
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY



What does it mean to "Build together Christian communities?" If time allowed, we could take an unofficial survey among our relatives and friends on what the word 'community' calls to mind... It isn't certain that everyone would react in the same way. If you were to ask people of different conditions, practising and non-practising, young and old, answers would vary quite a bit. "Community reminds me of nuns and brothers of congregations of years gone by, a 'religious' community." Others are reminded of the school or municipal community, or the urban community. Rare are those for whom the word indicates the parish community, and even more rare are those who are reminded of a very-much-alive group of baptised brothers and sisters who follow Jesus. Even if this survey does not immediately situate us regarding the essence of a Christian community, we nonetheless have the major elements to describe not only what is a Christian community but also the means to have it occur. Several pastors already call their Sunday or parish assembly 'Christian community.' Several local initiatives are the fruit of intensive community work.

GOSPELS OF LIFE

It is becoming more and more necessary that our Christian communities be real "communities of life," communities that are sensitive to the life of all its members, that they be like "gospels of life," welcoming to children, to the young and the not-so-young, to labourers and workers, to the poor, the strangers, the sick, the handicapped. May each community respond to the passionate appeal of Pope John Paul II: "Respect, defend, love and serve life, all human life! It is on this path alone that you will find justice, development, true freedom, peace, and happiness!"

PARABLE OF THE CHAIR

As strange as it appears, I shall use the *Parable of the Chair* to try to explain the four inseparable characteristics of a living Christian community: "A community is like a four-legged chair: if one of its legs is missing, it will no longer be a chair and will no longer be able to perform its function." The chair's four legs are the four poles of a community according to the Acts of the Apostles: 1) steadfastness in the teaching of the Apostles; 2) faithfulness to the fellowship, 3) to the breaking of the bread, and 4) to prayer.

Imagine what kind of community it would be that never celebrated Mass or the other sacraments. It would be altogether correct to say that it is not a Christian community. It would be unthinkable to call oneself a disciple of Christ without taking an active part in the prayer of the Church. The same also applies to the community of fellowship: without a true and deep fellowship, there can be no Christian community. It is even THE sign by which disciples of Christ recognise one another. We can understand why Saint John insisted so much on this point throughout his apostolic ministry and how in extreme old age he never tired of repeating the command of the Lord: positive, real, effective love of one's brothers and sisters, especially the poor and the dispossessed, a love that must always be corrected because one can turn away too quickly from the true poor, especially in these times of economic recession. One can so easily turn away from one's own flesh.

EARNEST FAITH AND PRAYER

Continuing steadfast in the teaching of the Apostles and in prayer are the other two pillars of a Christian community. Without these two, the chair topples... and does so quickly. A vibrant faith is renewed biblically and in the Church at the fountain of Tradition. It is a faith that communicates News that is good for every man and woman of our time; it is a faith that clarifies for today the marvellous event of the Resurrection of Jesus. It is a faith that can move mountains and overcome every obstacle, rid our world of indifference, defeatism, and oppression. An intense prayer in spirit and in truth constantly seeks the glory of God and responds to the concrete needs of His sons and daughters. It is a prayer that is thanksgiving, petition, revelation of the Father to His children. It is a prayer that becomes the breath of all creation, of all humanity, and a commitment to unity of all the disciples of Jesus among themselves and with the Father, since it is the very prayer of Jesus, in the Spirit.

This is a quick overview of the four dimensions of a Christian community, its dimensions of fellowship and celebration, education in the faith, and prayer. It is necessary that each disciple of Jesus and each Christian community wholeheartedly welcome the Good News of Christ dead and risen who gives new meaning to his personal existence and to the history of the world. It is necessary that each disciple of Jesus and each Christian community profess this faith in the midst of daily life through witness and commitment for a transformation of the world in justice and love. It is necessary that each disciple of Jesus and each Christian community celebrate this faith, love, and hope through the sacraments, in the Church. It is necessary that each disciple of Jesus and each Christian community become missionaries by sharing this Good News of the presence among us of the Risen Lord with those in one's milieu. For people baptised in faith in Christ Jesus, this connects with God's project for the world. A Christian community therefore becomes a gathering of baptised persons who commit themselves in the strength of the Holy Spirit and following the example of the dead and risen Jesus, to pray to the Father, celebrate His marvellous deeds, to grow in the faith, and to work together for the coming of the kingdom of justice and love, mercy and peace.

May the *Parable of the Chair* challenge us to reflect on the quality of our community life, and may it inspire us to use it in order to climb a bit higher in our daily life!

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