



PROGRESSIO

Looking Back, Moving Forward



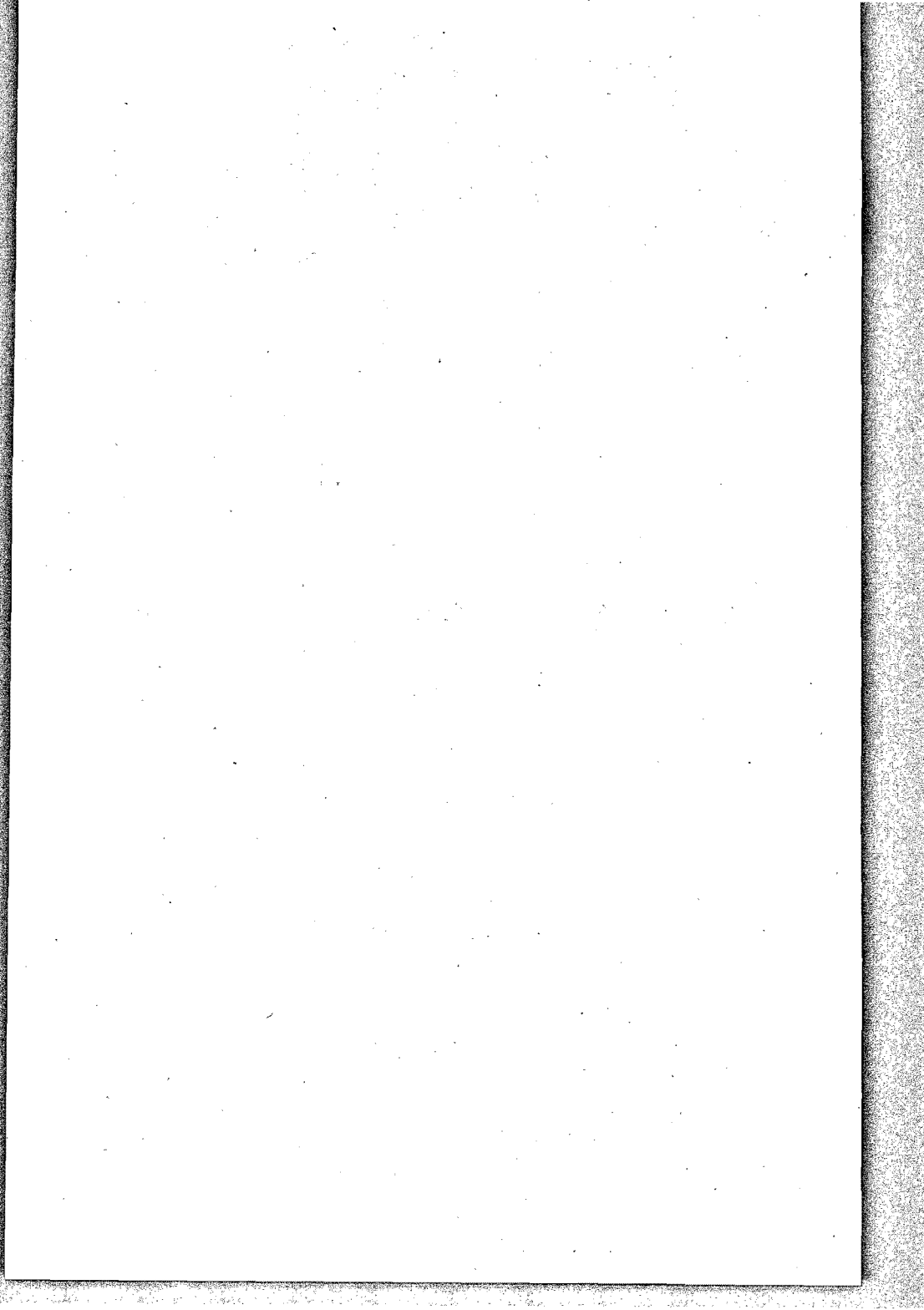
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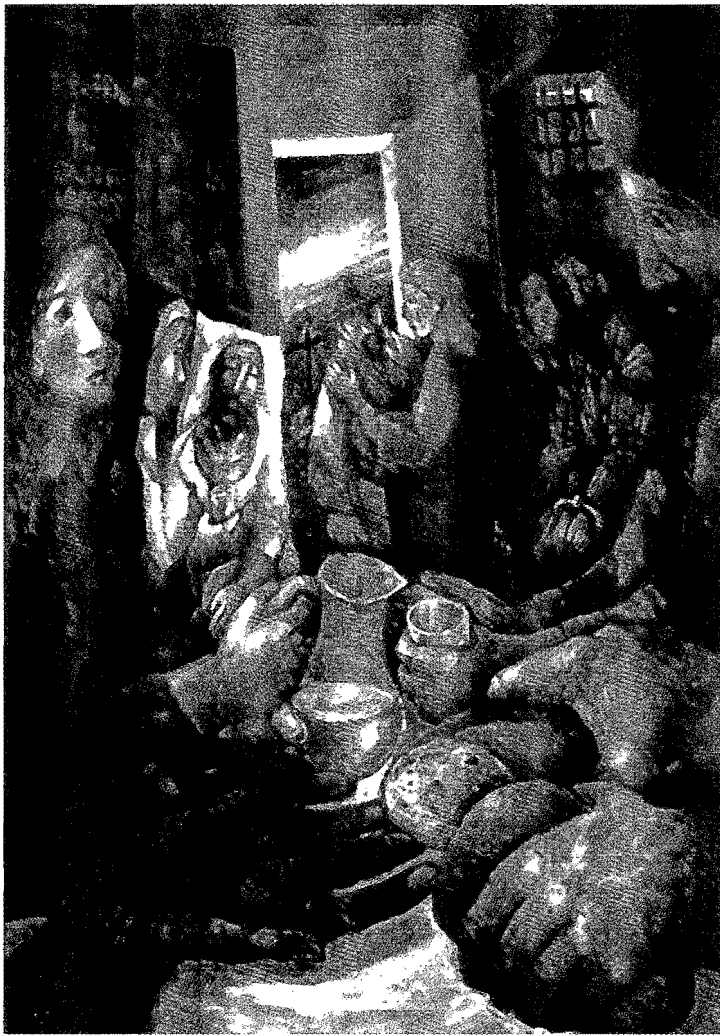
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***Thus with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation,
the baptized share in the same mission of Jesus as the Christ, the Saviour-
Messiah.***

FOREWORD

In reviewing the events of the past year, it could be said that 1998 was a significant milestone in the life of the Church, in human society and for CLC. Periodically, it is most important to take time to look back at our graced history and to remember the promise of the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit in the events and circumstances of daily life. As well, remembering our past is an opportunity to give thanks to God, to celebrate and to critique the choices made so as to be better disposed and informed in discerning future choices.

A half century separates two significant events in the history of CLC. Fifty years ago in *Bis Saeculari*, Pope Pius XII called the Sodalities to reroute themselves in Ignatian Spirituality by means of the Spiritual Exercises. He also exhorted them to be more mindful of the collaborative mission dimension of their apostolic service! It is almost a year since the 1998, 13th CLC World Assembly in Itaici, Brazil and the birthing of *Our Common Mission*. This was a graced period in our CLC maturation as the Spirit's beckoning was heard in a reaffirming and deepening call to live out our mission in concrete and collective ways..... CLC formation is for mission!

In this issue of *Progressio*, a link is also made between the 50 year old Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 10 year old Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*. Opportunities for the possibility of living out our mission in collaboration with NGOs are offered.

Concurrently, the preparation for the Great Jubilee in the year 2000 continues. The "year of the Lord's favour" heralds a time of pardon and reconciliation and a restoration of justice. This is another occasion for fruitful cooperation among many who join with Pope John Paul II in calling for debt cancellation for impoverished countries.

With a history filled with the richness of prophetic documents, CLC's response is articulated in *Our Common Mission*. From the midst of the marketplace, active in contemplating the face of God in the people we serve, CLC's prayer response is, "**Here we are, Lord**".

All is Grace

Antoinette Bemtgen is a member of CLC Luxembourg from "the very first hour." Those of our community who participated at the General Assembly in Hong Kong, 1994, will remember celebrating her seventieth birthday during the Assembly. Antoinette is a living example of how young at heart Ignatian Spirituality can keep you.



Fifty years have already passed since the grace of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ was given to me. My relationships with people changed at the same time, in line with the verse in Matthew 25:40, "Insofar as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me."

Sell all, like the rich young man could have done (cf. Mt. 19:16-20), was not possible because I owned nothing except a stable job of teaching. Thus, I attempted to put my talents, my salary and my time... at the service of the poorest, while understanding the term "poor" not only in the material sense. I refused the idea of saving money to buy my own home.

After my retirement, a series of adventures caused me to become co-proprietor of a spacious and comfortable home where I moved with my mother. To God, who never abandoned me but had marvellously led me through obscurity without my realizing it, I said, "Here, all that is mine is Yours. Use it as you will..." When my mother died, I reflected on how I could keep my promise. During a meeting with Agnes Rausch, I received the light I had asked for and I offered to take in persons in distress.

On the last day of 1991, the first family arrived. A political refugee from the former Zaire, who had been in Luxembourg for three years, could, in my home, celebrate his reunion with his wife and his two children. They had intended to remain with me some weeks: the time needed to find adequate lodgings. They remained 20 months!

The experiences of marginalization lived during my long illness, and my confidence in God, helped me to live with persons who were different in age, culture, eating habits, culinary traditions, a way of occupying space, a way of thinking and of acting. I was even connected with certain incomprehensible reactions to the events of their past. It was not by chance that the first phrase in Luxembourgian that Trésor, four years old, understood and made his own was: "t ass nêt schlëmm" (it's not serious). Like his sister, Catherine, a year older than him, he went to kindergarten which brought variety to daily life, and many conflicts and moments of joy. However, never in my life had I laughed so much nor had so much resistance to all illness. Some weeks after the birth of little Patience, the family was able to move into a little house that they had bought and furnished with the strict necessities.

With the people from Sarajevo, there were other problems. For example, because of a deeply rooted fear, they trusted no one. For two months, a Serbian woman was my guest. She accompanied her son who was wounded in the war and was being taken care of in a Luxembourg hospital.

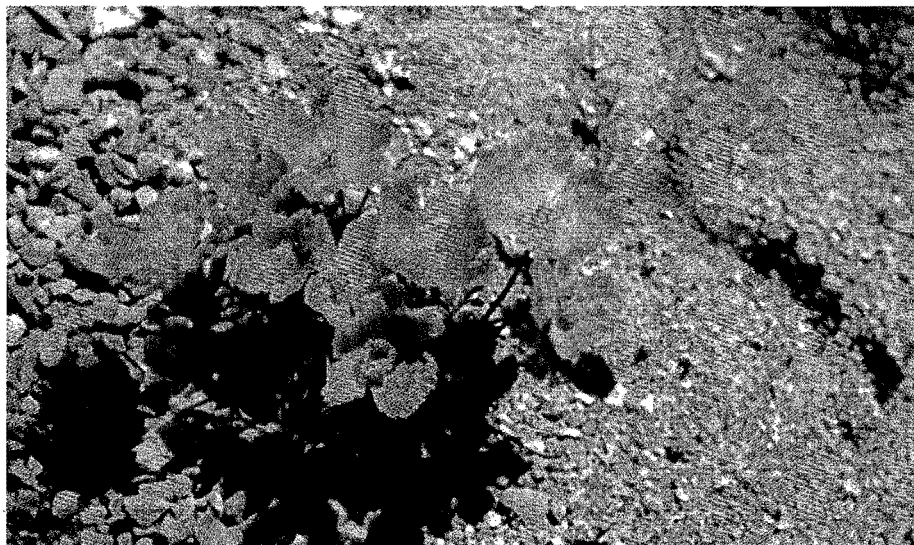
In the beginning, the Bosnian couple, with their two-year old daughter Dalida, did not cause exceptional problems. The fact that they were Muslims did not weigh on our relationship. But, in spite of a common life for eleven months, neither I nor my friends realized that the couple was in crisis. The dramatic breakup of their marriage upset me but did not make me turn back.

