

12 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord, ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. ¹²For just as the body is one

and has many members, and though many, are one body, the one Spirit we were all Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹³For in baptism we were all made to drink of one body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁴If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁵If the eye says, "Because I am not a hand, the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶If the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense be? ¹⁸God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. ²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Mere Community

1COR12

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Contributors

Author - Marcus Foo

Editors - James Yap, Jason Lim, Timothy Soo, Madeleine Tan

Photographers - Benjamin Lai, Brandon Ng

Designer - Jeslynn Seah

COMPASSIONATE HUMILITY
COMMUNION FELLOWSHIP
UNCONDITIONAL GENTLE REMINDER FRUITS ROOTS SYNERGY
PILGRIMAGE COMMITMENT GROWTH
SUPPORT AUTHENTICITY
JOY **FAMILY** LIFE HEART

ONE COR TWELVE
A COMMUNION OF COMMUNITIES

ACCEPTANCE STRUGGLES STRENGTH
CHALLENGING VULNERABLE SEEKING HOME DISCERNING DARING SWEET!
REFUGE HOPE LOVE RADICAL RESPECT BOND
FRIENDSHIP BROTHERHOOD FOUNDATION CROSS
JOURNEY UNITY
ACCOUNTABILITY FORGIVENESS COMFORT





Author's Note

I have not encountered so much joy in any other written work. Being the recipient of all the testimonies, sharing and thoughts of God and community, I had the humbling privilege of seeing a big picture of Communion slowly rolled out. Through the generosity of many individuals under the 1 Cor 12 umbrella, which consists of the communities of In One Spirit ("IOS"), Brothers and Sisters in Christ ("BASIC"), One with the Lord ("OWL"), Cornerstone, Leaven of God ("LOG"), Youth Vineyard ("YV") and Mustard Seed Community ("MSC"), which I will certainly attribute throughout the course of this book, I saw the faithfulness and creativeness of a God, who lavishly scattered amazing talents throughout the communities- of wisdom, writing, intellect, sensitivity, compassion, leadership and passion. God is indeed doing great things in SFX.

This book is about Community as we have experienced it. I did not endeavor to capture a universal or exhaustive idea of Community but naively hope that, through a mere snapshot, others might be curious enough to test it out for themselves what community really is. As the 1 Cor 12 formation team has wisely suggested, teachings are simply insufficient. Hard doctrine does not change lives. Personal encounter, testimonies, real-life and shared experiences are the ingredients to an accurate portrait of community living. I therefore should give much credit to the

formation team, consisting of its chairperson and its body of dedicated members. Together, they gave me a clear vision of how this book is to be crafted. Jessica Tan, in this regard, bears special mention. Her wisdom and energies to draw in inspirational pieces of work in that short and demanding space I had given her was invigorating. It was the necessary impetus for this work to take shape.

The "shape" of this book then is as follows. The dream of Community is first set out and in that light, the real purpose of Community – to make disciples – emerges. In order to make disciples, a Community is built on five essential pillars: prayer, scripture, the sacraments, evangelization and community living. Why "Mere Community"? Because community ought not to be the exception of Christian life, it should be the norm.

Finally, I must personally thank God and my community, Youthworks- eventually renamed MSC- for making this book such a personal piece of work. I have been in MSC since 2003. In a sense, this book was more than ten years in the making. The Divine Author behind this work, who in His wisdom gave me the front row seat to the drama of Community life by making me one of its protagonists, should therefore be the one receiving the full credit of this work.

Marcus Foo
Member of Mustard Seed Community

We dreamed a dream



A boy was looking at a sculptor's work and was curious – why were there so much chipping, scraping, mess and noise? What the sculptor did with the hammer and chisel did not make much sense to the boy then. A few days later, when the boy came back, he saw in the studio a majestic lion where the marble initially stood. In awe, he asked the sculptor, “Sir, how did you know that there was a lion in the marble?”¹

The story of Communities in the Church of St Francis Xavier (“SFX”) started on very similar grounds. The very first community, Youthworks, could be said to be chipping, scraping, mess and noise that made little sense to the people then. Yet, about a decade later, another community, LOG was to publicly and joyfully announce their own dream: to still be able to have their usual supper at the local prata shop about twenty years down (i.e. by 2030), with their families and in their respective vocations. Over ten years, seven other communities were raised together with Youthworks, which was renamed Mustard Seed Community (“MSC”). So, a similar question arises, “how did we know that the sculpture of Community was always in the marble of the Church of SFX?”

Like what the boy thought when he saw the sculpture, it was as though this idea of Community was there all this while. It lay dormant, waiting to gain expression and eventually found its way into the heart of the seven communities in SFX today. These communities, each with its own richly textured histories and unique personalities possess an interwoven connectedness to each other. MSC could therefore be the place by which the dream of communion could be said to have started. It was in a way, a project that was to be tested

over the course of a decade. A 2002 report on the “Current Status for the Archdiocesan Youth Office” is rather telling of how MSC (then called Youthworks) defined itself:

“We are a pretty unique group of youths and young adults because we are not bound by any common interest or hobby. The only factor, which has drawn us together and keeps us together, is our encounter of our Lord Jesus and His saving Love which continues to inspire us to give of ourselves to Him through one another. As such, we are not involved in any specific ministry and are not confined to any one aspect of service or spirituality. Our community is modeled very much upon the idea of St Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, in his letter to the Corinthians, which says that we are all One Body with many parts (1 Cor 12 :12). We believe that each of us has certain God given talents, which can be used for the building of our community and each of us tries to use these as truthfully as we can. The most important aspect of our community life is prayer and support for one another and the fact that every talent of ours is useless individually and is vital in the overall functioning of the community. Sharing the word of God every Tuesday night and our Community prayer time on Sundays are of utmost important and are the times we come together to listen to God’s guidance. The truth is that we experience and serve God in a routine of prayer, fellowship and journeying. We also place much emphasis on intercessory prayer when we come together to pray for one another. The fruits of our community cannot

¹ Henri J M Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, p. 84

be judged based on projects or visible products but by the lives which have been changed and hearts which have been touched. We hope to always be a community that welcomes anyone regardless of race or religion, to support them and share with them the love of our Lord Jesus Christ by just being there for them. We love because He loved us first (1 John 4:19)."

Three points ought to be highlighted from the 2002 report. First, MSC was to draw a clear distinction between ministry and Community. In that regard, MSC decisively chose the latter as their model and reason for being together. Secondly, that MSC was in no way going to be measured in secular terms, i.e. by the efficiency and success of its projects. Thirdly, the point of unity between all its members, in spite of their different personalities and characteristics, would be **Christ**.

What the 2002 report may not have shown was the intentional nature of Community. There is certainly no reason to assume that the communities in SFX spontaneously happened. Even if it did, continuity required effort. Clear evidence that the founding members fought for its existence and continuation were when leaders chose to debate the painful but fundamental question of "what is community" late into the night. Apart from that, issues such as disappointments, unrealistic expectations and miscommunications had to be constantly addressed because of the very personal dimension of community. In view of all these difficulties, some of us eventually gave up on the dream altogether. Others held on – believing that this dream of Community was not merely a product of human hands. So, when LOG made its declaration to six other communities in such a decisive way – that they saw themselves still living life and sharing it after they had all gone on into different vocations, professions – this was a powerful spiritual affirmation, an unmistakable sign that the dream of Community was not temporally fashionable. It was a clear force in the youths and young adults of SFX which translated into a living and breathing reality. We had entered into a shared and living memory. Community, became much more than an additional activity on Sunday – it became an entire way of life.



