

RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS Creative Animation of Fraternities

Some inspiration to the Superiors to guide the Fraternities

Introduction: The specific mission of the Religious superior involves three main dimensions:

1. *cura personalis* (spiritual governance),
2. *cura apostolica* (apostolic animation), and
3. *cura communitatis* (community animation).

1. The role and the mission of the Local Superior can be properly understood only with a spiritual vision of the Congregation as primarily God's work and not human device.
2. The Task of the Superior
for the mission: commissioning and discerning
for the preservation and growth of the community
for the care of the sick and of the health of all
for the care of temporal things
for the union of the body of the Congregation by means of obedience
by means of communication

I. Governance

1. Focus should be on **leadership**. This is different from **Governance**. **Governance** is the use of institutions and structures of authority to coordinate or control activity,

While **Leadership** is the quality of encouraging, identifying, and directing apostolic energies for the good of souls and of the entire body of the Congregation and its mission. Hence, inspiring, animating, loving, caring, giving without considering the cost and bringing others to do the same.

2. Hence the Religious Superior needs to go beyond legalistic governance structures. It requires Superiors to be leaders by reclaiming the Founder's values in their quest for leadership skills and management techniques, exercising a consultative, participative, transparent and accountable leadership, marked by principles of delegation of responsibility and subsidiarity so as to obtain the involvement and commitment of all, through dialogue and sustained conversation.

3. Some of the Leadership values are;
 - (a) love for the person of Christ leading to having the mind of Christ.
 - (b) availability as freedom for service.
 - (c) sense of universality: transcending human barriers of discrimination.
 - (d) spirit of gratuity.
 - (e) sense of oneness among all the fraternity.
 - (f) sensitivity to what is truly human.
 - (g) discerning attitude.
 - (h) delicacy in the matter of chastity.
 - (i) sense of the Congregation.
4. The Superior may not necessarily possess the high profile qualities and qualifications of a business executive; but he must have the spiritual qualities of personal credibility, sincerity in his vulnerability and basic skills to lead the community. Superiors who lack those skills tend either to abdicate their authority and let things drift or are autocratic in their use of power.
5. The main task of the Superior is **animation** of the local community. The importance of an effective Superior for the apostolic vitality and the witnessing value of the community, thus making the **community** not just a means for the mission but the **mission itself**.
6. The distinguishing mark of the Religious Superior is his love for the members of his community. Therefore he builds them up as religious and apostles and gains intimate knowledge of each member through regular spiritual and personal conversation and dialogue.
7. He leads the community in the Religious way of life through participatory governance, discernment, good relationship with the Local Church and Ongoing Formation.
8. Too often our community meetings tend to handle only administrative and business matters. Our communities rarely practice the kind of Religious "spiritual conversations" or "faith sharing" which is the basis of genuine discernment. Our communities in addition to the regular monthly recollections, could occasionally take off for a day and go away to a lonely place to spend an hour in personal prayer on a common theme followed by sincere, intense sharing or conversations.

9. Relationship with DoWs necessarily bears tension and has to be resolved. Hence ongoing formation and frequent meetings with the Provincial and other local superiors are necessary. Superiors need to be accepting, appreciative, encouraging towards their collaborators, delegating responsibility wherever possible, respecting the principle of subsidiarity, promoting greater participation and at the same time demanding accountability and coordinating apostolic activity. He needs the courage and ability to communicate, coordinate, confront and conciliate. He needs to confront individualism and reconcile differences and manage conflicts.
10. Mutual relations between superiors and DoWs have been a thorny issue for several decades. The public and high profile image of DoWs can result in relegating the Superiors to the role of a weak spiritual animator of the community. This is not in keeping with Religious way of proceeding where the Superior is the guarantor of the mission in the apostolic work entrusted to the community, the visible sign of the community's union of hearts and minds around a shared mission. (Need for Vision and Mission Statement)
11. Governance in the Religious Community is much more than management and administration. It is based on the spirituality of mission and discernment, in which those governed as well as those governing are involved in a relationship of love, trust and transparency.

II. Some Guidelines for Local Superiors

- I. The superior has **authority**, which he must not hesitate to exercise but as a service, in a setting of informal, fraternal and familiar relationships. However he has a right and a duty to take decisions by involving his Companions in a participative process. The authority of the superior extends to each individual member of the community and to the community as a whole and all its apostolic works, with due regard to the principles of participative administration, delegation of responsibility and subsidiarity as well as the necessary autonomy of DoWs. The role of the Superior is not only to govern his Community with authority but also to provide leadership in the apostolic, communitarian and spiritual dimensions of the Religious life.

