

SUPPLEMENT TO PROGRESSIO

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OF CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITIES**

COMMUNITY

**A Response to the Action of the Spirit
in the Christian Life Communities**

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Abbreviations used :

CLC : Christian Life Communities GP : General Principles

FOREWORD

This fourth Supplement portrays the thrust of the community dimension in CLC, as its profile emerges today.

It is no doubt useful to recall that the PROGRESSIO SUPPLEMENTS, like the review itself, reflect the searchings of Christian Life Communities around the world. When their evolution and experiences are of general value, we try to grasp what these are and present them to our readers. They constitute then a working paper. They allow us to confront our own experience with that described, and stimulate exchanges within our own community. This can aid us to objectify or to situate our own knowledge and experiences on the topic.

The COMMUNITY constitutes one of the essentials that make up our CLCs. And there is a striking similarity in the characteristics of it, as they appear in the experiences being lived today in many places. It is true too that, by and large, CLCs find themselves in the early stages of their community experience. This explains why they sometimes find it difficult to describe what they are only beginning to live, and to express all the riches and potential involved.

This SUPPLEMENT is then, in a way, a flash photo of a community experience as we see it developing and being confirmed in the CLCs of different countries. It seizes these experiences at the moment they are being lived and in the way they are being formulated today. This without prejudice to the complementary and corrective developments which CLC's future path may bring. This highlights the value of this booklet: it can help each of us to evaluate, personally and in our CLCs, the community experiences we are having by comparing them with the wider reality as it appears in CLCs across the world. But at the same time, this admits its limits: a definitive profile has not yet been realized: we see now only the outlines, more and more clearly, it is true. In this sense, it is an invitation to live and to share with growing fidelity that which brings us together in the Christian Life Community.

Many authors, all of them members of CLC, collaborated in this Supplement. Their contributions, whether these be in the form of experiential accounts or of reflections, draw on their concrete living in the Christian Life Community. Their diverse geographical origins corroborate the single thrust of the CLC community experience that they present, though this is clothed in quite a variety of expressions.

This Supplement, such as it is, sheds light on a segment of the road we are travelling. It recalls to all of us that, having made the same choice out of love for Jesus Christ, the COMMUNITY is there to open us and make us ready for the action of His Spirit.

José Gsell

Part One

LINES OF DEVELOPMENT IN CLC TODAY

I. CLC, A COMMUNITY TO SERVE IN "DISPERSION"

On my work desk is the photo taken at the end of the Assembly of Augsburg in 1973: a symbol of what I wish to communicate to you. That photo shows more than 200 of us, members representing the CLCs of more than 30 different countries. And yet that motley multitude of diverse origins forms ONE SINGLE COMMUNITY. A Community that later DISPERSED, headed for their respective "MISSIONS".

And that is what our local communities want to reproduce: the "universal sense" of the Church. Rooted as they are in time and space, and at the same time open to all time and to the entire world.

We must become conscious of this communitarian and "ecclesial" spirit, so as to be always alert that our life style is never deprived of meaning and force by other aspects that are not characteristic of CLC. These communities which form a single community will never need to be turned in upon themselves, and must never succumb to the temptation of turning into mere gatherings where prayer and reflection do not lead to SERVICE.

There is not space here to develop either the inspiring history or the theology of the dimensions just mentioned. Perhaps PROGRESSIO may later on offer more ample material about the inspiring origin of the spirituality of the Christian Life Communities. Nevertheless, to help us in our reflection and prayer, both personal and communitarian, I shall outline a few elements that are very significant:

We are groups of FRIENDS IN THE LORD: We have been "called together" by the Lord through a common experience founded in the Spiritual Exercises. "Called together": by the Lord, in order to make the journey of apostolic following that results from sticking close to Our Lord Jesus Christ with a keen desire to continue his work, SERVING SO AS TO BUILD THE KINGDOM. Our friendship is not held together by spontaneous or by

natural affinities of temperament, language, race, hobbies... Our FRIENDSHIP proceeds from the INITIAL LOVE OF THE LORD for each one of us. We have been "seduced" by Him, and instead of dividing us, our differences unite us in our common eagerness to follow Christ. We have divested ourselves of "self-love, personal desire and self-interest" for the sake of the ONE LOVE AND DESIRE of the Lord Jesus.

We are friends in the Lord IN DISPERSION: for the bonds of our friendship are based on the LOVE that is COMMUNICATIVE of self and is DISPERSED AND OFFERED to all men. It is a love that, in the language of St. Ignatius in the Contemplation to Obtain Divine Love, DESCENDS from God (the initiative of the love of the Lord) and EXTENDS itself to all. Perhaps we should expand on this second aspect because, very often, we more easily have the experience of love "that comes from on high" and less the EXTENSION or DISPERSION of that love in us, which commits us to be witnesses of his Gospel to the farthest ends of the earth.

This dispersion is manifested, as we have already indicated, by our being scattered in time and geographic space. But it is also shown THROUGH THE VARIOUS MISSIONS (SENDINGS or ASSIGNMENTS) that are entrusted to us by the movement of the Holy Spirit and are DISCERNED for a BETTER SERVICE. Each member community of the larger CLC community ought to seek and find its specific mission, just as each individual member of particular communities must do.

This means that this dispersion, established to "bind oneself more to God our Lord and show oneself more generous towards Him," is vibrant with the joy of sharing the same spirit of love and service, a spirit that unites us despite our physical separation and thus gives a special quality to our friendship in the Lord.

We are friends in the Lord IN COMMUNICATION: The most fundamental reason for our communication in the CLCs is the one that St. Ignatius states in the Contemplation for Obtaining Divine Love: "Love consists in two-way communication or sharing, that is, in giving to and sharing with the loved one whatever one has or can have, and vice versa the loved one with the beloved..." (Spir. Ex. 231). Thus the example of God, which is communicated "from above", makes us "reflect"

and leads us not only to a "take, Lord and receive" with regard to God (Spir. Ex. 234), but also towards all others - our neighbors, our friends, all men.

But, just as for the Lord a special form of his communication is his WORD, so also in "revealing ourselves" and communicating ourselves to others we accomplish this through the WORD, which helps us to be able to express and to increase our mutual love.

When Ignatius and his companions entered upon their famous Deliberation, what they asked themselves could be stated thus: "The first night that we got together this question was posed: whether it would be better for us to be united and bound together in a single body, so that no physical distance however great would separate us... Finally we decided for the affirmative... that we should not undo our union and association, but rather confirm it ...MAKING OURSELVES INTO ONE BODY, WITH EACH ONE KNOWING ABOUT AND CARING FOR THE OTHERS..." (Mon. Ignatiana, Const. I, p. 3, n. 3).

