positions. Nobody should interrupt someone who is speaking. After this others may ask for clarifications if there is something they have not understood, but without entering into a discussion. People can take notes if they wish. The moderator must always avoid dismissive remarks or attempts to argue. We must all make the effort to listen to the worries of other people with attention and respect, trying to retain the valid part of their arguments, but without answering them or disagreeing with them. This meeting should conclude without offering any opportunity for sharing or replying to whatever has been said.

2. Pray about the matter, letting a few days or a certain amount of time to pass so we can assimilate things and not fall into the trap of “gut reactions”. It is important to create a calm atmosphere so that we can concentrate on listening sincerely to others, even though we may not agree with their opinions. Unless he is totally unbalanced, whatever my brother in community’s opinions may be, there will always be some truth in them. It is not enough to justify our rejection of his proposals by using superficial arguments.

3. During the course of a second meeting: each brother should express his feelings as a result of having listened to all the others, and also present the arguments (for and against) which occur to him regarding the various options which have been proposed. No debates are allowed and when everyone has finished only clarifications are permitted. We must **try to discern what is best for the community and what we are being called upon to do (God’s will): a common discernment of a common good**. All of this presupposes a fore-going attitude of “relative indifference” (i.e., of being willing to accept the decision of the community as a whole).

4. Prayer, leaving a couple of days or a certain period of time for prayerful assimilation.

5. During the course of a third meeting: spending time in dialogue about everything which has been brought up previously and trying to find guidelines for community consensus, with each brother indicating which position he prefers.

6. Deciding what to do and what appears to be the most appropriate way for doing it:

- Taking a vote as a way of expressing the maximum degree of consensus, in which case it is a good idea to limit the scope of the vote and to specify clearly how it is to be implemented.
- There is also the possibility of the superior taking the decision or delegating the task to a group.

DIALOGUES FOR SHARING LIFE EXPERIENCES

It is a good idea to initiate this type of dialogue with the younger monks (simply-professed and recent solemnly-professed). Once people have become used to the idea, it can then be extended to the rest of the community divided into groups. No-one should be forced to take part in this type of dialogue. The more negatively inclined should either not participate at all or be placed in separate groups because they would destroy this type of dialogue from the very start.

1. These should be small dialogue groups and their members should remain fixed for a long period of time, along the lines of the following characteristics:
 - Groups of no more than 6-7 people
 - Freely constituted (initially at least, it is a good thing to aim for a certain harmony in terms of age or personal character)
 - Frequency: one meeting once or twice a month,
 - The novices should form a separate group, because their provisional status could be an obstacle for the brothers who are incorporated by virtue of their profession.
 - These dialogues are not for dealing with concrete themes (if the abbot wants opinions on a specific matter, then this should be dealt with by other groups), nor do they concern matters of observance or any practical aspects (liturgy etc.). They are not even for theoretical discussions with a view to producing practical conclusions. The object is rather to create a spontaneous atmosphere for deepening our fraternal relationships, for getting to know each other and for sharing the things we feel or experience, and nothing else: to share what we live so as to grow in mutual love. Just to give a few examples the following types of subject can be explored:
 - What attracted me most to the monastery in the first place, the story of my vocation etc.
 - The positive attitudes I value most in my community and others which I find less acceptable (without naming names). What positive and negative attitudes do I experience regarding the community. The way I feel in community, etc.
 - To talk about various types of emotions and to share certain experiences.
 - An expert can be invited to talk to the community about a certain topic and perhaps suggest themes for later group discussion.
 - Openly sharing our day-to-day feelings (pain, anger, frustration, etc., which are caused perhaps by the attitudes of specific brothers or by certain community situations), being aware that these feelings are mine, even though they may be provoked by other people. This means that both sides can assume their responsibility without feeling wounded. We should avoid value judgements in the form of expressing negative evaluations of another brother's attitude or trying to identify his deep-seated intentions....., it is enough simply to express the suffering I have felt in that situation because of his

attitude. This can be a useful form of fraternal correction without directly accusing anyone in particular, by simply expressing our personal reaction to certain realities.

- Once we have acquired a certain experience with this type of dialogue it will be possible to create pairs of brothers to talk about the qualities they see in each other (positive or negative) and subsequently bringing the whole group together so as to share impressions and compare things with everyone else's point of view. It is important to create a charitable and relaxed atmosphere. This type of dialogue is to help us get to know one another better, as well as to teach us how to accept other people with all their little foibles.
- We should always endeavour to deal with positive subjects and avoid opening up old wounds wherever possible.
- We should not talk about people who are not in the group.
- At each meeting a member of the group can act as moderator. This function should not be imposed from outside.
- Recourse may be had to external assistance at the beginning, but we should trust in the community and in Our Lord who is present in our midst.

DIALOGUE ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD

This type consists of the community as a whole, or in groups, meeting once a week to share on the scripture readings proclaimed in the Eucharist. A good time is before Compline, beginning by reading the texts and then leaving each person is free to express what the readings say to him. It is a matter of sharing the Word of God in a simple way, not offering formal classes on exegesis. By accepting what the brothers have to say we strengthen our community bonds and grow in mutual acceptance. This is not a context for debate or discussion, unless of course something really outrageous is said. Also, it does not matter if some of the time is spent in silence: this should not be a cause for worry because we also need to work on this aspect of dialoguing too.

FUNCTIONAL OR VALUE-ORIENTED DIALOGUES

These are the types of dialogue we normally organize when we need to talk about the various different aspects of our community life (liturgy, financial questions, etc.), or with a view to preparing the house report for the General Chapter, or in reply to questionnaires sent out by regional conferences and so forth.

FRATERNAL CORRECTION

- If correction is going to be productive, the brother involved needs to feel that he is accepted. Sometimes negative forms of behaviour are really veiled calls for affection.
- If we persevere with the groups mentioned above, then it will be much easier to deal with correction, since the greater the trust we feel the easier the process will be.
- On days of recollection it is a good idea to have a community meeting to look at the various values of our monastic life in a systematic way. This presentation could be prepared by two brothers each time, their task being to present the theme to the community. The aim is to evaluate how we put these values into practice, leaving the abbot to act as moderator.
- Allow for the possibility in Compline – taking advantage of the general silence and relative darkness for any brother who so wishes to ask forgiveness for something negative he may have said or done during the day, without naming any brother in particular (the person in question will know he is being referred to and avoiding mentioning his name will make it less embarrassing).

Isidoro M^a Anguita

Abbot of St^a M^a de Huerta