A year ago, I welcomed a refugee family from Iraq. As they did not have children that needed my attention, I was able to experience, intensely, how joy and pain are inseparable: her pregnancy, the pains of labour and childbirth, in short, all the symbols of growth and of becoming human. Just as I was present at the birth of the twins Martina and Mariana, I am now a witness to their evolution.

All true relationships are born and live through a reciprocal give-and-take. This is what I learned from my contact with my refugee families. I do not regret taking the risk of these experiences. This school of life was a challenge but I benefited from it. Among many other things, it offers forbearance and discretion as a means of growth. In the final analysis, all is grace!

“So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God’s message, we should do it according to the faith we have. If it is to serve, we should serve, if it is to teach we should teach, if it is to encourage others we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do so generously. Whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do so cheerfully.” (Romans 12, 6-8)

Antoinette Bemtgen
CLC Luxembourg



Your Work, Your Life and Your Faith

Isaac M. Oigo has been a member of CLC Kenya since 1991. He worked as an electrical engineer and is presently completing a Master's Degree in Counselling Psychology. Isaac does formation work with CLC members and others.

Last year, while reading the preparatory material for the upcoming World Assembly, I was challenged by "Area of Concern: Profession as Lived Mission." I would like to share some of what I came to realize as a result of this.

Firstly, there was the realization of how important what one does for a living is, in the scheme of things. As a worker, you will spend some eight hours a day, five days a week, over some thirty years in the workplace. This is a very large portion of your life. If it is spent doing things you don't particularly enjoy or care about, it is a terrible waste of your time and potential. Family, community and work are where most of your future will be spent and you must make the choices you are able to, with a view to making home and occupational life the best they can be.

This brings me to my second consideration. Part of this choice-making will require that you adopt a new attitude to work. Do you see your work as the drudgery you put in for five days so as to deserve the glorious weekend? Or, can you begin to see it in terms of vocation, as your response to God's call to you to use your talents and abilities to build the Kingdom?

Your work life is an integral part of your life, not a separate compartment independent of your faith life, your social life, or your leisure life. An attitude that sees your work as "vocation" will enable you to end this compartmentalization and to increasingly bring the faith that inspires you into your daily activities. It will enable you to make your service to your employer as part of your service to humankind and to God. This deepened understanding of work can be a milestone in spiritual growth, a marker of response to the call into Mission.

So, the work you do becomes the arena where you make choices and decisions about how to best use your talents and abilities for God's glory. Work becomes more than a job. It becomes your unique contribution to creation and, so, deserving of your best efforts which leads to a commitment to improve your skills and the management of your resources, especially time.

As integration of faith and life occurs, the workplace also becomes a place to witness your faith in your words and actions. By making choices not to do or support activities that go against Christian values, you witness to Christ in the world. It seems to me that no Christian would choose to work as an abortionist or researcher in biological weapons. In the Kenyan context, a job, where "bribery" or other illegal acts are a large part of what one is required to do, may be a challenge to either find other work or to pay the price required and witness to one's faith by refusing to do what everyone else is doing. Live your faith at work, at home and at church.

"It is all very easy to talk of vocation," some will say, "but what if I don't have a job?" Well, I am unemployed too, but that doesn't stop me thinking in terms of vocation. In fact, not being in paid employment can be an opportunity to make choices and think about the way in which one feels called to serve God and the world. One can then make choices about acquiring skills and knowledge that will move you in this direction. I am especially inspired in this by the example of St. Ignatius of Loyola's life. After his injury and conversion, he spent the next twelve years "unemployed" in today's terms. But, he didn't just sit and moan. He spent the time developing his relationship with God and, through this development, found a deeper call to serve God in the world. This call led him to seek to improve his ability to serve. He went back to school, learning Latin with pupils less than half his age and pursuing studies in theology so as to better share his experience of God's love with others. The call led him to gather a band of young men around him and to lead them to Rome to offer their talents and service for God's greater glory.

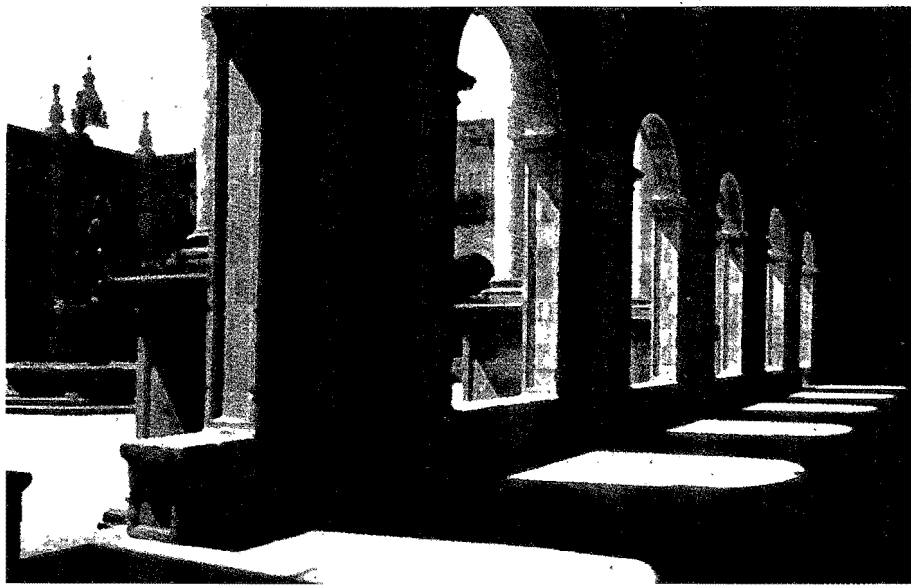
Even unemployment can be a call to a deeper vocation when it is used as an opportunity to reflect and make choices that lead in the direction of better knowing, loving and serving Christ.

Jesus said, "I have come that all may have life, life in all its abundance" (Jn.10:10). The work we do is our part in realizing God's vision for creation. How can we, in our occupations and professions, give life to the world?

There were three masons working on a construction site. A curious stranger approached one and asked him, "What are you doing?" The mason gave him an angry look and retorted, "What does it look like? I'm putting these bricks here, one on top of the other." The stranger approached the second mason, and asked the same question. This time, the reply was, "I'm building a wall." The third mason, on being asked what she was doing, looked up with a gleam in her eye. "I," she said, "am helping to build the finest building in this region, one that people will see and admire for a long time to come."

In your work, whether employed or unemployed, are you merely laying bricks? Or are you building 'cathedrals' to the greater glory of God?

Isaac M. Oigo
CLC Kenya



***Give thanks to the Lord,
for He is good;
and His mercy endures forever***



John, Christina and their two sons

The Lord has been so good to Christina and John. When John was 15, he joined the CLC in his Jesuit high school in Hong Kong. Living in a materialistic and utilitarian society, he was struck by verses in St. Luke's Gospel during a CLC life-camp in 1980:

"Life is more important than food, and the body much more important than clothes..... be concerned with God's Kingdom, and God will provide you with these things."

Those four years in the senior-high CLC, a group, we would now like to

call a "pre-community", were among the best moments of John's life. He had his world-view transformed, his priorities and goals in life examined, clarified and revised. He began to understand that life after school was not only about getting a good job and living comfortably for oneself. A CLCer had to serve.

Then came 1983, the year when John (and Christina, whom he knew little about then) took the university entrance examination. It was also a year during which Hong Kong was in turmoil. The negotiations between Britain and China over the future of the colony was stuck and at risk of breaking down. Deng Xiaoping warned that China might take over Hong Kong any time. Confidence among people plummeted, the Hong Kong dollar plunged, and supermarkets were ransacked. John's family decided to emigrate. He understood his wider family's earlier misfortune under the Chinese communists and the tragic sufferings under the Khmer Rouge regime. On the other hand, he felt that God was calling Him to live for the greater good. He felt his mission (what the mission was about was not so clear then) was among the Chinese people, including those in Hong Kong. In a 8-day CLC retreat, he decided to stay.

That decision led him to become an undergraduate in the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Hong Kong where there was a CLC. Naturally, he joined the group which incidentally also attracted Christina, a geography student. Being born Catholic, Christina participated in religious activities in high school but there was no CLC there. In the CLC, they knew more about themselves and others in the group. Even as imperfect as they were, God loved them so much in particular ways. Preparations for the CLC World Assembly in Loyola on the other side of the world, somewhat accidentally, sparked the beginning of their relationship.

On November 11, 1984, the CLC in Hong Kong held a walkathon to raise funds for delegates to attend the Loyola Assembly in 1986. Both Christina and John got plenty of sponsors. One hour or so after the walk had started, the university CLC group began to lose their way. The experience gave Christina and John more miles to accomplish, but also more time to chat and share deeply along the way. Eventually they were reunited with the other CLCers. Though their legs were a bit tired after the walkathon, Christina and John could not wait and had their first date that evening.

Their marriage five years later marked the beginning of a wide variety of experiences in their family and CLC life. They went through happiness and minor frustrations in their marital relations. Christina felt the fear over the uncertainty of the health of their first born (Ignatius) which John helped to calm. They taught their two sons how to swim, to draw and to become little friends of Big Jesus. They felt the joy of watching them growing in physique and wisdom but also experienced their weakness, as professional teachers, in delivering family education. In the light of the Christian education they received, and the experiences of one or both of them (in post-February Revolution Philippines 1986, Tiananmen 1989, Guadalajara 1990 and various experiences in Hong Kong), they reflected over elements of love and justice in their relationship with their maid and others. They discerned decisions to change profession (from dentistry to education) and jobs. They mutually supported and shared their service in the national community as president (John 1990-92) and vice-president (Christina 1994-96). They went through the highs and lows of their local CLC, and experienced intimacy and friction among the brothers and sisters in the national community.

Above all, they felt, and still feel, their life being blessed by God (who has given them so much) in their commitment in permanent matrimony and in their desire to seek the greater good in their mission. The Lord is the source of their life and love in their family, their strength to work and to forgive, their matchmaker, teacher and ultimate Light.

Christina and John Tan
CLC Hong Kong

Whoever wants to be first . . .



I have often listened to the Gospel about the dispute among the disciples over precedence. They are on the road, discussing amongst themselves who is the greatest. When Jesus asks them what they are arguing about, they fall silent. Then he calls the Twelve together and teaches them. *Then taking a little child, he set the child in front of them...*

At that point, I become perplexed every time; I try to understand and I wonder how much experience and familiarity Jesus really had with children. Were the children in Jesus' time different from the ones I know today? How can Jesus refer to children in this context, when they have ingrained deeply in them the desire for "greatness". I think that Jesus has chosen a poor example. Every day, at home or at work, I see how children argue and fight over this situation. Quarrels over precedence en masse.....on every imaginable occasion: in games, at meals, on holidays. Children want to be "first, decision-maker, head, leader, ruler"; they play at

being the strong man, like "Batman, Superman or He-Man", to show their power and position.