In One Spirit

A heart of togetherness



In a powerful moment, the community of OWL witnessed solidarity on 27 July 2013. Whilst on retreat, it was revealed that persons from the other communities had “adopted” each of OWL’s members and were tasked to pray for these members throughout the week. Further, each one of these spiritual “foster parents” had to prepare a gift to affirm this person’s place in the larger community. OWL received a message from the rest of the communities that said, “you and I are a part of each other – we are one”.

What is it about togetherness that touches our deepest selves? What is it about belonging that inspires such great action for us to move and to act?

Community brings about togetherness because it is a place where we can bring who we are. When we bring all that is broken and wounded within us, our hungers and thirsts, we bring about a place where we can witness the power of a compassionate God. When Jesus saw the leper, he was moved by compassion.² When Jesus saw those who were hungry, He worked the miracle with the five loaves and two fishes to feed them.³ When the blind, paralyzed and dead were brought to Him, Jesus felt their pain in the depths of his heart.⁴

When the apostles did everything “with one heart”, the Lord added to their number.⁵ This “heart” is the metaphor to symbolize all that a person is – his life, aspirations, desire, vocation, failing, inadequacy, weakness, shame – his soul. In other words, the apostles brought community about by their act of sharing who they really were.

A community that courageously reveals the pains of the heart allows others to take off their masks of superiority and false identities. By being who we really are, we draw nearer to each other. The distance caused by miscommunication, pride, fear and competition gradually disappears. We build unity. Pope John Paul II states that Communion is found in the supreme model of unity, which is one God in three persons.⁶ But this can be painful. Born with different personalities and coming with unique histories, it often feels like whilst there is an inner call towards togetherness, there is concurrently a deep rebellion in us that strives to protect our uniqueness from being stifled by others. Seen from these lenses, we sometimes ask ourselves whether this dream of Communion is something we would have to eventually wake up from. It is here that many leaders have been disillusioned and saddened.

² Mark 1:41

³ Mark 8:1-10

⁴ Matthew 14:14

⁵ “⁴⁴ And all who shared the faith owned everything in common; ⁴⁵ they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. ⁴⁶ Each day, **with one heart**, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; ⁴⁷ they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved.” (Acts 2:44-47)

⁶ Beyond human and natural bonds, already so close and strong, there is discerned in the light of faith, a new model of the unity of the human race, which must ultimately inspire our solidarity. This supreme model of unity, which is a reflection of the intimate life of God, one God in three persons, is what Christians mean by the word ‘communion’- John Paul II, Encyclical letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*

Principles towards Communion

We therefore propose the following principles in guiding our paths towards deeper union.

Firstly, we have to embrace the different stages of life that persons and communities are at. Deep within the call to community is an invitation not an imposition. Respect for each other cannot happen if we only seek uniformity and are unable to embrace diversity. Compassion can only come about when one genuinely holds the other through the fear that differences often bring up.

Secondly, commitment is required for security and stability. This nurtures a long lasting relationship that is borne of trust. Genuine relationships and unity simply cannot happen when persons are not willing to say concretely, “I will be there”. Divisions occur when persons do not value commitment, and the resulting pain goes beyond the disappointment of a broken promise. In the absence of deep commitment, there is a wounding because a deeply cherished value is cheapened. The pain is simply that “I thought you would have valued this the way I did”.

Thirdly, deeper union is achieved through humility and openness to challenge. Unity is fragile and sincere self-giving is costly because it often means that our egos will have to be diminished. In this regard, it is only the truth that will set us free. Without truth, we create

false gods out of leadership. We enthrone ourselves as the chief arbiter of right and wrong. We fail to listen to the cries of others and where our actions have caused division. We refuse to heal and deny others the right to be healed.

Finally, there must be a genuine sense of responsibility for my brother. This responsibility means, “your well-being is important to me”. It means “your aches are not yours alone, but mine. And my aches – I share with you too”. Community serves the Kingdom of God by gathering persons who lift one another up when the other falls, who keep each other warm in the cold, and who through togetherness form a threefold cord that is not quickly broken.⁷ Together we dream of a place of joy and where the Good News – of the victory of life over death and the Resurrection – is being proclaimed. Community promises to be a place of encounter – persons gathered together in complete weakness but with the faith that Christ will make all things new, whole and perfect. When we begin speaking about our deep human needs without demanding that the other meets them, when we begin expressing who we are knowing that the love we seek is a Divine one, we begin seeing that we are more alike than apart. In vulnerability, we draw together. That is why the Son of Man draws all men to himself⁸ when he is raised up on the cross.⁹ Through a vulnerable God, we see how we are all called into communion.



⁷ Eccl 4:9-12

⁸ John 12:32

⁹ John 3:14

One with the Lord

Community & Discipleship

“Take the sandals off your feet, for the place on which you stand is Holy Ground”¹⁰

“I did not come here to interrupt your way of life; I came here to enter into your way of life”, said the priest in his homily explaining the significance of Moses taking off his sandals. Community is a way of life. And those who join do not interrupt that way of life – they enter into it. They enter into a path of discipleship.

No real discussion about discipleship can begin without an important sharing about choice. At the heart of the call to discipleship is a deliberate decision and commitment. Neither can happen without an intentional reflection on the things that we hold dear – our priorities and values.

On 14th April 2013, the communities of 1 Cor 12 came together and we each held up a cross and verbalized our personal choice to follow Jesus. It was powerful because a King was enthroned – we allowed Jesus’s reign to take hold of our lives. Together, we witnessed the Kingdom of God becoming real when others came to personalize their own commitments and in their own words, “it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me”.¹¹ When we say yes, we enter into the life of Christ. We begin a journey of discipleship – the same journey that the disciples were invited to take.

Journeying in community

It is this “yes” that starts our “journeying” in community. Journeying is a personal encounter with God through others who are willing to bear witness to Christ. A journey, then, consists of two aspects, commonly referred to as the “vertical” and the “horizontal” aspects.

The vertical aspect is our personal relationship with God, who first approaches us in love and invites our free response. It is where we uniquely encounter Him speaking to “me”, gradually revealing Jesus – a man of flesh, a brother and a friend. It is where a person

finds, within himself, a deep recognition that he is chosen by God. Being first loved by God, a person then sees himself capable of loving and ultimately, of giving ourselves to Him.

However, this recognition easily fades into the deeper recesses of our being as it battles against the pressures of a world that may be harsh, unkind and frantic. This is where the horizontal aspect comes in. The horizontal part of journeying is about companions. Just as companions marked Jesus’ life (even His carrying the Cross together with Simon of Cyrene), we similarly need others to shoulder our crosses with us and to point the way. We need others and are needed by them. We must care enough to share a God who is real and present with us. Unless we share, God is only known in the abstract and remains Word. Journey, therefore is that sacred space where the Word is made flesh.

Journeying inspires others because it brings the Christian experience beyond obligations and rituals. In that way, Christ remains a relevant and deep reality that calls for our response. Journeying means that there are brothers and sisters who care for us and will therefore not shy away from challenging us to seek Him. Therefore, through journeying, there is a consistent openness to truth.

We practise the revealing of truths to others through affirmation. Affirmation is not about mere recognition of gifts. Neither is it about only “seeing the cup half full”. Rather, it is about unveiling a fundamental truth that we are all born in God’s image. There is a painful reality that our identities are buried under many shades of half-truths. Whilst the voice from heaven states “You are the Beloved”¹², louder voices silence this by screaming at us “you are only as good as your possessions”, “you will only be as good as others say you are” and “you are only as lovable as your gifts”. Often, the persons who hold authority in our lives – parents, siblings, teachers, colleagues – incidentally become the instruments that deliver these painful messages. When this happens, our identities shrink

¹⁰ This chapter was inspired by Father Ambrose Vaz’s homily at St Francis Xavier on 3rd March 2013.

