

Key moments in the life of the local community

Practical Guide for the Local Superior
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Apostolate

92. The service of the local superior is not limited just to community living. In fact, in an apostolic society, there should be no juxtaposition between community and apostolate, since we are a community for the mission.

93. The superior should encourage the community to grow in awareness of the real life-situation of the people to whom it is sent and among whom it lives, especially the poor of the area and the causes of their poverty. Their real life-situation should be the point of departure for the local community plan and should also help shape the lifestyle of the confreres of the house.

94. At times it may be necessary for the local superior, with the community, to question the mission of the house or of a particular confrere within it and begin to reflect with the Visitor about whether this mission is really in conformity with the end of the Congregation of the Mission and the orientations of the Provincial Plan.

95. The superior should encourage, within the local community, a deepened awareness of the communal dimension of our mission. The members of the community should regularly share about what they are experiencing in their mission: their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, their discoveries, their questions, the challenges they face.

Prayer

96. The local superior, with the confreres, will organize the times and manner in which the community will pray together. Just as prayer lies at the heart of the Christian experience, so too does it lie at the heart of community life, whether it be the celebration of the Eucharist (C 45 § 1), or the Liturgy of the Hours in the morning and evening (C 45 § 3), or mental prayer in common (C 47 § 1), or faith-sharing (C 46). The style and the rhythm of community prayer will not be identical in all communities because of differences in the number of confreres and their apostolates. Nonetheless, a community must pray together, no matter what its size or shape.

97. In speaking of prayer, our Constitutions place special emphasis on the word of God (C 46), as did St. Vincent (CR II, 1; SV XII, 114f). In this, they echo the long tradition of the Church encouraging *lectio divina*. Some local communities use this method to aid in the common preparation of the Sunday homily.

98. The superior, with the members of the community, should be creative in regard to the style and rhythm of its prayer, deciding not only on an order of day for its daily prayer but also, for example, scheduling a periodic community concelebration of the Eucharist, or a monthly day of recollection together, or two or three days every few months for a more prolonged time of prayer and faith-sharing. It is important that busy schedules and a wide variety of commitments do not become obstacles to the community's finding time to pray together. A community cannot live without drinking from this source.

99. In an ongoing way, the superior, with the members of the community, should seek to understand and live out more deeply the spirituality that is particular to the Congregation of the Mission, with its special focus on Christ as the Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor.

Meals

100. Especially in communities where confreres have schedules that conflict with meal times or where they are dispersed, the superior, with the members of the community, will fix times when all commit themselves to being together for meals. In community life, meals are a privileged moment for listening, conversation, sharing information, and for real communication. Meals eaten too quickly, and with almost no conversation, lose their human dimension and become merely a time for consuming food. On the contrary, meals should provide a space in the course of the day where we share genuinely with one another as brothers.

101. The superior, with the community, should welcome at table its collaborators, friends, relatives, and members of the Vincentian Family.

Meetings

102. Since meetings are an important time for conversation, communication, and fraternal relationships, the superior should be alert to giving everyone the chance to express himself and to be listened to. For that reason it may sometimes be necessary for him to restrain the verbal zeal of one confrere or to encourage another more reserved confrere to speak. A community where the confreres' liberty to speak or their capacity to listen are at a low ebb is not really a fully living body.

103. Our meetings should not merely focus on deciding upon an order of day or dividing up tasks to be done. The superior should also arrange meetings which involve faith-sharing and a periodic evaluation of our community life and apostolic commitments. Such meetings will heighten our consciousness of being together for the mission and enable us to search together for ways of building up a genuine community for the mission.

104. It would be a mistake for a local superior to dream about living in an ideal community without tension. He should not ignore the existence of conflicts. If they remain latent and unaddressed they may one day explode violently. The superior should invite the community to address conflict in order to arrive at a resolution. He can be a mediator, helping confreres to deal with conflicts and calling those involved to speak with one another and seek reconciliation. Our local communities, in fact, should be places where pardon and reconciliation readily take place both in the form of face-to-face forgiveness (C 24, 3°) and in the form of sacramental reconciliation (C 45 § 2).

105. In the spirit of St. Vincent (CR II, 17), the superior and all members of the local community should be disposed to help one another through fraternal correction (C 24, 3°). Such correction should be offered gently and humbly. Constructive help offered to a confrere at the right time can be a great gift, assisting him to overcome inappropriate behavior.

106. Our decisions will be enriched if we search for the truth with one another and openly express our varied points of view. The confreres of a house have the right to play an active role in the decision-making process, and should also be active in carrying out what is decided.

Within this context, the ultimate decision pertains to the local superior, especially when reflection within the community does not issue in a clear consensus.

Relaxation

107. The superior should encourage the community to be creative in finding ways of relaxing together, since this is one of the ways in which we create community. Of course, not everyone relaxes in the same way. But relaxing together, speaking during or after a meal, conversing in the evening, arranging an outing — all these can be factors in maintaining balance and creating unity in our life together. Communities where laughter and good humor do not exist will surely be sad communities.

108. If the superior himself is distant or depressed, the community will not readily be a place of joy and warm fraternal relationships. If the superior is close to the confreres and attentive to each, respects them profoundly, knows how to listen, dialogues openly, and spends relaxed moments with them, he will be able to create an atmosphere of confidence and joy

Nurturing new life

109. The superior and the members of the local community should concretize how they will promote vocations to the priesthood and brotherhood (S 36) and help in the formation of candidates for the Congregation of the Mission. Mindful of the corresponsibility of all the members of the province in this regard (C 93), the local community plan should specify matters such as:

- how the confreres will search out and encourage vocations to the priesthood and brotherhood in the Congregation (S 37 § 1);
- how they will provide ongoing guidance and support to interested candidates (S 37 § 2);
- who, among the members of the local community, will have a special responsibility for coordinating vocational promotion;
- when the community will pray together for vocations (Mt 9:37; cf. S 36);
- how interested young people might participate and be accompanied in the mission of the local community (S 36 and S 37 § 1);
- how, if the Visitor should send to the local community some of those who are already in initial formation, they will be integrated into and accompanied in our life and mission.