It is precisely because of this distance that the union involved is defined not only as a "bond of wills" but also by the essential means of obtaining it despite the physical distance, namely "having news and information about one another and much communication."

Features of Our Communities: I have had to accept the limitations of space and so am unable to consider fully and treat in depth other aspects of our COMMUNITY IN DISPERSION. But I want to be sure to underline some characteristics that ought to be present in every local CLC. They follow as corollaries from what has already been explained:

1) Each CLC is an apostolic group: all the means that we use in the CLC should lead us to follow Our Lord Jesus Christ "apostolically". Prayer, then, in and for action, means that if we are not dedicated to apostolic activity, our prayer is "empty of the message of the Lord."

2) The diversity of missions implies that in CLC our activity is not limited to any one category. Inherent in this characteristic is, then, a plurality of activities and commitments, and not "uniformity".

3) Since we are following Jesus Christ poor and humble (as we have come to recognize him through the common experience of the Exercises, we must have a life style that

continually identifies us more and more with the poverty of Christ.

4) This group of "friends in the Lord" should live an apostolic flexibility of men transformed by Christ who run towards the most universal good, leaving - often with regret - means that take us away from this vision, and who take bold and intelligent initiatives in the spirit of Christ.

5) Seeking, therefore, always the Divine Will, while letting ourselves be questioned and challenged both by his Living Word(Christ) and by his Existential Word (events).

6) We must sow the seed everywhere of the community as a sign of "koinonia" (fellowship) in such a way that each of the local communities and the Universal Community of CLC may be a sacrament: sign and reality of the communion of love established among men by means of Jesus Christ.

Justo González-Tarrío s.j.

II. THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

A newly formed gathering of CLC members does not automatically become a CLC group or community. It can easily remain a collection of persons or wither and die along the way. Each individual and the group as a whole must struggle with the help of God's grace toward human and Christian maturity. What is, then, the role of a local community and what does living it imply?

The Role Note that we are concerned with a CLC group, not a family or a group of friends or even a parish group. Our bond is a common vision and way of life: service within the Church and for the total liberation of man and the world in Christ. We gather together in community to live this mission together and to help one another live it, each in his own unique place and way.

We note also that the local group is the place where the community dimension of the CLC way of life is lived by most of us most of the time. Larger groupings such as congresses, courses or sessions on national and international levels are occasional and so do not touch our living of CLC over the weeks and months of the year. One's personal commitment and efforts are fundamental but remain individual until shared with the group. The local community represents the grass-roots of CLC where the universal and individual dimensions find their on-going communitarian expression.

We might term this the role of the local group: a lived-experience in community of CLC. It is not just discussion or planning or even praying together but a living out of a way of life based on the Spiritual Exercises and for apostolic service. Nor is it enough to have a collection of CLC members unless there is an interaction between them as members of a community. The human and spiritual quality of the listening and sharing which go to make up that interaction are the heart of the local group's effectiveness. Its role, then, is to be an experience of the CLC way of life lived in communitarian exchange.

The Quality of Interaction

Let us explore four dimensions in which a CLC group is called to live a sharing and receiving of growing depth and quality.

1. Friendship There is an initial period when, regardless of the content discussed or action undertaken, the main thing a group has to do is to gain a certain confidence in one another. That trust in turn, if it is not to wither for lack of roots, must grow toward a love of friendship. In order to be formed to serve with Him, the Lord calls us to learn to love one another, to be friends united in Him.

The human and the spiritual are interwoven here. In any human friendship there is sharing of one's longings and fears, receiving the unique gift of another person, moments of crisis when differences of opinion and interest, feelings of resentment, anger, etc., toward one another must be faced and worked through. These human dynamics have spiritual roots, for through them we die to self-centredness, receive the saving gift of God's love through another and give ourselves in response. This liberation among the members of the group must be lived out in patience, humility and confidence in the Lord if one's personal CLC dedication and one's apostolic presence in other groups and in society is to be liberating for others. The group's exchanges will become increasingly fruitful as its members care deeply enough about one another to be open and truthful out of love rooted in the service of Christ.

2. Prayer A second and closely related dimension of interaction is that of prayer. It is not just a question of praying together but of a pervasive attitude toward one another. Our friendship for one another is that of a group of apostles standing together but turned confidently toward the Lord who alone can realize in and through them the fullness of His call and mission. The more this prayerful regard for others in the group is real, the more progress on almost every other level will be facilitated.

An important way such an attitude develops is by sharing prayer. The form may vary: an exchange of what was experienced during meditation or review of the day, a time

of prayer or a Eucharist during the meeting. In such exchanges one listens to the Spirit's presence and action in others and tries to share the same in oneself; or, in moments of quiet prayer and Eucharist, the group can stand with one another before the Lord thanking Him for gifts received and begging Him for what one or another member of the group needs now. An experience of the Exercises often makes for a quantum leap in the group's relationships on this and every other level.

3. Challenge As the quality of trust in one another and in the Lord grows in the group, their interaction will be able to embody the kind of challenge the Gospel represents for believers. The Word of God is described as a two-edged sword which penetrates us in every direction to invite and challenge us to be converted anew and to grow deeper into the faith, hope and love given by God in Jesus Christ. Analogously, the Spirit can call the members of a group through exchanges marked by liberty and truth to a fuller CLC living of the Gospel.

The subject matter exchanged upon should reflect the needs of the group. The growth of the group as group will be treated in another article. Let us reflect on how the growth of individual members can shape a group interaction characterized by spiritual challenge. Being liberated for service means growing from an initial period when enthusiastic response to God's call is dominant, through a critical period when profound purification from self-centredness is asked and colors all else, to one where standing with Christ in serving men is the key note. Granted that call, crisis/purification, and service with Christ are constants present at every moment and that growth is not a line but a spiral of grace drawing us ever deeper into Christ, there are still thresholds where the dominant note changes. It can be of great help if a person and the other group members with him sense where he is now: the dominant note and need in his CLC life and growth in Christ. For example, a person experiencing predominantly the call of the Lord will hopefully be able to express the yearning, the enthusiasm, the joy of that time and to receive a reinforcement of that spiritual energy from the group. Another who is living a time of crisis and can share something of that pain and emptiness might receive from the group a loy

ing and prayerful encouragement to face the truth while hoping in the liberating power of God. For a person basically freed and given to service, the group can aid him to deepen his rootedness in Christ and to discern the greater service to which God is calling.

Not only is the individual aided by the spiritual challenge of the others to live to the full this moment of grace, they are usually enriched by being privileged to share in that yearning, that struggle, that generosity. Grace is thus multiplied and nuanced as through a prism so as to permit the Spirit to touch each person where he or she is and the group as a whole.