¹¹ Galatians 2:20

¹² Mark 1:11



away from the First Truth of Belovedness and instead yield to acquisitions, achievement and competition in a desperate attempt to hear that we are enough. Journeying must therefore be a practice of truths spoken in love. Affirmations, then, mean the dispelling of the half-truths and reminding us of the First Truth beneath all these layers.

Journeying, however, cannot be reduced to mere sentimentality. To begin journeying, a person must be empowered to take responsibility over his or her life. In journeying with community, each person must be further empowered with responsibility over his brothers and sisters in the community. Journeying is therefore a process of maturation, which gradually opens one up to risks and changes. In May 2013, the community of YV experienced a happy problem: they received an influx of new persons who had heard about the community and who were eager to join. Some within YV struggled with this influx. When new persons enter, the unfamiliar dynamics that arise can often threaten our sense of security. In a collective and discerned decision, YV decided that these new persons would have to undergo a 6 month induction period, where both the new could be acquainted with the culture and the old could come to gradually receive the new. Indeed, maturity requires a patience that balances

both our need for a sense of home as well as to be open to newness and life.

Community is to make disciples

What then is Community's role in this journeying process of discipleship?

Firstly, Community creates an indispensable place for being and not doing. When Jesus told a worried Martha that Mary, in choosing to sit at His feet and listen, had chosen rightly¹³, we see that before doing anything we must first be willing to present ourselves to God and listen to Him. Participating in community is not contingent on a person's gift, profession or how sociable a person is. Rather, a place in community is created for someone looking for God. Usefulness and relevance are not criteria for membership.

To be with God is a key component of community. Without a heart open to Him and His voice, our personal agendas will instead take hold and become the priority. That is why, in 1 Cor 12, there are many times set aside for communal adoration. Being with God enables truths to be spoken to us, truths that we are first loved, worthy and precious, not by what we

¹³ Luke 10:38-42

do but because of who we are. It is a way of being fed and freed by God. “To be” is freedom from ambition, from insecurities of how others view us, and from the fear of worth that is earned only through doing and achieving.

Secondly, there is a sacred place given to praise and worship. Most sessions in the communities begin with a time of praise and worship. By this, we mean much more than just the playing of music for a feel-good experience. Rather, we mean that we want to create a place of gratitude, acknowledging that nothing can happen without Him, who is Providence. Through praise and worship, we make the personal surrender of ourselves – that is why we raise our hands. In bodily language, we sing “I offer my life to You”. Instead of bringing Him to us, praise and worship is a way of bringing ourselves into Him.

When we constantly participate in this spirit, we begin to weave praise and worship into the very fabric of our lives. We tell God we desire a life where all of our actions, work, relationships and other movements give him praise, hold Him in reverence, and acknowledge that He is a God of abundance. Praise and worship therefore becomes an expression of who we are as Christians – a people of praise and gratitude and a people whose lives are in worship.

Thirdly, there is a constant call to radical living. Being a Christian is demanding. Yet, it seems that God raises prophetic and courageous voices to pave the way when the night seems a little longer than the day and the darkness seems overwhelming. These messages on radical living are shared eloquently through persons going for vocation and discernment retreats, some of whom eventually become priests and missionaries. Lifestyles radically chosen for God become unforgettable and penetrating words of truth – radical living is for everyone.

In practical terms, how does a Community express being, praise and worship and the call to radical living? We see this in the five pillars that 1 Cor 12 dedicates itself to: prayer, scripture, living a sacramental life, community living and evangelization. The next few chapters will be a reflection of the role these pillars play.

Community is therefore a place and space intentionally created for journeying. It provides both structural support for disciples and serves to nourish new ones. When we take up the faith of our brothers and sisters as our personal responsibilities, walking with them through their Calvaries and waiting in patience for their Resurrection, we eventually come to see a God that is truly the Way, the Truth and the Life.¹⁴ Community therefore builds disciples through their following of Christ and His way of the Cross.



¹⁴ John 14:6

Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Praying together

If I had to pinpoint one moment to exemplify what prayer as a community means to me, it would have to be the occasions where my community gathered to pray for my mum's health. They organized sessions where my mum would attend and thereafter offer up divine mercies and pray over my mother as a community – Brandon Foo from BASIC

Prayer is listening

A praying community is a community open to listening. Despite the noises of the world, which drown out our personal voices and needs, there is a deep desire in each of us to return to the wellspring of life and to hear His voice telling us who we are. When we come together in prayer, we bring ourselves and hear God's voice, calling us by name – telling us of His love that was lavished on us even before we were born. At the heart of an intimate relationship with God is a desire to listen to Him.

In listening, we step out of our own shoes and into His. We see the world – our world – through His eyes.¹⁵ We see how our broken hearts can be made new and find hope through knowing that disappointment and failure are crooked lines that can be written straight.¹⁶ In prayer we find a deep consolation in the message that “I am chosen by God” and “I have a place in this world because God has given me one”. In listening, we come to see ourselves as God sees us. In encountering this deep encounter with God, we find ourselves moving from loneliness into solitude.¹⁷

When we begin opening ourselves to God in prayer, listening to others flows naturally. This is because

prayer puts us all on equal footing with respect to God – there is no competition, no seeking of validation from others and importantly, we recognize the Emmanuel – “God is with us” – in each one of our brothers and sisters. Because we are all on equal footing, we learn to respect another's viewpoint as an aspect of truth that could be a way of God speaking to us. That is why meetings can take many hours!

Prayer is discipline

Discipline in community prayer encourages discipline in an individual's prayer life. By discipline, it is important to clarify that there is no rod or stick to enforce such a rule. Rather, discipline – which is intertwined with discipleship – means commitment ingrained in our culture. It is the practice of every community to begin sessions, meetings, bible sharing and discussions in prayer. It is also the culture of every community to end every heated debate, moment of friction and time of reconciliation in prayer. Community adoration and intercession are also seeds sown into the soil of community life. To begin and end in prayer is to place our objectives and agendas at the foot of the Cross. To be immersed in prayer for others is to see each other as brothers and sisters centered in Christ.



¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, “The Christian can see with the eyes of Jesus and share in his mind, his filial disposition, because he or she shares in his love, which is the Spirit. In the love of Jesus, we receive in a certain way his vision. Without being conformed to him in love, without the presence of the Spirit, it is impossible to confess him as Lord”

¹⁶ Corrinne May, *Crooked Lines*, “God writes straight with crooked lines, He takes the mess we make in life, He turns our groaning into perfect rhyme. Hidden by the veil of time, the wisdom of His love's design, God writes straight with crooked lines... It's hard to see the picture when we've got our head to the ground, but the vision is perfect from Heaven looking down. There is a reason for every detour and every scar, His mercy has always been hidden in the stars.”

¹⁷ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, “To live a spiritual life we must first find the courage to enter into the desert of our loneliness and to change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden of solitude. The movement from loneliness to solitude, however, is the beginning of any spiritual life because it is the movement from the restless senses to the restful spirit, from the outward-reaching cravings to the inward-reaching search, from the fearful clinging to the fearless play.”



Prayer is surrender

A point should be made about surrender. The word “surrender” often gives us a sense of being powerless, of not being in control. This can be quite an uncomfortable or even a scary experience for some. It is scary if ultimately there is no one in the driver’s seat. However, a heart of surrender through prayer is to let God be the driver. For community, then, to be disposed to prayer is significant! Through prayer, we come to recognize that our communities belong to God. Our work in community – the laboring, the sacrifices, the commitment – is our participation in His work of Grace. It means in humility, we ask that our lowly gifts of bread and wine be the sacrifice divine. Here we realize that much of the life that we experience in Community is an act of Providence, and that our role is to be collaborators in God’s vineyard. Without prayer, the products of community will gradually be perceived as mere results of manipulation and control. We fall into legalism and become intolerant of those who are at different phases of growth. Our lowly gifts of bread and wine can therefore only become a proper offering when we are willing to let God take the driver’s seat. This means patience and faith, which is made possible only through a heart of prayer.

