

Collaborative ministry consists in the identification, use and union of all gifts in ministry for the good of the mission. Therefore, there are gifts or talents with which people are endowed that contribute to Jesus' mission to introduce the Kingdom of God; for this to happen, these gifts need in the first place to be recognized. Then there must be the conditions that allow their release with synergy.

Collaboration is built on the variety of gifts brought together for a common purpose, which is partly the specific goal of the service given, and partly building community and communion.

Each one is the bearer of different gifts, and all are important contributions in consideration of today's complexity. There is always a need for one another and for the co-responsibility of each one, both for practical needs, to give community witness, and for communion.

Authentic collaboration has 4 characteristics:

1. It is focused on a clear, articulated, and lived common mission, owned by all colleagues.
2. There is an apparent priority for working together over tendencies to compete and/or to protect one's own area of control from others' influence. The major driving force is the desire to collaborate, a spirit of mutuality and partnership.
3. The group reaches a decision to identify, value, and unite the various gifts that each one has. Individuals and groups acknowledge the gifts they bring to the common mission and are able to affirm the gifts that others also bring.
4. It is a call to conversion, knowing that differences will always be there and conflict likely to surface sometimes. This needs not to discourage the community because it is a necessary step for building communion. It demands attitudes such as readiness to listen and learn from each other, letting go of one's petty ideas or preferences for the sake of journeying together, and to be free enough to accept being challenged and corrected in a spirit of respect.

What are the conditions that make collaboration possible?

1. **Clarify the terms of collaboration:** it is necessary to understand what is meant by collaboration and to reach a consensus on the vision, the purpose, the ministerial style, the objectives and the various tasks to be carried out.
2. **Conviction:** Collaboration always involves the need to manage diversity, personality, culture, interests, etc., with the emotional baggage and conflicts that it can generate; if there is not enough conviction of the importance and value of collaboration, it easily does not survive the tensions that may emerge.
3. **Courage:** sooner or later, everyone comes to experience some form of resistance to collaboration in the face of inevitable difficulties. The temptation is to attack the other or withdraw from collaboration. It is important to identify the difficulties and their origin precisely, discuss them and resolve them openly as they arise.

4. Capacity and a solid spirituality are needed, in particular:

- a. Ability to discern and appreciate the gifts of each person, to share leadership, to organize, to manage tensions and conflicts constructively .
- b. Design and manage a process of collaboration, taking into account
 - = the conditions that facilitate it
 - = a method to identify and value personal gifts
 - = clarify roles and responsibilities
 - = have a reporting and evaluation system.
- c. Spirituality that sustains and nourishes service and collaboration, compassion and forgiveness that bear witness to God's love. The journey of faith and prayer purify personal motivations, transform attitudes, help grow in living values and are essential for the transformation of conflicts and building communion.

The role of the animators of collaboration is to encourage and shape the path of conversion and reconciliation. They must be aware that not everybody can have the same level of capacity for collaboration, which depends on the process of human growth. They must also know the dynamics of collaboration and the obstacles that block it, such as problems of self-esteem, arrogant or hypocritical attitudes, burn-out situations, lack of conflict management, a sense of powerlessness, mourning, a poorly integrated sexuality, and the inability to share one's journey of faith.

Further readings:

- L. Sofield – C. Juliano. (2000). *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry*, Notre Dame (IN): Ave Maria Press.
- R. Covey. (2004). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful lessons in personal change*, Revised edition, New York: Free Press, pp. 185 – 284.