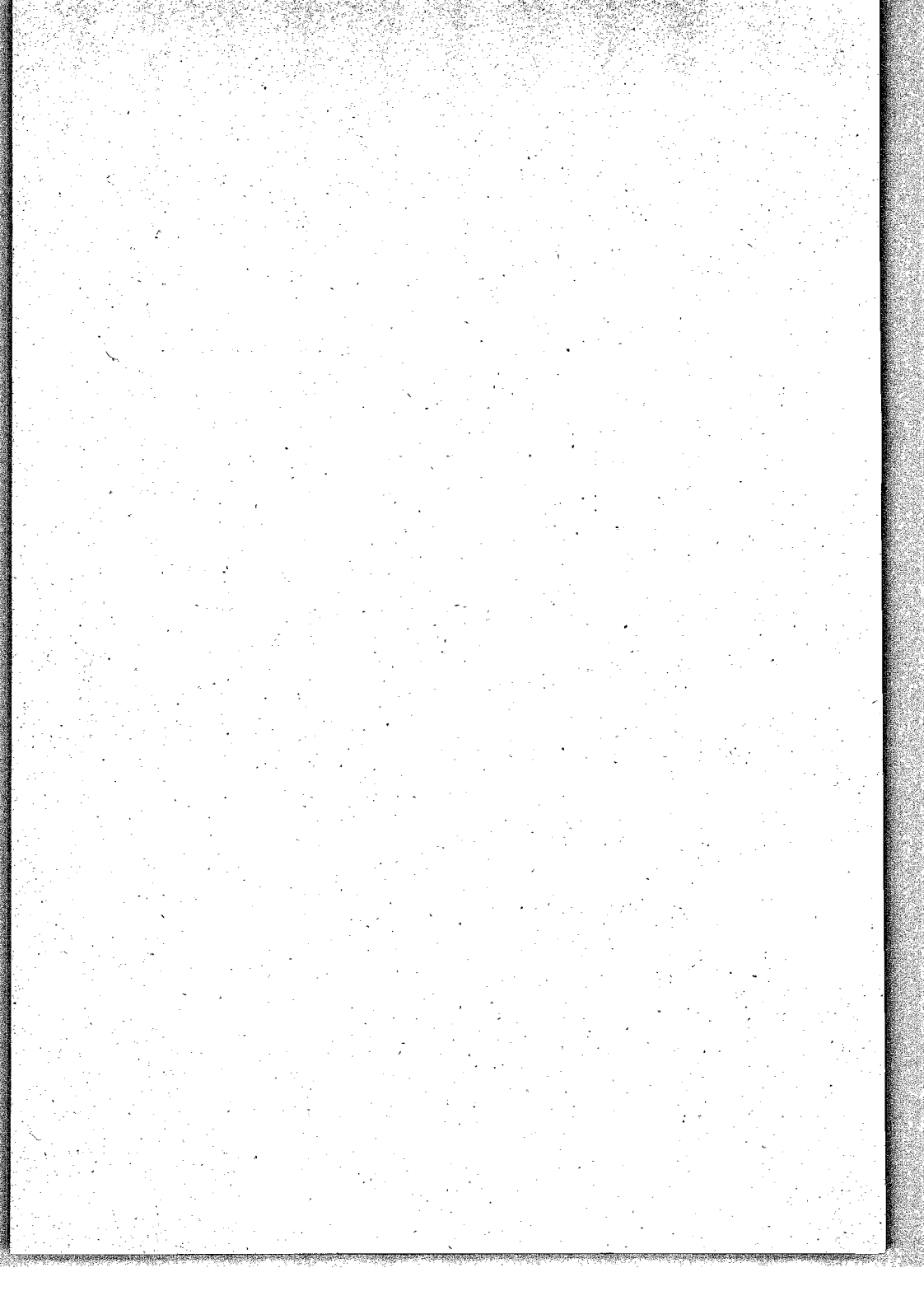
Once again, the quality of the interaction is crucial. There must be a trusting liberty to say to one another and hear from one another the truth, although limited, perceived through the Spirit's guidance. Sometimes they will be hard words inviting conversion: e.g., "If you never find time to pray, it must not be a real value to you yet", "I do not see how your working for that company is advancing the liberation of man," etc. Sometimes an encouragement to faithfulness: e.g., "Perhaps the Lord is calling you to trust in him rather than yourself through this difficulty," "What you said was of help to me," etc. Not to express what one honestly feels is for the growth of another would be to inhibit the Spirit's action in his life, in mine and in the group. The others are there to balance or correct if need be. Together with such a sharing, there must be a quality of listening which goes beyond the things said to the total person addressed and what God wishes to do in the world with and through him.

4. Discernment To realize the fullness of the local group's potential in CLC its interaction must also be characterized by discernment. Both on a group and individual level, decisions are being made from the outset and hopefully in a prayerful way. What must grow is the quality of inner freedom and sensitivity to the Spirit's movings. This comes by living and growing in every dimension of the CLC way of life over several years. It is deepened especially through experiences of the individually guided Exercises and their follow-up in daily living, especially by prayerful review of the day and talking occasionally with a spiritual guide.

As the discerning spirit deepens, it will be able to play an increasing part in group exchanges and choices as well as those that individual members make. The group will be more sensitive to the spiritual significance of its collective moods and more able to know surely where it is and what next step it should take. A group cannot make a decision for an individual but if it knows him well it can be of great help in seeing where he is perhaps not yet free to hear God's call in a given situation and how the Gospel clarifies the data for and consequences of a choice. In the beginning, more attention will be given to understanding and learning to live CLC. As members mature, group interaction will focus on discerning their greater service to the Church and world.

We have tried to clarify what the local group is and does: its role. We are "Communities" of Christian life not because that is 'in' today or even because it is good to be together. More profoundly, the CLC way of Christian life necessarily involves a communitarian dimension. Liberation for service to liberate the world in Christ is lived and matured through prolonged interaction in a group, an interaction characterized by deepening friendship, prayer, challenge and discernment.

Larry STINN, s.j.



III. STAGES OF COMMUNITY LIFE

An apostolic community, as described so far and as CLC understands itself, is not something present as a matter of course from the very beginning, or resulting automatically from good will or a clear concept. It is something initiated and guided by the Spirit, within concrete human conditions. Thus it is something undergoing a process of growth and development. Experience - partly confirmed by the research of group dynamics - shows that this process develops in several stages. Lived on a foundation of faith and by a group attempting to orient itself toward the CLC way of life, this process shows evident parallels with the phases of the individual's human growth and spiritual progress toward liberty for discernment and service, to which the Spiritual Exercises both challenges and assists one. So let us have a brief look at the main stages of this process by which a group of people who come together can become a community of discernment.

