

How to welcome cell members and new bcomers?

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The words of Pope Francis enlighten us on the task of cell leaders and of every responsible person working in the new evangelisation.

1. Like Joseph, who first welcomed Mary as his fiancée with great joy, so the leader welcomes the members of his cell with all his heart and with trust and faith sends them out, in the name of Christ, to evangelise their oikos.
2. The second phase of Joseph's hospitality, the most painful, that is, the one in which his fatherly heart (*Patris Cordae*) is formed, is when he sees Mary return from Elizabeth with the child in her womb. That episode is similar to when a leader sees a member of his cell arriving with a newly evangelised member of his oikos, a baptised Christian, whom he, together with him, must introduce into the life of the cell.

The spiritual life that Joseph shows us is not a way of explaining, but a way of welcoming.

I remember our first cell experience, when I was the co-leader, a member (phoning the day before) brought a relative to see how the cell meeting is run.

Our leader (a young lady) and all of us had to quickly show our welcoming spirit; with love and enthusiasm we prepared for her relative a programme of the cell meeting and after a short presentation of all those present, we listened to her for a long time, as she told us all about her life and her problems.

At that time, here in Szeged, Hungary, we were taking our first steps in the evangelisation of the oikos, and it was clear that neither the members of the cell nor our sister's relative were prepared for that meeting, but the welcoming spirit worked miracles and later that relative became a cell member.

*Only from this acceptance, from this reconciliation,
one can perceive a greater story, a deeper meaning.*

So it is clear that Joseph is not a passively resigned man. His is a strong and courageous protagonism.

This double reception required all of Joseph's vital strength, mental and spiritual - he committed all his forces, heart and soul!

Luckily for him, for Mary and for all of us:

“God helped him by enlightening his judgment.”

In our own lives, acceptance and welcome can be an expression of the Holy Spirit's gift of fortitude. Only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments.

In the experience described above, and in many others, we experienced the truth and power of Pope Francis' words.

When a member, caught up in his unresolved problems, during the meeting, instead of the brief experiences of evangelisation feels he can talk at length about his difficulties, Joseph's fourfold welcoming spirit is triggered:

Joseph leaves aside his reasoning

- 1) *to make room for **what happens** in its oikos*
- 2) *and, however mysterious it may appear to his eyes, **he welcomes it**,*
- 3) ***assumes responsibility for it***
- 4) *and **reconciles with its own story**.*

thus entering into salvation history that the Trinity prepared for humanity.

The Church makes this reality present on earth and this is also the ultimate goal of evangelisation.

By being welcoming in the cell several times we have experienced that:

Jesus' appearance in our midst is a gift from the Father, which makes it possible for each of us to be reconciled to the flesh of our own history, even when we fail to understand it completely.

As God said to our Saint:

“Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid!” (Mt 1:20), so he seems to tell us: “Do not be afraid!” We need to set aside all anger and disappointment, and to embrace the way things are, even when they do not turn out as we wish.

Welcoming life in this way introduces us to a hidden meaning.

Our lives can be miraculously reborn if we find the courage to live them in accordance with the Gospel. It does not matter if everything seems to have gone wrong or some things can no longer be fixed. God can make flowers spring up from stony ground. Even if our heart condemns us, “God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (1 Jn 3:20).

Here, once again, we encounter that Christian realism which rejects nothing that exists. Reality, in its mysterious and irreducible complexity, is the bearer of existential meaning, with all its lights and shadows.

Pope Francis' text elaborates on the steps we need to take if we want to follow the path of welcome, recalling what Joseph invites us to do

1. *welcoming others,*
2. *without exclusion,*
3. *as they are,*
4. *with a preference for the weakest,*
5. *because God chooses what is weak (cfr 1 Cor 1,27),*
6. *he is "father of orphans and defender of widows" (Ps 68,6)*
7. *and commands us to love the stranger.*

In the text of the International Seminar on Parish Evangelisation Cells, we find a part that corresponds magnificently to the words of Pope Francis:

The cell is inclusive:

- 1) welcome those who come from oikos relations
- 2) people from different cultural backgrounds,
- 3) from all walks of life,
- 4) from whatever point in their journey of faith,
- 5) when they accept the invitation.
- 6) by carrying out a personal encounter, even in the current pandemic,
- 7) by meeting in virtual form and looking each other in the eye.

The cell must remain small, because only in this way will there be room in its life for an attentive and caring welcome, for spiritual growth, for each person's prayer, for deeper and mutual knowledge.

The enthusiasm in the cell is fuelled by the joyful witness of new converts, they are the sap that makes the cell grow until it multiplies.

Evangelisation is a divine work, which the Spirit manifests in the testimony of those who discover God's love and mercy.

Also in that 2021 text, the four basic steps that prepare the reception of a new cell member.

But who is the latest arrival in the cell?

It is that brother of the oikos of any cell member:

- (1) for whom we prayed together,
- (2) who was accompanied
- (3) and served by one of us
- (4) all the way along the spiritual path to entry into the cell.

Thus we can conclude that the starting point of evangelisation is the welcome given by the leader by the mandate of the parish priest, but also that the arrival point of evangelisation is the "collective" welcome (sometimes painful) by the whole cell of the new comer that changes the identity, the way of life and therefore also the history of the cell.

We must point out, according to our small and humble experience, that the reception of the members of the cell by the leader and the trust born in them, depends on their missionary impetus in the oikos!

During the first four moments of Don Pigi's method, the new evangeliser prepares, as Joseph did, the reception of the person in his oikos which will then lead to the encounter with Christ.

The originality of Don Pigi's method is that these steps of evangelisation of the oikos make Christ encounter not only the person evangelised but also the cell and then, in turn, the cell leader.

Thus it is always Christ who grows in the community of the parish and in the Church ...

Here there are no categories, no social classes, the logic of the world in the cell is completely overturned.

The richest in the cell **is not**

1. who has the more economic power
2. who is more successful in relationships,
3. who is more intelligent, or who has the easiest word,

but he who knows how to bend over towards his brother

1. by serving him
2. by listening to him
3. by welcoming him

The richest in the cell is the one who has the most capacity to love.

The cell is not just a prayer group, a family group, a counselling group or a Gospel group; normally each group seeks to grow towards a goal of knowledge, relationships, leisure.

A group starts with a core group and gradually welcomes newcomers with similar interests, faith or ideals. Therefore it always struggles to involve the newcomers.

The cell, because it is oriented towards evangelisation, is realised when a brother who is far from the faith joins it. Then the whole cell bends over to him and, as it were, sets the pace while waiting for the brother to grow..

To answer the question: what is the cell and how does it live?

We can answer that the cell is the love freely received from Jesus and freely given.

The cell:

1. Is **welcoming**
2. Is **non judgmental**
3. Is **prayer**
4. Is a **place of holiness.**