Prayer is giving

A culture of prayer is life-giving. About a decade ago, a group of individuals from Youthworks, like a fish out of water, approached a house where one of its members and his father resided. This house was no different from any other, apart from a recent tragic car accident that it had the misfortune of witnessing and the eventual burden of a lawsuit that it had to shoulder. Now, this group of individuals from Youthworks was entirely inadequate in responding to this deep crisis on three counts. First, the father was not a Catholic. To be a witness in such a context was to run the risk of either being scoffed at or at the very least, dismissed. Second, these individuals knew next to nothing about the law and certainly could not provide any legal advice. So apart from being dismissed, the responses that the individuals brought were clearly useless, from a practical perspective. Third, the head of the household – the non-Catholic father – was not to yield to any notion that he “needed” help, certainly not from younger persons and much less from an abstract being which he had not come to know or believe in. In some sense, Youthworks risked seeing a very offended recipient of its well-intentioned gesture.



So, Youthworks offered the one thing they knew how to – “could we pray for you?” Surprisingly, the father, who at one point in time resisted going to Church, agreed to be prayed with. A non-Catholic father, who for his entire life saw the faith as an observer, who saw Church as an obligation that his children had to comply with, experienced a moment of belief. And these individuals made the belief – that God is real – a possibility for him. A faith-filled community with a culture of prayer gives life by inspiring faith in others, such as a non-Catholic father.

A leader who prays

There is no better chapter to discuss the role of a leader in Community. Leaders are placed in a privileged position to institute changes that have widespread repercussions throughout community. Unless they have a praying heart – a heart that is open to the will of God – their agendas and selfishness quickly take over. Exhaustion quickly overwhelms and efficiency becomes the principal guide in decision-making processes. Wisdom begins with a listening heart – that was what Solomon asked of God.¹⁸ Thus, prayer must be at the center of leadership because of the three essential roles of a leader in Community.

Firstly, a leader must be guardian of a vision. A vision sets out the place that community aspires to be; its dream. A leader safeguards this vision by protecting community against influences that threaten to dilute the vision or make it more ambiguous in the minds of community members. This does not mean that a leader is being possessive or overprotective – a leader must effect changes that are sensitive and faithful to this vision. For instance, in MSC, there was a season in which individual retreats were promoted. This was certainly a good thing. But at an extreme, it also encouraged individual spirituality at the expense of the community’s prayer life. Guarding the vision does not mean rejecting these ideas altogether, but it requires wisdom to find the right balance.

Secondly, a leader must bring about unity. A spirit of dialogue cannot be fostered if leaders exude an air of superiority. If leaders claim to have “seen this and done that”, no new experiences and shared memories can really be forged. When leaders impose without caring to listen to others, enact rules without exception and focus on strict guidelines instead of mutual caring and responsibility, community can become an oppressive place. Unity is forged through shared responsibilities. Similarly, for unity in the Church, unless leaders come together to pray, communities will not draw together in a common vision. The act of praying together then is, again, a humble recognition that before God, all leaders are equal. All leaders must therefore be entitled to share with each other their pains in community and draw healing together. All leaders must be open to listening to the pains that other communities have caused and be open to forgiveness.

Thirdly, a leader must be able to define present realities. A shepherd knows his sheep. Again, this is the art of listening. God listened to the cries of His people and moved Moses to act. Listening to God in prayer is to sense the movements of people’s hearts. Has disillusionment set in? Is it time for the community, after long and exhausting hours of ministry, to have some rest? Is the community properly empowering and inspiring individuals? Because defining realities goes hand in hand with bringing matters into the light, it calls for a courageous leader. A leader must dare to speak the truth, to say “this is wrong” when the circumstances require it.

To guard the vision, bring about unity, and to define realities are spiritual tasks entrusted to the leaders. Because community is a deeply spiritual reality, a leader must place his personal spiritual life as priority. A leader who prays, draws on the unending reservoir of peace and joy, and through which he or she finds encouragement and sustenance. A leader with a heart of prayer, like Moses, hears a God who reveals the needs of His people. A leader who commits to prayer, like Isaiah, “prepares the way of the Lord”.

Cornerstone

The word of a rejected God¹⁹

To be grounded in Scripture is to be open to a well of living water. Each week, a day is set aside for bible sharing. Just as the disciples' "eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus" after Jesus broke bread²⁰, the weekly gospel text applies to any moment in our lives as we search for Christ who is eager to connect with us.

To be grounded in Scripture sharing is to acknowledge that sometimes, scripture may well be inaccessible for some and hence we need others to be the ones drawing water to quench our thirst. Timothy Soo from LOG shares,

In some sense, I may not know that God is speaking to me though the scripture passage until I hear it being given life through my community member's sharing and vice versa. And even when I am aware, the message is consistent and affirming between others and myself.

In MSC, we are humored by how Colin, a member of our community, often responds to another's sharing with the phrase "that struck me very hard". I should clarify that Colin does not comment on these sharings. Rather, a previous sharing is often the source from which he finds inspiration. Colin recounts that the Word of God is always alive and creative,

God truly speaks to me through Scripture. Even though there are passages that I have read many times, the phrase or word that speaks to me is mostly different each time I read it. Scripture brings different meanings into my life and also encourages me to persevere in my walk with the Lord. Apart from drawing strength from the Word itself, by sharing the Word, cell group sharing gives me hope and encouragement. At times, when I share my

reflection, new thoughts and insights come along as well, and it actually reveals new truths that I was initially unaware of. This goes to show the power of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures. Through bible sharing, I find hope when I see lives being changed through the Word, and how it has encouraged others to persevere in their walk as well.

Scripture sharing is the doorway to truth. In an ultimate declaration of truth, Jesus was presented to the crowd with the words "Ecce Homo" – behold the Man.²¹ He stood in front of a crowd like a mirror reflection that we cannot deny. Beaten, flogged, whipped – Jesus stood there as the honest reflection of Man, as we have become, because of sin. Likewise, the Word of God reveals the thoughts of our hearts.²² A community which places bible sharing as one of its fundamental pillars is constantly challenging its members with the question that Jesus asks, "Who do you say I am?"²³ Rachel from the community of BASIC, brings this to mind,

When I think of community and the Word of God, I immediately think of Friday bible sharing. More than a scheduled weekly catch up and check in with one another, it is there that we see Scripture leading the lives of our fellow brothers and sisters, be it through reflection – how Christ reveals Himself through His Word – or admitting challenges and difficulties we are facing. Someone once told me that the way to Jesus is to be Jesus, and it is here where we witness others experiencing Christ in their lives. Simply put, our fellowship is enriched and becomes a Christ-centered one when Scripture is experienced as an intimate encounter with God.

Encountering Jesus is to hear the words "peace be with you"²⁴, arising amidst the chaos and confusion of our

¹⁹ The direction as well as contents of this chapter were helpfully provided by a thoughtful piece from Corinne, who is from the Community of OWL.

²⁰ Luke 24:31

²¹ John 19:5

²² Hebrews 4:12

²³ Mark 8:29

²⁴ John 20:21

personal circumstances. The Word of God, spoken by God, provides a touch of calm over the raging waters caused by a world of impatience, restlessness and loneliness. When we pray over and with others, a general practice is to pass on scripture verses to the other in the hope that they would find nourishment and strength from it. For many of us, this Word is the ray of light in our darkness. So, not only does the Word of God reveal the thoughts of human hearts, it is the oasis for a heart thirsting in the desert and the calm in the storm.

