



CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY  
COMMUNAUTÉ DE VIE CHRÉTIENNE  
COMUNIDAD DE VIDA CRISTIANA

## The Christian Life Community and Responding to the Challenges of Youth

The Christian Life Community (CLC) is a lay vocation that *[holds] the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as the specific source and characteristic instrument of [its] spirituality<sup>1</sup>*. It presents as 78<sup>2</sup> national communities in Europe, Latin America, Asia-Pacific, Africa, North America and the Middle East.

Our members are men and women, adults and youth of all social conditions. There are currently more than 23,000 members in the world today, with many members in the 40-60+ age range. Our community is structured as small groups who meet regularly, but on regular days we are immersed in the concerns of everyday life—our families, our professions, our advocacies. To us, daily life is a vibrant expression of our mission as laity. We are mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. We are office workers, teachers, pastoral workers, politicians, formators. We are farmers, businesspersons, artists, scientists. We work at the heart of the Church's structures, we work in the peripheries. We are the invisible leaven, and sometimes we are very visible lights.

Because CLC is a way of Christian life, our mission is not limited to any particular apostolic field of mission. Thus, our community gives particular emphasis to finding God's will through discernment – both personal and communal.

### World CLC Structure

World CLC is led by an Executive Council whose task is to support and co-discern with the world community. National communities are affiliated through the World Assembly, convened every 5 years. National communities and regions usually form informal networks, structures and platforms to support various apostolic initiatives and formation.

### Youth Commissions

Since 2014, we have had a World CLC Youth Commission, composed of members from various countries. They are youth members and adult CLC members who work with the youth. Other regions set up youth commissions as well (e.g. Asia Pacific and Latin America) and organized encounters or formation activities for the youth.

### Our Work with the Youth

A Survey in 2015 showed us many distinct efforts of many national communities also with youth: e.g. through giving of the Spiritual Exercises, volunteer encouragement, extending invitations to conferences and workshops on various topics, encouraging commitment, formation program development for in the parish, attending camps, providing formation and guidance, and organizing other activities, according to the context and reality of each country.

CLC youth usually find themselves closely networked to Ignatian communities – the Jesuits, the Eucharistic Youth Movement, the European MAGIS network. However it is not uncommon to see CLC members working in many other youth ministries (e.g. in universities, parishes).

## Youth in CLC

We have two types (levels) of youth in our communities: the a) school-age youth and the b) young professional youth.

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<sup>1</sup> General Principles #5

<sup>2</sup> 64 full member national communities and 14 observer communities



- A. The **school-age youth** (around 12-20 years old) are usually present in organizations and clubs in schools and parishes. They are not formally part of the World CLC structure; nor do they have formal vocational commitment at this point. Their formation is focused on friendships and skills for relationships & communication (community), opportunities for service (apostolic orientation), and cultivating a relationship with a loving God, who calls them (spirituality).
- B. The **young professional youth's** (around 20- 30s) formation involve more depth in all the three aspects (spiritual, communal, apostolic). This is a stage where they are growing in capacity, agency and influence. It is also a stage of finding their places in the world, rapid changes and increasing uncertainty. In particular, it is usually at this stage when the undergo the Spiritual Exercises, and the process of communal discernment, and when they begin to keenly find how they can live their lives as a response to God (vocational discernment).  
It is also at this stage when they begin making commitment to a particular vocation, whether it is the CLC vocation, or other ways of life within the Church.

### *CLC and the Youth Synod*

In the past years, we feel that as a world community, we are being moved towards a closer union with the Church, and a desire to be of service with it, and in it. We have been finding consistent confirmation between our apostolic priorities and the various movements of the Spirit in the Church, particularly in Pope Francis' papacy. Our upcoming World Assembly in Buenos Aires (July 2018) is geared towards praying for a particular: **We desire greater depth and integration in the living out of our CLC charism in the world today.**

We reflect this in our active participation in the different steps towards the Synod on Youth: after having received the preparatory document, we invited our young members to be involved in the preparation of the Synod by responding on a questionnaire launched by Synod Secretariat to allow the youth to express their opinion on different matters; we were then represented in the Pre-Synodal meeting by a CLC member, and are now awaiting now for the Synod in October 2018.