When I was making a personal guided retreat, I listened to this Gospel during Mass; it was the Gospel of the day. Again, this text disturbed me. Then, I remembered something that had happened at home. There was another argument, again, among our four children. It particularly involved our youngest, Judith, eight years old, who felt misunderstood because of her youth. When I went to bed that night, I found this note on my bedside table: *Dear Mummy, just for once I want to be first too, your Judith.*

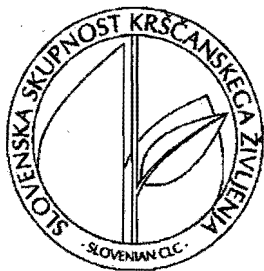
Now the Gospel becomes real for me. I am touched. The text is about me. I understand that my daughter's words are mine, that this is my problem too.

Dear Lord, just for once I want to be... I cannot yet finish the sentence because I am too ashamed of my feelings. And yet, I know - because I have experienced it - that God takes care of me. I find it hard to confess my desire for importance, my fear of being disadvantaged, my ardent desire for love and recognition. I feel helpless and confused.

And so, this experience becomes the key event of my retreat. After a period of rebellion and desolation, I begin to grasp something in this Gospel. I realise what "becoming childlike" means. I accept my poverty, I name it and tell God. In the presence of God, I am able to become "like a child" with all its feelings, fears, desires and yearnings. In this confidence, and thanks to this openness, a transformation can take place. I do not need to be preoccupied with my *importance*, my rank and my position. I feel and I believe that I am important to God and that he gives me the place and position that are right for me.

To this day, this experience of the Exercises is still with me and every quarrel among children brings me back to my "being childlike" in the presence of God.

Barbara Blum
CLC Germany



Commitment to a World Community



CLC Slovenia's journey towards commitment

The first friends began to meet 22 years ago, wanting to continue in community and to be united in their personal search as they journeyed with the Lord. As the friendship among them grew in their relationship with the Lord, the community grew and became more and more numerous.

In this first community, or rather, in the hearts of its members, the Holy Spirit spontaneously infused a strong desire to become a fraternal group, which fixed its sights on the spiritual way of St. Ignatius of Loyola. In 1990, this same Spirit — who goes throughout the world giving life and growth as he will — led us to the World Community (CLC) in which we felt completely at home.

The historical continuity of the Marian Congregations and of CLC in Slovenia was broken when Congregations were prohibited by the communist regime after the Second World War. Certainly, the Spirit found another route to lead us to CLC.

Upon reading the documents we had received from the World Community, we considered, among other things, the commitment. Despite the fact that, in the beginning, we found it strange and in a certain manner unnecessary, we began to meditate and to discern spirits in the strength of the Word of God. A short time later, in 1993, there matured in some of us a first decision — to accept and make the commitment. Before pronouncing, or rather exteriorly expressing the commitment, we prepared for half a year. This preparation consisted of meeting among ourselves with a spiritual guide.

So it was with the "first pioneers," whereas in the larger CLC Slovenia group there was, nevertheless, a certain rejection of the commitment. Those who had made it — the same as the "Direction of CLC" — felt that the simple word "commitment" meant much more than appeared at first view, for while it was presented to us as a challenge, we felt it to be an unknown field within the community.

We began to study, in depth, the documentation of the World Community, in order to make the commitment ours, translating some important articles which helped us very much. We were helped, above all, by the article of José Reyes that we found (1990) printed by the CLC of Bologna (Italy). It served us as a guideline for tracing out, with more clarity, the way towards the commitment.

We found it equally important to have the clearest and most exact image of what the members of our CLC saw, thought and felt about the commitment. What did we do? We asked twenty members (we chose persons from different localities, different ages and professions, different civil states, and years of belonging to CLC) who during a certain period deeply reflected before the Lord on the commitment. They wrote down their points of view and their opinions and handed them in. We mention part of one of the reflections: "For me, the commitment is a decision, a step by which I consciously hand over to God all that I have and in this way serve the Lord where He wants, wherever He calls me. The commitment makes me remember the decisions and the acceptance of the way of life that CLC offers me with the guarantee also of fidelity, not towards the people in CLC Slovenia or toward the possible influential members of the Community, but toward the aforementioned manner of life. The commitment is a symbol that makes me recall the life-giving relationship with the Lord. It is an act to which I can return in my needs and doubts when I look for the roots of my decisions. This symbolic act also makes me recall the motives and reasons that led me to decide and to accept the commitment."

Their contribution was the basis of all the work that followed. In reading and rereading all the valuable reflections, which express so much acceptance of the commitment as well as hesitation in regard to it, we decided to present it to all the members of CLC, thus helping them to

discern in regard to the preparation and external expression of the commitment.

Thus was born the booklet: *The Commitment in CLC Slovenia*. In it, we find some words of introduction on the part of the "Direction" and the spiritual guide, some texts from the General Principles and the General Norms which speak of the commitment, a presentation of the biblical-theological aspect of the commitment and the above-mentioned article of José Reyes. We also added various suggestions about how to prepare for the commitment, then a little more-detailed program of the contents of this preparation and, of course, the texts of the commitment of our CLC Slovenia and some other CLC groups. In the booklet, we also summarized the reflections mentioned above. With this same point of view, each member of the Community could approach the commitment and arrive at a knowledge of all its dimensions and richness.

In the CLC Assembly of Slovenia (January 1997), we decided to include the commitment in the pedagogical program, as an integral part of it, and started from there. We are trying to systematically introduce the temporary and permanent commitment in the formation program of CLC. We already see results. Before Christmas 1997, a good number of our young members pronounced the temporary commitment after having carried out a preparation of some months. We note the reflection of one of the members made on this occasion. "For me, the commitment has a double meaning: looking back at the past (observing what the Lord has done for me through CLC) and looking to the future (what I am going to do for the Lord). I believe that it is much more important to see the marvels the Lord has done in CLC, than to look towards the future. For me, commitment is above all to give thanks for the journey that I have made in CLC in which the 'principles and foundations' have been given me in Christ and, added to that, the Ignatian spirituality which helps me to live this foundation. The group is very helpful to me in my relationship with the Lord, because it infuses in me the courage and joy I need to be able to accept the situations (at times very difficult) of each day. Also, I was given various missions in CLC; above all in my parish, which helped me to examine my relationship with God. It is clear that, for me, the commitment is also a preparation for the mission of my life, within which I will live my relationship with Him who calls

me to life. The commitment — the 'thank you' for the past and the 'yes' for the future."

The preparation for the commitment is very important to us. We cannot pronounce it automatically. We need a time of discernment which ends with the decision: yes, I will make the commitment or no, I will not make it. The candidate considers three areas during the preparation: that of spirituality (by means of Ignatian spirituality), that of community and that of mission. There are many ways of carrying out the preparation either individually or in a group and in the form of spiritual exercises in daily life. The individual sees how he or she has been visited by God through CLC and how to respond to this call. The same dynamism of the commitment is in the Bible: the initiative comes from God. God offers his gift, but the response comes from us. It is up to us to recognize the talent, to accept it and respond to it.

The journey that the CLC Slovenia has made (that we have made) in regard to the commitment is a good sign that the commitment is being made more and more an element of unity. It is a stimulation and an obligation for each of us to be more and more disposed toward the Lord and towards a life in which we have to recognize and accept the will of the Lord.

We end this article with the text of the permanent commitment:

Lord in your infinite love you have never stopped drawing us to You and in the fullness of time you created in Jesus Christ a new bond with humanity, so strong that nothing can destroy it. By means of the Church you continue your redemptive work, which is destined for all humanity.

Thanks to your mercy, together with the Church, I can pronounce the apostolic faith for which I thank you. And above all I thank you because you help me, through CLC, to live in greater depth my personal relationship with you and to recognize my mission in the Church and in the world.

I want to respond to your call, committing myself today, by means of CLC Slovenia, with the World CLC, and accepting it as my way of life within the

Church. I commit myself to never stop orienting my life in conformity to the spirit of the charism, as it is described in the General Principles of CLC.

By means of the Community, I ask the grace to be able to identify myself with Christ poor and humiliated and so take the Gospel to the world.

May I be helped in this by our Mother Mary, Saint Ignatius, Saint (the saint of each one) and all the saints.

(Here each one adds a personal statement. It is not necessary that it be read at the time of the external expression of the commitment.)

Darja Silan and Fr. Milan Bizant, SJ
CLC Slovenia

TWO ANNIVERSARIES:

Universal Declaration Of Human Rights And Christifideles Laici

Our CLC representative at the UN in New York, Fr Daniel Fitzpatrick SJ wrote the following article for Progressio.

The year was 1948. On a global level, the world was trying to recover from the scar torn years of World War II. On an individual level, a young priest in Krakow, Poland was beginning his ministry in a country recently wracked by armed conflict and now unwillingly being incorporated into the Soviet Union. In December of 1998, these global and individual events of 1948 intersected as we celebrated two anniversaries. On 10 December, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. On 30 December 1988, Pope John Paul II published his apostolic exhortation **Christifideles Laici**. Though separated by forty years, it is striking how each of these documents converge on the meaning and need for human rights in our world today. It is against the background of World War II that the Universal Declaration was formulated; it is against the background of World War II and the Soviet invasion of his homeland that the Pope speaks to us about the violations against human rights. In fact, fifty years after the proclamation of the Universal Declaration, we are more aware than ever of the need to preserve and protect the rights of all throughout the world.

These two December anniversaries, then, gave us the opportunity to reflect on the fact there are many fundamental issues in our world which are not only a concern of the Catholic Church but also of the nations of the world and of people of good will across our globe. The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** reflects this so clearly in the opening words of the Preamble which states that the "... recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."

Article 1 of UDHR makes this even clearer: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason

and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

In these words, we hear an echo of our Judeo-Christian tradition which has come down to us over the centuries. From both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, we read of God's command to His people that they, too, be concerned about the welfare of all, especially those most in need. For all are created in the image of God. The history of the church down through the centuries is filled with stories of men and women who have dedicated their lives to serving others in need and protecting the dignity and worth of every human being. The names of Frances of Rome, Camillus de Lellis, Mother Cambrini, Peter Claver, Elizabeth of Hungary, Vincent de Paul, and, in our own day, Dorothy Day come easily to mind. In the past hundred years since the publication of **RERUM NOVARUM**, the church has raised a constant voice on behalf of social justice and human rights for the people of the world.

It is not surprising, then, for us to read **Christifideles Laici (CL)** words similar to those in the Universal Declaration. Even though this apostolic exhortation is not primarily a document on human rights but, rather, a call for the laity to take their rightful place in the life and mission of the church, Pope John Paul II makes it clear that at this great moment in history part of that mission is for all Christians to hear the needs of the world. The Pope quotes in **Christifideles Laici**: *"The people of God believe that they are led by the Spirit of the Lord, who fills the whole world. Moved by this faith, they try to discern the authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the events, needs and longings which is shared with other people of our time"* (CL no.3).

The **Preamble** to the Universal Declaration expresses those needs and longings very well. The UDHR was proclaimed because it expresses the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the common people that there will come a time when we shall all live in, *".....a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want"*. The Pope points out how often in our world we see violations against the very things of which the UDHR speaks: *"Once again we find ourselves before....our brothers and sisters, whose fundamental rights are being violated"* (CL no.5). In enumerating these violations the Pope's list corresponds with those enunciated in UDHR. In number 5 of **Christifideles Laici**, the Pope speaks of violations against the right to life

and integrity (cf. UDHR, Art 3), the right to a house and to work (Arts. 17,23,25), the right to a family and responsible parenthood (Art. 16), the right to participation in public and political life (Art. 21), and the right to freedom of conscience and the practice of religion (Art. 18).

The global view of both of these documents reminds those of us in CLC of the first of our General Principles wherein we find a reflection of the Ignatian contemplation on the Annunciation and Incarnation of the Second Week of the **SPIRITUAL EXERCISES** (Nos.101-109). "*The Three Divine Persons, contemplating the whole human family in so many sinful divisions, decide to give themselves completely to all men and women and liberate them from all the chains*" (GP no.1).

