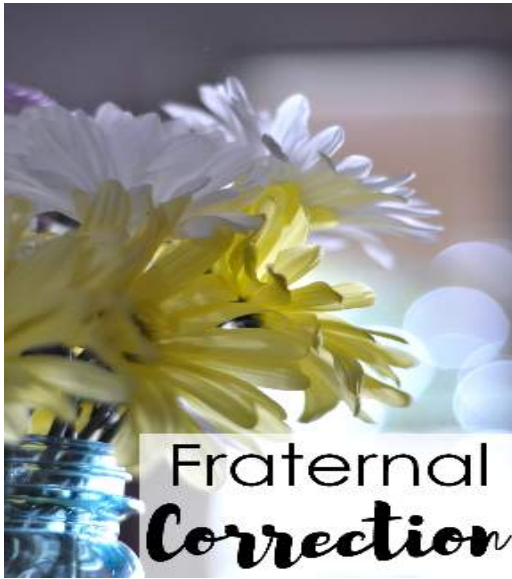
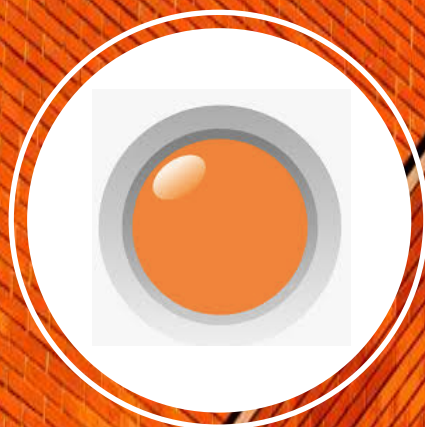




CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY CENTRE
Encountering God • Healing Hearts • Empowering Lives



Gain or Pain?



Stop, Wait or Go?

When to correct?

Fraternal correction (*correctio fraternal*) is the admonishing of one's neighbor by a private individual with the purpose of reforming him or, if possible, preventing his sinful indulgence. (Wikipedia)



In today's modern world, the sense of sin has been lost, desensitized. Conversely, the Pandemic draws us to sanitize our hands many times. When we are confronted by sin or wrong doings, if we have a well-formed conscience, then we would react upon seeing sin. Jesus had that reaction. He kept His cool, but He responded with correction and sometimes condemnation of sin. But that needs to happen prudently, patiently, and with loving care. Fraternal correction is an act of charity (CCC 1829), in which we call a brother or sister in Christ, who has fallen into serious sin, back to the way of the Gospel. Fraternal correction is explained by Jesus in the Gospel (Matthew 18:15-17).

The reason for fraternal correction is the same for any work of mercy: to avert evils from a neighbour, to enable him/her to serve the welfare of the community and to promote God's glory.

Apart from mortal sins, we must also help our neighbour to avoid or get rid of lesser sins, imperfections and defects in good manners. It can be a great benefit, for example, on correct table manners and proper dress etc. These kinds of deficiencies can easily handicap social contacts and relations. A certain amount of courage and effort is involved in almost every correction.

After all we expose ourselves to the risk of non-acceptance or angry reaction or a long sullen silence, even if the correction has been made in the proper way. Well, no act of mercy is a bed of roses, and if the common good requires it, even a grave disadvantage does not excuse us from fraternal correction. Prudence will dictate how to choose the right moment and wait for an opportune time. To save the feeling and reputation, correction should preferably be performed in private, particularly if the fault is not a public one. This leads us to the order of correction, according to the mind of Jesus.

No man is an island. We have to live in community, certainly in contact with our superiors, co-workers, fellow priests, fellow students, priests & parishioners, ministry members. If we have at heart the good of the people of God, the principles of fraternal correction must be applied. It is a delicate operation, touching the sensitive zones of a personality. Such a task can be approached only with a pure intention.

The Lord has said, *"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light"* (Matthew 6:22). That is to say, singleness of purpose lightens our whole self. Let us ask Jesus to give us singleness of purpose and a heart unalloyed by resentment, hatred and vindictiveness.



Call for Discernment

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (John 4:16-18)

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

The **woman** answered him, "I have no husband." *Jesus* said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the man you are now living with is not your husband



Fraternal correction is an ancient, Christian understanding of what it means to **help each other grow in holiness**. It is not a reaction to injury suffered, it is not vengeance. It happens when we are truly moved by love for our brother or sister. It happens when we are moved to assist our brother or sister grow in holiness. If and when we are doing that, it is called fraternal correction.

A very difficult thing to do, isn't it? We sometimes avoid correcting people because we are afraid of the consequences. We are afraid that if we speak up, even in charity, there may be ramifications. We are afraid of what will happen.

Some questions for personal reflection

1. How do I feel when being corrected?
2. Have I been able to correct someone with fraternal charity?
3. What is my comfort level in confronting wrong doings?
4. Am I afraid of losing a friendship and not face the truth about immorality?
5. What are my own personal views on fraternal correction?

Will we be hurt, or affected by this? Will we lose a friendship? Will they think we are being judgemental? The list goes on.

Suppose we notice an inappropriate and indecent dress code in church. Or someone vandalising a church pew? Or another person caught stealing? There are a number of civic minded persons who would stand up for truth and integrity. Others who think they are civic minded by snapping photos and uploading them on social media causing the perpetrators' embarrassment as this can go viral. So where do we stand on this continuum? Right wing? Left wing? No wing?

Not an easy answer. Some would say there is no black or white, straight forward answer. What if we tell that person about his/her wrong doings and got told off or worst still the person got physically violent towards us. Fraternal, fraternity, maternal, maternity – words that seem endearing on its own. In religious communities, some still practice chapter of faults, meaning they would say out their faults openly and ask pardon from their community. In a loving caring community, fraternal correction can benefit all the members in the community, by deepening trust and charity among members. Not using these faults to bring them down.

In Matthew 18:15-16, *“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”*

We find it hard to be told our blind spots. But with fraternal charity, the practice of charity with a love that recognises another person as a child of God, and therefore as brother or sister in Christ.



Fraternal Correction: When to step in and when to stay quiet

We look at this and we imagine, somehow, that maybe we need to hold back and be silent because of the consequences. That's when we know that fraternal correction is actually going to be fruitful. When we realize that we would rather not do it, but we are going to do it out of charity. Fraternal love comes with a sense of mutual responsibility.

This is an important part of the spiritual life. To support each other, to call each other to holiness. But when we do it, we always need to be careful about it. We always need to realize that we are doing it not because of any bad motives, not because of the frustration or impatience that we might have. But instead, because we really want the salvation of our brother or sister. And we really want those out there to be led to eternal life, with us too. Pope Benedict XVI quoted a 5th century theologian, St. Augustine of Hippo, who said Christians cannot be indifferent to the “severe wound” a fellow believer may have inflicted upon themselves through sin. However, St. Augustine also stressed that any subsequent fraternal correction has to be animated by love and not revenge insisting “you have to forget the hurt you have received, not the wound of your brother.”

The Pope suggested this was a reminder of the communal nature of the Christian faith – as confirmed by the promise of Christ, *“Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven”* (Matthew 18:19)

For while “personal prayer is certainly important, indeed essential,” said the Pope “the Lord assures His presence in the community” at prayer because it “reflects the reality of the Triune God, the perfect communion of love.” Thus, through communal prayer and fraternal correction “which requires a lot of humility and simplicity of heart” we can journey together towards God as “a community truly united in Christ.”