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Praying the Principles

Robin Koning SJ



The Aim of the Local CLC Group

In the opening statement of the Christian Life Community Handbook, one sentence speaks of the aim of the local CLC group.

Before I quote that sentence, you might like to hide the rest of this article and think about how you would articulate the aim of your local CLC group.

What do you see as the purpose of your group?

Why do you meet together each week or fortnight or however often you meet?

Now let's see what the CLC literature says, in that opening statement in the handbook:

Each local CLC is a group of people who meet together regularly to help one another to know Christ better and to seek and respond to what He is asking of them individually and collectively.

Here we see three elements of this aim:

1. **To help one another:** CLC is a community. It is not simply about nourishing my own faith, deepening my own life with Christ, being supported in my life. It is about helping one another. In particular, the CLC group process invites us to help one another by listening contemplatively to one another. I don't judge or even need to offer advice, but simply listen to the story of the other and treasure what they reveal of themselves. I also help them by my sharing my own story of Christ in my life, honestly and openly, entrusting myself to the group.
2. **Helping each other to do what?** Here, the statement mentions three things:
 - a. **To know Christ better:** This is at the heart of CLC identity. As a Christian vocation, the CLC way of life is grounded in union with Christ. For Ignatius, this knowledge of Christ was never simply head knowledge, but felt-knowledge, heart-knowledge – the knowledge a person has of another whom they love.
 - b. **To seek what He is asking:** From this heart-knowledge of Christ, we can come to know his desires for us, where he is leading, what he is asking, how he wants us to follow. This is the grace of the Second Week: "to ask for interior knowledge of the Lord, Who for me has become man, that I may more love and follow Him."
 - c. **To respond to what He is asking:** This final point reminds us that there is little point in knowing what Christ wants if we are not going to do it. The house built on rock is built by those who hear Christ's word and act on it. "Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was built on rock" (cf. Mt 7:25).
3. **Individually and collectively:** CLC is about more than helping one another in the ways just noted - to know what Christ is asking and to do it in our individual lives. It's also about helping one another to do this as a group –for the group to know what Christ is asking of them collectively, for the group to respond collectively to his leading. What might Christ be asking of our group as a group? Is there something

we are being called to? Some project? Some prayer intention? Some service to the wider CLC community? Some justice issue? Some outreach? Some openness to new members?

These sorts of questions help put our local groups in touch with the call of the world CLC community for us to live out our nature as an apostolic community, in continuity with the apostles of Jesus who were called "to be his companions and to be sent out" (Mk 3:13).

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

The CLC General Principles begin, fittingly, with God. Not a God in splendid isolation, but God as “Three Divine Persons”, the Blessed Trinity. These three persons are contemplating the world. They see “the whole of humanity” – not just one part, not one culture, not just one class, not just one race, but the whole sweep of humanity. They see a humanity tangled up and trapped in all sorts of “chains” and at odds “in so many sinful divisions”. It is a vision which St Ignatius gives us to contemplate at the start of the Second Week of the Exercises, in the Contemplation on the Incarnation (Exx. 101-109).

Having contemplated the world and its need, the Trinity make a decision flowing from their contemplation – “to give themselves completely to all men and women”. The aim of this self-giving of God to humankind is “to liberate them from all their chains” – picking up Jesus’ inaugural address at Capernaum, that he was sent “to bring liberty to captives” (Luke 4:18). This self-giving of God is to be embodied when the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son, the Word, becomes human. In accord with this decision and contemplation, God acts - the angel Gabriel is sent to Mary (Exx. 102). “Out of love, the Word was incarnated and born from Mary, the poor Virgin of Nazareth.” As John puts it, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16).

But Jesus’ mission is not something he accomplishes independent of human involvement. Already Mary has been mentioned, she to whose ‘Yes’ all our responses to God are united. This Principle goes on to speak of Jesus’ invitation to all of us to be involved in his mission. The mission is described in terms of two inter-related aspects: “to give ourselves continuously to God” (love of God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength) and “to bring about unity within our human family” (love of neighbour). All of this is to be carried out in imitation of Christ, who is “inserted among the poor” and shares “with them their condition”. In all this, we hear echoes of the Kingdom Meditation (Exx. 91-98), in which the eternal King invites us to join him in his mission, and to do so by fully identifying with him in his poverty. This call of God to the human race, which is God’s gift to us, together with our human response, continue “to this day through the influence of the Holy Spirit in all our particular circumstances”. It is the Spirit who unites us today with the living Christ.

From this general picture of God’s mission to the whole of humanity, and God’s invitation to all Christians to be involved in this mission, Principle 1 turns to the particular mission of CLC. The Principles have been composed precisely to aid us in taking our part, as CLC, in God’s vision for the world. The transition begins with the word ‘therefore’. Because of God’s contemplation of humanity and its need, God’s action to liberate humanity in Christ, and Christ’s desire for humans to be intimately involved in his mission, CLC seeks to make its own “the options of Jesus Christ”. This is the imitation of Christ – not living

CLC General Principle 1

The Three Divine Persons, contemplating the whole of humanity in so many sinful divisions, decide to give themselves completely to all men and women and liberate them from all their chains. Out of love, the Word was incarnated and born from Mary, the poor Virgin of Nazareth.

