

Meet the ExCo



Denis Dobbelstein

Who are you, Denis, briefly?

I was born in Belgium, a small country in the heart of Europe, crossroad of Latin and Germanic cultures.

I grew up in a family where love is stronger than the wounds of life.

I have been married to Marie-Claire for 25 years. Our son Antoine is 24. Camille, our daughter, is 22. They've left the family nest, and we're proud of them for that.

I live and work as a lawyer in Brussels, a cosmopolitan city where more than 125 different languages are spoken.

What attracted you to CLC?

Perhaps some of you think I discovered CLC through my mother, who was president of the national community. But in fact, my parents discovered CLC after I did.

Others might think it's because my brother is a Jesuit. But he's younger than I.

Did I discover CLC thanks to my wife? On the contrary, we met thanks to CLC. And our history as a couple is deeply linked to our commitment to serve the community.

In fact, I joined my first local community in 1980, when I was 14. I participated in my first worldwide congress (Loyola) in 1986, and it was dazzling. I had the impression that I was discovering the whole world, at fast-forward speed. But over and beyond the enthusiasm sparked by this event, I especially received confirmation that I had found "my" faith community. Already, Ignatius spirituality was making me grow. At Loyola, I had the privilege of fully contemplating the treasure of our spirituality, which bears fruit in very different cultural contexts. From this founding experience, I received the certitude that there was something right and true here, a universal treasure pertinent for taking on the XXIst century.

Since then, I've filled just about all the roles possible in CLC, with periods where I gave priority to my family when necessary. I was CLC president of the French-speaking part of Belgium from 2006 to 2012. I've been a member of the worldwide ExCo since the Assembly meeting in Beirut (August 2013).

Could you say a few words about the graces you have received in CLC?

Different Jesuits progressively showed me ways to enter into personal dialogue with The One who is infinitely over and beyond us, through Holy Scripture and the Spiritual Exercises. This is my "vertical" axis. And on the other hand, through my local communities, I discovered the second axis of encountering God, the "horizontal" axis.

Each and every one of us is created in the image of God. Each one of us offers a partial and yet pertinent reflexion of Christ's face. The experience of sharing in a local community has allowed me to encounter God far beyond the limitations imposed by my own history, or my vision of the world, or my sin. This encounter is not simply the fruit of the multiplication of individual testimonials. Community is not only a space for encountering God; it can also be God's presence (Mt 18, 20).



Denis Dobbelstein

Denis et Marie-Claire on their 25th wedding anniversary



I was fortunate to be part of the first generation of Belgian lay Ignatians, called by the Jesuits to be their partners. They had the courage to entrust us with responsibility, although some of us were very young. From this, I was given the conviction that we prepare the future through the intuitions, energy and even the wisdom of the next generation. I'm also filled with gratitude for the implicit message: we are allowed to make mistakes, even when they seem avoidable to those who have more experience. Life is a risk that needs to be taken.



Denis' Parents on their 50th wedding anniversary

At CLC I was called to be a trainer... before being trained. (This is another Belgian folly.) But in fact, through my contacts with the Jesuits, Ignatian sisters and lay theologians in our efforts to construct a set of adequate programs, I received unimaginable training. And once again, there was a decisive, implicit message: we are all seekers of God in a world that's in evolution. Some people have the talent for training others, but they continue to seek. My "masters'" humility was a grace for me and a strong signal for all the CLC.

Since becoming a member of the world ExCo, I am able to measure the apostolic force of the CLC better, thanks to the relevance of community discerning and the effective determination of some national

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What is your role in the world ExCo?

First of all, I strive to do the same thing as all the other members. But each of us uses different words to express this, in function of our personal story and the context we're working in.

I would say that our first responsibility is to contemplate the community. At Fatima, Father Nicolas invited us to see, hear and sense the world as God does, as a fundamental preliminary to attempting a prophetic word. Mutatis mutandis, this is what the CLC can expect from the members of the ExCo: that we know the community interiorly, that we look beyond appearances, that we look at what is best and spaces which call the community to growth. Then, humbly, we can invite the community to new thought from time to time, not in our own name, but in reflecting what it already is in other places. Sometimes we speak for the CLC, but it's important that the community speak for itself, in acts more than in words.

An important part of our service consists of visiting our region's communities. We don't go as tourists, but as "bees", hoping to pollinate just as a bumblebee deposits the pollen collected on a previous flower almost by accident. This is the force of a community of worldwide dimension: there is such wealth that all the communities can benefit from the vitality of the others. One community has a long history, rich in experience

From left to right:
The Dobbelstein Family
The Local CLC 1997-2013
The Local CLC 2015



and even in expertise, another has the vitality and thirst of youth, yet another has wisdom or creative intuition or an apostolate which generates enthusiasm.

There is a permanent challenge to our world CLC service and that is to carry both concern for communities that are new, fragile or ageing with our ambition for growth, service and apostolic appeal. Our community has many members, and everything isn't always pertinent or possible all the time. Our community is renewed incessantly through the integration of new members, but nevertheless it's growing in maturity and the desire to assume responsibilities compatible with our 50 years of history and our secular roots.

Personally, I consecrate time and energy to subjects as diverse as the language of wisdom, the boundaries of the family, updating the General Principals and General Norms...and finances. Believe me: all of this is incredibly passionate, including the finances, because through all these subjects I'm able to see all that CLC has the capacity to undertake throughout the world. But, I have to admit that I'm particularly interested in the language of wisdom. First of all, this challenge crosses all the dimension of CLC's mission and I strongly sense that we owe this particular service to our world which is in profound mutation. Secondly, this language of wisdom will not be written in Rome or in Brussels, but rather by all of us within our local cultures.

To serve the worldwide CLC community is a "reasonable folly", it's beyond our own force and yet it's desirable. I invite each one of you to regularly pray to the Holy Spirit for the ExCo.

What is your dream for CLC?

Sometimes I dream of a worldwide community which is more visible, more recognized. I find myself looking for a single priority, a slogan, an image that can be associated to CLC et help us to grow in numbers. But then I sweep this idea away; it's only an easy temptation.

Four pertinent frontiers were identified at our meeting in Beirut. It's not easy to present a community with engagements in several fields. We live in a world where everything moves fast, but our community proposes discernment and action which respects the diversity and the complexity of our world. And this is precisely what I dream of for CLC: that we offer to the world and the Church our specific manner of discerning, deciding, and committing ourselves. I recall the words of a Belgian bishop who came to a regional meeting in Belgium. He was surprised at all the people he knew and said "Now I understand where you find your strength. I'm not asking anything new of you; simply continue to offer your wisdom and your capacity for discernment in the apostolic missions in which you are already committed."

*Original in French
Translated by Cecilia McPherson*

