



Nine-Year Novena

2024-2033



Reflection on Community

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As a congregation rooted in the spirituality of St. Augustine, living in community is a central aspect of our religious life. This is clearly seen when you open *You Are Sent (YAS)*. After expressing our mission, the first theme in the Constitution is community – even before talking about vows or ministry or anything else.

Although each of us is called individually by God and has to respond personally to God, we do this in community. We are not hermits who respond in solitude to God's call. Our call is embedded in the experience of community life. Besides the paragraphs directed to community in the Constitution (C) and the General Directory (GD), the entire text of *YAS* constantly uses **we** rather than **I**. We are in the mission of God together with our sisters who are chosen by God as we are.

When I met with all provincial councils, I learned the same wherever I went: community life is the biggest joy and at the same time the biggest challenge. This is very human. This is who we are. We can be our best in community life if we are supported by others and appreciate others. And we can struggle with realities of community life if we focus on ourselves, if we don't feel the support of others or suffer from misunderstandings and other challenges of community life. I guess that each of us has experiences of both sides. Before diving into *YAS*, ask yourself: What is the experience of community during my life? What did I enjoy? What was challenging? How did I integrate both sides of life? What did I learn from these experiences? What was my understanding of community life at the beginning of my religious life, and what is it today? How has my understanding grown?

I now invite you to read what *YAS* is telling us about community: C 6-9, GD 1-10, 57-64 and 80-81.

During our history – which we honor with the Novena – the expression of community has drastically changed. If you would ask Mother Theresa, she probably would speak about the similarity of rhythm in daily life for all the sisters. She would mention the loving support and point out the importance of obedience to the local leader who holds the community together.

Today, we see more variety in community living and we have grown in the understanding that just living under the same roof does not equal a good and healthy community life. According to YAS, the bonds that hold us together are Christ as the center, the spirit of love and respect, praying together the morning and evening prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours and praying personally. We accept the rough parts of community life when others or differences challenge us, forgiveness and reconciliation as a giving and receiving, creativity in creating our community life. We welcome one another and are open to others outside the community. Then community can be more than a functioning group and become a loving, welcoming group of sisters with Christ as the center of their common life.

Because we cannot build a community just by oneself, we need to deliberately work to shape our community to become the best it can be. This is work and takes constant effort. First of all, this means that each sister is in contact with a faith community, however this looks in a variety of ways. The community needs to take time together to agree on elements of community life – and then together bring them to life.

Sometimes, people look at us and wonder how women who are so different manage to live together. Well, it is not solely by our doing, but surely is the work of God. Do I really believe that God calls me through my sisters to share the Divine Love I receive with others? What is the strength that binds us together and helps us to reach out? Our community life has an impact on others around us.

Each community needs elements that bring the members together and at the same time it needs enough freedom for each one to unfold – a beautiful yet delicate dance.



“Awed by the mystery of God’s action in our midst, we gratefully celebrate life.” (YAS, C7)

For your personal reflection

With the reflection and the text of YAS in mind, consider these questions:

1. Which community experience did I enjoy during my life? What was challenging?
How did I integrate both realities of life? What did I learn from these experiences?
2. What is my understanding of community life today? How has my understanding of community life grown?
3. What are areas of healing that I see needed in myself or see in others?
4. In the past, what did I contribute for a healthy community life? What will I contribute in my situation now?



For sharing with the community

1. How can we encourage each other as we want to grow in our community life?
2. What conversion or changes do we need as we look at *You Are Sent* and our reality?
3. What do we celebrate as good elements of our community life?