The final document of the Pre-Synodal Meeting make some very important points regarding the needs of the youth. We point particularly to some specific parts in the document:

- **Re: Understanding of Vocation:** *There is a need for a simple and clear understanding of vocation to highlight the sense of call and mission, desire and aspiration, which makes it a concept more relatable to young people at this stage of their lives... The term "vocation" has become synonymous with the priesthood and religious life in the culture of the Church... The term vocation is not very clear to many young people; hence there is need for greater understanding of the Christian vocation (the priesthood and religious life, lay ministry, marriage and family, role in society, etc.) and the universal call to holiness. (#8 Vocational Sense of Life)*
- **Re: Vocational Discernment and Accompaniment:** *"...many young people do not know how to intentionally go about the process of discernment; this is an opportunity for the Church to accompany them." (#9 Vocational Discernment).*

These are very particular elements that the Christian Life Community may be able to be of service, especially in enriching the lay response to these. The CLC Charism calls specifically for a keen awareness of our own vocation, and Ignatian discernment as a specific tool for aiding members see Christ's call for each person.

### *Gifts from the CLC Charism*

This connects to our conviction that the CLC Charism may have gifts to offer the Church and the world today. We feel that the most important thing would be to share our CLC Charism and Ignatian spirituality



with young people, wherever they are committed in the Church and in society, without necessarily recruiting for CLC. While we would like to have youth as members, our main focus is to help youth their own path in life. Our focus is to help them seek and find God, and their own particular vocation, taking care not to lead them towards a preferred charism. We believe that we have the following as gifts to share from the CLC Charism:

### **The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius**

The Spiritual Exercises continues to be the “specific source and the characteristic instrument of our spirituality<sup>3</sup>”. It continues to be a path for a deeply felt sense of being loved by God, an ongoing personal conversion, and of uniting with Christ in his mission to bring salvation to all of creation. During the past years, our life and affinity with the Exercises has been a unique window to the heart of Pope Francis, especially when he talks about mercy, discernment, conversion and a personal relationship with Christ.

### **The Awareness Examen & Personal Discernment**

The Awareness Examen & Personal Discernment are inseparable practices that have helped us to see and to be attentive to the lifegiving movements and invitations of the Holy Spirit, as well as to recognize movements that draw us away from God’s life and love. For us, they are cornerstones to the authenticity of our way of life, and to our being contemplatives in action in daily life, outside of our small local groups.

### **Our Being Laity**

Our being Laity and our responsibility to take leadership in the Church<sup>4</sup> was reaffirmed when the World ExCo visited the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. We know that there is no line between our life and our mission. We are the Church, alive in our families, among friends and neighbors, in the workplace, in the political arena. We make immediate impacts in personal interactions, and we can work to make changes in oppressive structures, ones that limit the freedom and integrity of others. This keen awareness of our being laity is a gift, as well as an assertion especially in places where clericalism dominates.

### **Being Community & Communal Discernment**

As small groups we are able to access a space for concretely living a meaningful way of being Church. Meeting in small groups offers pathways for dialogue, greater intimacy, friendship, support, and apostolic maturity. Discernment of major life choices, including vocation, are also done with the community through our communal apostolic discernment process.

## *Conclusion*

CLC is not a perfect community. It can be a diverse and uneven community given the scope of its presence and its nature as a lay vocation. Even as we are called towards a deeper consolidation and integration of our own charism, there is an opportunity for us to be of potent service, especially during this moment in the Church. As such, we can ready ourselves towards humble offering our desires and our tools, especially in anticipation of the result of the October 2018 Synod on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment. As to how, and what means and at what level—these are matters for further exploration and discernment by us, and with the Church.

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<sup>3</sup> General Principles n.5

<sup>4</sup> Projects 167: An (extra)ordinary meeting of the W-ExCo