

Jesus Caritas Directory Jesus Caritas Fraternity of Priests

DIRECTORY

In 1976 the General Assembly of the Jesus Caritas Union of Priests took place at Montefiolo, near Rome. They agreed to issue this Directory, to replace the former Statutes. They also agreed on a change of name, from Union to Fraternity, in order to stress the need for universal brotherhood, both among priests, and by priests towards the entire human family. The delegates went to Rome, to receive the blessing of Pope Paul VI. Not only did he bless them, he also thanked them for being for him a source of hope and consolation.

‘Be ardent’, he said, ‘to spread among your diocesan fraternities, that burning love for Christ Jesus and that consuming concern for the redemption of the world so fully expressed in the life of the hermit of Tamanrasset. In this way you will continue to give us your indispensable co-operation in upholding the Catholic priesthood and its identity. That priestly identity has never consisted in anything else and never will, than in the exclusive and permanent gift of oneself to the Lord, along with a total availability to people, with a view to heading them along the way that leads to knowledge of God as he really is.’

This translation of the Directory has been made by priests in Ireland and England.

Chapter One

SPIRIT AND AIM

For the Sake of Jesus and the Gospel

The FRATERNITY is like a magnet. It draws priests. They do it for different reasons – some for friendship and to experience trust among brothers, other to be listened to and accepted as they are. Jesus loved for his own sake draws some, others come as pilgrims pioneering new ways in the Church.

But more than anything else it is for the sake of Jesus and the gospel that we come together in the FRATERNITY. We work alongside him as he continues to save the world. We recognise him in the Eucharist, which is the centre of our lives and the very heart of our faith.

Brother Charles has helped us to rediscover where our Christian and priestly vocation springs from: ‘I love Our Lord Jesus Christ with a heart that wants to live him more and more. But anyway I do love him and I could not think of leading any other life but his.’

And so we see as the key to our lives the words *Jesus-Love*. JESUS CARITAS.

The Gospel calls us. It is the power of the risen Lord which speaks to me and sets them free. We want to listen to this word of God in our age, to treasure it as Mary did, to live it even shout it out with our lives. We want to encourage each other to leave all for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel. Brother Charles saw his vocation as this Gospel life: ‘Let us return to the Gospel or else Jesus will not live in us.’

To be Brothers of all Men

Meeting Jesus in the Gospel and in the Eucharist led Brother Charles to meet him in his brothers: “As often as you did it for the least of my brothers, you did it for me.” (Matthew 25:40). He live among the most deprived, sharing their lives. He was one of them and worked to help them better themselves.

They called him the ‘Universal Brother’. He looked on his ordination to the priesthood simply as a new way of being at the service of all.

As diocesan priests, we have to live this brotherhood, if ware are to carry out, for all mankind, that mission the Church has entrusted to us. On us depends the preaching of the Gospel. It is by sharing the lives of men and women that we learn from them just what the love of Jesus means. In our turn we are impelled by the Gospel to kindle in others the flame of human brotherhood.

The Lord lives with us in the Eucharist. His presence invites us also to be one with all mankind, with a loving care for those that non-one loves. Such care is a form of contemplation.

In Abandonment to the Father

If we say each day with Brother Charles: ‘Father, I abandon myself to you, do with me what you wish..’ we express our desire to give our whole lives to God and to men without holding anything back. It is the responsibility of our fraternity to help us understand this abandonment and to practise it as God calls us day by day, and wherever he wishes us to god.

Chapter Two

AT THE CROSS ROADS OF THE WORLD AND OF THE CHURCH.

Today individuals and whole peoples demand the right to shape their own destiny. They want responsibility. They dream of justice and brotherhood. They try to build a new world in the teeth of tension, disappointment, violence.

The People of God are part of all this. Only within this context can they discover the powerful appeal of the Risen Lord. Even the Church has its own family tensions and it suffers also from the division of the churches.

The priests of Jesus Caritas cannot stand aside. They have to live the Gospel in today’s world and in today’s Church, not in some religious ghetto. That is what Brother Charles did. He was a realist. And so it is their responsibility to go along with their people, to share their cares and their joys, to struggle with them for freedom and to search with them for hope. For it in this way that the Kingdom of God comes to birth.

The fraternity must help us to recognise and to undertake this responsibility through the Review of Life and through prayer. Sometimes it may be necessarily to make one’s position clear in public and on particular issues there may be unavoidable rifts. Guard-dogs have to learn to bark!

The Review of Life will bring each brother to look again at his faith, his ministry and his identification with his people.

Chapter Three

IN THE SPIRIT OF BROTHER CHARLES

‘Let us look at the saints, not to imitate them, but to imitate Jesus.’

