

Missionary Families of Christ

FRATERNAL HOUSEHOLDS

The pastoral structure of MFC is such that every member (except for kids) belongs to a household for personal support, and every member is under the pastoral care of a leader.

There are two types of households in MFC. One is the *led* household, the other is the *fraternal* household. A led household is a cell group where there is a Household Servant. A fraternal household is a cell group where there is no one Household Servant, but where all the members take pastoral responsibility for everyone else in the group.

The ordinary and most common type of household is the led household. Within a chapter, which is the pastoral subdivision of the one community that is MFC, basically everyone belongs to a led household. Members belong to a household led by a Household Servant, household leaders belong to a *unit* household led by a Unit Servant, unit leaders belong to a *chapter* household led by a Chapter Servant, and chapter leaders belong to a household led by a Household Servant who is a senior. This is the most common pattern, though subject to some variations.

Notice that the structure is pyramidal. But if you continue moving up the pyramid, you will reach the top, where there is no longer any household available for the top leader, in a particular territorial area. Also, there is no longer any other MFC leader who can exercise headship over this top leader.

However, in MFC we believe that every member, no matter how mature and high in leadership, still needs regular pastoral support that is found in a household. We also believe that every senior (elder) needs to have someone over him who can help and support him in his continuing personal growth in the Lord and in MFC.

How is this possible then for the person at the top of the pyramidal pastoral structure in a particular area? The solution is to have a fraternal household. In effect, we are cutting off the very tip of the pyramid and flattening it a bit. Instead of one person at the very top (or tip), there will be a group of seniors who in effect will act as heads over each other. They will have a *fraternal* pastoral relationship.

Establishing fraternal households

A fraternal household is normally only established in a mature MFC area where there are already a number of seniors (seniors are Chapter Servants and up). By its very nature, fraternal relationships work well if the members of the fraternal household are mature in their spirituality and in their appreciation of the life and mission of MFC. Otherwise, MFC members are better off in a led household, where there is one clear leader who moves the members forward in spirituality and community life.

Spiritual maturity though is not an easily definable quality. And we do not need to define it for our purposes. For us in MFC, the preferred type of household is the led household, even for those who are already seniors. There is no set level of spiritual growth where we then say that one “graduates” from a led household to a fraternal household. In fact, a very mature senior may be placed in a led household for certain pastoral reasons. Thus it is possible for a senior who is in a led household to be more mature than another senior who is in a fraternal household.

The basic reasons then for establishing fraternal households are the following:

To provide a support group for top leaders, in line with our pastoral principle that everyone, no matter how high in leadership, ought to be in a household for personal support and to be under headship to another MFC leader.

To provide support to the top leader in a new or growing area, even if that top leader would not otherwise qualify to be in a fraternal household in a mature MFC area.

The second basic reason given above for establishing a fraternal household has to do with the establishment of MFC in new areas, and their initial development. When we bring MFC to a new area (a distant one), we start with a CLS and after the CLS we form households. The CLS Team withdraws and leaves the new group to themselves as far as their day-to-day life as MFC goes. Households are formed according to our pastoral pyramid. MFC in the area will continue to grow through the years as it conducts CLSs and integrates new members into the body. Now the problem is that the top leader, whether he is just a Household Servant because the new MFC established is just a small group, or whether he is a Unit Servant or even later a Chapter Servant as the community grows, will have no household to belong to and will have no one as pastoral head. Thus in this situation we can also establish a fraternal household, even if the fraternal household members are still immature in their personal spirituality and in their appreciation of the life and culture of MFC.

Fraternal relationships

Membership in a fraternal household of couples is for both husband and wife. Just as in any MFC household, the men and women relate to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. In addition, in a fraternal household, the *men exercise headship* over each other. The women exercise *leadership* over each other, headship over them still being exercised by their respective husbands.

Members of fraternal households are expected to take responsibility for one another and for the life and vibrancy of the household. More specifically, they are expected to:

Be totally open about their life and willingly bring up for discussion any areas needing improvement (remember that there is no one pastoral head who will be regularly monitoring one’s life in the Lord).

Actively support and encourage one another in the Christian life and in faithfulness to the life and mission of MFC.

Confidently give advice and direction whenever deemed helpful, even when such is not solicited.

Actively work to strengthen personal relationships within the group.

Correct any member when necessary.

Faithfully attend all meetings of the group, and call on one another to faithfulness.

Be available for one-to-one meetings with any group member upon request.

On a practical level, the host (the man in the case of a couple) for a particular fraternal household meeting is the one tasked with deciding what to take up for that meeting. In addition, he leads the worship and facilitates the time of sharing and/or discussion. Of course, the whole fraternal group could agree and decide on what to take up for the meetings. But in the absence of any such agreement, the host decides.

Pastoral oversight

For every fraternal household, there is a designated *functional head*, who is a member of the household. The functional head is not the pastoral head of the fraternal household, and he, just like the other men, is under headship to the others. His responsibilities include the following:

To see to it that the household meetings happen and that there is good order in the meetings.

To continually evaluate the vibrancy of meetings and fraternal relationships, and if lacking, to bring this up to the group for discussion and action.

To see to it that the group members are holding one another accountable for the life of the group and for their individual faithfulness to the life and mission of MFC.

To bring up to the attention of the functional overseer any matter that needs a higher senior to take care of.

There is a *functional overseer* designated for every fraternal household. This would be a top senior, who is not part of the household. His responsibilities include the following:

To be available to the group and to any of its members for any pastoral input or discussion, upon request by any member.

To handle major correction.

To occasionally inquire as to the vibrancy of relationships within the fraternal household, and to conduct pastoral visits whenever necessary.

To direct the group to take up a particular topic for discussion or to do a particular activity, as he deems helpful or necessary.

(SG. Oct 7, 2019)