Christifideles Laici reaffirms, once again, Vatican II's call that we all have, "*... the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel*" (CL no. 33). It is the task of each Christian, "*.... to rediscover and make others rediscover the inviolable dignity of every human person*" (CL no.37). This, "*.... makes up an essential task, in a certain sense, the central and unifying task of the service which the church, and the lay faithful in her, are called to render to the human family*" (CL no.37). The Pope indicates that this is not only the task of individuals within the church but, also, of lay groups. John Paul II writes that lay groups should have, "*... a commitment to a presence in human society, which in the light of the church's social doctrine, places it at the service of the total dignity of the person. Therefore, associations of lay faithful must become fruitful outlets for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are most just and loving within society*" (CL no.30).

In these words, we hear echoes of the words and spirit of our own CLC **General Principles**: "*The field of CLC mission knows no limits: it extends both to the church and the world, in order to bring the Gospel of salvation to all people and to serve individual persons and society by opening hearts to conversion and struggling to change oppressive structures*" (GP no.8). "*To prepare ourselves more effectively for apostolic witness and service in our daily environment, we assemble in community those who feel a more urgent need to unite their human life in all its dimensions with the fullness of the Christian faith*" (GP no.4).

In the Pope's words and in our General Principles, we hear, again, the invitation of the Lord to each of us to labour in His service for the spread of His kingdom of justice, love and peace (Sp. Ex. nos.91-98).

Anniversaries are moments in our lives when we stop to reflect, to look back, to repent, to give thanks and to look to the future. The two anniversaries of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and **Christifideles Laici** bring to our awareness, once again, the large question of human rights in our world. Over these past fifty years, much has been done in many areas of human rights. For this, we thank God and pay tribute to the many women and men who have worked for human rights over these past years. On this anniversary, however, there was little cause to make it an occasion of celebration. Rather, we are more aware than ever before that there is a tremendous challenge still in front of us. This challenge is made concrete when; each year during March and April, the UN Commission on Human Rights sits in Geneva to hear violations of human rights around the world. This past year, fifty three member countries of the UN sat on the Commission with another sixty member countries in attendance as observers. In addition, there were many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) present as advisers, advocates and "watch-dogs" of the work of the commission. There were twenty-four agenda items of serious violations of human rights brought before the Commission from around the globe.

Even though we are aware of the many challenges that face us, we are able to face them in the spirit of hope. Each year on the feast of Pentecost, we are reminded, once again, that the Holy Spirit continues to work in the world in ways beyond imagining. It is the Holy Spirit that puts in the hearts of each human being on the face of the earth, the knowledge of his/her own dignity and worth as a child of God. It is in and through the power of this same Holy Spirit that people recognize the need for a respect and a reverence for fundamental human rights for themselves and for all. It is this same Spirit that challenges each of us in the depths of our beings to do our part to ensure that these basic human rights be enjoyed and lived by all.

Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and former President of Ireland said in a speech at Oxford University on 11 November 1997, *"Human freedom is that precious space secured by standards, laws and procedures which defend, protect and enhance human rights. We are all custodians of those standards."*

Whether we use legal language, or ethical and philosophical language, or theological and spiritual language, the message of the High Commissioner speaks the truth: "We are all custodians of those standards."

Introducing Elisabeth Janz Mayer-Rieckh

Elisabeth Janz Mayer-Rieckh, working with Father Henry Volken SJ, is accredited by World CLC as a representative at the UN in Geneva. We are grateful that, through Elisabeth's availability, we have another means to collaborate with the Jesuit Refugee Service for whom Elisabeth is working.



Allow me to begin by thanking you, the CLC, for your trust and support over these past few months. This support has been extremely helpful to me while working in cooperation with Henry Volken and agencies such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and Caritas Internationalis.

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to be associated with the Christian Life Community. I would like to give you an example of this cooperation. In February of 1998, we met as a working group in a session entitled, "UN Commission on Human Rights on a draft Optional to the Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts". There was, in this session, a strong presence and active participation of several NGO's. The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), along with the Christian Life Community (CLC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the World Council of Churches (WCC), Caritas Internationalis, and the International Catholic Child Bureau delivered a statement highlighting the particular vulnerability of children in the world in regard to the forced recruitment into the armed forces and the devastating impact on them. In this statement there was an appeal to governments to respect the fundamental right of children to protection from all forms of involvement in armed conflicts.

My background is in social work and community development which is my first university degree. Some years later, this was followed by a masters in development studies. As a social worker I started to work in Vienna, Austria (my home country) with the organization Caritas. This consisted of working with the homeless, street children and women in need. Later on, I moved on to refugee work. In this particular field of endeavour, I first worked with the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong through an organization called, Community and Family Services International. It's here that I first made contact with JRS since we were working in close cooperation with each other. Following that, I went to work in Cambodia for 2.5 years for UNHCR. Their work consisted in the repatriation of the Cambodian refugees from the Thai Cambodian border. My particular involvement was concentrated on facilitating the return of vulnerable individuals such as, single mothers, children, handicap children, psychiatric cases, the elderly etc..

While in Cambodia, a very important event happened to me in the arrival of my first son, Christopher. Since that time, I have become the mother of two boys.

Following my stay in Cambodia, I moved to Geneva where I worked for two years with the International Working Group on Refugee Women.

In these past last two years, my work has been with the Jesuit Refugee Service as a liaison person to the UN and, more specifically, to the UNHCR along with other international organizations.



The following is a report on the recent session of the UN Working Group drafting an Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The report provides a brief background to the Working Group, a summary of the proceedings, four points of action for those JRS offices/other NGOs interested in continuing or getting involved in lobbying activities with their respective governments and an update on recent NGO initiatives. In Annex 1 you find a NGO Position paper on the subject and in Annex 2 the statement delivered to the Working Group by a number of NGOs including JRS. You are most welcome to get in touch with me for further information. The World Council of Churches has recently taken the subject officially onto their agenda for the coming years. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are fully on board to 'campaign' on the subject of child soldiers as well.

Elisabeth Janz Mayer-Rieckh

UN Working Group of the UN Commission on Human Rights on a Draft Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts (Geneva, 2-10 February, 1998)

I. Background

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted in 1989, and nearly all countries are now parties to it. The age limit set in the Convention for the participation and recruitment of children into armed conflict is 15 years. At the time of drafting the Convention, the question of the minimum age for recruitment into armed forces and participation in hostilities gave rise to considerable controversy as many states at the time wished to adopt an 18 years limit in line with the general age of majority stated in Article 1 of the Convention. Since the adoption of the CRC, the General Assembly mandated a UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict which was presented to the General Assembly on 8 November 1996 by the expert Graca Machel. In 1992 the Committee on the Rights of the Child

recommended the adoption of an Optional Protocol to the Convention to raise the minimum age for recruitment into armed forces to 18 years. By resolution 1994/91 the Commission on Human Rights decided to establish an open-ended inter-sessional working group to elaborate, as a matter of priority, such a Draft Optional Protocol. This was the fourth session of this Working Group.

II. Summary of the Session of the Working Group from 2-10 February 1998

This session of the Working Group was again chaired by Ambassador Nils Eliasson of Sweden. Many of the NGOs present, as well as a number of government delegations, felt that this session was by far the most frustrating so far. No tangible progress was achieved in this year's negotiations which had to be terminated early as governments were unable to find agreement even on the most fundamental article to the protocol relating to the question of a minimum age of 18 years for the participation in hostilities. The United States was the only Government openly blocking consensus on this core article. The governments which came out in support of the US were South Korea, Kuwait and Israel (Israel was not actually participating in the Working Group but sent a message).

Unfortunately, rather than closing the session at this point, as was suggested by the NGOs present and a number of the more positive-thinking delegations, the Chair proposed to continue negotiations on the basis of an un-official text, the so-called 'Chairman's perception after open-ended negotiations' which, it was suggested, would be attached to the final report to the Commission of Human Rights. After hours of painstaking discussions, we now have a very weak Chairman's perception constituting the lowest common denominator reached by states. (full text available upon request). The NGOs as well as a number of governments expressed that this text should not be presented to the 1998 Commission on Human Rights for adoption, nor should it form the basis for further discussions.

It might be useful to once again point out here that in recent years the consensus among governments, UN agencies and NGOs has been growing stating clearly that 18 years marks the transition to adulthood and that those below this age have the right to obtain special protection. A

number of international and national provisions recognize 18 years as marking the distinction between child and adulthood such as e.g. the right to vote, the right to legal majority, prohibitions on employment in hazardous occupations, and prohibitions on sales of alcohol and tobacco. So why should there be an exception for the recruitment of children and their participation in armed conflict, in particular when the devastating and long-term consequences and impact of such activities on the well-being of children and their societies are well known and documented today?

Note should also be taken of the fact that the overwhelming majority of states, both in the world and in the UN Working Group, agree to a minimum age of 18 years for both the participation of children in hostilities and their compulsory recruitment into the armed forces. It is only a minority of countries, particularly Western countries, which continue to pressure for the recruitment of volunteers at the age of 17 or even 16 years. Unfortunately, it is exactly these governments that tend to be the most active in the Working Group while many of the African countries for example, which in principal have no legal problems preventing them from agreeing to high standards on this question, do not participate.

The former small group of (Western) countries primarily wishes to ensure that the ultimate text will not require them to change their current laws and practices with regard to their recruitment policies. Another argument frequently used is that recruitment is seen as simply another form of employment and/or that they need to be able to train their recruits before sending them into actual combat. While there is general agreement that training for the armed forces is desirable, this should not imply that recruits should be sent into combat as soon as they reach the age of 18 years, but rather that 18 years should constitute the MINIMUM age. Moreover, the experience of NGOs as well as the research undertaken for the Machel Study demonstrates clearly that where under-18 years old are recruited they also tend to be used if the government becomes involved in an armed conflict.

A further line of argumentation maintained by a number of governments is that they need to be able to have military schools or training facilities with entry at a lower age than that for regular voluntary recruitment. In so far as

pupils in these establishments would not be members of the armed forces, they would not come within the scope of the Optional Protocol in any case. Such an exception would, therefore, enable recruitment into the armed forces, with no restrictions on the kind of training, including weapons training, which would be provided. As such, the same problems as for general voluntary recruitment under 18 apply. If such schools are necessary, why is it essential that the pupils are members of the armed forces? Some countries operate such establishments, but at the age of 18 the pupils have the choice whether to join the armed forces, and only at that point are they "recruited".

The only subject that was part of genuine negotiations during these 7 days was the question of how to address the recruitment of under 18 years old by non-governmental entities. While governments largely agreed that this was a widespread phenomenon in the majority of today's internal conflicts that had to be addressed in this Optional Protocol and that they would accept that armed opposition groups should be prohibited from recruiting (even voluntarily) persons under the age of 18 years, it was difficult to reach agreement on how to address this problem. Some delegates raised the concern that an Optional Protocol could only set obligations for States parties and not for non-governmental parties to an armed conflict, and others were concerned that by naming non-governmental actors in the protocol one would legitimize their status.

One of the positive and encouraging aspects of this year's session was the much stronger presence and active participation of NGOs including the Quaker's Office to the UN, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Rädda Barnen, IFRC, representatives of the Dutch Coalition for the Rights of the Child in armed Conflict, and an NGO representative from South Africa and JRS, just to name the ones that were present and active in the Working Group on a daily basis. The oral statements delivered by a number of NGOs at the outset of the session undoubtedly had a strong impact, bringing to the forefront the many painful realities confronted by (former) child soldiers that NGOs witness on a daily basis in many countries around the world. As in past sessions, JRS together with the **World Christian Life Community**, LWF, WCC, Caritas Internationalis and the International Catholic Child Bureau delivered a statement highlighting the particular vulnerability of displaced children to the forcible

recruitment into armed forces, the devastating consequences that the participation by children has on their physical and psychological well-being, and appealing to governments to respect the fundamental right of children to protection from all forms of involvement in armed conflicts (Annex 1).