The Rules of Sharing

Community can become a place of belonging where persons are not afraid to share. But we cannot simply demand this. Through the rules we abide by, we protect the sacredness of those sharing and give others the safety that they need to open up.

Firstly, what is shared in the group must stay in the group. Confidentiality is fundamental in a place where a person is encouraged to honestly walk out of shame, guilt and sin. Painful realities such as sexual struggles and torn relationships are brought out into the open. Because of the very sensitive nature of such sharing, it only takes one person who violates this cardinal rule to make others fearful of sharing vulnerably in the future. Communities such as YV, MSC and Cornerstone have therefore experimented with keeping certain days of sharing closed to persons not from the community. This practice is to give those in the community the assurance that it is alright to take off their masks. This is not to say that community has to close up on itself. Rather, it means that community must live with a to and fro of exclusivity and inclusivity and build both a place of welcome as well as a home.

The second rule is that no one ought to comment on another's sharing. This is a rule of mutual respect and is founded on humility. No one should be utilizing another's sharing to boast of their own knowledge. It is easy and tempting to do so because of the objective perspective that we seem to have retained when it is another person who shares. But sharing is an act of self-giving and a person has to be received as such. When we rush to guide and "correct", we are incapable of sitting with diversity and error. In our need for correctness, we run the risk of rejecting the person altogether. To sit with these struggles does not mean we condone it, but it does mean that we respect the various stages of life that persons are at.

The third practice (which is not so much a rule) is that we praise God at the end of each person's sharing. How do we as a community share vulnerability without sinking into sorrow? How does community lift someone who is on the brink of despair? How do we create a path of healing through the pains of loneliness and self-rejection? The short answer is: with a heart of gratitude. For Thomas, to touch Jesus' wounds and his side was the turning point of his faith. A wounded Christ becomes the key through which we turn our experiences into sources of hope and healing for others. We therefore rejoice in them. When we share, we do so with the aim of eventually understanding who we are through the eyes of Christ. When we share, we allow others to share in the joy of our personal encounters with Him.

The Fullness of Sharing

When Jesus "broke the bread and gave it to His disciples"²⁵, bread that was in one piece was multiplied. The paradox here is that in breaking and sharing, we find wholeness.

Breaking the Word is not just an intellectual exercise – to pray the Word involves imagination, creativity and affection. When we immerse ourselves in the Word of God and see the characters – Lazarus, Zacchaeus the tax collector, John the Baptist, the three wise men who brought their gifts to the infant Jesus, Peter who was called the "Rock", John who was called "the disciple that Jesus loved", Mary, the mother of God – we gain a more concrete and holistic experience of a Man born in a certain time and place and come to meet Jesus of Nazareth, a man of flesh. The Word of God is not merely read: it is seen, heard and felt. It requires a holistic response, not just a discussion of doctrine or theory.

We may feel that our seemingly tiny sharing applies only to us. Gradually, we learn that breaking the Word actually creates food for many. It is a heartening and amazing experience for another's sharing to resonate with us. Recognizing the similarity between each other's experiences helps us to discover more about ourselves. The Word is the voice of the Good Shepherd who gathers His flock to Him. When we care to share, we care for His flock that He entrusts us with. When we care to share, we point others to the Good Shepherd who would unceasingly leave the ninety-nine to search for the one lost sheep. In this process, we also discover that the lost sheep²⁶ within ourselves is found.

²⁵ Matthew 26:26

²⁶ Luke 15:4

Leaven of God

The outward sign of inward grace

"Just as the sacraments encompass and provide for all of Christian life from beginning to the end, so too do we see our community as being for the whole of life. Our community life is not confined to a certain stage (such as only in the course of our study years), but will grow to see us through every stage, with the sacramental life firmly as our foundation."

– Jason and Michelle, from the Community of Cornerstone

The parable of leaven²⁷ is about small beginnings with an expectant hope, likewise the experience with community. However, community living can reach very arid seasons when its leaders and flock collectively lose zeal and belief in this way of life. In these seasons, we lose hope and are resigned to the "smallness" of our existence. Fatalism easily sets in, resulting in sheer indifference. Community, as an entire body, suffers.

On the other hand, a community constantly growing in zeal also runs the risk of falling into pride and claiming to be superior to others. We forget our humble beginnings and create boundaries that give some a sense of identity at the expense of others. While a single community can stay intact, such arrogance divides the larger community as a whole.

How then does community find its personal uniqueness and support in its vision without being arrogant and dominating, and also ensuring that it is always open to service in the vision of a larger kingdom of God?

By placing community in the heart of Church life, we find ourselves immersed in the reality of a greater kingdom beyond the confines of the walls of community. Through participation in the Sacraments, we retain a connectedness to the universal Church and open Community's windows for members within to look out and for others outside to look in. Participation in the Sacraments as such is no mere ritual or obligatory response – the Community of Cornerstone expresses this beautifully:

"Attending the Christmas Midnight Mass and Easter Vigil Mass together as a community is a time-honored Cornerstone tradition. There is nothing like joyously celebrating these highlights of our liturgical year with our brothers and sisters in community, although the pews are often way too "squeazy" to sit everyone comfortably. Some members of our community already attend the earlier Christmas mass with their families, but choose to attend the midnight one just two hours later to celebrate with community too. It is a perfect culmination of our journey together over the Advent and Lenten seasons. Two particular Easter masses (2010 and 2012) stand out for us because that was when members of our community were Baptized and Confirmed. We had been journeying with them through RC1Y after befriending them at Confirmation and RC1Y camps. Since we knew them personally, we felt at an even deeper level the joy of receiving new members into the Church through the waters of Baptism and chrism oil of Confirmation."

What we therefore see is a synchronized celebration between the liturgical events and the personal transformation of lives. When the community gathers together to participate in the Sacraments, there is an inexpressible joy and hope that through the Church we can find Jesus and so find "life, life to the full."²⁸

It is precisely through this connection with the Church that we find particular meaning in the words, "This is my Body". Through these words, we profess the mystery of Christ's real presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. At the same time, we become intimately aware of how through Him, we all become a part of that "One Body".²⁹ These two meanings are inextricably connected – our relationship with Christ is made manifest in our relationships in Community. Unfortunately, we often experience this connection because of the effect of sin. When selfishness and conditional love takes over, and we lose sight of God, we find both our relationships with God and others fractured.

²⁷ Matthew 13:33

²⁸ John 10:10

²⁹ 1 Cor 12:12



When individuals are hurt in community, a sense of disillusionment may take over and the entire community experiences the hurt together. We need the Sacrament of Reconciliation as the means to receive God's forgiveness, forgive ourselves and also find the path towards forgiving others. When we come to see ourselves as fragile and human, we come to see and accept that same fragility in others; we find the grace to mend our wounded relationships with each other.

There have been instances where the entire community experiences hurt, when a sense of disillusionment takes over and individuals are disheartened or simply hurt by others.³⁰ To turn to the Sacrament of Reconciliation as the way we forgive ourselves, and to receive God's forgiveness is also to find the path towards forgiving others. When we come to see ourselves as fragile and human, we come to see the fragility in others and accept them for it. From the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we find the means to mend the wounded relationships between each other.

Encountering God is no passive event. Just as "fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to His power."³¹ Similarly, just as our

communities exist because of grace, grace must transform the lives of individuals in our communities. When we begin outwardly expressing such grace that we have personally and internally encountered, we become inspirations that others can draw from. In short, our lives become sacramental – outward signs of inner grace.

