

CLC – A Lay Apostolic Body

Dear delegates and fellow companions

Background

My presentation starts 10 years ago, in Nairobi (2003) when we were “*Sent by Christ, members of one body*” moving from a community of apostles to one apostolic community. We said that we “*felt confirmed in our call to become a lay apostolic body that shares responsibility for mission in the Church*”. The five years that followed were years of experimentation, understanding and deepening. Five years ago, in Fatima (2008) we acknowledged that we were “*Journeying as an Apostolic Body*” however we were also confronted with our fragility; in fact we said “*it is not (yet) possible to give a clear description or definition of a “lay apostolic body”, because ours is a new way of being in the Church*”. This ExCo established an internal working group to further reflect and deepen our understanding and meaning of CLC being a lay apostolic body in the Church and in our Society. The fruit of the working group is a 20 page paper that describes our reflection so far. The ExCo used this paper, discussed and deepened it. The working group showed an early version of the paper to a group of wisdom people in CLC seeking their feedback and advice. This feedback was invaluable and the group felt it was necessary to re-write it into the form it is today. What I will try to do in the coming minutes is share with you the fruit of this reflection and work.

Tracing our roots to the call

As a working group we felt it was important that we gave this reflection a sense of history, a sense that this call is not something that just sounds nice to have, or some new buzz word in our CLC jargon of life. We know that some people will argue that CLC was always called to be apostolic, but our search tried to trace a point in time when CLC started to refocus itself on its service and mission after the process that saw CLC transform itself from the Marian Congregations. Our search took us back to the Loyola Assembly (1986): “*Mary the model of our mission*”. Without wanting to cause any historical errors (since this is not meant to be a historical thesis) allow me to simply state that this is where we (the working group) started our journey. That Assembly was clearly received as a call for the community to seek its identity in mission. Guadalajara (1990) saw our new General Principles be written and these also speak about CLC being a lay apostolic body, and just to point out two paragraphs I mention GP4 and GP8. I can quote a few other places in the GPs but time does not allow for this. In 1994, the grace of the Hong Kong Assembly called us to be one world community sent on mission. The following Assembly in Itaiçi 1998 called **the** community to a common mission seeking Christ in the more urgent and more universal needs of our societies. It was becoming clear by now, that CLC was transforming itself again. Recall the first important transformation, that of moving from a federation of communities towards (what we take for granted today) one world community. A second transformation was now taking place, as was clearly received in Nairobi 2003, we moved from one community of apostles to becoming one apostolic body in the Church. The Assembly in Nairobi recognised that if this transformation was to be successful, CLC would need to develop structures that would support this transformation at all its levels. Fatima 2008 gave a clear emphasis to the Lay Apostolic Body, its tools and structures. We also felt reconfirmed in our call to follow this journey – a journey that would lead us to be prophetic in our Church and society.

A Lay Identity in the Church

Our reflection also led us to study and discover our role as lay in the Church. If CLC is called to be a Lay Apostolic Body in the Church, then, surely there is a role for the laity in the Church. In fact, the more significant re-discovery of this role took place in the second Vatican council. This can be seen in the council's documents. This council had such a profound effect on the Church that it highlighted the dignity of all baptized, religious and lay. It also restored the co-responsibility we all have (religious and lay) in the mission of Jesus Christ today. So, how do the lay integrate their faith and daily life? The apostolate of the laity is very broad and includes specific contexts such as Family, Profession, Politics, Economy, Society, Culture, etc. Lay people, above all, must be characterized by the quality of their individual presence in their daily environment and routine. As lay Christians, CLC members' mission falls in this pattern – bringing the presence of Christ and discerning His presence in all the spheres of our daily lives. The priority of CLC mission is in these spaces and areas.

The communal approach to individual and common mission is also a powerful witness in and of itself to the common origin and destiny of humanity and of creation. It brings with it significant implications for the understanding of the call to bring about greater justice and integrity for all peoples and indeed for all creation. Thus the communal dimension is of itself a sign of the presence and invitation from God to build a world of justice, peace and integrity. From this standpoint, the call to live as Lay Apostolic Body in the Church acquires greater urgency.