1. Phase of Pre-Confidence - 'Principle and Foundation'

The initial phase of confidence-given-in-advance (according to group dynamics) or of 'the Principle and Foundation' (Spiritual Exercises) requires only a short period of getting acquainted. It is marked by a high degree of unity in understanding of the group goal and of common pre-supposed criteria. One feels that one's basic needs as a human being, such as acceptance, warmth, love, etc., and the special needs that led one into this group, can be met here.

In a group marked by Christian faith, that faith will be recognized as the common background of experience. The characteristic sign of this initial period, a sometimes overwhelming joy because of the experience of mutual confidence and openness, is possible because of basic unity in essentials.

But here one should remember the warning of Ignatius: "If the one who is giving the Exercises sees that the exercitant is going on in consolation and in great fervor, he must admonish him not to be inconsiderate or hasty in making any promise or vow..." (Spir. Ex. 14). Because of the growing joy, honesty could be endangered. The new-found fellowship (it is not yet a community) is experienced as such a great value that one is ready to make unjustifiable

sacrifices for it. One might be ready to withhold or even to suppress opposing opinions or incipient difficulties through fear that otherwise the 'peace' and unity, or even the continuation of the group, would be in danger.

2. Phase of the Crisis of Truth - 'First Week'

This means that - at first almost imperceptibly - questions come up, such questions as to how the limitations in the individuals, becoming more evident now, can be reconciled with the professed ideal of the group, which one wants to keep as it is. One realizes that the fulfillment of one's own needs is limited by the differences, always more obvious, in the expectations of the others. One feels disappointed and 'blocked' interiorly by reserves and mistrust. In order that this crisis, which at first glance seems to be a threat to group cohesion, can be consciously accepted and lived through, two essentials are indispensable for each member: honesty before one another, and faith that the unity so far experienced as a community of shared faith, can withstand the test of discovering egoisms, sins, limits and secret rivalry (often hidden behind very reasonable arguments). One comes to believe that the group can survive all this and really deserves true sacrifices - and not just those which I was ready to make anyhow. Consequently the 'conflicts', the differences in opinions, the negative interior reactions toward some persons, should not be suppressed. Each one has to face them and then to clarify them by talking with the persons concerned.

If in this way I honestly allow myself to recognize my feelings and opinions and consent to be changed - even if it be painful - then my reactions (and that means myself) can become changed and purified by and through open and frank speech with the person concerned. The parallel to the 'First Week' of the Exercises is obvious here: having experienced love and care, I can afford to admit the selfishness, unrealistic aspects and sins in my opinions and feelings, which were revealed to me only in this openness to the other person. Thus - purified - they can be overcome or worked out.

By this process I will come to experience how foolish really was the attempt to establish my security by my own means. Actually I did try for a while to play a role

before the others, but basically was not happy because of the anxiety that I could not follow through with it. If now I can have the experience that the others do accept me as I am, then - out of this crisis - the real and true community is growing. Each one now is given acceptance and regard, not so much despite his weakness and his faults, but rather along with, and finally even because of, his sins. Before this point is reached, the group will first have to live through difficult moments. Generally it involves not just a single crisis, but a series of critical situations before solid unity and freedom is attained. The result at the end is not just a changed community, but the individual members themselves have undergone a process of change and conversion. Here is another reason why this phase of group development can be paralleled with the crisis period in the Exercises, the 'First Week', in which one confronts and accepts the truth about oneself, confesses one's guilt, and in gratitude experiences that - out of the mercy of God - one is allowed to live.

3. Discernment and Decision - 'Second Week'

Once mutual acceptance is gained - and this will be renewed over and over again - energies are no longer chained, but free for service. All energies are now free for the real goal of the group: collaboration in the mission of Jesus Christ.

In group dynamics one would speak here of the smooth step into the phase of intimacy, at the end of which the increased identification with one another and with the goal makes free decision and group action possible. However, discernment and decision-finding in a CLC group does not mean merely to arrive at some group activities, but to find the will of God. And, as we receive the will of God made concrete in the person of Jesus, and so try to let ourselves be entirely shaped according to Him, the will of God cannot be found any longer by the way of mere abstract reflections, but shows itself in a concrete human person, in Jesus and His way. A man and his way cannot be met by means of thinking. One has to contemplate him and thus assimilate his attitudes and way of life (first part of the 'Second Week'). For a community this means that, together with others, one grows into this way by meditating the gospel.

But it is only in His death and resurrection that it became evident who this Jesus was. That is why the conformity with this decisive part of His life remains the essential and crucial question to those who want to live and decide in His spirit. One is, however, easily deceived in judging one's own readiness in this regard! That is why Ignatius teaches us very seriously to consider this aspect. Only when I honestly and often and insistently ask to be chosen for that which emotionally I detest the most, only then can I hope to have the freedom in which a true and not falsified decision is possible.

The same holds for a community that intends to find its decisions by discerning the 'more urgent and universal', by following the guidance of the Spirit of Christ. The members must be prepared for the consequent sufferings, prepared even to dissolve the community if it is God's will. Because only when all of them, as a community, have discarded all conditions and reservations, can they be truly free for God's will.