The life of Brother Charles was a continuous effort to live completely for God and to be a brother and to all in the context of his time. Our fraternities have grown out of this witness and many have been drawn by it to join. As a FRATERNITY we can say who we are only with reference to Brother Charles. But that does not mean a slavish imitation of everything he did. The gift of Brother Charles to the Church has to be fully discovered. It is up to each fraternity to keep searching for it in his own time and in its own place.

If we love God and love men there are certain things we must do. So Brother Charles wished to be one with poorest of people. He imitated the simple life of Nazareth by being a workman. He gave up the privileges of his class and country. He had a welcome for all, whatever their customs, nationality, social class or race.

In his person Brother Charles made the mystery of the Church present in a pagan world. This drove him to ‘shout the Gospel with the whole of his life.’ He as for ever searching for a new way in which the Church could be present among destitute people who are not Christian. For half a lifetime he laboured to bring to birth little fraternities which saw the light of day only after his death.

Brother Charles kept attached to the Church and her ministers even when they weighed him down by being so short-sighted. As a missionary he had the courage to be an innovator, believing that Jesus was ‘master of the impossible.’

Everything Brother Charles did sprang from his faithful love of Jesus. This love led him to make definite time for prayer and reflection. His daily routine was marked by penance.

He meditated every day on the words, action and spirit of Jesus in Holy Scripture. Through reading the Divine Office he took part in the prayer of the Church. With Jesus he adored the Father in a Eucharistic prayer that was both courageous and persevering. With Jesus he interceded for all. He celebrated the memory of the passion and resurrection of Jesus in the daily Eucharist. He set aside for himself long periods of solitude, days in the desert, night of prayer, retreats and regular times for spiritual reading and intellectual work.

From his conversion on, Brother Charles became more and more a man of the beatitudes. He became really poor, even to the point of accepting a seemingly useless death. He became chaste and single-minded in his love for Jesus and in his neighbourly love for all. He became obedient and yet as a man of initiative, who continually sought the Father’s will and how he might be a partner in the sacrifice of Christ. He had a great hunger and thirst for justice. He wanted to create peace; for that he was ready to suffer.

Chapter Four

OUR WAY.

The way the fraternities travel cannot be limited by regulations, rules or statutes.

The charism of Brother Charles and what we experience in the fraternities, helps us to discover in practice where the Lord is leading us. The pages that follow should be interpreted with this in mind.

The Fraternity

The fraternity is not simply a means for reaching personal perfection. What it really does is provide a setting for us to hear God's voice. It is the setting which for each of us the drama of the Gospel comes down to earth. And so it is a genuine community of the Church.

It is a community of brothers, a place where everyone feels he is recognised and accepted just as he is, where differences are respected and welcomed. It is the place of sharing and openness to one another, where true friendship comes to be. This friendship is expressed in many ordinary ways: recreation together, visits, letters, phone calls.

But to live in fraternity means especially that we bind ourselves to one another. Each must feel responsible for all. While the fraternity should be concerned for every priest who wants to join, it must be clear, nevertheless, that we are taking on a commitment to each other, which makes demands. A fraternity cannot achieve its purpose unless the members bind themselves to it, in some stable fashion.

The fraternity is a community of the Church, a place where Jesus meets us. Like the disciples at Emmaus, sharing our cares and sharing the word and the Eucharist, we discover the ever active presence of the risen Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

The fraternity gives us the opportunity to learn together how to pray. In the light of the gospel truths, we challenge each other with courage and gentleness, to discover the Lord's call. In this way, the fraternity helps us to experience the variety of God's gifts among our brothers and opens us up to universal brotherhood.

The fraternity is the sign that we too want to live as universal brothers, and that we believe that in Jesus Christ this is possible.

A fraternity usually consists of five or six priests.

Whether it be a small group that meets each month, a team that works together, priests who live together, or some priests who are looking for an opportunity to meet one another, the important thing is the fraternity day. This get-together includes as far as possible, relaxation, a meal, talk, review of life, Gospel sharing, silent and prolonged prayer and celebration of the Eucharist. It takes time to do all this. This time we must give.

Most fraternities meet regularly. But there are a number of priests who live in isolated places. Everything should be done to enable them to link up with the fraternity so that they can share better in the review of life, receive an invitation to meetings, to retreats and to the regional Month of Nazareth.

All the brothers, especially the responsables, must concern themselves with keeping contact with these priests by writing to them, visiting them, and giving them friendly support.

The Decision to Live in Fraternity is made in Stages

After a certain length of time in fraternity it is up to the members, taking account of the life-situation of each, to ask a priest who wishes to join to make up his mind whether or not to take part in the fraternity, especially if he attends meetings irregularly. Normally the priest who wishes to confirm his membership, not only of the fraternity, but of the world-wide FRATERNITY, takes part in a Month of Nazareth and makes an explicit commitment. He is then considered to be a member of the FRATERNITY.

