

Change a Heart: Millvale Franciscan Volunteer Program Orientation A Workbook on Community and Prayer

Living in community and praying in community are not experiences most people coming to the Millvale Franciscan Volunteer Program have had, yet they are integral parts of the program, expectations of the program, and, often in the end, the most significant parts of the program.

Community living and community prayer are surely best learned by simply doing them, but there are certain things it is worthwhile to be aware of as you begin. These reflections are simply a starting off point for all that you will learn in the year ahead. Hopefully, they will build a foundation on which you can begin to build your experiences. If nothing else, they may be a reminder of some things you already know.

Community Living

Good community never simply happens because people live together under the same roof. Community must always be created, maintained, and sustained. Here are some things to keep in mind:

1. You have to learn not only to talk with each other, but also to share with each other. It is important not simply to ask or to say how your day went, but also what was hardest, most rewarding, most frustrating, most enjoyable, most disappointing—what affirmed you, made you angry, scared you, made you laugh.
2. Working at consensus, in making decisions, takes time. Don't rust to votes; discuss things through. Where is there agreement, where is there disagreement, where is there give-and-take? Extroverts are people "who think with their mouth open," i.e., they will immediately have things to say. They process define their thoughts by expressing them. Introverts, on the other hand, take in all the information and then need time to think about it. If you have something important to decide, talk about it at one time and make your decision at another time. This will keep introverts in the game!
3. Don't make every minor decision a topic for discussion. You will drive everyone crazy. Perhaps you can rotate "leadership" on a monthly basis—someone has the power to make small decisions. Save your consensus-building for the bigger issues and concerns. All issues and concerns are not the same size. If everything gets to be the same size—everything is big or nothing is big, we are in trouble. Work together at knowing the difference. Have big discussions only for big issues.
4. However, the "axle grease" of community is not the big stuff, but often little things. Communities run smoothly and tensions are at a minimum when we are all aware and thoughtful about the little stuff: e.g.
 - a. If you drink the last of the orange juice, make more

- b. Clean up the sink after you use it
 - c. If someone is expecting a call, stay off the phone
 - d. If you see the toothpaste is getting low, get another tube
 - e. If you use the last of the toilet paper,
 - f. Etc, etc, etc.
5. Do some fun things all together, even if it isn't your best idea of fun. Find ways to play together, everyone together.
 6. Get away by yourself from time to time. Community is great, but we all also need some personal and private time.
 7. Do some projects together—e.g., everyone do yard work one afternoon or everyone together wash the car, etc.
 8. Each of you will have your own ministry, but periodically do some joint ministry together, e.g. everyone work together on some project at the local parish, everyone go together to volunteer for the local soup kitchen. It is good to have some joint (common) ministerial experiences.
 9. If you need help, get it. Any group can come to areas where they get stuck and only an outside person can help you get past it.
 10. Be careful of having special friends within the community—the one person you are always with. Nothing can hurt community more.
 11. You will all make friends with people outside the house, but make sure your primary community remains your fellow volunteers—the place where you put your best efforts.
 12. Cultivate the habit, which may seem awkward at first, of regularly thanking each other and praising each other. Even when we are just doing “what we’re supposed to do”, we all like our efforts to be noticed. Appreciation should never “go without saying.” None of us likes to be taken for granted. “Thank you” and “that was good” go a long way in building community.
 13. Fasting and feasting are both part of Christian community. Purposely designate some things you are going to do without. Take on some special “fast” for Lent. But also feast. Celebrate birthdays well. Celebrate each month the anniversary of your arrival in the house.
 14. Don't store up resentment. If someone is getting on your nerves, wait just 'til you won't blow up at them, but then tell them and tell them why. Be very specific. Half the time or more the person is just unaware and when they know, things will change.
 15. Be sure to pray together for at least 10-15 minutes every day—no exceptions, no excuses. It is like glue for your community to help hold you together.
 16. Remember that, generally, women are more process-oriented and men are more product-oriented. Men are anxious to decide and do. Women tend to be more concerned about the process leading to the decision and doing. There is neither right nor wrong in this, only difference. This is an area where you may truly need to compromise. Males will think females “talk something to death.” Females may think males “rush to conclusions.” Working through this can be fun and enlightening!

