

Vacations

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INFO SSCC Brothers No 104 – July 5, 2016



Pedro Pablo and Javier, two SSCC brothers from Chile, on vacations

They asked me to write something on vacations. If they asked me it's because, sometimes, this matter causes confusion and tension between the brothers. I remember having taken part in discussions, heated at times, in which there was an exchange of questions such as: Do I have a "right" to a vacation or not? For how much time? What can I do during my vacation? How much can I spend? Why do some spend more than others, or travel more than others, or disappear from the community longer than others? ...

What can we say about the vacations of a religious? We do not have general rules about this issue. The Constitutions often speak about "work" and "activities", but never mention "vacations". When they refer to "rest", it is done in the context of the local community, which should offer places of rest for each brother (Article 47.3) and seek times of rest together (Statute 11.1).

Therefore, speaking about vacations is primarily an exercise of "religious common sense", that is, of that practical wisdom, which, taking account of the core values of our religious consecration, manages to harmoniously organize the concrete life of the brothers.

The local communities and the provinces would do well to discuss this issue, even coming to adopt some kind of rules that serve as a reference to everyone and prevent anxieties, tensions and abuses.

For my part, I will limit myself to describing two ways of understanding vacations, from what I observe in the Congregation, and give some basic guidelines.

Rest from work

A first meaning of "vacation" is a time in which you stop performing your regular work.

In our case, the brothers who work in teaching or in parishes, or are contracted as employees in some organization, can, in general, take two, three or four weeks of vacation per year, normally following the rhythm of the school calendar. Those who perform services within the community (formators, superiors, administration, etc.) have a less defined work calendar, but usually also allows for time off from their regular tasks.

This time of rest from one's main activity is healthy, both for us as well as the people we serve.

In stopping our regular work, a space opens that allows us to do interesting things that we cannot do during the rest of the year, and to dedicate more time to that which refreshes body and soul. Vacations are thus an opportunity to reconnect with friends and family, to calmly read, to pray without a watch, for contact with nature, for sports, to sleep more, for a different kind of service, for a retreat or study session, to visit other communities in the Congregation, to get away with other brothers, etc.

How long can I suspend my work? This depends on each concrete circumstance. We need to be careful not to overdo it or to exceed the amount of vacation time the working people around us have.

It's advisable to find a few days of rest, but we will also accept shortening our vacation (or even suspend it) if the brothers or the mission requires it. Our relationship to the community is not like that of an employee who demands his rights from a boss, but one of fraternity in which the brothers organize themselves to serve better.

Absence from the community

Another way of understanding vacation is that of spending time away from the community. In many cases, this coincides with the previous meaning: when I rest from work, I go away from the community. But not necessarily, as there are brothers who rest from work, remaining in the religious house or going to another community in the Congregation. The local community is our home, our immediate family, and not just a dwelling that I occupy for work purposes.

Leaving our local community for a few days can also be healthy, as much for ourselves as for the brothers who live with us.

In this sense, there are very different practices in the Congregation. For many brothers, time outside the community is mainly devoted to being with their biological family. They go back to their hometown, look after their parents (when they are still alive), visit brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, cousins...

Others adopt a more "touristic" style of vacation. Alone or with friends, they go to see new places. Some have friends with substantial financial means who pay for their expensive trips. Others make do with simpler means.

Those in foreign lands, in areas traditionally called "mission", use part of their vacations for mission animation activities, stopping over in parishes, Christian communities and houses of the Congregation.

Time outside the community also varies according to circumstances. Those who live in their own country, tend to go on vacation each year. Among those brothers who are abroad, some return to their country every year, others every two years and others every three years.

Criteria?

As I indicated before, the circumstances are as diverse as the places, so it is better if the criteria for vacations be determined at the level of the local communities or provinces.

I encourage keeping three guidelines in mind

- Plan your vacation in dialogue with your community. Vacation is not time away from the gaze of others. Together with your brothers, look for criteria and ways to take vacations. Be flexible and generous at the time of setting

them. And, on returning, tell one another how things went during the vacation; you may have a good time of dialogue between brothers, which will help you to know each other better and appreciate each other more.

- During vacations, do something worthwhile. May what you do on vacation be like a wind that pushes your sails in the direction that you want your life to go.
- To measure the time and money you will need for your vacation, do not forget that, *"a simple lifestyle in solidarity with the poor is a decisive factor for the vitality of our entire religious life"* (Constitutions 30.1). Do not agree to a kind of vacation that would be offensive vis-à-vis the possibilities for people who live simply. In this, as in so many other things, let us remain alert so as not to bring our customs down to worldly terms. Let us not act as if we were carefree rich or like people *"who are obsessed with protecting their free time."* (Evangelii Gaudium 81).

The months of July and August are the customary vacation times in societies in the northern part of the world, and also in some in the south. To the brothers who have vacations in the coming days, I wish you an excellent time of rest.