Additional statements calling upon members of the Working Group to set high international standards that can truly protect children worldwide were delivered by UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC, and a message was sent by the Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu. A strong intervention was also made by the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Mary Robinson, pointing out that the purpose of this Working Group was to provide improved and higher international standards for the protection of children and that national legislation should not be presented as an obstacle to the elaboration of such new and more advanced international standards. She appealed on States that are not in a position to accept the 18 years age limit, not to prevent its adoption of the Optional Protocol by other governments. She also emphasized that the Working Group should not seek an unsatisfactory compromise for the sake of compromise only (full text available).

III. What can NGOs do?

Four very useful Points for Action, related to the lobby work with specific governments, have been provided by Rachel Brett from the Quaker's United Nations Office:

- ① Contact your government insisting that there should be no exception for the armed forces in relation to those under 18 who are protected under national and international law as children.
- ② If your government already fully supports this position, encourage it to persist in the face of the opposition outlined above. Such governments include Belgium, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, Guatemala, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, Uruguay and Venezuela.

- ③ If your government supports or could support this position but has not been active in the UN working group, encourage it to become more actively engaged. These governments include Algeria, Angola, Belarus, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Hungary, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Malawi, Malta, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Paraguay, Slovenia, Spain, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, Vietnam.
- ④ If your government does not support this position, particularly where it is only a question of voluntary recruitment or military schools, lobby for it to change both nationally and internationally. This group includes Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Republic of Korea, South Africa, UK. Denmark, Norway and Portugal have stated their willingness to raise their voluntary recruitment age to 18 if this is the standard set.

The list of countries given above is by no means exhaustive. If your government is not listed, please contact it to check its position. In all cases, please notify the Quaker UN Office, from whom further information is available, of amendments and additions to the above lists and of responses and changes in positions.

IV. Further developments on the NGO front:

The NGOs participating in this year's Working Group met after the session to plan for future action and strategies. It was generally felt that it was time to move this standard setting exercise outside of the UN in order to be able to draft a comprehensive international instrument for the protection of children in armed conflict situations. Rather than negotiating a text within the Working Group under the current climate, a text of high standards should be presented to governments for their signature with the aim to build a critical mass of countries with high national standards that step-by-step get others on board and ultimately move on to an equally high international standard. It was generally felt that work on the national level was of utmost importance at this stage and that the model of the

'Landmines Campaign' in many aspects was a very useful one to follow. One distinct technical difference that was noted is the fact that for this Optional Protocol a monitoring mechanism, namely the Committee on the Rights of the Child, is in place and that therefore the standard setting exercise ultimately had to be moved back into the UN (by tabling the text at the General Assembly for adoption once enough countries are on board).

A number of activities and initiatives are in process to get a concerted and effective 'International Coalition for the Prohibition of Child Soldiers' off the ground in the near future. Among many other things, this has resulted, in the formulation of a NGO Position Paper on the subject that you can find attached.

ANNEX 1

Oral Statement submitted by the World Christian Life Community, the Lutheran World Federation, Caritas Internationalis, the World Council of Churches, and the International Catholic Child Bureau, in consultation with the Jesuit Refugee Service to the Working Group of the UN Commission on Human Rights on a Draft Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts (Geneva, 2-10 February, 1998, delivered by Elisabeth Janz Mayer-Rieckh, World Christian Life Community).

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

I speak on behalf of the following non-governmental organizations which have followed the developments of this Working Group closely over past years: the World Christian Life Community, the Lutheran World Federation, Caritas Internationalis, the World Council of Churches, the International Catholic Child Bureau, and the Jesuit Refugee Service. We would like to thank you for this opportunity to address the Working Group again today.

Let me first welcome the progress achieved to date and the concerted efforts made by a number of government delegations to draft an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that truly aims at strengthening the protection of children in armed conflict situations. At the same time, however, we cannot but voice our serious concern and distress at the fact that no agreement has been reached even on the most fundamental question of a minimum age of 18 years for participation in hostilities.

In our work world-wide with refugees and other groups affected by armed conflict, we continue to witness the devastating consequences that the participation by children has not only on their physical well-being, but also, and often even more damaging for their own and their families' and societies future, their psychological well-being, to which every child ought to be entitled. Over recent months we have encountered child soldiers in:

- Cambodian hospitals, injured by landmines, many knowing no other life than war;
- Sri Lanka, where many child soldiers see no alternative to their current involvement in armed conflict. As one Sri Lankan boy put it to one of us: "After my first killing I could not sleep for two days. But just now I have returned from an attack and I do not know how many we killed. It is part of our work now";
- Colombia, where reportedly some 5000 of all school-leavers under the age of 18 years go into military service and where children are also significantly represented in guerrilla and para-military groups;
- Liberia, where children as young as seven years old are trying to shake off the consequences of their traumatic experiences as soldiers.
- Burundi, at checkpoints in the countryside, where young boys carry guns almost their own size;
- The Thai-Myanmar border region, including one boy so traumatized and desensitized that his sole desire was to seek violent revenge upon those for whom he formerly fought.

We noted with dismay over the past year that the involvement of children in many of today's armed conflicts has continued unabated and even increased as conflicts are prolonged, economies collapse, and light

weapons proliferate. A recent article in the International Herald Tribune reports that "as many as 250,000 children are serving in government armies or armed rebel groups. In more than 30 countries around the world, these young combatants are both the tools and the casualties of adult hatred. More than 2 million children have been killed in armed conflicts in the past decade. Six million have been seriously injured or permanently disabled" (IHT, 10-11 January 1998). We have received numerous accounts from our colleagues around the world that indicate the need for extensive and long-term psycho-social programmes for former child soldiers who have endured hardship and cruelties of a scale to which no human being, and much less children, should ever be exposed.

Mr Chairman, different sources, including the UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children (A/51/306/Add. 1), have noted the particular vulnerability of displaced children, especially when they are separated from their families. While refugee camps should constitute safe places where refugee children and their guardians receive protection and assistance, they have sometimes effectively become centres for the forcible recruitment of child soldiers, predominantly adolescent boys but also girls and young children. Some refugee children, under such precarious circumstances - unsafe and left to their own devices - have reportedly also volunteered to join armed groups hoping to find there physical protection and economic security, or simply because they see no other choice.

It is both this trauma, and the astonishing resilience and capacity for rehabilitation we encounter with child soldiers, that has led our respective agencies to appeal to governments to respect the fundamental right of children to protection from all forms of involvement in armed conflicts, and to urge that the Working Group make every effort to move the process for an Optional protocol forward with a view to ending such exploitation of children.

We propose that the Optional Protocol include the following provisions:

First, a clear prohibition of participation in hostilities by persons under the age of 18 years, either directly or indirectly. This prohibition should not be subject to qualifications and must set a clear and unequivocal international standard.

Second, we welcome the agreement reached on a total prohibition of compulsory recruitment of under 18-year-olds into governmental armed forces, but we urge governments to also adopt the age of 18 years as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment. What is called voluntary recruitment is in fact in very many cases not a free choice but the result of indoctrination, incitement to vengeance, poverty, destitution, severe pressure, the prospect of physical protection, and the hope to make up for the loss of family. The requirement of parental consent is no safeguard, and, more often than not, is irrelevant, as children most at risk have experienced a breakdown of support structures, profound social instability and other societal pressures that make informed decisions in their best interests virtually impossible

Third, the Optional Protocol should address recruitment by non-governmental entities, a widespread phenomenon in the majority of internal conflicts.

Mr Chairman, we appeal to members of the Working Group to enter into this important session with an open mind, to assume fully the serious responsibility we all share to help create a world which promises a viable future for all children. The international community cannot and must not let this opportunity pass. Short-term political interests should not be allowed to override conscience, which demands that this deplorable practice be brought to an end.

I thank you for your attention.

ANNEX 2

Joint NGO position on the draft Optional Protocol on involvement of children in armed conflict.

Following the fourth session (2-10 February 1998) of the UN Working Group to draft an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement of children in armed conflict, the non-

governmental organisations (NGOs) most involved in the Working Group and the NGO Sub-Group on Refugee Children and Children in Armed Conflict have met to discuss next steps and have come to the following conclusions:

1. The objective is an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect children from recruitment and participation in armed conflict. Unfortunately, the Working Group has failed to produce a draft Optional Protocol with the necessary standards. The Working Group should, therefore, be suspended for one year, ie there should be no session next year, and the question reconsidered at the 55th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights (1999). In the meanwhile, the High Commissioner for Human Rights should be requested to prepare an analytical report on the "Chairman's Perception following open-ended consultations" annexed to the report of the Working Group, taking into consideration information submitted by Governments, the specialised agencies, relevant UN organs, regional and intergovernmental organisations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and NGOs. The 1998 Commission resolution should specify that the question of the draft optional protocol and this analytical report should be considered at the Commission in 1999 so that the issue remains on the agenda.
2. The Chairman's Perception text of the draft Optional Protocol from the fourth session of the working group should not be presented to the 1998 Commission on Human Rights for adoption and forwarding to the General Assembly nor should it form the basis for further negotiations at this time. This text is the product of a consensus-based approach and it has a number of weaknesses. Amongst these are:

Article 1: Although the minimum age specified for participation is 18 years, the prohibition is limited to "direct" participation and states parties are only required to "take all feasible measures".

Article 2: Although the minimum age for compulsory recruitment is set at 18 years, that for voluntary recruitment into government armed forces is 17. Furthermore, there is an exception in that voluntary recruitment below

this age is permitted provided that the recruits are in schools. There is no requirement that the pupils in such schools are not members of the armed forces nor restrictions on the kind of training, including weapons training, which they may be given.

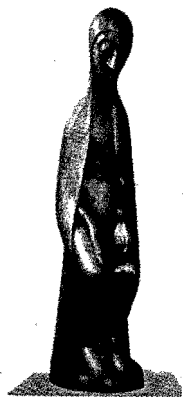
Article 5: Enables reservations to be made over and above the weaknesses already identified as forming general parts of the text.

3. The NGOs are committed to work for the creation of an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child which will establish standards likely to have a significant impact on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The purpose of new human rights standards is to advance international law and to elaborate clear obligations for states. Therefore, the NGOs do not believe that at this point the most important feature of such an agreement should be to enable most states to adhere to it without having to change their current laws and practices (the "broad consensus" argument).

Rachel Bretto, on behalf of the NGO Sub-Group on Refugee Children and Children in Armed Conflict, and associated NGOs. 27 February 1998



A Litany to Mary, Woman of Asia



Mary you responded in faith to the call of the Spirit to be the mother of Jesus.

R/ *Teach us to respond generously to the Spirit calling us in our difficult conditions.*

Mary, as a pregnant unmarried teenager, you faced the taunts and insults of the gossip in your home town.

R/ *Be with all young single mothers in their struggle to make a home and feed their children.*

Mary, you gave birth to Jesus in a manger as there was no place at the Inn. You know the difficulties of the poor.

R/ *May we work for decent housing for all slum and shanty dwellers.*

Mary, you knew the difficulty of protecting your child Jesus from the threats of the rulers of the day - with the killings of the innocents, and the weeping of the mothers.

R/ *Inspire us to take steps to protect our children; to take on the world powers and their attempts to control Asian populations.*

Mary, you were a refugee with Joseph and Jesus in Egypt - and experienced what it was to be an alien in a country where your people have been slaves for generations.