17. Anyone's personal guest should become everyone's guest. Hospitality is essential to community, but it should be practiced communally. Your guest is my guest too.
18. Many of you will celebrate your first Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and/or birthday away from home. Put time into planning your time together on the holidays.
19. Communities, sometimes, develop their own routine, habits, patterns, schedules, and ruts. This is all natural, but it can also be deadly. Keep trying new things, experimenting with new ways. Change just for the sake of change can sometimes be very good.
20. It is easy, come spring, to start thinking about what comes next—job, grad school, etc. This is bound to be a concern and to take some time, but be careful lest you simply coast to the end of the year. Try to remain as present to the program and to one another as you can, all the way to the end.
21. Laughter is a sure sign of a healthy community. If things start getting too "serious" for you, remedy that by doing something totally frivolous.
22. Try very regularly to go for a short walk (or a long one) with each other member of the house. Spend some time talking, about anything, regularly on a one-to-one basis with everybody in the community.
23. Don't ignore someone who is down or exhausted. If they need space, give them space. If they need rest, make sure they get it. If they need to talk, let them talk. A prime ministry each of you will have during the year will be to one another. If someone stays down or worn out or is frequently sick, get help.

Community living will be one of the great learnings of your volunteer year. So often, believe it or not, what people miss most, when the year is over, is community. Many former volunteers try very hard afterwards to find new communities to plug into.

Pledge to do your part, your share, and then a little more. If all of you do that, it will work very well.

We all both give to community and take from it. Try to give more than you take.

Community Prayer

It is not important how we pray, but that we pray. There is no right or wrong way and the best thing we can do is to experiment and find what works best for us. If a certain way is good for a while, but then starts getting monotonous, pray in another way.

Prayer in community is always a matter of compromise. If we are committed to praying together, then we can find a way to do it. We are faith-community, not a fraternity or a sorority and not some kind of association. Praying together helps

us to remember why we are together. Common prayer both helps create community and is an expression of community.

So, how do we do it? The following are some suggestions. They may provide a place for your own creativity to begin. Any of these suggestions can stand-alone or they can be used in combination.

1. Human beings rely on our sense and we should involve them in our prayer—use candle, music, crucifix, and pictures, even incense. The use of such things helps to engage us and to make prayer a little special. It is simply true that environment for prayer can often enhance prayer.
2. Don't rush into prayer. Always start with a minute or two of quiet, just to focus yourselves. Ease into prayer. Slow down, take a few deep breaths, and relax a bit.
3. Take a gospel passage, maybe the one for the day, and read it very slowly. Think about it quietly and then share what most struck you in the passage.
4. Read a psalm, each one slowly reading one verse. Make the words of the psalm the prayer of that day for your community.
5. Start with prayers of *thanksgiving*. What do we want to thank God for? Then prayers of *praise*. What do we want to praise God for? Then prayers of *petition*. What and for whom do we want to pray for? Then prayers of *contrition*. What do we want God's forgiveness for?
6. Pray the rosary together, or a decade or two. Before each of the prayers take turns saying whom this prayer is for, eg, your parents, family, the people you work with and for, each other.
7. Pass a lighted candle to each of you. For the minute or two that each person holds the candle, all the rest pray silently for that person.
8. Ask your director to teach you how to pray the office, get books, and pray it occasionally.
9. Sing some hymns together, or listen to them on tape. Singing is wonderful prayer.
10. Periodically share on something like, "where I most clearly saw the face of Christ today (this week.*)" End this sharing with an Our Father or a Glory Be.

Just as you shouldn't rush into prayer, don't end it abruptly. A minute or two of silence at the end is good.

Have a sign up sheet with a leader for each day or each week. You can all decide together what you would like to do for community prayer, but one person needs to give each day a little thought and planning.

Don't be afraid to invite any guests to join you for prayer. People are usually grateful to take part.

When you schedule your prayer, try to find a time that is most realistic. Because there are “day people” and “night people,” very early in the morning or very late at night may not be when everyone is most alert.

As a general rule, before supper is better than after supper.

Take the phone off the hook during your prayer time. People will always call back. Give yourselves this ten or fifteen minutes uninterrupted.

The basic rule is to pray as you can and not as you can't. Remember too that even if prayer does not seem satisfying that something good takes place nonetheless. The fruit of our prayer together is most often outside the time of our prayer.