

CLC Leadership

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I am spending the weekend at a regional CLC gathering with a handful of CLC members from the eastern coast of the USA, one small part of the World CLC *Community*. Our discernment this weekend is on how CLC in this region will respond to an invitation to collaborate with our Jesuit brothers in the USA. We reflect on a paper from the USA Provincials called "A Meditation on our Response to Christ's Call". As I sit here with the meditation, I am finally able to make sense of the struggle I have experienced in writing this article on CLC Leadership.

I was approaching the article academically as someone who teaches in a leadership program and works with leaders in organizations. I was thinking of leadership principles and how they relate to CLC. I was thinking of my own experience in CLC leadership and of the struggles and opportunities that face us. Mostly I was focused on the handful of CLC members who find themselves in a formal position of leadership. We do need to consider the needs and responsibilities of formal leadership as they are critical to growth and health of CLC and we do need apply good leadership principles to the task of CLC leadership. For CLC these are important, but secondary considerations.

CLC Member as Leader

The starting place for any discussion of CLC Leadership must be our charism; the integration of community and Ignatian Spirituality that supports and informs mission. The CLC Charism informs how we do leadership, points to who we must think of as leaders and provides the skills and tools to lead well.

Chris Lowney in his recent book Heroic Leadership explores the who and how of the leadership of the early Jesuits. He identifies key strengths that can inform what is needed in leadership today. He describes how leadership is strengthened in those whose lives are transformed by the experience of the Spiritual exercises. He suggests that;

- we are all leaders and we are leading all of the time whether we do it well or poorly
- Leadership comes from within and is as much about who we are as what we do
- Leadership is not about a specific act, but about how we live our lives
- The process of becoming a leader is ongoing, we are never finished

His insights relate as well to CLC and how we are called to lead.

When we think about the who of CLC Leadership, our General Principles, our commitment to become apostolic community and our framework of Ignatian Spirituality place the focus on all CLC members not simply a handful who find themselves in formal leadership positions. We must all be leaders. This is true for a number of reasons.

First, in CLC community we influence each other as we listen to how each community member is hearing God's call in their life. Whether a community member is making a life choice, discerning mission, or simply responding to the day to day events of ordinary life, the support and challenge of the community impacts them. We lead each other.

Often leadership literature calls a person a leader only when they are directly responsible for a large organization or influencing many people. Leadership is in fact much broader

than this. Is someone less of a leader because they influence only individuals and small groups and only informally? The Gospel would suggest otherwise. Jesus led a small group of followers and he often influenced people one by one. Their lives were changed by the way he met them, listened to them and healed them. We may not be able to heal in exactly the way Jesus did, but we can powerfully influence the life of others by our presence to and interaction with them.

Our personal leadership begins in everyday life, in our families, neighborhoods and workplaces. Parents share their values and beliefs with their children and provide them with the skills and support to set their own direction in life. We influence by our words and actions (whether positively or negatively) those we meet in our lives and in our work.

Fortunately our CLC Charism provides not only the imperative to lead in our own lives and as we discern with each other, it also provides the skills and tools to do it well. Daniel Goleman (Emotional Intelligence) coined the term emotional intelligence to describe the ability of an individual to:

- Be self-aware—able to recognize and understand ones own emotions, moods and motivations
- Self regulate—able to control disruptive impulses and think before acting
- Understand what others might be experiencing emotionally
- Have a passion/motivation that goes beyond material things
- Manage relationships and work with others to find common ground

His research indicated that these factors more than intelligence or education made the difference in successful leaders. When we live the spiritual exercises and a discerned lifestyle, we develop and utilize these very capacities.

General Principle #5 refers to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as “the specific source and characteristic instrument of our spirituality”. As we engage the Spiritual Exercises, we allow God to teach us about ourselves. We learn to observe ourselves and notice the movements in our own hearts. We come to recognize consolation and desolation, to discern which spirit is moving us as we engage the everyday decisions of life. We become more aware of our own strengths and limitations and how they influence interactions and the large and small events of life. In a word, we learn to be self aware and prompted by the Spirit. We learn to self regulate. As we pray with the first principle and foundation, the two standards, and the contemplation on divine love, we are invited to shift our motivation to the banner of Christ and work to build the kingdom. We learn to seek the magis.

Since we are not simply Ignatian, but our way of life is in community we have the opportunity to develop the other dimensions of emotional intelligence. As we listen to the story of other community members we grow in our understanding of their internal process. In communal discernment the community listens to the Spirit in the voice of each member and works together to discover God’s call.