4. Decisions in the Different Stages

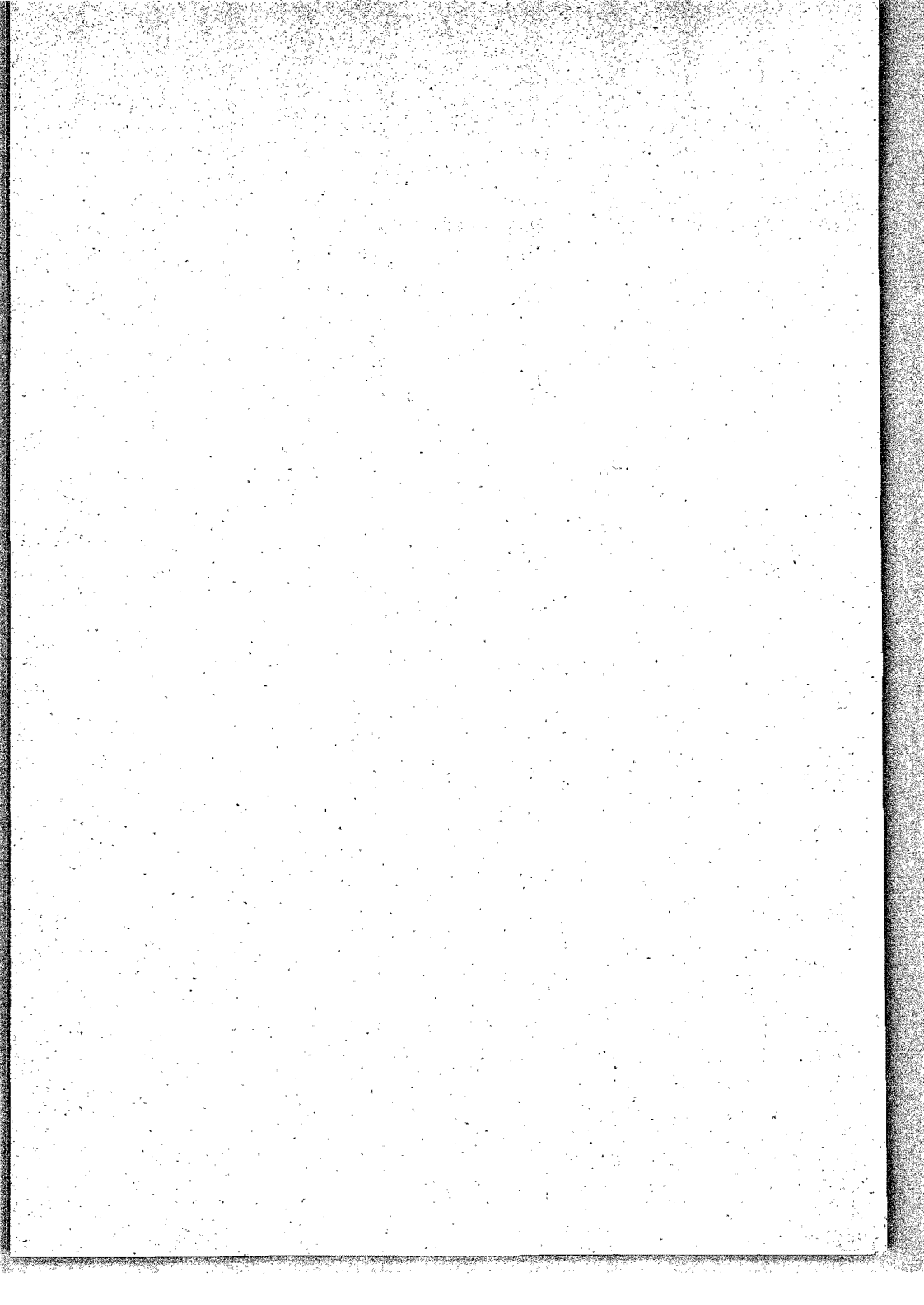
Here we are at the point where a "communal deliberation" falls into place, parallel to the "election" in the Exercises made by an individual. In both cases, the way to it is long and cannot be shortened. The deliberation process itself cannot be discussed further here, but there is still a question to be looked at: how can a community, during the course of its development, come to decisions?

During any stage of development in a group, the necessity for common action or for taking a stand on a certain issue can arise. This is proper to the life of a group as well as to the life of an individual. The measure of a group as of a person is not how far it (or he) has already gone, but whether and how it copes with what is called for by its present stage of development.

Nevertheless, decisions vary as far as their importance, consequences, and validity are concerned. This is true as well for a group during its different phases of development. In the pre-confidence and crisis phases, the group is not yet founded as a unity in Christ. So, what it decides and does may be the right thing, but it is not yet the witness of unity and life that is apostolic

service in its full sense; for the love of God, which is manifested in Christ, cannot be given to others through action alone, but must reflect the witness of life itself. It is only in the last-mentioned phase, which in the context of group dynamics is called the "differentiation phase", that this transparency with Christ grows. Whereas before, the members of the group did something or took a stand for a cause, now the group is living for something. Whatever the group or any member of the group now does is no longer a mere action, but a witness of life able to give witness to the Life that is Christ.

Ingeborg von Grafenstein



Part Two

EXPERIENCES

I. CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY AT "KOINONIA" CENTER, SOUTH AFRICA

Like many people all over the world at this time, we are and have been searching for a true understanding and practice of community. For us this means, of course, a particular orientation in the context of CLC, but yet one which seems to us to have universal validity.

In general, over the last three years, we have lived an experience arising rather out of the insights of faith than out of any given theories and practices of a specifically intellectual or psychological kind, though the latter have been of great help as corroborations. In this way, perhaps we have been able to keep closer to the origin of the Spiritual Exercises in Ignatius' deeply personal experience than if we had followed an exteriorly-imposed plan.

Our existential situation, under Providence, has been basically ideal, but not unrealistic. Some of its components have been: a centre where a resident community can live; an opportunity for a fairly small on-going community, as well as for a larger one during the annual four-month Training Course; a wide age-range, from the late teens to the sixties; international, inter-racial and ecumenical dimensions; both men and women; lay, religious and priestly involvement; and the chance for a balanced human, spiritual and apostolic development of community life which can then be shared not only with our CLCs but also with the larger community.

The fairly small on-going community has experienced a gradual discovery of essentials. At first, with much apostolic work to be done, the initial enthusiasm gave elan and impetus. In time, however, it became clear that the "working community", good though it was, did not meet the deepest requirements of Christian life together. Using the basic "koinonumen" method (described recently in the Youth Section of PROGRESSIO), we reached a greater understanding, which we believe will continue to grow. Perhaps the best way to describe this insight will be first in terms of a further development of the koinonumen method adapted to our particular situation, and secondly in terms of the

"theology", so to speak, of the human, spiritual and apostolic community as we now see it.

In our most recent koinonumen, we used as means of communication not only sharing, as preferable to discussion or dialogue, but, beyond this, what we called, for lack of more suitable words, "accepting and being accepted": an unlimited, unconditional, trusting acceptance by each one of himself and of others, and the same kind of acceptance by others of him. We came to see this deepening of communication, from discussion through dialogue and sharing to acceptance, as having a parallel in the human and spiritual areas, becoming, on the human level, progressively more personal and more a matter of the heart and the contemplative mind than of abstract and very possibly judgmental exchanges, and, on the spiritual level, more a matter of contemplative than discursive prayer.

Secondly, how can we, having experienced it, relate this deeper communication to our faith? We see it as a reflection, or more precisely an "incarnation" of the Paschal Mystery and of the eternal community of the Trinity. Beginning on the human level, each one forms a truly personal and interpersonal link with the community of the Trinity. This develops by means of personal prayer as self-encounter with, accepting and being accepted by, the eternal Community; and by means of prayerful person-to-person encounter, with both positive and negative aspects - such as praise, gratitude, trust, hurt, forgiveness - in order that we may accept others and be accepted by them in the community of the Trinity. Only after this basic human, prayerful encounter, comes the possibility of a truly praying (or spiritual) community. Formal, organised prayer in liturgical or paraliturgical expressions can now be filled with far greater meaning; and the making of practical decisions through communal discernment or trustful dependence on the judgment of "specialists" can link prayer and action indissolubly, because the community is ready to listen for God's decision rather than just its own. It can "seem good to us and to the Holy Spirit". Informal, spontaneous sharing or shared prayer can spring from the true charity achieved through prayerful personal encounters. From these human and spiritual foundations, it is possible for genuine and fruitful apostolic work to arise. Only when so bonded in true community does it seem to us that

we can share with others the life of the Eternal Community of the Trinity. Like St. Paul, we do not think we have "already obtained this or are already perfect", but, also like him, we "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" and "we look forward to the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is GOD."