Our Place in the Church - Lay and Ignatian

CLC is a member of the body of Christ, the Church. So what shape and form do we have? What is our particular vocation in the Church? In line with the *magis* that characterises our particular way of being disposed to the Lord, we cannot tire in listening to what the Lord may be saying to us in these conversations. Reflecting on Ignatius' life and ministry to and with the laity, one can learn some lessons for the understanding of the Lay Apostolic Body today, beginning with the central place of ***Love for and in the community***. We do not live our vocation in isolation or in a vacuum. Our personal vocations are flavoured by our participation in the various communities and groups of which we form part, such as our country, our religious tradition, our family, gender and the times in which we live. We are shaped by, and help to shape, the communities in whose lives we share or touch. Ignatius also teaches us about the ***Love for the official Church and how to deal with it***. Ignatius considered the official Church to be a fundamental community for the authentic living of his personal and Jesuit vocation. To help his companions and followers do this efficaciously, he gives the "Rules for Thinking with the Church" [the Spanish original *para sentir con la Iglesia* is better translated *to feel with the Church*] as a part of the Spiritual Exercises. When dealing with the Church one needs to understand that the Church itself has many faces; there can be the inclination to think only of the hierarchical or teaching authority of the church - which is more concerned with the preservation of the doctrine - as 'the Church'. This is one face of the Church, and it is important that we learn how to interact with the hierarchy in a healthy and discerning manner. However, there is also the prophetic face where the Church endeavours to be rooted in society, and more alert to the signs of the times. As a Lay community, CLC is called particularly to this prophetic yet still universal Church. To be prophetic as a lay community in the church, we need to *know* the world, our context, be rooted in our society, understand well the teachings of the *Church* and integrate these in our on-going reflections on *signs of the times*. GP6 states "*Union with Christ leads to union with the church ... Sharing the riches of membership of the Church This sense of the Church impels us to creative*

and concrete collaboration for the work of advancing the reign of God on earth, and includes a readiness to go and serve where the needs of the Church so demand.”

While it is important to underline that when we say Church we mean the Roman Catholic Church, we also embrace the ecumenical nature of the Church drawing our membership from all facets of our Church. This is not only an integral part of our reality but it is also a prophetic call to live our vocation faithfully. This paradox of living in greater unity while remaining open to the diversity of the Church defines our CLC vocation as a new way of living the life of the Church today and we are still discovering what this new way really means to us and the Church. This discovery will help us to be more effective in our particular mission in the Church. In doing so we are drawn to refine the character and nature of our members.

Our way of living community

Our reflection also led us to look at our world community and the way we live it. Over the years CLC has developed its own way of living a community, one world apostolic body. We are not a perfect community but it is important to reflect upon this expression of our being community.

The core of our community is built around small communities, called local groups. In these we share our lives and our faith centred on Christ. We have a guide and a spiritual companion/director who helps us in our daily discernment, helping us to remain faithful to Christ even in the difficulties that we face. This is the place where the practice of communal discernment starts, sharing responsibility in mission. It is the place where our dynamic of Discern, Send, Support and Evaluate takes root. This is where we practice DSSE. Healthy local groups create a healthy community!

Our small communities gather together as a national community in which we also have a national leadership team and a spiritual companion (in the form of an Ecclesiastical Assistant). Here too we practice communal discernment and share responsibility for the life and mission of the community. This is also done through the DSSE dynamic.

Our national communities (and therefore every member of CLC) gather themselves as members of one world community. Here again the same dynamics of the small groups are followed. We have a leadership team in the form of the World ExCo and spiritual companions in the form of the World Ecclesiastical Assistant and the Vice World EA. Here too we practice communal discernment sharing responsibility for the life and common mission of the community. The dynamic we use is here again the DSSE dynamic. So, one can clearly see why the small groups of CLC are so important.

A few important expressions of our way of life as an Apostolic Body

Commitment

Over recent years a lot of energy in the community at all levels has been spent on understanding and deepening the meaning of “commitment” in CLC. We have a whole range of experiences in this respect. We have communities that have adopted an expression of commitment very clearly in their national community life, while we have communities who are only starting to embrace this expression, and others who have not even started to deal with this. Our collective experience today shows us that “commitment” is first and foremost to God! He loved us first and the realisation of His unconditional love for us can only open our hearts and minds to humbly commit ourselves to Him in

return. The **expression** of this commitment is done in CLC through its way of life as a landmark experience (in a ceremony) in our life.

In undertaking an expression of commitment we need to always be mindful of the fact that we need to remain open to “the whole Church and all people of goodwill” (GP7). We must resist, at all costs, a tendency towards exclusivity! As we deepen our reflection and understanding on the meaning of commitment in CLC, we realise that we also need to deepen our understanding on another important and related issue...membership. As we grow into being a lay apostolic body we will need to know who are the people we can count on to undertake our mission. We need to know who is really committed to the CLC way of life in its totality. This is not only a reserved privilege of those who have expressed their commitment to God in CLC, but it is an open invitation to all who consider themselves to be members of CLC, all those who are walking with us in our local groups!

