

Community Dues

Flos Carmeli - Fall 2006

In some of our visitations this year, the issue of community dues has arisen for various reasons. We thought we'd publicly answer a few of the questions we've been asked.

What do my community dues go towards?

We'd like to remind everyone that the Constitutions, Art. 55 states that a financial report is to be provided to the community each year. We suggest that the easiest thing would be simply to provide everyone in the community with a copy of the financial report that is submitted to the province each year. This will keep everyone informed of how their dues have been spent.

Dues should go towards things such as:

- rent for your meeting room (even if you meet at the local Carmelite monastery or the local parish, you should be paying rent for the use of the room)
- provincial dues (annual provincial financial statement is in the spring Flos Carmeli)
- stipend for retreat master, rent of retreat facility, other community related retreat expenses; same for days of recollection
- stipend for conferences given to the community by non-community members
- purchasing scapulars for clothings
- community mail and copies
- visitation expenses
- some of our communities cover partial or full travel expenses for things like the councilor workshops or Congresses
- some communities offer retreat scholarships for those who can't otherwise afford the annual community retreat
- various other expenses approved by the council and community

What if the financial report shows an expense I want to question?

It is appropriate for a member of the community to question what the community dues are going towards. The reason for the annual financial statement being provided to the community is to provide some accountability to the community for how the dues are being spent. The written report provides much more information than the monthly verbal treasurer's report that is part of our business meeting. Unfortunately, the Provincial Council has recently come across a couple of our communities where funds were spent improperly and without approval from the local council or community. We very much want to think that we can trust our fellow community members but the reality is that money is one of those touchy things which are not always handled appropriately.

How much should our dues be and what if I can't afford it?

Most of our communities have dues of \$10/month which can be paid monthly, quarterly, or in full once/year. Some communities pay provincial dues out of those regular dues and others collect the provincial dues separately. It does help if the council draws up a budget each year

which is shared and discussed with the community and then the amount of dues can be set based on the expected budget.

The vast majority of our members can afford \$10/month as part of their monthly budget. For the small number of people who live on very limited incomes, Statute XIV.2 notes that the local council should handle this with discretion. In other words, the member should approach a member of the council to explain privately why they are unable to pay the dues. This gets shared with the council which informs the treasurer that this individual is excused from dues. Both the council and the treasurer should keep this information in confidentiality. Some of our members are better off financial and are encouraged to contribute extra to help towards those few members unable to afford the dues.

What kind of bank account should we have?

A basic checking account serves well for most communities. Many of our communities make sure the account is at a bank where there is no monthly charge. There should be at least two names on the account – the treasurer and usually the president. Never should only one name be on a community account. Also, the bank account for the community must always be a separate account. In other words, community dues may not be kept in someone's personal account.