- "Koinonia" Center

II. COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE IN CALCUTTA, INDIA

The CLC situation in the Calcutta Archdiocese is rather complicated - 40 units, grouped linguistically as English, Bengali and Hindi-speaking; old-time dedicated parish Sodalities and new, vibrant "cells"; groups of every conceivable social strata in the placid villages and teeming cities. Until two years ago, the Federation executive, then a purely administrative body, searched for an effective way to uplift these groups and build them into a community. A deliberation led them into making the Exercises together. At the end of them, they unanimously decided to form themselves into a Living Cell and meet once a week for two hours in deep prayer, sharing and apostolic action. The members are from distant parts of Calcutta - an English nun who is a college lecturer, a priest-missionary from Belgium, two lady secretaries, two college students, a lady professor, a young trainee-teacher and myself, a mercantile executive. Can people from such different backgrounds form a community? Two years have shown that a common commitment can bind diverse individuals together. The group continues to grow in fervour, in openness and dedicated service. There have been moments of crisis, due to human temperamental failings or to discontent, but ultimately divine love and a discerned sense of duty prevail and the storm clouds recede and disappear.

Community to us means learning to relate lovingly to each member in the group. We remember each other in our morning prayers, offer in turns the Eucharist daily for the intentions of the group, visit each other especially in times of distress, remember each other's anniversaries. We sometimes meet in each other's homes.

Our weekly meetings provide varied, interesting fare.

Occasionally we meet round the "table of the Lord", for we experience this as an effective instrument for unity. We listen to God's Word on an issue of present concern and we respond to it in prayer and subsequent action. More often, our meetings (which are sometimes attended by guest CLCers, for we also aim to be an animating agency) consist of deep, shared personal prayer based on Scripture and a sharing of our personal and functional lives - our joys, burdens, hopes, failures and aspirations. We pray for and mutually advise, comfort and support each other. In communion with Him, we try to Christianise the everyday situations we find ourselves in.

Recently, one of our members was the target of an unscrupulous boss who made overtures impugned with diabolical motives. Should she resign her job or fight? The CLC spirit of liberating justice decided that she should fight. We prayed for her and supported her at every stage. She went through much persecution. Ultimately justice prevailed and the man was dismissed.

In a non-Christian college, torn by internal faction and unhealthy rivalry, the lady professor has been able to introduce daily prayer-services and start small sharing communities of non-Christian students. There is more love now and the atmosphere is more pleasant.

We also share experiences and problems in a miniature "revision of life" and attempt to find solutions in accordance with God's will. The Lord has showered His graces on our work. We prayed over a young Hindu girl, afflicted by the ravages of polio and her despairing parents. The child is slowly improving, but more important, there is peace in the home. The sick are being comforted and reconciliation brought to broken families in circumstances that can be described as mysterious and beautiful - God's loving heart using our human hands for His greater glory.

Our group is always open to the larger CLC family and the larger community of the People of God. It is a servant community, with everyone giving evidence of a deep, Christ motivated concern for his fellow-man. FORMATION is its apostolic priority. Formation days are conducted once a month, also regular recollections and the Exercises once a year. We visit and assist the units, and the units, inspired by the Executive, are gradually knitting themselves

into a community. Each member is also called to an individual apostolate, about which he shares with the group. Thus one conducts charismatic renewal meetings; another is involved in social communications; another with the oppressed poor; another with the working youth; another in ecumenism. Two months ago, an Anglican joined our group. We are the richer for it. The Spirit speaks to us through different people, diverse situations and "the signs of the times". Who knows where He will lead us?

- Anthony Martyris

I. BUILDING OF A NATIONAL COMMUNITY IN THE USA

It all began or continued to be a reality when in early 1973 our National Board of Directors changed their title from Board of Directors to the National Community of the National Federation of CLCs. Along with the change came the commitment or recommitment to the sense of community as described in General Principle 5, Sense of Church.

Whenever big changes are made it is often the result of seeds that are planted months before by persons from the community. The vision begins to be seen by other members of the community. And so it was with our National Community. The seed was really planted and began to grow in late 1972 when a Faith Experience¹ was held for the members of the Board of Directors. Many had gone through this kind of experience with others, but this was the first time that the elected board of directors met with each other in a Faith Experience so that each member might have the opportunity to become part of a faith community. As one person expressed it, "My expectation is that the national Board of Directors might become a national COMMUNITY of directors.

Thus came the birth of a National Community. And yet it is hard to put into words the light and hope which came to us during that particular meeting. Our movement was being led by the Spirit to a great service in the whole Christian community. We had at one time been a "functional community", performing the tasks that we had set before ourselves. But since the Faith Experience we had grown into something far more true to our CLC ideal - a basic "personal community". At that meeting we committed ourselves to a new focus. We saw our role as Christian

Life Communities in the total renewal effort of the Church, and we formulated a resolution to assist in the forming of all kinds of Christian communities. And so, "We commit ourselves to a new role as Christian Life Community to the total renewal efforts of our Church through assisting in the formation of all types of Christian communities..." "We commit ourselves to making our national center in St. Louis a strong instrument, to accomplish this through programs such as faith experiences..., development institutes..., leadership workshops...". "Together as a national community we can help build the Church of Vatican II by working diligently to touch our environment with a sense of the Church."

Our first attempt at carrying out this new, or should we say, renewed, commitment took place at our last National Convention. Our theme, though chosen months before our new focus, was certainly an expression of our thinking: NEW COMMUNITIES FOR CHRISTIANS - AN AMERICAN RESPONSE. Many attendees had participated in past conventions and many had come for the first time. Many were CLCers and some were not. The experience of building a faith-community for the duration of our days together can still be sensed in conversations and correspondence received today.

Our second attempt was an entirely new concept for us. We have for two years co-sponsored a program with the School of Divinity of St. Louis University (St. Louis, Missouri), a program on the role of leadership in the development of Christian community. Both years we had a microcosm of the Church, that is, priests, brothers, sisters and lay men and women, in attendance. The aim of the course was to provide for the spiritual growth of the individual as an essential requisite of true Christian community and to provide for the growth of community through development of facility in leadership and communication skills. The Faith Experience at the beginning of the course proved to be a good one in which the participants had an opportunity to explicate their individual personal growth in faith with one another, to grow in trust and community. In some small way through the St. Louis effort our national movement has begun to communicate and build the faith community ideal in our nation.

Striving to continue to be a National Community is a tremendous challenge. Frequently we tend to lapse into a

"functional membership", and as we do so our trust in God and our effectiveness as His instruments wane. We must continually renew the depth of a faith commitment to Him through communal discernment. Only in this way, we believe, will the CLC in the United States be a "divine force" in shaping the Christian community of our times and, ultimately, the Kingdom.

