



## VOW FOR MUTUAL COLLABORATION

Why do some people choose Religious life? What is actually at the heart of their calling? Religious seem to have a sense of the connectedness of everything. They hold values which are important to the human community. They hold them to a point where they are prepared to give their whole life to living them out in obvious and concrete ways.

One such value is that of collaboration. A simple meaning of collaboration is working together. Homo sapiens succeeded as a species ahead of other early primates because its individuals worked together. Within their tribes no one person had all the skills needed to ensure the ongoing life of the group. They learned to co-operate so that each provided essential elements to the mix.

Religious live a community life which is quite a different from the family life they grew up in. Why would they freely choose to live so differently and give so much importance to community life?

All life forms value working together. By working together things are created which no individual could create. Just watch an ant's nest. In community living qualities are learned and practised which enhance life ... mutual respect, self-fulfillment, self-esteem, relating, intimacy. New energy is created by the very process of coming together which gives rise to new passion for life. Religious Life has evolved to hold this value for wider society.

Our modern world knows the value of collaboration. Witness the constant struggle to create processes and institutions to deal with difference, injustice and crises. The United Nations, the African and European Unions, however weak they appear to be, are designed to reduce the impulse to solve problems by going to war. The rise of social media and communications of all kinds is evidence of deep needs within the human for sharing ourselves with others, being connected and simply being known.

Religious put the collaborative living project at the heart of their lives. It is for this reason that Diarmuid O'Murchu names the vow of obedience as the vow for Mutual Collaboration. The fact that Religious choose to live with others who come together neither by family ties nor by personal choice, is a profound commitment to the value of collaboration.

***Do you think Religious communities give witness to humans living together in harmony? What have you noticed that is different about the way Religious relate?***

Jean Vanier believes that a collaborative community takes a long time to form. A community is only a community when most of the people in it have made the passage from 'the community for me' to 'me for the community'. Then masks drop, and all members are conscientiously seeking growth and happiness of every other member.

So a collaborative community is not simply a group of people who live together. It is a current of life, a heart, a soul, a spirit. It is people who love each other a great deal and who are all reaching towards the same hope. They have no need to play a role, to pretend to be better than the others, to demonstrate prowess in order to be loved. They are essentially places where we learn to live at the pace of humanity and nature.

Practising a vow for Mutual Collaboration is a way of loving. It requires going beyond oneself for the sake of another. A group of Religious can live under the same roof and yet live separate lives. They can live a 'mutual free-for-all' whereby each permits the others to do what they want, with the assumption that they too will be allowed to do their thing. There is little of the accountability humans need to live healthy, balanced lives focused on a greater good. There is little interest in the growth of the group or in the issues of their neighbours or of "common humanity", as Pope Francis calls it. These Religious have little to offer the wider society. They are hardly living a "Religious Life".


***Where am I and my community in terms of mutual accountability? Am I aware of and involved in the issues of our common humanity?***

Every group goes through stages of growth and there is always a time of conflict. Religious communities are no exception. Religious who are living the call to mutual collaboration need to risk entering into those conflictual conversations. Doing so will connect them, deepen mutual trust and help them to face together "the different, the other, the frightening, and the unexpected" (Donna Markham).

Discernment is one practice which Religious can use to negotiate these challenges. This reflective process assists the individual and the community in coming to decisions about their lives which are rooted in gospel values. It demands time to listen to not only ones' own heart and inner voice but also to the voices of others in the community, of trusted friends, of the Congregation, of the global community. It is a process of shared leadership.

Diarmuid O'Murchu asks,

***"Can we begin more adult conversations on how to exercise shared responsibility in mutually creative ways? How do we skill individuals and communities to exercise leadership from the ground-up, and in the spirit of mutual obedience, to make community the primary locus for Congregational discernment?"***



*If birds travel without coordination,  
they beat each others' wings.*

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