Community can therefore be the living sign that grace is at work. The most powerful message of a sacramental life is expressed by a laying down of one's life – there is no greater love than that. When one of MSC's members, Samuel, joined the Seminary, we therefore rejoiced in excitement. When another two members, Jude and Terence, joined the Seminary thereafter, we humbly remarked in awe that the Spirit was working marvels. And then we saw that this Spirit was one of abundance – we saw two of our fellow sisters, Celine and Valerie heading to New Zealand to discover the ways and calling of a missionary life. Almost all the communities had, at some point in time, sent individuals to join the School of Witness³² to become persons of conviction. These decisions are outward signs of an inner grace constantly at work in the lives of people – God is active and present and calls for a personal response. They reflect a generation of youth and young adults eager to bear testament to a God who changes lives.

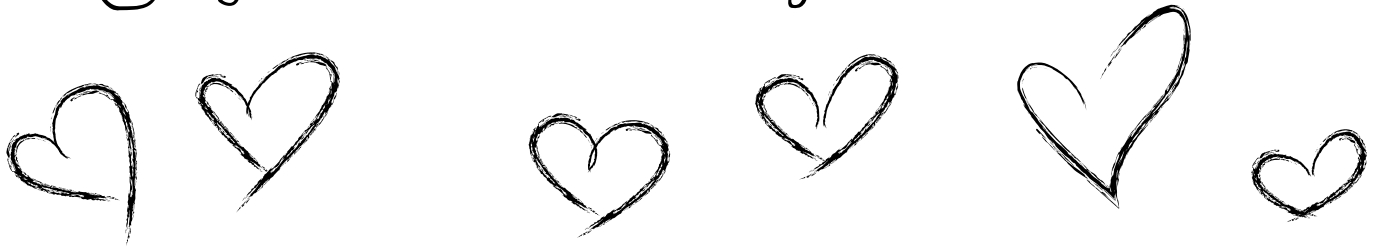
³⁰ "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it" 1 Cor 12:26

³¹ CCC 1127

³² The School of Witness is a 9-week formation programme organized by the Catholic Youth Office (CYO). As of 2014, the CYO has become the Office for Young People (OYP).

Youth Vineyard

Living in Community



Remain united to me and I will remain united to you – John 15:4

In the heart of community is a deep call to love. Community living is therefore a lifestyle of love. This is neither idealistic talk nor sweet sentiment – if community promises to be a place of encounter, then concrete responses to love must be made. This is difficult because a community is made up of different individuals. We have different wants, ambitions, aspirations and histories. Our brokenness, competitiveness and identities are all different. Therefore, before we think about these responses to love, it is necessary to reflect on how our individual natures can run into conflict with a communal way of life.

What happens if community does not recognize the uniqueness of the individual? Deep within us is a cry to have our individualities affirmed. When individuals do not feel that their individualities are affirmed. When individuals do not feel that their individuality is affirmed, their deepest selves are wounded in a way – they lose the confidence of making decisions for themselves, of having a sense of who they are. Community becomes a substitute for loves in their lives – they become dependent on and eventually possessive of community. For an individual, this is an unhealthy dynamic. Community is a place of solace, but it cannot become one of escape. Whilst community accepts brokenness, the fragility and dependence arising from brokenness can distort an individual's relationship with community by shrouding him or her with the illusion that this place is one of "unconditional love". This is why in many religious groups, before a person is accepted as part of the religious community, he or she must undergo a test of sorts to see if community life would be detrimental to both himself as well as the community.

On the other hand, it is clear that making the individual the center of community life simply does not forge unity. Disunity arises because persons yield to the temptation of individualism. In community, it is no exaggeration to say that self-centeredness is the source of most of our underlying tensions and hurts. This has a brutalizing effect on community life – needs are ignored, sensitivities are trivialized and relationships suffer. And it is important to bear in mind that when a part of the body is in pain, the entire being is in distress. Issues between individuals in community have wide repercussions and are often telling of the state of the community in general.

What then is the correct "balance" between individual needs and the needs of the community? How do we build up individuals without losing communion? We would like to suggest three guiding principles of unity. Firstly, unity begins with compassion. Secondly, unity is supported by a culture of forgiveness. Lastly, unity is nourished by celebration.

Unity begins with compassion

When we begin seeing the core of ourselves as fundamentally similar to that of others – not in a way that robs us of who we are but in a way that allows us to see that we actually share a common place – we then learn how to draw together through compassion. That the new Archbishop of Singapore decided to ground his episcopate on the twin pillars of passion and compassion by which he would lead the Archdiocese is telling of the kind of response he knew Christians needed. Compassion certainly does not mean weakness, compromise or mere sentiment. It forms a crucial basis by which communion can be understood.

What is compassion? Pope Benedict XVI writes in "Jesus of Nazareth",

"I have to learn to be a neighbor deep within and that I already have the answer in myself. I have to become like someone in love, someone whose heart is open to being shaken up by another's need. Then I find my neighbor, or – better – then I am found by him."

Once we come to see the tragedy of an individual being dismissed, where no connection is found, we come to see the importance and life-giving force of compassion. In dismissing others as "different from us", we make victims out of them. This is a devastatingly lonely place to be: whilst they scream for connection, we treat them as mute, unable to hear their cries. When we try to talk "sense" to them, they are unable to receive, appearing as if they are deaf. These are persons in immense anguish.

There is a desire to be seen for who we are – to be seen is our due. It is part of our basic theological makeup to be seen as ourselves – "they were naked but not ashamed"³³. Yet, there is an immense fear of being seen as we are. The questions that we ask are: Can I really be known? If I fail, can I still be accepted? Am I only my successes? Am I allowed to put down the masks of being in control and confident? If people knew where I used to be, would they still desire connection with me? If people knew who I was, how would they respond to me?

Compassion is about seeing the other as a part of me. It is the fundamental means by which we tell the other that they are worthy of being seen. And in a most basic way, it is how we find and build connections with others. Through compassion, the other "appears" before us. The other is no longer mute, as we have freed him to speak; I may not agree with what you have to say, but that you get to say what you feel is important to me. I may not share your opinion, but I respect that you have one. I may not understand why you have felt this way, but I will not shift it away, dismiss it or try to solve it either. Compassion is the first deep expression of acknowledging that the other is the same as us – struggling, inadequate, lonely, angry and so on. It is that primary platform by which a common humanity surfaces to our consciousness. In

this consciousness, we begin seeing ourselves in the other – and we become neighbor to them.

There is nevertheless a paradox. With regards to the deaf and the mute man, his ears were healed first³⁴. He started listening first. It is as though if we do not begin caring for another we can never really learn to care for our inner selves. In trying to respect him, I find something respectable within me. In trying to love her, I find something lovable within me. Community therefore presents us with a certain truth: the other becomes the way in which I become free. When another "appears" before me, I no longer become the center of my world. There is now some space for the other. I stop screaming for connection and realize that I have actually connected. I connect when I listen. I connect when I care.

Unity supported by forgiveness

Perhaps the greatest evidence of unity is in reconciliation. Forgiveness is the place where egoisms are removed, personal failings are put aside and a genuine embrace of the other happens. In 2001, during a retreat, the community of YV chose to reconcile in the form of washing each other's feet. This speechless apology was for having held on to grudges, allowing anger to fester or having let bitterness divide us. Apart from its scriptural symbolism, cleansing of another's feet speaks precisely and eloquently of how we still want to remain as "one". In reconciling, one does not merely become free; one restores union with the other.

The truth is that hurting people hurt others. Because community is a gathering of wounded individuals, competition, pride, insecurity and sin carve painful hurts amongst members. On our own, because of our instinct for egoistic self-preservation, we simply are unable to forgive another. It is at this juncture that community reveals to us most clearly how we, in our imperfect selves, need God. To go to God in such moments is neither an escape nor an unrealistic decision. To go to God is to see reality for what it is – that we are human persons aspiring towards a greater holiness but often still falling short of the demands of charity and generosity. To go to God is to see that

³³ Gen 2:25

³⁴ Mark 7:31-37



part and parcel of being human is to be ready to receive others in their imperfection. To go to God is to make forgiving seventy times seven times possible.³⁵ Embedded in the heart of prayer is a deep call to love others.