- Marie A. Schimelfening

- 1) The "Faith Experience" mentioned here is a session of two days in which participants, in a climate of faith, exchange experiences of the action of God in their life history. It was fashioned by J. A. Esquivel s.j., and is widely used in the United States. An account of it appeared in the May, 1973 issue of PROGRESSIO.

AN EXPERIENCE IN REGIONAL COMMUNITY

The development of CLC in France led rather soon to the establishment of regional Communities. They answered a double need. On the one hand, CLC members had, after a certain number of years, definitively chosen the way of life of Association Vie Chrétienne (the national Christian Life Community of France) by an act of permanent commitment to it. Thus they felt the need to deepen their intimacy with Christ by mutual exchanges with those who shared the same Ignatian spirituality, so as to discern better, in the face of current needs, the will of God as to their apostolic mission, both personal and communitarian. At the time many of the groups included both persons who had definitively opted for CLC and others who were candidates just beginning their CLC experience. On the other hand, such regional communities answered another need keenly felt: that of giving responsible leadership to CLC in a given region.

It began with a first attempt in Paris-West in 1971, and quickly spread to other areas. The regional community is made up of those members in an area who, after having completed a period of formation, have permanently committed themselves to CLC. This community is responsible for the CLCs-in-process (that is, candidate groups, or groups-in-information) throughout the area and is accountable for their growth and their vitality. This regional community becomes too a community of discernment, with the role of assessing the needs of the Church and of people in that region.

One of its services is, then, to assure the healthy functioning and growth of CLC. There result concrete tasks that it assumes as a group, assigning certain of its members to carry them out, and receiving from them an account of the work carried out. This is the case with the "year of introduction" for persons interested in CLC. Two or three members of the regional community are responsible for working with the new group, helping them to experience the CLC way of life during a year and so allow them to decide at the end of that time if they should continue. Often too it is members of the regional community who assist the groups-in-information during the period running from the end of the introductory year till permanent commitment. Finally, this area community is specially adapted to function as a place for community discernment of the concrete needs of the region. Viewed this way, it is a help to the groups in general and to their members in their efforts to adapt their apostolic response to the priorities of the present moment.

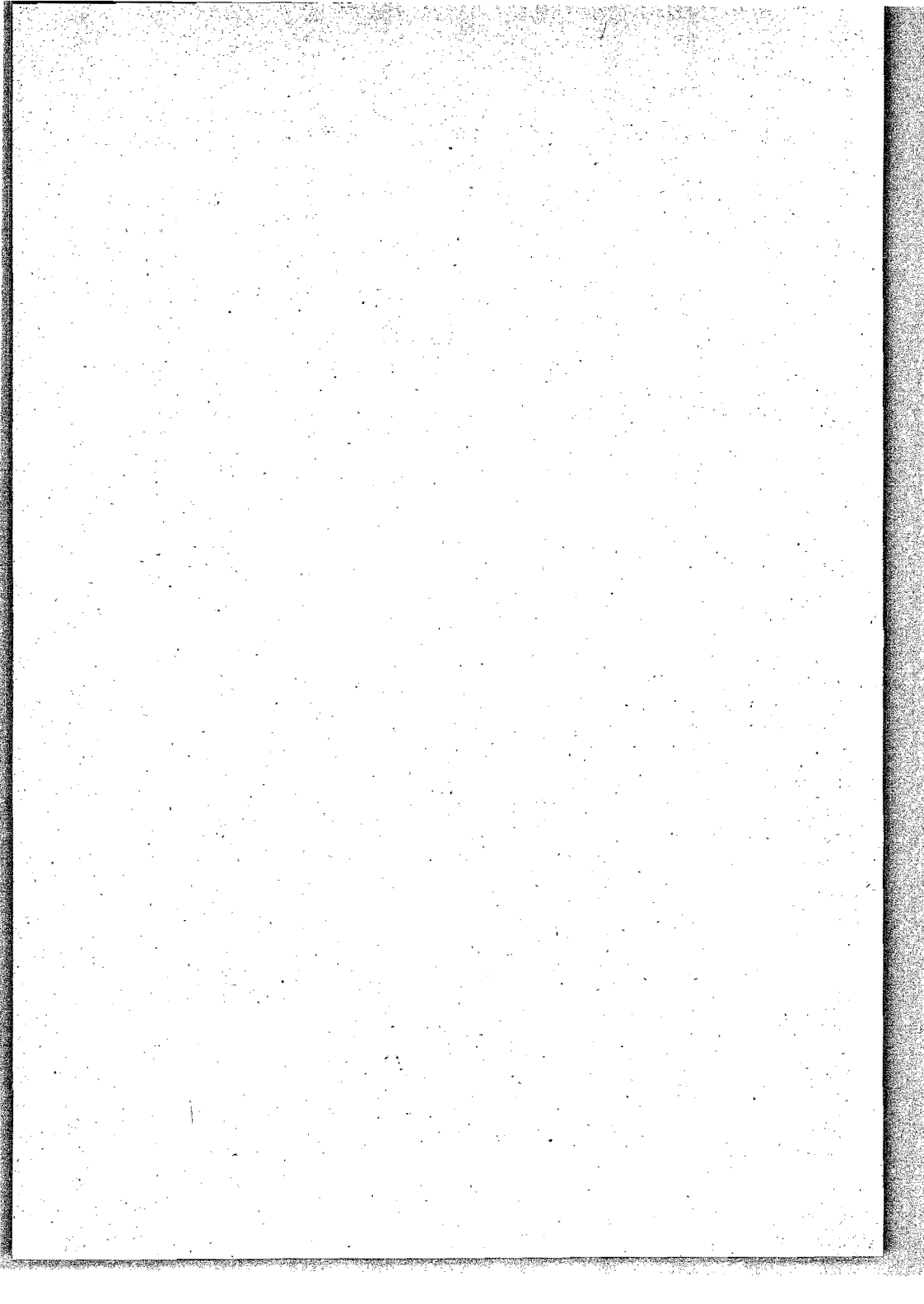
The setting up of these regional communities has beyond any doubt favored the progress of the groups of the area as a whole. Even if future developments or adaptations may yet modify certain aspects of their functioning, it is clear already that they have promoted the development of a community awareness at the regional level and that, in doing this, they have brought the universal dimension of CLC home to members and have inserted it into events. As Madeleine Terrasson underlines in her Activities Report to the French CLC (November 1, 1974):

"A recent meeting with regional leaders has shown that as yet all the regions do not yet have true regional communities, with responsibility for their area, and capable of

supporting their members who are active within and outside CLC, and assigning them to apostolic missions. Nonetheless one notices these developments:

- the awakening of a sense of responsibility within the community; this was especially noticeable at the recent elections for the national Council and for regional leaders
- the awareness of belonging to a community that is larger than one's own group; regional meetings, and relationships between groups, are more frequent than before
- intermingling of groups; a realization that the group is only a means
- a practical concern for the growth of CLC in the region.