Financial Co-Responsibility

From the last Assembly in Fatima (especially) there has been a collective realisation that as our world community finds its place in the world, reaching financial independence is an important milestone. Similar to a person who, after living through university years (maybe partly living on the financial support of his/her parents) now is trying to find his/her place in the world, then achieving financial independence is an important state. Not as an aim in itself, but this state gives the community the chance to dream and explore new avenues. In the case of CLC, reaching this financial independence is one very clear way of expressing our solidarity with each other (our previous conversation about financial management links here). We cannot say that we are one community if we do not feel responsible for each other. It is also a means that will help us work towards “changing oppressive structures” (GP8) especially as we are invited to look at our responsibilities as Christians in the world.

A simple lifestyle

Conscious of the danger of what this term may imply for some people, it is a truth that if CLC is a lay apostolic body, then, it must strive to seek a simplicity in life that will leave it open to the quiet voice of God. We do this, for example, by exercising a preferential option for the poor (GP4) in some of our choices for ministry. Such a choice expresses our freedom to befriend “the poor” whoever they may be in our society. Our choice of simple lifestyle also expresses itself in the review of daily life. We try to give an apostolic sense to even the most humble realities of daily life (GP8c).

Fatima named the call to closer identification with Christ’s mission to bring good news to the poor among its signs of hope and challenge received, and thus recommended that the World community at all levels embrace greater visibility precisely by taking prophetic stances and actions in favour of, and in solidarity with the poor. Put against a dominant world culture characterised by enormous levels of consumerism that threaten the sustainability of life for the poor and for other life-forms on the planet, a prophetic stance cannot mean anything less than the option for a simple lifestyle.

Apostolic Availability and Initiatives

Our apostolic call is characterised and takes form in many ways. Our mission is vast and knows no bounds. We are called to be with the individual but also in our social and Church structures. Because of the vastness of our mission we need to be conscious of this fact and remain focused on our call. I will move on for now from this topic since Franklin will deepen this specific topic later on.

Signs of our apostolic nature are seen through our apostolic works and advocacy initiatives. To be a truly apostolic body the W-CLC must engage itself in specific works that will be of support and service to the *"people of GOD"*. It is not only through the various apostolic initiatives arrived at through DSSE that CLC becomes an apostolic body. It is also through advocacy arrived at through DSSE. A further reading and prayer on GP8 will highlight the apostolic nature of CLC while enhancing this through our being one world community.

In living the active awareness of being an apostolic body in the world, CLC local communities can do well to let their apostolic discernment be formed and informed by the grace of Itaici, where the grace of understanding mission as bringing Christ, finding Christ, and living Christ became the defining characteristics of CLC mission. All our mission assumes the character of 'bringing the freeing power of Christ to our social realities', it engages deeply with our cultures allowing the light of Christ illuminate what in them needs transformation, and that it be a channel of living Christ in every aspect of our daily lives.

Deepening our apostolic call

As CLC lives this grace of growth and transformation we are to expect that we will all be invited to re-order or re-orient our lives and our priorities. This means a challenge of having to live a change that will have deep rooted implications both for ourselves as individuals and for our community.

The CLC community of the future will not be the same CLC community we know today!

CLC (and therefore us) will need to be present with Christ in the suffering of our world today, feeling, seeing, hearing, tasting the suffering with Him. This transformation is essentially a call to be in the world as Christ is in the world, that is to be real witnesses of Christ. As our apostolic community feels, hears and sees the suffering of God's people the way God does; and as our Apostolic Community responds, then, and only then, does CLC become a prophetic voice in our world.

In a recent meeting with the world Executive council, Fr. Nicolas, our World EA drew our attention to the importance for CLC members integrating their mission and their profession. As professional people, business people, and lay people in the midst of the world, the call to bring, find and live Christ as members of his body is very central. We need to be present with Christ not merely as spectators in a very sad story but as sinful protagonists humbly working to relieve some of the suffering in our world.

Voices of our apostolic works

I now silence myself and let some of our works speak for themselves...

(video: CLC Answering some calls)

So what definition can we give to CLC being a Lay Apostolic Body?

Maybe we can use a (prophetic) definition of Josée Gsell in 1986: *"CLC is a living reality, it is a community of members where each one is led to see the priority not of his/her own interests nor even those of his/her own country but those of the whole world community, in order that living concretely and in its depth this universality among ourselves, we are able then to spread it throughout the world"*.