



OWITF Reflections

Reflection Letter 4, May 2015

In the Nairobi document *Drawn by Mystery, Destined for Life*, there is a phrase that reads: 'All brothers are called to give their full energy and commitment to...' which is followed by the eight calls of the Chapter. When Brothers think of OWITF, they may think that this Congregational call applies only to the new communities in the developing world, and that other Brothers have no role in this. Nothing could be further from the truth. Every Brother is invited to a personal and communal commitment to this Congregational call.

In this reflection letter we focus on Community, one of the 5 Cs that we consider as pillars to our lives as Brothers (Community, Consciousness, Celibacy, Compassion and Contemplation).

Jean Vanier, the founder of the L'Arche community has written probably the most important book on community life – *Community and Growth*. In this book he writes: "...Individualistic material progress and the desire to gain prestige by coming out on top have taken over from the sense of fellowship, compassion and community. Now people live more or less on their own in a small house, jealously guarding their goods and planning to acquire more, with a notice on the gate that says, 'Beware of the Dog.'" Here he is highlighting the danger of individualism that can very much take hold of us as we continue to live together. Living in the same house does not necessarily mean that we create a home. We can be living in the same house, and yet not be living in community. Obviously, the challenge is to counter individualism, competition and privacy with a way of living that is based on friendship, mutual support and openness.

Vanier goes on to say "It is only when we stand up, with all our failings and sufferings, and try to support others rather than withdraw into ourselves, that we can fully live the life of community." It seems that real community involves, therefore, a level of sharing of our vulnerabilities and an openness to allow people see into our personal lives.

Brene Brown in her book, *Daring Greatly, How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live* points out that 'Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.' Then, she goes on to say that true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world. When this happens, our sense of belonging grows, as does our level of self-acceptance. Shame prevents us from opening up to others, when we fear that if people really knew us they would not love and accept us

(Eugene Kennedy has a beautiful book entitled, *If you Really Knew Me Would You Still Love Me?*). Brown says, 'If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive.'

So, practically what can communities do to create places of intimacy, gentleness, compassion and love (from *Nairobi Chapter document*)? Here are some suggestions:

- Meet once a week to share on how the week has been for you. By sharing our personal experiences of the week we begin to get to know each other at a deeper level.
- Celebrate birthdays and key moments in the life of the community.
- Engage a facilitator to work with the community on, at least, a monthly basis.
- Practise the art of appreciation, where we thank Brothers in an authentic way for the kind deeds they do for each other.

Our Way Into The Future invites all of us to begin this journey, and calls us to compassionately support each other on the journey. We end with a poem by Noel Davis which poses the questions: How can we as a community discover the treasure of spending time together? And what one little thing am I called to do for my brother today?

GOLD PROSPECTING

*Four built a hut on borrowed land,
mateship as their bond...
They came in search of gold once more
uncertain where to find it...*

*They struck gold in veins of silence
running through the trees
and on through their times of solitude.
They uncovered it in helping Mother
Earth raise her tribe of young.
They felt the gilded lining of care-free dawns
and delighted in the silken flow of Snowy Creek.*

*They discovered it
in the simple ways of their bush hut,
in the companionship of the fountain
and the kettle in the fireplace
and in the morning call of a lone thrush.
But most of all they found
it in one another*

*when they spent time together,
in the little things they did for each other
amid the diggings of each day.*

*They discovered it in each other's eyes
lighted by the fire's glow at night
as they shared toast and talk of life,
dreams, blackberry jam
and how best to bag a trout...
And in their care for strangers
and others uncovered
the richest lode of all –
the love seaming through their hearts.*