R/ *Motivate us to respond to the issues of refugees, and to resolve the causes which make people refugees and political asylum seekers.*

Mary, you were a migrant worker as a family in Egypt and experienced the difficulties of earning a living in a foreign country.

R/ *Help us defend the rights of migrant women workers who are subject to much harassment and discrimination.*

Mary, you received sad news of the execution of John the Baptist, at whose birth you assisted.

R/ *Be with all women who grieve the unjust treatment of family and friends.*

Mary, you empathised with the needs of others for food and drink.

R/ *Help us to bring about a sharing of food in our countries, and in the world.*

Mary, you felt deeply the meaninglessness of the religious leadership and spirituality of the day.

R/ *Inspire us to understand the real message of Jesus concerning religion and spirituality.*

Mary, you sought with loving concern to understand your son being in the company of prostitutes, and helped them to transform their lives.

R/ *We pray for the light to struggle against the growing prostitution, tourism prostitution, and child prostitution in our countries.*

Mary, with worried motherly concern, you learned of the many threats to your Son's life.

R/ *Be with all mothers who are anxious about family members taking risks by simply working for basic human rights.*

Mary, you heard with sorrow the news of your Son's midnight arrest and detention.

R/ *Be with all mothers whose loved ones have "disappeared" in the middle of the night.*

Mary, you saw the torn bleeding body of your Son, whipped and crowned with thorns by the imperialistic powers.

R/ *Be with all mothers whose hearts break as they watch helplessly the torture of their children.*

Mary, you witnessed the many false accusations in the mockery of an unfair trial.

R/ *Be with all women who resist the oppression and the lies in a male-dominated patriarchal society.*

Mary, you saw the connivance of the high priests in the trial and the killing of Jesus.

R/ *Help us to evaluate the thinking and action of the religious institution among us.*

Mary, you accompanied Jesus up the hill of Calvary and stood by His cross, with the other women, till the end, and there became for us our mother.

R/ *Be with all women who can only stand and weep and watch and pray in the midst of extreme violence and brutality.*

Mary, you persevered in the cause, for which your Son was killed, and gave confidence to His disciples.

R/ *Give us courage and hope to persevere in our dedication to the same divine-human cause, even when the forces against it seem insurmountable.*

Mary, you were a member of the people who had been under foreign rule for 600 years, lastly under Roman power.

R/ *May we find in you the strength to defend our freedom and national, social and cultural integrity.*

Mary, you understood what it is to be exploited by foreign powers, foreign economic interests and a collaborating local elite.

R/ *Safeguard our people's interests against modern foreign domination and their allies*

Mary, you proposed a radical transformation in your society in the words of the Magnificat

R/ *Help us to analyse the struggle against the negative effects of globalization and opt for the spirituality of your song of liberation.*

Mary, your song encouraged economic transformation to send the rich empty away, to fill the hungry with good things - and to share; so that no one was in need.

R/ *Help us to fight the unjust accumulation of economic resources; the take-overs; the sale of national assets; and the increasing inequality and unemployment.*

Mary, your song sought political transformation - to bring down the mighty from their thrones and to lift up the lowly.

R/ *Help us to oppose all political abuses, human rights violations, corruption and global domination by the big powers.*

Mary, your song asked for cultural transformation - to scatter the proud; and exalt the humble.

R/ *Help us to resist cultural trends that are against values of genuine humanity.*

Mary, our sister who shares and cares.

R/ *Help us perceive what is happening to our family, workers, women and children.*

Mary, our friend who tends and mends

R/ *Help us to reduce the damage to our culture and environment, with globalization.*

Mary, our mother who protects and bandages the wounded

R/ *Help us make a common cause on behalf of the rights of the marginalised, the indigenous Aborigines, the farmers, fishers, the plantation people, and the urban poor.*

Mary who brought up Jesus to appreciate nature in the birds, the animals, the trees, the hills and the sea.

R/ *Inspire us to care for our nature that is being devastated.*

Mary, you were in the midst of the disciples of Jesus when they received the Holy Spirit and strengthened them to be a witnessing community of Jesus.

R/ *Inspire us to listen to the Holy Spirit in our times, to be a renewed community of sharing and partnership.*

Mary, you are called the Queen of Peace

R/ *Strengthen us in our efforts to realise peace with justice in our country and the world.*

Mary, Asian woman of humility and joy

R/ *Intercede for us, our sister*

Mary, faithful companion through the sorrow, in the struggle for justice and liberty

R/ *Pray for us, dear friend*

Mary, loving witness to the gospel of truth and the glory of the kingdom

R/ *Hear us. O Mother*

The Jubilee Year

(Some history...)



Pope John Paul II has declared the year 2000 a Holy Year. The custom of Holy Years draws its remote inspiration from the Jewish Jubilee Year referred to in chapter 25 of the Book of Leviticus.

Etymologically, the word “to jubilate” comes from the Hebrew word “Yobel”, which means ram and alludes to the fact that at the beginning of an announced jubilee year ram’s horns were used as trumpets.

“And on the tenth day of the seventh month you shall sound the trumpet; on the day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout the land” (Lv 25, 9).

The Jewish Jubilee Year was celebrated every fifty years and its object was to level out the social situation of the people of Israel: “You will declare this fiftieth year sacred and proclaim the liberation of all the inhabitants of the land” (Lv 25, 10).

The Jubilee Year had very special characteristics...

Slaves were freed.

“He [the slave] shall work with you until the jubilee year. Then he shall leave you, he and his children; he shall return to his clan and regain possession of his ancestral property. For they are my servants, these whom I have brought out of Egypt, and they must not be sold as slaves” (Lv 25, 41-42).

The land which had been sold in the course of the preceding fifty years returned to its original owners: "Land must not be sold in perpetuity, for the land belongs to me, and to me you are only strangers and guests" (Lv 25,23).

It was forbidden to sow throughout this year so that the land could rest: "This fiftieth year is to be a jubilee year for you: you will not sow, you will not harvest the ungathered corn, you will not gather from the untrimmed vine" (Lv 25, 11).

If one must neither sow nor harvest during the jubilee year, an obvious question comes to mind: "then what shall we eat?"

This in fact only requires that we place our trust in the Lord..

"In case you should ask: What shall we eat in this seventh year if we do not sow or harvest the produce? I have ordered my blessing to be on you every sixth year [the preceding year] which will therefore provide for you for three years. You will have the old produce to eat while you are sowing in the eighth year and even as late as the ninth year; you will eat the old produce while waiting for the harvest of that year" (Lv 25, 20-22).

The Christian Holy Year draws its inspiration from a year as original, and as inconceivable today, as this year. A year of liberation, a year of pardon in which everything tries to return to God's original plan.

Within Christianity, too, the Holy Year has its history. The first Holy Year we have news of was celebrated in the year 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII. Fifty years later Pope Clement VI - one of the Avignon popes - again declared a Holy Year.

Apparently, at first, no conclusions were reached over the definition of the date of celebration of Holy Years. In 1389, Urban VI instituted the celebration of the Holy Year every thirty three years in memory - he said - of the years Jesus Christ spent on earth.

It was not until the year 1450 that Pope Nicolas V decreed that Holy Years should be celebrated every fifty years...

We owe the present custom of celebrating Holy Years every 25 years to Paul II, who decreed it in 1470.

However, mainly because of political circumstances, Holy Years were celebrated neither in 1800, nor in 1850.

It was Pius IX who celebrated it again in 1875.

The Holy Year begins with the opening of the Holy Door. This custom goes back to the XV century. The Holy Door is opened on Christmas evening of the year preceding the Holy Year and is closed on Christmas day of the Holy Year.

The Holy Father grants a special indulgence to those pilgrims who, fulfilling the customary requisites, visit the famous Roman Basilicas - Saint Peter's, Saint Paul's, the Lateran, Saint Mary Major - in the course of the Holy Year.

People who are unable to go to Rome during the Holy Year - i.e. the majority of Christians - can also obtain the Jubilee indulgences in their own communities since the Pope extends the advantages of the Holy Year throughout the world.

Luís T. Ardila, S.J.
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Putting Life Before Debt

In this policy document two international networks of Catholic development organizations, CIDSE (International Co-operation for Development and Solidarity) and CI (Caritas Internationalis), together call for the cancellation of the unpayable debt of the most impoverished countries by the year 2000.

International debt is a dangerous obstacle to human development, forcing the world's most impoverished countries to use scarce resources to pay their debt rather than invest in the well-being of their people. Our concern stems from our firsthand experience of the impact of debt on the poor and years of our advocacy work for debt relief.

The severity of today's crisis facing the poorest countries in the world, combined with the upcoming Jubilee, have inspired us to work together to actively find solutions to the problem of international debt. The purpose of this document is to increase public awareness of international debt, outline a CIDSE/Caritas Internationalis position, and propose actions to bring about a lasting solution to the debt crisis.

We view international debt from the perspective of Catholic social teaching, which offers a set of principles and a framework to understand the issue and examine options to bring about change. International debt is a complex policy issue that carries with it a profound moral challenge. This challenge is based on how the international debt affects the human dignity, human rights, and human welfare of some of the most vulnerable women, men, and children in the global community. The moral dimensions of international debt extend to how it was contracted, who was involved in key decisions, which institutions are now primarily responsible for its resolution, and what moral criteria should be used to assess and structure the relationships of the individuals and institutions involved.

The existence of debt has both social and financial costs. On the social side, debt repayments divert resources that could be used to fight poverty or invest in infrastructure such as roads, schools or health facilities. Sub-

Saharan African governments transfer to Northern creditors four times more than they spend on the health of their people. On the financial side, high levels of debt indicate investment risk and thus deter investment. The impact of debt is made worse by structural adjustment and stabilization policies which seek to correct macroeconomic problems and improve the management of public resources, yet often have the effect of limiting social expenditures, slowing investment, reducing the competitiveness of domestic firms, and increasing unemployment.

Previous attempts by bilateral, multilateral, and commercial creditors have not been sufficient to reduce international debt in a way that benefits the most impoverished people. Recognizing the magnitude of the crisis, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund agreed in 1996 to a comprehensive debt reduction plan, the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative. Its purpose is to reduce the external debt of heavily indebted poor countries to a sustainable level. Only a few of the 41 HIPCs are eligible, however; and those that qualify receive too little relief after too long a wait. Furthermore, sustainability is defined in narrow terms that do not take into account the impact of debt on people's lives.

CIDSE and CI call for cancellation of the unpayable debt of the most impoverished countries by the year 2000. To achieve this goal, we advocate:

1. Drastically improving the HIPC initiative;
2. Linking debt cancellation with investment in human development in ways that are appropriate within each country and determined after consultation between governments and civil society;
3. Ensuring decisions on debt relief are made in a transparent way. The international financial institutions, Paris Club, and governments should share planning documents with civil society organizations and actively incorporate the views of civil society on debt analyses, planning, and conditions placed on loans;
4. Changing the structure of international financial relations to ensure that debtors, people affected by debt, and creditors are equal parties in negotiations on debt. One possibility is to set up an international bankruptcy/insolvency procedure.

These objectives can only be reached with the strong mobilization of public opinion, both in creditor and debtor countries. CIDSE and CI urge their constituencies to learn more about debt, to build awareness at the grassroots level, to launch or join public opinion campaigns, and to lobby decision-makers. On the basis of shared Catholic social teaching, CIDSE and CI believe that organizations associated with the Church have the responsibility to work with decision-makers on this issue. In the spirit of solidarity among nations and peoples, CIDSE and CI believe they have an obligation to work together to promote an authentic and substantial solution to the debt problem now and in the coming years.

Why Now?

