

FAITH AND LIGHT INTERNATIONAL

Community in crisis

A number of questions concerning difficulties in communities has been brought to the attention of the international council.

1) **What to do when a community seems to be deviating from the Charter and the Constitution**, refusing for example, any discernment or any mandate for coordinators, or when the coordinator refuses to participate in a provincial meeting?

It is normal for a community to go through difficult moments, times of pain and conflict. A conflict is a sign of life and maturity. So, we must accept and confront these difficulties, not minimizing them, and then try to solve them. In every difficulty or conflict there is always a problem of relationship, there are the limitations of different coordinators. Coordinators may be going through difficult moments on a personal level, psychologically, spiritually or in their family. We must try to understand, support and help them.

The fundamental question is: **Does the community coordinator want to adhere to the Charter and the Constitution, yes or no?**

If the answer is yes, then the provincial coordinator should dialogue with him in order to understand his difficulties, why he or she is not able to follow the requirements of the Charter and Constitution.

Difficulties often arise when a coordinator has too great a need to give orders and has trouble sharing responsibility. This may suit the other members who do not want responsibility. However, it is a dangerous situation, because when the coordinator leaves, (sickness, moving house, etc...) the community risks to die out. One of the first roles of any coordinator is to help others take on more responsibility.

If we see that the coordinator does not want to adhere to the Charter, that he or she wants to create their own group, their own project, then we must make sure that it is what the whole community wants. We should never oblige a group to remain in Faith and Light if the community members do not want that. The Bishop and parish should, however, be informed of their decision. Sometimes it is the community priest who wants to have "his own group" or who wants to have control over it. In that case, the provincial coordinator (with perhaps the provincial chaplain) should enter into a dialogue with him and with the community.

When attitudes are not completely blocked or irreversible, when dialogue is still possible, we must do everything we can to work towards reconciliation. We may need to ask for outside help from a psychologist or a priest. In all this, it is very important to respect as much as we can what people with disabilities and their families want; that means that there must be meetings where each one can express him/herself and especially say why they do not want to be part of Faith and Light nor adhere to the Charter and Constitution.

2)What to do when it is young people, friends in the community, who are diverting the spirit of a community or who do not want Faith and Light to be a Christian movement?

This is a very delicate point. Some young people do not have any faith, but they do have a real friendship with people who have a disability. Sometimes parents who practice their Christians faith are too legalistic and ritualistic. There can be a blockage between these two groups.

Faith and Light should be guided by the principles of Vatican II and should live the principles of ecumenism and respect for others as expressed in our documents. That means a living faith in Jesus and the Holy Spirit who brings a quality of listening and of love for each person. That means also that faith is lived out and encouraged by the community as a whole, following the Guidelines.

Flexibility is needed in welcoming young people, but it must also be clear that Faith and Light is a christian movement. Young friends should be acquainted with the Charter, but they should also discover that religious practice is not imposed.

However, we expect them to have a deep respect for religious values and above all a respect for the spiritual needs of people with disabilities. Young people who make fun of faith or who do not respect the spiritual needs of each person should not remain in Faith and Light.

It is not easy to find a balance between an acceptance of young people, just as they are, and the respect we expect from them in regard to the values of Faith and Light. We need coordinators full of respect for young people yet also capable of guiding them towards greater life.