

## **Fraternal Groups: Laying the Firm Foundation (Part II)**

The multiple blessings that can be reaped from fraternal group participation are more fully guaranteed when they are established upon these four principal commitments. They are Faithfulness to meeting together, Confidentiality, Living in the light with our lives and Active support of the fraternal group facilitator leader. Let's look at each of these commitments.

### **1. Faithfulness to the meeting**

- We all know that trust and freedom to share our lives happens best when we are meeting with other brothers who consistently are present to us and are taking a genuine interest in our lives and spiritual and human wellbeing.
- We know that inconsistency in our personal participation at the meetings raises doubt among the other brothers as to whether we are taking this fraternal meeting seriously and it tends to inhibit open sharing among the brothers.
- On the positive side, faithfulness to each other allows us to be much more connected and to follow the progress in Christ of each brother.
- Finally, faithfulness implies the kind of heart commitment that ensures our arriving on time and showing respect to all the brothers by communicating to them beforehand if one has an unavoidable conflict which requires us to miss the meeting.
- Faithfulness to meeting with our brothers is a concrete expression of our love for one another.

### **2. Confidentiality**

- The simplest way to express this commitment is by putting it in this formula, “what is shared by the brothers in the group stays within the group.”
- We don’t discuss personal matters with people outside our group, neither to our wives, other parishioners, other friends.
- We must be committed to guard one another’s dignity and reputation by refusing to disclose any sensitive matter to anyone outside of the group. Gossip has no part in the lives of those who are disciples of Jesus. After-all, the group is that place and space where supposedly we can open up candidly with our brothers regarding things that truly matter a great deal to us. We are walking with men who will accept us in our human weaknesses and support and strengthen us in our intentions to grow in Christ-like character and maturity in Christ.
- All of us are a “work in progress” and nobody has their lives in perfect order. We are not in men’s groups to pretend that we are perfect specimens of Christian maturity and character. The exhortation from the Scriptures is to, *“Encourage one another daily while it is still today” Hb 3:13*
- The commitment to support one another by respecting confidentiality should be explicit and even spoken of with some frequency in order to create this atmosphere of trust in one another. Our brother’s dignity and self-respect are a concern for all in the group.

### 3. Living in the Light with our lives

- There is the natural human experience of shame and embarrassment when for whatever reason we fail at the way we are doing something or how we have handled a situation or spoken to another in less than a charitable way. We want to hide our mistakes, failures and sins from others.

- Yet, it is often precisely in these areas where we should actively seek the positive access to our brothers for wisdom, exhortation and support and prayer.
  - Many examples might illustrate this point. If the group is discussing how to have private one on one meetings with our children, we shouldn't hide the fact that we haven't ever embarked on this manner of working with our children. We are all on this journey together, to learn, to grow and to serve the needs of others. We can admit our limitations and seek to guidance and wisdom to make changes for the good. St. Paul tells us an important truth about ourselves when he says this, *“Therefore do not associate with them (the pagans) for once you were darkness but not you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try hard to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (Ep 5: 7-10)*
  - In situations where we may have sinned in some small way, we definitely have recourse to our brothers for help, consolation, wisdom and discernment. There is no need to save all recognition ion of venial sin for the Confessional. The Scriptures gives us adequate orientation here. It is in the letter of James where we read of an explicit exhortation, *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” Ja 5:16*). It's not just all sharing counsel with each other, but also praying for, with and over one another
  - Brief testimony on living in the light.
4. Following the leadership of the fraternal group “facilitator leader” or “pastoral guide.”
- Every group works better when it has some kind of leader to foster and protect the unity and ideal of the group. Fraternal groups are *not* pastoral groups where there is some kind of personal submission to an individual who is exercising

**authority over one's personal life. No, our fraternal groups make possible much dynamic mutual support, encouragement, exhortation and other expressions of mutual help**

- **Yet, for the sake of harmony, coordination of action and focus on the purpose of the group, a facilitator leader/pastoral guide becomes very valuable.**
- **These men: 1. Take initiative to ensure that the group is meeting on time, carrying out joint decisions made by the group, actively facilitates discussions having to do with how the group is developing or how some element of the group needs some kind of on course correction, etc.**
- **The Facilitator Leader (FL) has the responsibility to keep discussions on track or be the mediator between the brothers if some kind of tension arises between members of the group.**
- **It is helpful to openly choose a FC and give him that responsibility for a year and renewable if the group wants him to continue.**

## **Assorted Issues and common questions**

1. **Length of time for a group meeting (1 ½ is ideal but an hour can work if group is small)**
2. **Frequency of meeting: The ideal can be either weekly or every two weeks (There can be room for experimentation)**
3. **Size of groups: Between 3-7 max. (There are always exceptions when needed; we don't have to be rigid)**

**Ways to get started:**

### **Alternative 1. Steps:**

1. **Decide to find the men who you know and who you think would be ready and open to entering into a fraternal group**
2. **Meet together and discuss the material that is being presented on Fraternal groups.**
3. **Pray together and individually and listen to the Lord and your own heart on the matter.**
4. **When you have the men that you believe should form this group, then begin to discuss all the particular elements that require some kind of decision, such as time, place, leadership, prayer style, etc.**
5. **After these discussions, everybody should verbally say to all the other brothers that they agree to the dynamic and spirituality of the fraternal group.**

## **Alternative 2. Steps:**

1. **You can sign up for a group and we (Tony, Gerald and I ) can help put together FG's from among those choosing to join one.**
2. **You can then follow all the other steps as mentioned in the first alternative.**

## **Further comments:**

1. **The three of us, Tony, Gerald and me are very committed to help any men's group in the parish get underway and coached for a while in order for the groups to get stabilized and solid.**