We are approaching the great celebrations around the new Millennium. The Jubilee is both a time of repentance when injustices are put right as well as the symbolic beginning of a new era. Jubilee symbolizes a fresh start for the poor, an opportunity to reestablish justice and equity throughout the world. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Jubilee was to have occurred every fifty years. It was a time to free slaves, return land to its rightful owners, and forgive debts. Linking this biblical concept to the coming millennium, Pope John Paul II states: "Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought ... to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 51). We see the Jubilee in the Year 2000 as the time for a new beginning for impoverished nations, an opportunity for justice and the solution to the problem of international debt.

The upcoming Jubilee, combined with devastating poverty of the least developed countries, the widening gap between rich and poor worldwide, the relative failure of past efforts at debt reduction, and a new opportunity for debt relief, present a challenge we cannot ignore. In the spirit of solidarity among nations and people of the North and South, we have an obligation to promote an authentic and substantial solution to the debt problem.

Advocacy: Steps to Build a Campaign on Debt

If the goal of a significant debt relief is to be met, more people need to become involved in campaigning and lobbying.

1. Learn more about the debt issue

If you have not worked on the debt issue before, spend some time learning the basic facts about debt in order to make the topic accessible for yourself and your constituency.

Before you start gathering information, find out what is already available. Contact national or regional debt networks, your national episcopal conference, your local CIDSE or CI partner, or regional offices of the NGO liaison unit of the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program.

Debtor Countries

Examine the economic condition of your country. What is the country's annual income, known as Gross Domestic Product? What is the level of inflation in the country, and is it falling or rising? What types of products does the country produce for export, and how much money does it earn each year from exports? Is export income falling or rising?

What percentage of the population lives in poverty? How unequal is the distribution of income, land, and other forms of wealth in your country? What percentage of the population cannot read? How many people do not have access to potable water? Are literacy rates and health care coverage different for women and men? What percentage of the government's public expenditure goes to health, education, or agricultural programs? Are the services financed through these expenditures accessible to the poor? Do women and children fare worse in these areas?

How much debt does the government owe? What is the structure of the debt? How were the loans used? Was the money used for productive investments, for paying back older loans, or for balance of payments

support? Find out the amount owed to each type of creditor: commercial bank, bilateral government, or international financial institution. Within the international financial institutions, the government may owe more to a regional development bank, such as the African Development Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank, than to the World Bank or IMF. If this is the case, you might consider focussing your campaign on a regional development bank rather than the World Bank or IMF. Some of a government's debt may be short-term and some long-term. Which type of debt does the government pay regularly? Which type does it pay occasionally or not at all?

The World Bank and IMF look at the overall amount of debt in a country as a percentage of exports (the average level of exports over a three-year period.) They say that a country is heavily indebted if the debt-to-export ratio is over 200 -250 percent. Another common measure is the debt service- to-export ratio, which compares the country's annual debt repayments to its annual exports. The international financial institutions say that a country is heavily indebted if this ratio is over 20-25 percent.

To illustrate the burden of debt, divide the total amount of government spending on health by the population of your country. How does that relate to the real cost of health care as you know it? Compare the amount of money the government spends in a year on debt repayments to the amount it invests in health and education. Oxfam International, for example, estimates that Tanzania spends four times more on debt servicing than it does on health and education combined. (Poor Country Debt Relief, April 1997.)

In Creditor Countries

Find out the number and value of loans made by your government. Which countries are the major debtors to your government? How is the debt burden affecting the population in those countries? Look at the total value of loans made by the European Union (EU) and find out more about debt owed to the EU by groups such as the Africa, Pacific, and Caribbean States (ACP).

What is the policy of your government on debt? Does it have a position document on debt and structural adjustment policies? (In Ireland, an

NGO coalition has asked the government to develop a policy paper on debt.) Has your country cancelled debt in the past? If so, of which countries? Is your government planning any new cancellations or reschedulings?

2. Establish clear aims and specific objectives

If you narrow your focus to one section of the debt, then the campaign will be manageable. Decide which aspect of debt is most crucial.

The HIPC Initiative. Since only a few countries are likely to be eligible, and they will be evaluated one by one, you could campaign to: 1) Insure your country will be considered for HIPC relief; 2) Encourage creditors to shorten the time frame; or 3) Increase the amount of debt relief for that particular country. Alternatively, you could try to get the maximum relief possible from one creditor institution, such as the African Development Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank. Check with your representatives, known as Executive Directors, at the World Bank, IMF, or the other international financial institutions, to find out their position on the HIPC Initiative.

Structural Adjustment Policies. If you prefer to focus your attention on the social and environmental consequences of structural adjustment policies, you may be aware of another initiative, the Structural Adjustment Review Initiative (SAPRI), which is gaining support from civil society organizations around the world. The Initiative is a joint government-World Bank-civil society effort to review the impact of World Bank supported structural adjustment policies in seven countries — Ghana, Mali, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Bangladesh, Ecuador, and Hungary. Is your country one of the seven? If not, consider starting a study of structural adjustment in your country.

Monitoring Government Spending. It is important to ensure that new resources made available to the government through debt relief are spent in a way that benefits the people, especially the poor, in your country. Civil society organizations can play an important role in monitoring and lobbying for change, for example, to eliminate corruption.

A useful monitoring tool is the 20:20 initiative agreed upon at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995. This initiative states that countries of the North and South should enter into an agreement in which countries of the South would allocate on average, twenty percent of their public budgets to basic social services (education, health, housing, food, safe water, etc.) and the countries of the North would allocate on average twenty percent of their aid to such services.

In Debtor Countries

Find out whether your government is willing to commit to the 20:20 initiative. Beyond that, try to find out current budget allocations on the national, regional, and local levels. For example, how many girl children receive primary education? What percentage of the agricultural budget goes to support small scale farmers?

In Creditor Countries

Find out whether your government is committed to the 20:20 initiative. If so, have any concrete steps been taken since the Copenhagen summit? Have patterns of allocation been changed accordingly in the foreign aid budget? Is there any quantified data on foreign aid for basic social services? Do any recent aid agreements between your country and debtor countries refer to the 20:20 initiative?

3. Build awareness at the grassroots level and among coalitions

Consider joining or launching a campaign to change public opinion. Several campaigns for debt cancellation are gathering momentum, and you can draw on their work. Being part of an international movement strengthens work at the national level.

Talk with people in your church or organize a discussion about debt after mass and invite your church officials to participate. Talk with people in other churches and from different denominations. Work with popular education materials that national Jubilee Campaigns or other initiatives provide so that more people can learn about the issue. Ask people you

know in debtor countries to gather and document information on the concrete impact of debt on their lives (health services, education, etc.) These testimonies can be used in your lobbying and advocacy.

You can use this information to let local media know about the problem. Write a letter to the editor or try to get an editorial placed in your local newspaper. Organize an event and invite the press.

Support Southern/Northern partnerships. Both Southern and Northern groups can help each other by sharing information, supporting policy changes (e.g., anti-corruption laws), and designing common strategies for debt relief. If your parish has a relationship with a parish in a creditor or debtor country, ask them whether they are also interested in the debt issue.

4. Lobby decision makers

In Debtor Countries:

Who are the politicians, local government officials, bankers or business people who play a role in decision making? Then, identify the decision makers in the North. Who makes the decision to reschedule existing debt? Who decides whether a country should qualify for debt relief? Which commercial banks hold the country's debt? Which creditor countries?

In Creditor Countries:

Who decides the government's policy on debt? Which ministries are involved and which committee of the Parliament or Congress is in charge of the issue? Who represents your country at the international financial institutions? To whom does this representative report?

In Debtor Countries

Consider meeting with your representatives in the legislative and executive branches of government to find out their policy regarding the debt issue. Ask them to gather international support for debt relief. Also, consider meeting with your Finance Minister or other officials at the Finance

Ministry, because they are the official representatives to the World Bank and IMF. You can also try to meet with visiting delegations from the World Bank and IMF or from the Resident Representatives based in-country.

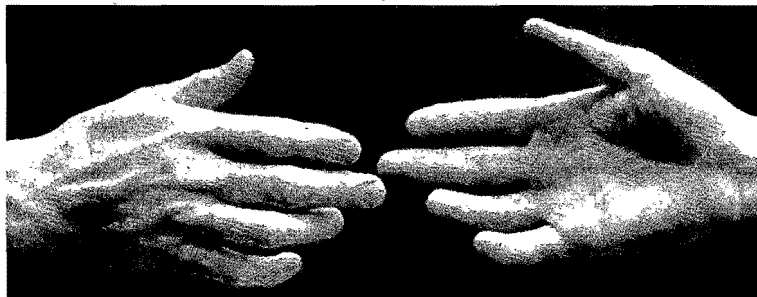
In Creditor Countries

Meet with your finance minister, country representatives at the World Bank and IMF, legislative representatives, and European Community representatives. Encourage them to visit a highly indebted country. Urge Congressional or parliamentary members to sponsor debates or presentations. Try to get the government to develop a policy statement on international debt and structural adjustment.

Both

Meet with church leaders and NGOs in other countries. If you or your bishop or another church leader visits a creditor or debtor nation, encourage them to meet with representatives of episcopal conferences and NGOs. In some creditor countries, the episcopal conference communicates regularly with legislative and executive branches of government to express concern about certain issues. You could encourage them to communicate the reality of poverty to their representatives at the World Bank, IMF, the legislature, or the European Union.

Consider organizing a public event together with other churches or NGOs or making a joint statement on debt, particularly around the time of key international meetings such as the G-7/8 Summit or the annual meetings of the World Bank and IMF.



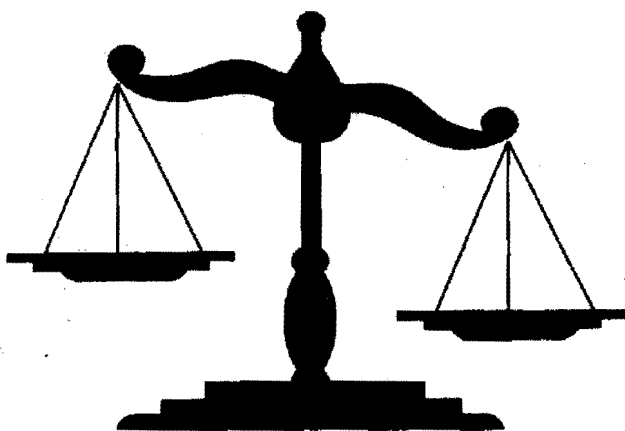
'Til Debt Us Do Part

If you ever imagined that western countries were generous to developing countries, you would be wrong, very wrong. It might surprise you to know that for every £1 given in aid, poor countries pay back nearly £4 in debt repayments to those same donor countries. Indeed, most African nations spend four times more repaying the *interest* on western loans than they do on health care and education. Many debtor countries have repaid much more than the equivalent of the original loan, yet their total debts continue to rise - with shattering results. For over a billion people world-wide, the process of development has gone into reverse. For instance, Zambia used to be one of the richest nations in Africa. Now, every Zambian citizen owes the country's creditors over £565 - more than three times the average annual salary. In an effort to pay this debt, state owned enterprises have been privatised and many people have been dismissed from the civil service. Coupled with the closure of many industries, this has caused unemployment levels of 80%. The price of food, transport and fuel has rocketed because of the removal of government subsidies. Children are being taken out of school because of the introduction of school fees, and medical treatment has become an unattainable luxury. All this is happening despite clear evidence that investment in health and education is one of the best ways to promote economic growth.