Living the spiritual exercises, using of the awareness examen, and discernment both personally and communally provides some of the best preparation for leadership we could find. These tools of our spirituality provide the framework and skills for us whether we are leading in the context of everyday life, in our workplaces, our families within CLC.

Formal Leadership

CLC Leadership, (whether in the local community, the national community or in world CLC), must fundamentally reflect the Ignatian leadership principles and skills already discussed. These provide the framework into which we incorporate good leadership principles. Those in leadership roles must listen well to our members. Information should flow freely so all members are clear about the situation of the community and can participate in developing vision and direction. If CLC is to be successful, we must assure that the organization has the structures and resources it needs to be effective. It is the role of formal elected leadership to guide this process. Each CLC member shares in the responsibility to develop the resources the community needs. We do this with our financial support and by giving our time and talent.

All of this, any organization needs. What differentiates us again is our grounding in Ignatian Spirituality. The framework provided by the General Principles and our history stands alongside and further informs what we hear from leadership experts.

Chris Lowney suggests four principles that he sees reflected in Jesuit leadership. I believe they also suggest what is essential to the CLC leader today. We must grow to;

- Understand our strengths, weaknesses, values and worldview
- Confidently innovate and adapt in a changing world
- Engage others with a positive loving attitude
- Energizing ourselves and other through heroic ambitions

Lowney suggests that the Spiritual Exercises shape these qualities in the Ignatian person. They reflect in part the graces of the four weeks. We as CLC need to pray for these graces to be richly present in our community.

A particular aspect of leadership in CLC is that it is voluntary. It most often is not our primary work, but must be balanced in the context of profession and family and community. In this too, the leader uses the gift of the spirituality and discernment to discover which of the many things we can do are most important.

Other implications for CLC leadership flow from our discernment to become an Ignatian Lay Community on Mission. We have been a community of apostles who are each doing the work of building the kingdom. We are called to become more and more an Apostolic Body that discerns, sends, supports, and evaluates with each other. As a community we listen for times and situations when the 'magis' requires that we act together. To lead in CLC whether in the local community, regionally, in National CLC or in World CLC is to participate in leading CLC as an Apostolic Body.

Leadership in the National Community:

Certain key structures, strategies and responsibilities are present when a CLC National Community is working effectively as an Apostolic Body. If we are to grow, the leadership group must work with CLC members to put in place and guide these major responsibilities. No one leadership group can do all of this. It is the work of the entire community supported and coordinated nationally. None of us do it perfectly.

- 1) Communication: CLC members can only be involved with the national and world community if information flows freely in CLC. People are more likely to be engaged

when they are connected to each other and to what is happening in the broader community.

- 2) Formation: The General Principles remind us that our formation must be formation for mission. It must be faithful to the General Principles and Norms and to the Charism Document. It can best be guided with a National Formation team. This team can work with the larger community to assure the formation process and materials develop authentic CLC for mission. Communities need the skills of social analysis as they discern direction for mission. As community members discover that CLC is their specific vocation, they need processes for temporary and permanent commitment. Our experience is that all of this happens best when communities have trained guides.
- 3) Promotion: In many parts of the world there is a clear hunger for spirituality and community. Many are making the spiritual exercises and yet know nothing of CLC. Our national communities need a strategy and the resources (people and materials) for growth of new communities
- 4) Growth of the National Community: Leadership works with the National Community to assess the strengths and limitations of the community and develop strategies to grow. With leadership, the community assesses its situation and discerns national priorities. Committees and working groups are coordinated and supported. Committees and working groups become places where new leadership is supported and developed.
- 5) Connection to the Society of Jesus and the Church: The recent document on CLC's Relationship with the Society of Jesus in the Church developed out of our need to clarify those relationships. It and the Nairobi letter point to the importance of nurturing relationships which continually shift as the CLC community matures. It is a primary responsibility of leadership to maintain these relationships.
- 6) Administration: CLC like any organization must be good stewards of its finances and administration. Most of our national communities struggle to have sufficient finances to carry out the work of CLC. How can leaders work with the community to develop the financial and other resources necessary for effectiveness?

As Christian Life Community we are called to become a discerning community on mission—an Apostolic Body. Each of us whether in formal leadership or not, has a role in this process. Those in formal leadership have a specific role to support, coordinate and guide the work of the whole community. If CLC is to truly become an apostolic body, it must begin with the deep commitment on the part of each member to grow as a discerning person on mission. We must then be willing to submit our discernment to the input of the CLC community. That can happen well only when each member of the community is deeply grounded in the CLC Charism. It will also happen best when supported by clear elected leadership at all levels in CLC. .