Reconciliation becomes the greatest evidence of unity because it is a personal response to shed off the calluses of selfishness, indifference and hurt, even when these emotions drive us apart. The coldness of hostility and isolation is shot through with a ray of intentional human affection. The community hears one saying to another “I want to be with you, even though you have hurt me.” And beneath that, “let us create a place of belonging again”. As such, the washing of feet is hardly ever a private affair – the community as a whole rejoices and heals even though the “un-forgiveness” could have only existed between the two individuals. To forgive seventy times seven times is now a new kind of vision, one of unlimited unity. It is the straight line that God has written with whatever crooked ones we have given Him.

Unity nourished by celebration

Each year, every community sets aside a date for its anniversary. This is a time of coming together to give praise to God who has been faithful. In MSC, a date is often marked out at the close of the calendar year to recount our blessings. During community retreats, it is also a common practice to have group affirmation. In OWL, affirmations are more subtle – one goes up to another to gently highlight another’s gifting. All communities, without exception, do their utmost to have a birthday prayer and celebration for each of its members. During retreats, many communities have the practice of writing personalized letters to the retreat participants, thanking them for their perseverance,

for their openness during sharing. This is the spirit of celebration. Celebration is about goodness. To celebrate is to recognize the blessings of a God who is good, who made us good, and who wants good things for us.

During the 1 Cor 12 retreat at the start of 2013, every member was asked to wear his best for the night dinner. The songs, dances, claps, laughter – joy – in a spirit of celebration are the fruits of a Community in love with God. A spirit of celebration affirms and empowers. Sabrina Tan from the community of Cornerstone recalls that

“It is important that gifts and talents should be celebrated through affirmations and actions. Whenever a brother or sister leads worship or gives session, we would take the initiative to encourage and affirm them especially for those who are doing so for the first time.” The building of a home happens not by the cold imposition of forced rules, but by the inviting glow of warmth. This does not mean that only giftings or persons with gifts are being celebrated. Celebration must be a free gift and not a transacted obligation. Only then can persons find that it is they – and not their various talents – who are the gifts.

Celebration nourishes unity when persons put aside petty irritations to genuinely be present. Here, we foster togetherness by letting the milk and honey of goodness flow into a place often congested by sadness. In a community anniversary, we put on the mind of God – who is goodness and love – to revisit a year of journeying as a community. In a birthday celebration, we praise Him for the gift of life that is often taken for granted. Through celebration, we sow and re-sow the seeds of gratitude in each other’s lives. We reveal truths of goodness and beauty in each person – in other words, we celebrate them.

³⁵ Matthew 18:21-22

Mustard Seed

A call to act

Evangelization and Mission

A community that grows also sees its members urgent in a mission. This urgency is not borne out of hatred for differences, or of superiority, but of a deep-seated sense that there are many persons, like the Samaritan woman at the well, thirsting for the Living Water. A community that is growing therefore sees itself as open and not locked up in elitism. Many of the communities call it “outreach”. In a very literal way, community reaches out to embrace others who have not believed in the possibility of being loved by God. Natalie Kwan from the community of IOS recalls her own experience of being reached out to:

“On a personal level, I experienced and truly understood the meaning and significance of bringing God to others during my own confirmation camp. Even though I was a Catholic then, I had not grown close to Christ and attending mass and catechism was more of an obligation rather than a choice. During the camp, I was blessed with facilitators who were open to us during group sharing, who encouraged us to be vulnerable and honest whenever we were asked to share. When they prayed over me, it was an amazing experience, one that really enabled me to feel God’s presence right there and then. Truly an experience like no other, it inspired me to take my spiritual journey towards confirmation seriously. It left a deep impression on me, something to hold on during periods of spiritual dryness.”

Mission and evangelization is about being an instrument through which another can come to see Christ on his or her own terms. There is a beautiful saying in the Gospel of Matthew – “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”.³⁶ There are many hearts that are searching for security, for peace and for a place which they can call home. In short, there are many hearts looking for Jesus, the real treasure that the world cannot give. By reaching out, we become the



hands, feet and mouthpieces through which Christ can minister. We, in a way, become signposts pointing to where this treasure is. A poem by St Teresa of Avila, titled “Christ has no body” illustrates this beautifully:

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion is to look out to the earth. Yours are the feet by which He is to go about doing good and yours are the hands by which He is to bless us now.”

A community must have a mission – this is the purpose of coming together. True, community is about being and not doing. The question then arises, what is the purpose of our being with each other? Without a clear mission, members lose the “why” of belonging. On the other hand, when this “why” is placed in sharp focus, we see that members personalize their ownership in community. This is a very joyful experience. I recall two such instances. On one occasion, knowing that an old folks’ home lacked the necessary manpower to bring its members on an expedition, MSC decided to offer its help to bring these aged individuals to the airport by train. Of course, MSC also had their constraints: resources and energy. But collectively, when we gave to others, we became unified by that meaningful purpose and by the joy of pursuing it. Another occasion was when MSC conducted a retreat for the young adults. Even though we were sleep-deprived, we all still gave “with one heart”. For instance, those involved in logistics would go the extra mile to purchase delicious suppers for us in the wee hours of the night!

This experience is not particular to only some communities. Michelle Tan from Cornerstone writes, “One of the ways in which Cornerstone has sought to evangelize and do outreach together has been through serving in camps and retreats in SFX. Each camp, there is never a shortage of volunteers from our community, choosing to serve in different roles in the service team. Some of us have even stepped up to become camp ICs. Even as we serve as part of a wider 1 Cor 12, it is very heartening to know that we are not stepping out from

³⁶ Matthew 6:21

Cornerstone alone. We step out together with people we have closely grown with, and with the prayerful support of the rest of the community.”

Others also embarking on a similar task multiply the joy of giving. Communities, then, often encourage others to be leading or conducting sessions for retreats and sessions. This should not be seen as a mere utilizing of gifts. When we take up the task of conducting sessions, we are forced to confront a fundamental question: what does God want to tell the community through me? This leads to ownership of a personal faith, a thirst for knowledge to be shared, and a concern for the community’s needs.

Creativity and novelty

That evangelization and mission is urgent does not mean that it is stressful or exhausting. When members pull together their creative energies and create novel ways of spreading the Gospel, the end product can be a masterpiece. Sometime back, LOG instituted a Sojourners program. This was an evangelization program meant to bring the Gospel and community living nearer to the hearts of those who have been distant from God and community. As part of their publicity, they even printed airplane tickets with a meeting with God as the eventual destination!

Technology and media, in this regard, expand the opportunities to spread the Gospel. Timing it with the Year of Faith heralded by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012, Timothy Soo from LOG gathered some writers and shared his dream that various teachings of the Catholic Church could be given a personal touch through the blogosphere.”³⁷ And for every week since then, writers have been faithfully posting blog-posts for the purpose

of reaching out to the Internet community. Many communities have also set up websites with the sole aim of putting out into the deep.³⁸

There is also a greater push towards sharing the Gospel through mimes and dances! These touching forms of expression are effective and penetrating. The Word of God is not just transmitted by word of mouth. Neither should it be limited to merely written messages. Instead, when persons pull together their various talents such as choreography, we radiate the messages of a God who animates our entire being. Dancing to share the Good News is bringing the Good News.