2. The Superior's authority enables him to look to the spiritual development, apostolic fruitfulness, fulfillment of the community's mission and providing of all helps, even material ones for this purpose. He will confirm this authority by personal example, by his dedication to the duties of his office, his love for the Congregation, his assiduous prayer and his sacrifice for the community. The more the superiors lead by example the more effective will their governance be.
3. In the exercise of his authority the Superior will use the means of love and trust. Sometimes it is better for the Superior to be misled by excess of confidence and run the risk of being taken for a fool than to give the impression that he does not trust his brethren. He cannot be the impersonal administrator who sacrifices persons to an exaggerated ideal of efficiency. He must know how to combine kindness and love with firmness in demanding even difficult things.
4. Governance is the primary task of the Superior. That is his main apostolate, from which he will not allow himself to be distracted by other concerns, not even the sacred ministry.
5. The mode of governance in Religious Communities is spiritual. The Superiors direct their companions not so much with external regulations as by discerning love. For this purpose there must be a sincere, open and trusting conversation between the Superior and the companions. The highest form of this dialogue is the manifestation of conscience - a frank friendly, confidential and continuous dialogue.
6. Dialogue of such an intimately personal nature demands that the Superior should be and is always known to be a man who maintains absolute confidentiality. The Superior may use that information to take appropriate decisions for the good of the person, of the community, the Province, the Congregation and the Church.
7. The Superior is the guarantor of the mission of the Congregation in a particular local community. He is also the bearer of the authentic tradition derived from the original charism of the Founder, from which he is not at liberty to depart. Although an individual member may receive his mission from the Provincial, it is the Local Superior who has to guide the individual to fulfill that mission according to the local circumstances, clarifying it further and integrating it within the

mission of the community and of the Congregation. Therefore, apostolic discernment is the first task of the Superior. He should provide an atmosphere of apostolic discernment in the community by ensuring adequate spiritual resources needed for the apostolate.

8. In the discharge of his primary responsibility of facilitating individual and community apostolic discernment the Superior needs to have regular personal conversation with the individuals and hold frequent community consultations. He needs to encourage the shy, urge the hesitant, restrain the headstrong and ensure that each individual finds his due place in the community and its apostolate. He will make himself available to the members of the community as much as possible for a personal conversation. He will have a special care for those who for apostolic and other reasons live outside the community.
9. The superior is responsible for the spiritual vitality of the community. He should encourage and challenge individual members to progress in the life in the Spirit, closer union with God and more intimate relationship with Christ and a more radical availability to mission, ensuring that everyone spends time in personal prayer, makes annual retreat and uses other means of spiritual aliveness. He will also ensure that everyone gets spiritual direction (Young Priests) . He will provide conditions that foster personal and community prayer, sacramental life and communication on a spiritual level, ensuring suitable balance between prayer, work and leisure. The atmosphere in the community should be such that it provides necessary privacy and opportunities for intellectual, spiritual and cultural development of members.
10. The Superior will see to it that the community has a daily order of time, which should include daily common prayer, common meals and recreations (eg. SAC order of breakfast, lunch & supper). In the same way a calendar of events on a monthly basis could be drawn up.
11. The local superior needs to promote ongoing formation of the community members and thus encourage them to have personal contact with others especially the poor and the suffering. He will periodically conduct community evaluation of the life style and religious spirit of the community, particularly with regard to the works of charity for the poor. He will also foster greater hospitality and openness in the community.

12. It is the Superior's duty to ensure that the norms and practices of the Church & the Congregation are observed. This includes also liturgical norms prevailing in a particular local church, and also participation in the meetings and functions of the local Church and other Religious.
13. The superior will administer the temporal goods of the community with great fidelity and without seeking personal privileges; not as a proprietor but as a steward. He is assisted in this by other officials of the community (eg. House Minister, Treasurer, Farm Manager etc.) He will periodically communicate to the community the financial situation and accounts of income and expenditure (Monthly statement of accounts could be displayed).
14. He will meet with his Consultors regularly and at least once a month and oftener if necessary and useful for the purpose of securing their individual and collective advice on important matters. The agenda of each meeting should be communicated in advance, the minutes of the meetings are to be recorded and read out at a subsequent meeting. He will willingly listen to the advice freely and spontaneously given by any member of the community even the most junior ones or those who may not be too prominent in the community. (eg. Regent, Cook, etc.)
15. The superior should have regular community meetings, preside over them and actively participate in the deliberations. Some of the community meetings should also offer an opportunity for communication at a spiritual level as well as for shared reflection on community's vision, mission, work and life style. These community meetings could also be real apostolic discernment in common provided there are proper dispositions. This is not so easy but our communities must seek to acquire these dispositions, because such community discernment is the highest form of dialogue.
16. The Superior is a link between the local community and other communities in the Province as well as with the Province as a whole, indeed the whole Congregation. Therefore he must faithfully attend all the meetings convened by the Provincial to foster union and solidarity among local Superiors. He will also foster frequent and familiar exchange of information and ideas among the communities and will see to it that the members from other communities are lovingly received, entertained and assisted.

17. It is the duty of the Superior to keep his community mindful of the duty of gratitude and affection towards the benefactors, fellow workers and friends. He must be ready to offer the hospitality of the house to the fellow priests, religious, benefactors, lay collaborators and employees.

Conclusion: Finally it should be noted that, what is more important is not written regulations but the law of charity and love that the Holy Spirit writes and engraves on human hearts.