To keep the fraternities vital and to ensure concern for each member, to guarantee links with other fraternities and to maintain their ecclesial character, someone must be made responsible. The brothers expect this man to attend meetings (place, date, sharing of tasks) and to ensure that each one has the opportunity to express his thoughts. He should draw concrete conclusions from what is said, remind all of their commitments, and plan retreats. He should maintain contact with other fraternities and other priests, ensure personal contact outside these meetings and pray for his brothers. He is among them 'as one who serves'

The Review of Life

We often hear about review of life, but the term covers different things, e.g. discussion groups, sharing of the Gospel, review of apostolic life. For us in the Fraternity the review of life means a common act of faith in which we walk about event in our lives and share our cares, our hopes, our disappointment. It means laying our lives out openly before each other to discover where the Lord is calling us.

All this demands great courage but our review of life is indispensable, for it is first of all to look with awe at the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our time. Whenever we make the review of life as we are called to conversion. It opens our eyes to what is best in us. It keeps us always alert to the Lord who may call us in ways we never expected. It helps us find the Lord himself always greater than we thought, always different, so often disconcerting.

There is an overall unity between the review of life and the other activities of the fraternity. The review is prepared preferably in the desert, always in prayer and, if possible, it is written. It is better not to make it at all than to improvise on the spot. It presupposes an atmosphere of prayer, of listening to the word of God, of attention to one another. No need to fear moments of silence. We must have the courage to put questions to one another gently but frankly. We should not be put off by fear of possible tensions or clashes. False friendship is the death of a true review of life and therefore, of the fraternity.

If in a review of life together you help someone to discern the call of the Lord you must support and assist him in putting it into practice. Each member should be one with the others and feel responsible for them.

An honest review of life can introduce us in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ, at work in us. Sometimes it will lead us to the sacrament of reconciliation.

Contemplative Prayer

If we are to bring into being an authentic fraternity, each member's life must have its roots in a spirit of contemplation. Yet the ways of prayer are often painful. The Holy Spirit himself comes to help us in our weakness. He helps us to persevere in close companionship with the Lord Jesus. 'We must read and re-read the holy Gospel in order to have always before our minds the actions, words and thoughts of Jesus so that we may think, speak and act like Jesus.' (Brother Charles)

These things stir us daily to greater fidelity and prayer. These are the love God showed us in the gift of his Son who even died on the cross for us; the witness given us by Brother Charles; and the needs of our brothers and sisters.

Being faithful in prayer entails a Eucharistic adoration which is regular and prolonged. We try to spend a whole hour every day. It also entails a reflective reading of Scripture and the monthly practice of a 'day in the desert' which is an important means of recognising the Divine Absolute in our lives.

Each one has to find the rhythm of prayer best suited to himself. With the fraternity he undertakes, in his review of life, to look precisely at those points where his fidelity in prayer, to God and to his brothers, is in question.

Commitment

Since the FRATERNITY began, life in fraternity and the practice of the review of life have led us to discover, in the love of God and the love of people, a demand that is absolute. We have been led to give expression to that discovery in a commitment traditionally called consecration. At the same time there are certain problems about this consecration. Experience has told us that we must not consider it as we do religious vows. Nor should we equate it with consecration in a Secular Institute.

God first loves us. So we want to do something to recognise his love. We want to commit our whole life to thanksgiving. This love gives us freedom to place our life, both present and to come, in his hands.

This step is taken in the light of the Beatitudes and for 'the life of the world.' It may be an act of personal definitive abandonment to the love of the Father; it may be the gift of one's life to minister among the poorest; it may be a commitment to devote one's self entirely to the liberation of a people. Each one's situation and personal charism will shape the commitment he makes.

First of all we have to learn to live without resources in a world lured on by riches; to live in a state of dependence in a world where abuse of power leads to oppression, and blocks the path to personal self-liberation; to live by love in a world where those unloved are more and more numerous; to live fraternity, in a fragmented world, and a divided Church.

Commitment means also learning to join forces with what is best in people, as they use their talents for the benefit of all. For people in their hearts have a spirit of service which leads them to recognise their responsibility to others, and the spirit of love, which gives meaning to their lives.

The role of the fraternity is important when we make this step. Each one asks his brothers to witness his commitment and to be jointly responsible for it.

In practice what we undertake is to live in fraternity, according to the spirit of this document.

The fraternity should help the brothers to make this commitment as a definitive act in response to the love of God. Such an act is advisable only after personal growth, following an extended experience of pastoral ministry and of life in fraternity.

At first this response to the love of God will be expressed in a commitment for a set time, that is renewable. Ultimately it will be expressed in a definitive commitment. But whether the commitment be temporary or infinite it should be renewed each year in fraternity. The purpose of this is to keep the commitment fresh and realistic, in the spirit of this document.

(Chapter 5 = A Minimum of Structures)