Some of the communities have also embarked on mission trips. On mission trips, communities confront two immediate realities. Firstly, the communities see the vastness of God’s kingdom that transcends national, cultural and language boundaries. Secondly, they encounter poverty in others and ultimately, themselves. In Cambodia, Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand, communities have sent members to teach English, interact with the children and share the Gospel. In physical poverty, we see the richness of people celebrating in simplicity, giving lavishly even with the little they have. In physical lacking, we come to appreciate the things that are only too ordinary. Mission trips can have extraordinary effects on community.

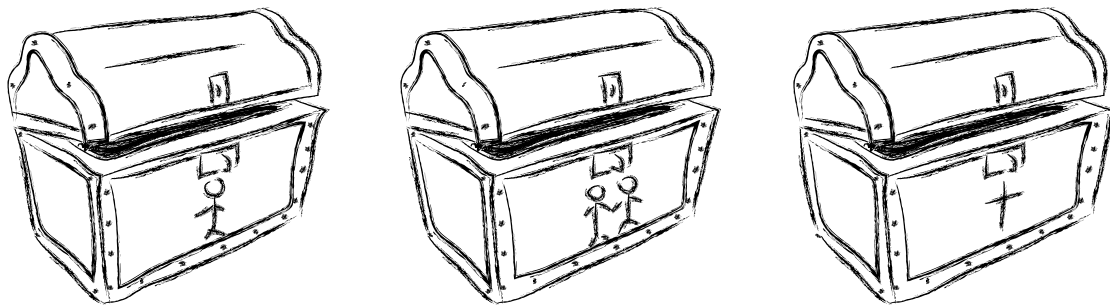
Evangelization and mission are instruments of ventilation. Fresh air enters when members go out to experience the larger world – the harvest in which we are laborers. Like an open channel to the sea, it ensures that the waters within the community are teeming with life. It ensures a spirit of creativity, novelty and anticipation – for greater things are yet to come in God’s city.



³⁷ www.knockingonthebrotheldoor.blogspot.com

³⁸ Luke 5:4

The Kingdom of God



We must begin our conclusion with a reflection on treasure. There are three treasures that we have uncovered, all of which are intimately bound with the other. First, deep within us is the treasure that is originally hidden and which we must eventually discover – the treasure of our sacredness as persons. To discover this is to open up a reservoir of dreams, imagination and aspiration. Most importantly, it is to possess an opening to love and be loved.

The unwrapping of the first treasure, takes place in community – the second treasure. This second treasure is found in the ‘other’. Through you, I can find goodness in me. Through your brokenness and imperfections, I can learn to love that which is broken and imperfect in me. Through your wounds, I find that we share similar struggles. Through the other in community, we see our very first treasure – the treasure of our preciousness as individuals – recognized and affirmed. We therefore see the second treasure – of a place of belonging – as leading to the opening of the first treasure.

The last, but certainly not the least, of these treasures is God. Because of Jesus, there is a hope that we can find ourselves beneath the layers and layers of masks and barriers that we have put up over the years. It is through Jesus that we make forgiveness, healing and ultimately, celebration possible. So, it is in Jesus that community comes together. It is through Jesus that we find sustenance, hope and joy as a community. He is the one who recovers our very first treasure (of ourselves as children of God), and then reveals it by allowing us to give of ourselves in the second (in community). The great treasure of Communion, ultimately, is lives given fully and wholeheartedly to Him.

*The Kingdom of God
is near at hand*

The Kingdom of God is also described as near at hand.³⁹ A sign of a community in service of the Kingdom of God is when community members live lives to the full – when mature and authentic decisions are made for Christ. When we see others daring to proclaim a God of wonders, when we see the metanoia – the change of heart – in the lives around us, we see a Kingdom of God that is near and real. On the other hand, a sign that a community is closed and withering is when there is no freshness or newness in the spiritual lives of its members. This is when communities are closed up in elitism, made too comfortable by self-praise and a refusal to listen to the voices of others in need, in fear of change and flux – that is when the Kingdom of God becomes an abstract and distant reality.

When then have we seen the Kingdom of God in our midst? Gracemary from BASIC shares:

“I saw the Kingdom of God when I stepped into the CSC Adoration Room. Slowly, more and more SFX youths started entering to reflect and pray with Jesus. Soon, the room was filled with SFX youths who didn’t plan to go together, but all felt the desire to meet Jesus in the Eucharist.”

Community must lead to growth. I should be quick to clarify that the test of a person who is in love with God does not come in overt acts of leading worship. However, a person who has allowed Christ to reign is a person in worship. To proclaim Jesus’ name is to proclaim the hope of victory over the areas of

³⁹ Mark 1:15

⁴⁰ Hebrews 10:9



darkness in one's life. It is to allow the healing touch of a wounded Savior with the eventual response "Here I am Lord, I have come to do your will"⁴⁰. Timothy Soo from LOG mentions one such instance:

"Joshua Fok from the community of IOS grew from being a shy and quiet youth to become a young man who was boldly proclaiming Jesus' name while leading worship for 1 Cor 12."

It was a touching moment when Joshua stepped out of his shyness when he proclaimed Jesus' name precisely because it is Jesus who finds and speaks to our deepest selves. Through this secret space between God and I, I find my beauty, my gifts, my goodness – I find my dignity. That is what it means to be seen "in the image of God". Timothy was not so much rejoicing in this newfound gift of leading worship that Joshua acquired but in this new relationship with God that Joshua was committed to.

Colin from the community of MSC also shows us what it means to allow Christ to reign. Colin came from a place of deep turmoil, as a result of fragmentations in his family. With this history, Colin found himself

in numerous instances where he had to confront and grieve for the losses in his life. And along the way, in a community that challenged as well as listened to him, Colin found something beautiful in himself – that this aspect of brokenness could be a rich fountain of life for others. He had gradually seen himself as a gift and chose not to reject the past as a curse. Through the journey with community where Colin had to face his own insecurities – such as when elder persons who had provided him a sense of security and structure had to leave – he grew to make mature and radical decisions that served as inspiration for many. He is now working with the youths and helping to build communities in the Church of the Risen Christ.

The Parables that speak about the Kingdom of God

The parables are an excellent way to describe the community scene in SFX. The parables are a collection of stories that Jesus use to describe the indescribable – the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God has therefore been featured in many parables – the mustard seed⁴¹, the leaven⁴², the lost coin⁴³. In this sense, the seven communities in 1 Cor 12 are also parables. This is because each community possesses a precious story which is slowly unveiled over the course of time. The purpose of each story is to reveal a face of Jesus to those who need to see Him – those who need to be clothed with dignity, have their void and emptiness filled, and have their spiritual thirsts quenched.

Each community is a story portraying the Kingdom – of expectant faith, trusting hope and unconditional charity. We aim to create a place where differences are respected and not suppressed, diversity is embraced and not rejected, and togetherness can still be celebrated. At the outset, we stated that each community has its own personality and this should not be stifled by a common vision – the Kingdom of God. We now go further. The different communities, when they come together, are like the stained glass in a church – where God's light enters and then takes on the multi-colored narratives that are the history and spirit of each community. The parables are Jesus' way of communicating the Kingdom of God to those who have not seen or heard of it. The communities serve His Kingdom when we speak this message of love, truth and forgiveness with clarity and conviction. God is love. Amen. ♥

⁴¹ Mark 4:31-32

⁴² Matthew 13:33

⁴³ Luke 15:8-10

NOW THERE ARE
Varieties
of gifts

BUT THE
same
Spirit



----- TO EACH IS GIVEN -----
THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT
for the common good

The six pillars of community life

Discipleship

Sacramental
Life

Breaking of
the Word

Prayer &
Worship

Community
Living

Mission &
Evangelization

But *Strive*

FOR THE GREATER GIFTS

and I will show you
a still more

excellent
way



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