



Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

October 17, 2023

Dear Brothers,

Creating a community together can be challenging, especially when it involves a group of men from diverse families and interests, intergenerational and intercultural backgrounds. It requires sacrifice, intentionality, and commitment. When we



understand the purpose of religious community life and are committed to the mission of living and proclaiming the Gospel, our life in common can be fulfilling and prophetic. Unfortunately, we also can make life difficult for our community. This reminds me of the famous line from French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit*: "Hell is other people." Some people interpret this quote as a reference to the complexity of human relationships and the potential for conflict. However, Sartre meant that other people's perceptions of us can shape our own self-perception. Thus, in an unhealthy relationship, we can feel trapped and hellish. As Christians, especially as vowed religious, we are encouraged to see "Heaven is other people."

"[Some religious] have perfected the skill of living alone together. While community members may live under the same roof, they might as well be living alone" Br. Seán D. Sammon, FMF, "Building Healthy and Life-giving Communities."

What does it take to create a healthy and life-giving community? In his article, "Building Healthy and Life-giving Communities," Br. Seán D. Sammon, FMS, attempts to answer this question. For him, a healthy religious community exhibits at least six distinct qualities. I quote...

- ❖ First, a healthy religious community is a center of faith and spirituality. A rhythm of prayer is part of the group's life
- ❖ Second, members of a healthy religious community are aware of the many ways in which their family-of-origin influences their day-to-day behavior. When we come to religious life, we bring our families with us. And that

includes the best aspects of our family's life together as well as some behaviors that might best be described as idiosyncratic.

- ❖ Third, a sense of humor among the members is a necessary part of any healthy community.... It brings out the playful side of many community members and contributes to an overall good spirit within the group
- ❖ Fourth, in healthy religious communities, members demonstrate an active concern for one another. While respecting privacy, they are interested in what is happening in the lives of the other members
- ❖ Fifth, the members of healthy communities also practice a set of "little virtues" that build up the life of the group: answering the door or phone, not leaving dishes in the sink, taking out the garbage, straightening up after [themselves].... Members of these communities demonstrate concern for the common good.
- ❖ Sixth and most important, a spirit of reconciliation always exists in a religious community that is psychologically healthy. Its members don't hold on to injustices and are quick to forgive others when offended

I also found Br. Sammon's discussion on the personality traits that foster healthy community life to be insightful. According to him, being flexible and adaptable is key to being able to cope with people and unexpected changes. Self-acceptance is important in building strong relationships with others. Dependability is another key trait that contributes to a healthy community, as it helps to establish trust and reliability. Fostering relationships is critical to building a strong community as they create a sense of belonging and support. Finally, resilience is important in overcoming challenges and disappointments, and in maintaining a positive outlook on religious life.



"When we come to religious life, we bring our families with us."

Fr. Jim Walters and his family

A healthy religious community requires intentionality and commitment from each of its members. What has been your part in creating a healthy community?

Fraternally,