

Fr. General Message
Meeting with CLC Ecclesiastical Assistants
and World Executive Council - World CLC Assembly

Lycée *La Providence*, Amiens (France)

Sunday, 6 august 2023

Greetings to the ecclesiastical assistants and members of the World Council.

From Buenos Aires to Amiens

When we met for the first time five years ago in Buenos Aires, I was a World CLC Assistant for the first time. It was winter and I remember the heating in the big tent we were in, which protected us from the cold outside. Today, we're in the European summer, a hot August in Rome, and milder here in the north of France. Five years have passed, but I can say that between this winter in Buenos Aires and this summer in Amiens, we are experiencing a CLC springtime in which new green shoots and new fruit are growing on the same trees of our 55-year tradition as an Ignatian and apostolic lay community.

At the Buenos Aires assembly, I wanted our meeting to be a time of listening, of seeing each other for the first time as ecclesiastical assistants, of answering your questions and of journeying together with the world community and with the ExCo. Today, I would also like to be open to your questions at the end of this brief presentation. Since the last World Assembly, the dialogue with you and with the ExCo has rapidly borne fruit in a common discernment on the figure of ecclesiastical assistants in CLC, which after two years concluded with the *Document on the role and profile of the ecclesiastical assistant in CLC*, published from Rome in November 2020.

Document on the profile of the assistant

This document has helped to deepen the way of working and collaborating between the Society of Jesus and the Christian Life Community. When we sent it to all the national communities, I accompanied it with a video message and a letter to all the Jesuit provincials.

The three key elements that sum up the profile of the ecclesiastical assistant can be summarized as follows

- A person on mission at the service of the Church as the People of God.
- An Ignatian companion who assists the community.
- A person who collaborates as a team with the National Council.

These three keys help CLC in each country to fulfil its call to give life to the General Principles of CLC. And its work is carried out by accompanying and assisting in the following of Christ, as proposed by Ignatian spirituality. For this reason, we will always be concerned to collaborate in the formation and participation of the community in the Spiritual Exercises and in promoting their discernment through the use of all Ignatian tools.

Following the discernment of the Ecclesiastical Assistants, the role of the World Vice-Ecclesiastical Assistant and therefore of the Executive Secretary of World CLC has also changed. The Vice-Assistant is a bridge and a facilitator, he is always present to accompany the World Council and facilitate its discernment, but this task is no longer the responsibility of the General Curia of the Society of Jesus in Rome. For organization and contact with the structures of the Curia and the institutional Church, there is already the Executive Secretary who collaborates and participates actively from the CLC Secretariat in Rome.

Need for formation.

In recent surveys of national communities, it is clear that beyond the difficulties of the pandemic period, there is a need for formation and exercises in many communities. It will be up to us to be creative and bold to help the members of the communities to organize their own formation as lay men and women, in a process of belonging and commitment to the CLC that cannot be blocked, and which has its driving force in the realization, giving and accompaniment of the Spiritual Exercises.

In the annual meetings I have had with the ExCo, I see that you address many initiatives in the bowels of the world community to address this desire for formation. Also within the other apostolic frontiers as they are: poverty and globalization, families, young people and ecological justice. The three pillars of the CLC: community, spirituality and apostolic mission

need a formation that makes them strong and sustains them in the difficulties of a world that is not content with little. In the tradition of the Marianne Communities, the Christian Life Community has been and will continue to be a factor of equilibrium in the Church. A profound formation, rooted in the vocation to be the people of God on the move, is a gift for the Church when the external winds try to carry us to the extremes of rigorist and paralyzing pietism or of thoughtless or paternalistic social action.

I know that, in the development of their accompaniment to the CLC, there are many problems that you have to address. Many of you have many other occupations that are also part of your service to the Mission of Christ, and you save a valuable amount of your time, against your health and rest, for the CLC. In some parts of the world it is difficult to find the necessary replacement of church assistants. Therefore, instead of waiting for things to change on their own, we must all promote the human, personal and institutional channels that will help the community to live its vocation, while we live ours. Because the Mission is one, that of Christ, of which we are all servants, as the 34 General Congregation reminded us, but the vocation that we share as baptized persons is concretized in the specific call that we receive from the same Lord as Jesuit religious and the laity.

Servers for reconciliation

Our task is also to be servants of reconciliation, especially when the same difficulties that affect our countries and our Church arise in every community. As sons and daughters of our time, we are not immune to the problems that baffle and upset us:

- ^a In a world that does not want to hear about God, we want to spread the Good News.
- ^a In a world that protects itself from the poor, migrants, the excluded, the mistreated, we want to open the doors of hospitality and reconciliation.
- ^a In a world where young people live under an infinite number of models that distort Christian values, we want to accompany them towards new models of faith and hope.
- ^a In a world where the family is scarcely the foundation of society, we want to care for the weakest and most neglected, and to be open to the crises and challenges of a diverse and new reality in families.

- ^a In a world where the economic profit is more important than the environmental sustainability of the planet, we want to live and care for a common home for all humanity.

The greater the disorder of the world, the greater will be our need for personal and common discernment in order to find an answer that is on the same path of the Gospel. Since the World Assembly in Buenos Aires, the CLC rediscovered the value of common discernment, its practice in national communities has become more and more widespread, especially to promote the three verbs of action expressed at the Assembly: sharing, deepening and moving forward. But we all know that discernment involves certain basic attitudes that are not improvised:

- ^a Passion for Christ and to live the Kingdom with him and like him.
- ^a To shape our lives from gratitude and gratuitousness to take strength in consolation, with much examination, and not to “move” in personal and institutional desolation.
- ^a Examine our ability to listen so that new voices reach us.
- ^a Recognize our defeats and fears, but without settling into the triumphs either. That is, to go for the Magis Ignatian, that our following of Christ, poor and humble, may lead us to put all our abilities at the service of the Kingdom.
- ^a This is how we will find the freedom of the Gospel as a community.

The ecclesiastical assistant will be a facilitator of common discernment if he lives in himself these basic attitudes and seeks the formation and personal accompaniment that will help him in his task.

Discernment and synodality

This call for discernment comes at a time when the whole Church is experiencing a resurgence of synodality, as a commitment that includes us all, to walk together moved by the same Spirit. Pope Francis always reminds us that «It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God

expects of the Church of the third millennium»¹. If we want to live a synodal Church in each community, we will have to find the harmony of communion in discernment.

I will conclude with a quote from Pope Francis: *“Communion, in fact, is not the result of strategies and programmes, but is built in mutual listening between brothers and sisters. As in a choir, unity does not require uniformity, monotony, but the plurality and variety of voices, polyphony. At the same time, each voice in the choir sings while listening to the other voices and in relation to the harmony of the whole. This harmony is conceived by the composer, but its realization depends on the symphony of each and every voice.”*².

Thank you.

¹ Pope Francisco, Address in the Ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops (17 October 2015): AAS 107 (2015) 1139.

² Message of his holiness Pope Francis for the 56th World Day of Social Communications. Rome, 24 January 2022. <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20220124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>