For Christians, such global division is unacceptable. *Jesuits for Debt Relief and Development* (JDRAD) is a new global project which aims to mobilise the Jesuit network to contribute to the analysis, lobbying and debate necessary for a more just global economic order. Based in Dublin, JDRAD is also involved in the international Jubilee 2000 petition campaign which is calling for a once-off cancellation of debt for the world's poorest countries by the year 2000. The concept of Jubilee is one which comes to us from the Old Testament. According to this tradition, debts were forgiven, land was redistributed and slaves were set free every fifty years. This was to make sure that people who had fallen on hard times were not kept in poverty or slavery forever.

The refusal to cancel obviously unpayable debts makes permanent slaves of the debtors. And the West helped to create the situation in the first place. In the 1970s, the oil-producing countries invested a great deal of money in western commercial banks. Seeking investment opportunities, these banks then made loans to developing countries - often without evaluating or monitoring the loans properly. Much of the money borrowed did not benefit the ordinary people in these countries. Irresponsible creditors and corrupt debtor governments cleaned up at the expense of the poor. When the prices of the commodities upon which many developing countries depended fell and interest rates soared in the West, the debt crisis began. One of the strongest arguments for debt cancellation is this: the ordinary people who did not benefit in the first place are the very ones who are paying the price.

Tom Giblin, SJ and Niamh Gaynor
Reprinted from JDRAD.



MEET THE EXCO...

Progressio has, in the past, introduced new members of the world CLC Executive Council by means of short autobiographies. In this, and subsequent issues of Progressio, members of the world ExCo that you have not heard from in past issues will be presented.

I was born in Sudbury, a small city, in Northern Ontario, Canada. The barren landscape, made up mainly of blackened rock face, is known as the Sudbury Basin formed by a huge meteor impact tens of thousands of years ago.

Since 1856, when prospectors discovered the rich deposits of ore in these very old rocks from space, the Basin has offered its refined nickel and copper to the world. To this day, the mining and smelting activity of this region has provided employment for many people who have immigrated to Canada from various parts of Europe over the past century.

Today, one will find among its population 166,000 inhabitants with quite a colorful and diverse mosaic of languages and cultures:

My mother came from Scot and French ancestry. My father, born and educated in Québec, had tremendous pride in his French Canadian roots. His entire identity was well grounded in that culture and language when he was transplanted into the rocky region of Sudbury. As the second eldest, I was the first son in a family of 2 girls and 6 boys. Both my parents worked hard to ensure that we children understood and valued our heritage. We were surrounded by many English speaking neighbours and friends and, as children, it was not easy to be regarded as different. Consequently, we tended to speak mainly English when outside the home or classroom.



Gilles and Leah

This situation was not unusual for the many minority groups that had carved out a life for themselves in this part of North America.

It became apparent to me, as I reflected on my personal history, that my parents had a survival instinct. I am convinced that survival meant for them to know one's past and to be proud of its roots. Their philosophy was founded on the conviction that all persons had the right to demand that those rights be respected in the existing structures that made up their society.

As I recall, my parents were very active in seeking to transform those structures that were unjust. They were not only active in secular matters, but also in our Church. Through their persistence, the first French Canadian church was established in the area. A great deal of importance was placed on our accessing french language education. My studies continued at College Sacré-Coeur, a private school administered by the Jesuits of the Province of Québec. They had been invited to come to this Northern Ontario region to support the French Canadian communities by providing them with a secondary level of french language education.

At the age of 19, I decided that my education should continue within another environment and enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force which was, to my surprise, much more disciplined then the one that I had left behind. The military establishment was certainly not as nurturing as the family and community that I had left behind. Over time, I became accustomed to this new lifestyle— perhaps partly because of the Canadian survival instinct, and always fuelled by the ever present fascination of a young man who believed he would, if called upon, lay down his life for his country.

As years passed, my career in the Canadian Air Force progressed. Naturally, this meant being transferred from one assignment to another as is the norm in military life. It was while stationed at a military base situated near the city of Sudbury that I met Leah. When we decided to marry, it meant that Leah would have to give up her teaching career and adjust to my nomadic lifestyle.

Our wedding day was celebrated in a lively mix of Italian and French traditions. Our first daughter, Diane, was born in Montreal, Quebec and two and a half years later our second daughter, Joanne, was born in North Bay, Ontario. Our son, Richard, arrived nine years later while we were stationed in Greenwood, Nova Scotia. Leah devoted her time and talents to the care and development of our children. Being away from my home and family for periods of time was expected of me as I continued in my chosen profession.

Up to this point in our married life (early 1980's) I felt quite secure in this arrangement. The preoccupation with my upward mobility gave me a the sense that all was well. I was convinced that, through my efforts, I could continue to achieve success and provide security for myself and family. Looking back, I recognize that a great deal of this success came about by not questioning my situation and by going along with the system, oblivious to what was happening elsewhere. I had allowed myself to become insulated to what was happening outside of my own little world.

While all this was happening in my personal life, there were some significant events taking place in our Church. The social teachings were resurfacing as a result of the Second Vatican Council. "Gaudium et Spes"

was a forceful document. It had a tremendous effect in challenging the comfortable such as myself. It stated "....the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of our age, especially of those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ."

As well, there were other teachings impacting on my passivity such as was found in the Council's Constitution on The Church in the Modern World. All of them were clearly stating, "All persons have rights and the dignity of all persons must be respected".

In 1976, Leah and I were transferred to a military base situated in the province of Prince Edward Island. A priest, who had come to know us through the renewal movements, suggested that we begin taking the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. We began this 18 month spiritual journey, as a married couple, meeting bi-weekly with our Spiritual Guide.

As we moved through the stages of the Spiritual Exercises in daily life (Ann. 19), I became aware of the significance of my lay vocation and how God had been preparing and forming me through the events of my life history. The significance of my parents, family, having met and married Leah and having children were all special events in my life and this awareness was one of the special graces I received through the Spiritual Exercises. All these were signs of God's love for me.

The Principle and Foundation catapulted me into a direction of wanting to know more about this God, one that seem to be saying: "Come and see". As my vision became clearer, there came a stirring within me asking the question: What is God asking of me, now, at this point in my journey? Part of my answer came through the fourth point in the *Contemplation to attain the Love of God* "This is to consider all blessings and gifts as descending from above. Thus, my limited power comes from the supreme and infinite power above, and so, too, justice, goodness, mercy etc, descend from above as the rays of light descend from the sun, and as the waters flow from the fountains".

These inner stirrings enabled me to hear the many voices of my past. As I reflected more and more on them, I became aware of how they were linked

to the memories of my youth, including the struggles of my parents in their attempts to defend their way of life. These voices began to make more sense to me yet, at the same time, made me uncomfortable as they were addressing my passivity.

The Canadian Military's growing support of policies such as the use of nuclear weapons and first strike weapons was making me uncomfortable. I began to ask myself questions about the justice of spending so much money on armaments while many around the world lacked the basic needs of life.

In 1982, the Canadian Bishops had written a document on "Peace and Disarmament". They criticized the Canadian Government's policy of encouraging, with the aid of public funds, the build-up of nuclear weapons. They pointed out that it was wrong to agree to allow the testing of these missiles on Canadian soil. The bishops concluded the brief by saying: "As representatives of the Canadian Churches, we commit ourselves to the building of a world in which the foundation of our social and economic security is justice... We commit ourselves to work toward the removal of the arsenals of destruction which frustrate the search for justice and which threaten life itself, in our land and throughout the world."

These words encouraged me to respond in a concrete way. I was determined to let my superiors know of my viewpoint on policies regarding the defence of our country, knowing full well that this was not acceptable behaviour from within military ranks.

As a result of taking this position, Leah and I decided that we would need some assistance in determining our course of action. We brought this matter to the attention of our Spiritual Guide who assisted us to prayerfully discern our decision. In due course, I chose to resign from the military explaining my reasons for leaving. Leah and I began to live a very different lifestyle, adjusting to a much smaller income.

During this period, we had been meeting, on a regular basis, with a small group of persons drawn together by similar concerns. These concerns had to do with how to integrate Gospel values in all realities of our lives.

As we continued to grow as a small Christian community, Leah and I were invited to attend a seminar on "Building Small Christian Communities" given at the Guelph Centre of Spirituality in Ontario. The staff at the Centre had become aware of the need to explore this new and growing facet of the Church. The result of their prophetic effort was the beginning of CLC, Canada. From that point on, the CLC groups slowly began to grow throughout Canada: first in Central Canada, then in the East and West.

Our own CLC, Ixthus, was maturing as a community with a strong apostolic emphasis. A charism of our CLC group was that of communally discerning life situations and dealing concretely with issues in such a way that we were supportive of each other when changes were to be made.

During this time, I was reading and becoming more informed on social matters and the teachings of the Church. The Canadian Bishops' Conference produced several documents written on the continuing poverty in certain regions of Canada and among certain minorities. An example is a document titled, "Unemployment: The Human Costs and Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis". In it, the Gospel value of the primacy of work was quite clear. That it is through work that workers provide for personal, family and other community needs and contribute to the common good, thus, becoming partners with God in bringing creation to perfection. These statements even went on to suggest that worker-participation in management, shared ownership, profit-sharing, cooperatives of all kinds be developed and encouraged by our government.

Such statements were, in part, the reason why our CLC group began to research and analyse the issue of work in our area. Three of our CLC members decided to participate in the development of a worker-owned cooperative. Several unemployed persons outside of the group were invited to take part in this project. To-day, Culture Craft Co-op is still a successful work-place and continues in providing meaningful and dignified employment.

It was through this experience that I became convinced that small business enterprises could be created by using the cooperative model, using the tools of group discernment, decision making, and consensus in building an

effective work place. These were tools used in community building which I had been exposed to in my formation as a CLC group guide. In this model of establishing a business enterprise, one is inserting gospel values as well as ethical human values in the work place.

Two years later, there was an opportunity in our region to assist in the establishment of a similar workplace in an indigenous community. In 1988, I began working with the Lennox Island First Nation. Since the establishment of our Canadian Confederation, the Mi'kmaq People had been confined to a small reservation on Lennox Island in an isolated area that suffered from an endemic high degree of unemployment.

For the following nine years, I worked with the Mi'kmaq Band Council in the development of business enterprises that provides employment for many of the community members. During this time, I came to know and appreciate their spirituality and participated in many of their spiritual traditions.

During these years, I was involved in the establishment of a Funeral Co-Operative, an Organic Farming Collective and a Farmer's Market. At the same time, the promotion of Spiritual Exercises Apostolate was a priority for me and I found the time of working in the development of making retreats accessible to those at the Parish level very rich and rewarding.

Promoting CLC at the Regional level resulted in being involved on the National level where I served for six years including two years as president. The invitation to take part in an international formation designing team in Rome in 1995 benefited my participation in the development of a formation program for Canada.

Over the years, Leah and I continued to remain closely linked with the programs and retreats given at the Guelph Centre of Spirituality. In 1995, a group of lay persons and Jesuits began meeting for the purpose of visioning and planning an Ignatian Ecological Community. In order to work more closely with the staff at the Centre, Leah and I had been asked to consider moving to that region and we began to plan accordingly.

Unfortunately, due to a critical need for economic constraints, several of the Society of Jesus' apostolic projects had to be cancelled, including the spiritual/ecological project. Naturally, this was met with a certain degree of disappointment little knowing, at the time, that the Lord was preparing us for something else.

That something else came in a letter from the World CLC ExCo informing us that the World Community was seeking the names of potential candidates for the position of Executive Secretary of the Secretariat in Rome. We were available.

This will, no doubt, be another exciting and somewhat challenging phase in our CLC spiritual journey. The load has been made lighter because of the untiring efforts of the many gifted people who have passed before us at the World Secretariat. Leah and I are looking forward to these coming years as we continue to serve our Community. Hopefully, during this time, we will be given the opportunity to meet many of you and listen to you as you share your spiritual journey with us.

Gilles Michaud
Executive Secretary
CLC Secretariat

