

Post-Assembly 2022 - Co-Responsibility in Councils
August 5, 2022

Fr. Frank Donio, SAC - Introduction to Co-Responsibility in Councils

- Problems: open conflict in councils; yes-men; autocrats; shifting group dynamics.
- Important topic: followership, where groups know how to be co-responsible with a leader and work in service of the membership
- Two prompts to guide the conversation:
 - Give a very brief overview of your polity; and
 - Think about the role of discernment in the decision making processes your council uses.
- What surprised you about what you heard from the table conversation around the questions?
 - Variety of structures of leadership, but despite the variety, are often dealing with the same issues.
 - Affirmed desire to be more discerning in meetings and tendency to get caught up in maintenance/problem solving/working on the agenda.
 - Councilors not always present or full time; don't have the time/context for good discernment. Zoom hasn't helped.
 - Discernment helped by giving time before issues are formally talked about
 - Agenda sometimes given at time of meeting; talking off the top of their heads. Not as productive and not as good for discernment.
 - Norm of instant communication closes space for discernment; when meetings are stacked up it is hard to take time to discern

Fr. Victor Laroche, OP - Role of Holy Spirit in Decision Making

- Each person has a role to play; but God is in charge - for example, the cardinals vote and the Holy Spirit helps them
- There is always room for change, room for discernment - congregations move away from things previously done and into new areas
- "Building the Bridge as you Walk on It" by Robert Quinn as instructive
 - This is often the task of what major superiors/councils do - and a metaphor for what discernment is like.
 - Corollary: sometimes things are not meant to be - the bridge can't be built - the conversation can't happen or is avoided
 - Second corollary: only so much time can be spent in discernment - eventually action must be taken. There must be a balance between discernment and action, even if the ideal solution hasn't necessarily been reached.
 - Important to not discern about yesterday's questions; need to focus on the real questions of today.
- Question:
 - How to deal with people who are not willing to discern? In canon law and particular law, there are guidelines that help guide discernment and move things along.

Fr. Tim Kesicki, SJ - Theological Background

- Origins: 1 Cor 12:4-10
 - Can get caught up in the list; CVs can read as gifts but it doesn't always work that way
 - Can overprivileged certain gifts; such as favoring the PhD over the pastor

- How do we recognize the true gifts of the Spirit as Paul would have recognized them? It sets the path for co-responsibility.
- Obstacles:
 - Concern with perception of institute - both internally (other brothers) and external; this is something of a demon; goal is not popular acclaim or praise
 - Intransigence - can result from trauma, not necessarily a lack of faith
- A piece of advice from St. Ignatius of Loyola
 - Choose the matter well
 - Can be forced to discuss things rather than choosing the matter well
 - But, choosing well is essential for co-responsibility in councils: not all things are necessary to be discussed
- Large group discussion:
 - By the fruits you can tell about a decision - although execution sometimes derails a good choice
 - Encourage as many voices as possible; with more voices the path emerges in all its complexity.
 - Major superior as the facilitator of discernment: stop and reset; refocus; move through the issues

Fr. Frank Donio, SAC - Consultation

- In the 1980s, consensus was central - including sometimes about very minor details
- Consultation does not necessarily equal consensus - deliberative bodies may need to consult but not necessarily come to a consensus
 - There's only a handful of items that a major superior needs to consult on
- What's a good practice in terms of consultation with the council?
 - Seeking advice from the councilors
 - The better the question is framed and a preliminary read on the issue is given, the better the result
 - When a decision has been made, important to explain the reasons behind the decision and cultivate ownership, especially among those who don't necessarily agree

Fr. Victor Laroche, OP - Delegation

- Sometimes occurs for practical reasons (Master General can't visit everybody; has to have help - similar is the case of a provincial)
 - Important to do this as much as possible and for people to accept responsibility
 - Bottom line has to be integrity: what is going on is not about the delegate, but about the community
 - "I cannot do it all myself" - Jesus himself delegated the mission to do other things (to the 72, to the apostles)
 - Summary:
 - prerequisite of delegation is learning, discerning how to let go - "If I don't do it it's not going to be done as well as it needs to be"
 - Delegation is important to self-preservation, self-care - and moreover, delegation is good, ideal