- Roland CALCAT



Part Three

SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What Kind of Community is CLC?

CLC is a true COMMUNITY. So it has certain goals. In CLC, these goals are so all-embracing that they involve a common vision of life. Does our CLC have such a shared vision?

Any community involves sharing. In CLC, this needs to be an unusually deep and honest communication of thoughts and inner feelings. Does our community share this deeply?

CLC is a LIFE community, in which the entire existence of members (faith, family, work, prayer, sacraments, politics, etc.) is the community's concern. So the shared activity in CLC must be varied, reflective of this. Is this true of our CLC?

CLC is a CHRISTIAN community. The community members are companions of each other because they are companions of Christ, working with him to extend his freedom to all men. CLC is a community in Christ, not just a warm, human community with Christian touches. Is Christ the heart of our CLC?

Finally, CLC is not just any Christian community, but a specific one. Its specifics are in the GENERAL PRINCIPLES. How well does our community know the GPs?

Finality of Community

A CLC community is apostolic. Its whole raison d'etre is to help Christ build his kingdom. This means then that the needs of world and Church must be fully integrated into CLC formation. Do the formation programs of our national and local groups achieve this?

Members need to be informed of human needs and problems, to know the "signs of the times". Offering its members such information is a community function. Does our community fulfill it?

An apostolic community needs to discern apostolic priorities. An alert community, then, will find ways to help its members learn about community discernment and to practice it. How is our community furthering concrete, discerned, apostolic action on the part of its members?

Apostolic activity is the outward expression of our inner commitment. To help us be faithful to our gift of self to God and to continually grow in that gift are key community functions. Since CLC is "a community centered in the Eucharist" (GP 6), well-planned periodic liturgies are essential. A CLC needs too to initiate its members into personal prayer, and to provide motivation or opportunity for personal evaluations, sacramental Penance, spiritual guidance. Because all these elements form part of the Spiritual Exercises, a central community responsibility is to facilitate a deep experience of the Exercises for its members. Sometimes this may involve helping to find competent guides, or a suitable place, or helping resolve financial or family difficulties. Does our CLC aid its members to a continual growth in Christ through its meetings, renewals, Eucharists and Spiritual Exercises retreats?

CLC is an ecclesial community. The Christian life of members is pursued in union with the national and world Christian Life Community and in fidelity to the universal community of the Church (GP 6), by whom we are missioned. Does our community feel itself part of the national, the world Christian Life Community? Does our "sense of the Church" lead us to love her, to listen to her leaders, to spend ourselves in her service?

Roles

In any true community, responsibility is somehow shared. In CLC, for fully committed members, this sharing should be complete. This does not of course mean that all play the same role. Group dynamics experts have specified some key roles thus:

- Initiating - getting things started or organized
- Regulating - balancing the pace, not too fast or too slow
- Informing - bringing information needed for decisions
- Supporting - giving encouragement and affirmation
- Evaluating - reflecting on or testing group action.

Rarely is a person gifted in all five functions, but many excel in one or two. The combination of them all is what makes a community advance. In our community, are all members active, responsible?

Of course, some persons in CLC have special responsibilities. Three of these deserve special comment.

One is the president (chairman, leader). His true role is to assure that the community functions as it should. He is leader of a team. A knowledge and experience of group dynamics can then help him. Since a CLC is a spiritual community, he will need too to reflect often and prayerfully on the group and on what the Lord is asking of it here and now. He needs of course to work with other members in doing all this.

Another key role is that of ecclesiastical assistant. His special role is to "help the members to discover the ways of God" (GP 14). As the group's ecclesial link, he has special responsibility for doctrinal and pastoral concerns and for the group's unity. He is not the group's leader; his role is more interior, at the level of motivation and Christian orientation. He needs to work closely with the group's leaders, always available but never usurping their functions. And to fulfill his role properly, he needs to "take part in the life of the group" (GP 14), not simply to assist it as an outsider. In a group's initial stages his role may sometimes be broader, but this is temporary. The name given him in the GPs - assistant - is very apt: he assists the group to be truly Christian in both its life and its service.

On a national or regional level (as also in a CLC with many members), the team of leaders (council) has an important role (GP 13). To be effective, it needs itself to become a kind of spiritual community, in which team members truly share both their faith life and human life. Are such special roles as president, assistant, council, effectively filled in our local or national community?

Two Key Means

The meetings of CLC are crucial, since they are the main times that members come together. What techniques contribute to truly effective meetings?

First, for community to develop, a group must be small: perhaps 6-12 members; if it is larger, it must develop sub-groups with a true community life of their own. An informal setting, for example, being seated around a living room, helps much too; and seated in a circle, so each can see the other. Even a small meeting needs to be prepared; one way is for the leader, assistant, and one other member (rotating) to prepare it together.

The meeting is to help the community to be and to serve. It normally, therefore, contains elements relating both to personal growth and to apostolic service. The format can vary, but the principal technique should be a sharing of experience. Not therefore simply vocal prayer, but, e.g., an apt Scripture reading followed by silence and then shared reflections. Not mainly talks, but e.g. an exchange of experiences on a theme such as simplicity of life style in CLC. Meeting time is precious. Is our community using meeting techniques that truly involve the whole group?

But CLC is also a national and a world community. Here communication becomes extremely important. Obviously the high point of this is when persons from different communities meet together personally in national courses or continental discernments or world sessions such as Augsburg and Rome in 1973. But exchange of publications and of programs, personal correspondence, visits when possible - these are precious too. Not only between a local group and national or world federations but also between groups and members in the same or different countries. And sharing of ideas, of course, must grow into sharing of experiences, of expertise, of material resources. Is our group and its members using fully the medium of communication to help build the national and world CLC community?

Phases

A CLC community is a living, growing thing, and so it passes through phases: the initial phase of warmth and confidence; the crisis phase, involving perhaps a series of

conflicts; and hopefully, the identification phase, where, in spite of certain real differences, we come to identify ourselves entirely with the CLC mission and so commit ourselves to each other in community. This identification with CLC as a world community can and should reach the point where physical separation no longer weakens its bonds. It is then a community in dispersion, but as deep and true a community as ever. But this supposes an authentic and deep experience of CLC as an apostolic community inspired by the Spiritual Exercises and missioned to serve the Church and the world wherever God's call beckons. Does our community face honestly its conflicts and crises? Is it using them to advance toward a more total identification with the mission of the universal Christian Life Community?

Nicholas RIEMAN s.j.