Inserted among the poor and sharing with them their condition, Jesus invites all of us to give ourselves continuously to God and to bring about unity within our human family. This gift of God to us, and our response, continues to this day through the influence of the Holy Spirit in all our particular circumstances.

Therefore we, members of the Christian Life Community, have composed these General Principles to aid us in making our own the options of Jesus Christ and taking part through Him, with Him and in Him in this loving initiative which expresses God’s promise of faithfulness forever.

every detail of his life when we are in a very different world, but taking on his options, his attitudes, his desires, his values, his vision for humanity. By doing so, we take part “in this loving initiative which expresses God’s promise of faithfulness forever”. We do not do so as though Christ has done his part and now we do our part, independent of Christ. Rather, we do so as part of his living Body, his ongoing presence in the world. We do so, as the Principle states, drawing on a prayer from every Mass we celebrate, “through Him, with Him and in Him”.

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

From the grand vision of Principle 1, with its references to God's contemplation of the world's need, his sending of his Son in our flesh, and Christ's desire for us to join him in his mission, we now turn to the practicalities of CLC life. Principle 2 talks about the criteria for interpreting all the Principles, and names a number of such criteria.

Firstly, this Principle speaks of CLC as "a way of Christian life". It is a way of following Jesus, of discipleship. As such, members are not part of a military unit pledged to iron discipline. Nor are we cogs in a machine, with a set of instructions to be mechanically followed if it is to function well. We are part of a body, a living organism, an organism whose life is the Spirit. For this reason, "these principles are to be interpreted not so much by the letter of this text [i.e. the text of the Principles themselves] but rather by the spirit of the Gospel and the interior law of love ... which the Spirit inscribes in our hearts".

The idea of 'not letter but spirit' comes to us from St Paul when he says that the new covenant, the covenant initiated by Christ's life, death and resurrection, is a covenant "not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit give life" (2 Cor 3:6). In this CLC Principle, 'spirit' is spelt out in two ways. Firstly, it is "the spirit of the Gospel". This is the spirit of Christ, the spirit of his call to discipleship, the spirit which moved him in his own ministry, in his teaching, healing, dining with the poor, and in his suffering, dying and rising.

The Principle then speaks of "the interior law of love". This is not a separate criterion, but another way of speaking the spirit of the Gospel. He taught us this law of love explicitly as a command: we are to love God with our whole being, and our neighbour as ourselves; we are to love one another as Christ has loved us; we are to love even our enemies. He taught it also in stories – think, for example, of the parable of the Good Samaritan. He taught it in how he dealt with people – the woman caught in adultery; the leper to whom he said, "Of course I want to – be healed"; the outcast ones with whom he mixed. And supremely, he taught it by embodying it, by loving us to the end (Jn 13), by his readiness to die for us while "we were still enemies" of God (Rom 5:10).

Principle 2 next looks at ways in which this interior law moves us beyond a blind application of regulations. It "expresses itself anew in each situation of daily life." This new expression in every situation is the reason that CLC encourages the Examen prayer for each member, and why our small group meetings end with a review. These practices are precisely about discerning where we have been led "by the spirit of the Gospel" and in harmony with "the interior law of love", and where we have been led in other directions. This reflective, discerning way of proceeding enables us to respect "the uniqueness of each personal vocation" and "to be open and free, always at the disposal of God".

In the final sentence of this Principle, we are reminded

CLC General Principle 2

Because our Community is a way of Christian life, these principles are to be interpreted not so much by the letter of this text but rather by the spirit of the Gospel and the interior law of love. This law, which the Spirit inscribes in our hearts, expresses itself anew in each situation of daily life. It respects the uniqueness of each personal vocation and enables us to be open and free, always at the disposal of God. It challenges us to see our serious responsibilities and to seek constantly the answers to the needs of our times and to work together with the entire People of God and all those of good will for progress and peace, justice and charity, liberty and the dignity of all people.

once more that mission is the focus of our CLC vocation. Here we are connected again with the opening scene of Principle 1 – the Divine Trinity gazing upon the world in all its needs and choosing to send the Son to enter fully into human life and to bring liberation. The spirit of the Gospel and the interior law of love challenge us, we read, to be part of this ongoing mission of Christ in the Church. The challenge is phrased in this way: "to see our serious responsibilities and to seek constantly the answers to the needs of our times and to work together with the entire People of God and all those of good will".

This mission is, of course, not ours alone. It is the mission of the whole Church. This Principle situates CLC within the life of the Church. At the start of the Principle, we read that CLC is "a way of Christian life". Not the way, but a way. It is one path amongst many that have arisen in the Church under the guidance of the Spirit. Likewise, at the end, we are told that our challenge is "to work together with the entire People of God" – i.e. the whole Church, with whom we have a common mission.

And what is that mission? To work "for progress and peace, justice and charity, liberty and the dignity of all people". Let's do it!

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

Once again in this principle, we are reminded that CLC is a world community.

It is not simply my individual group, nor a more or less loose affiliation of groups in my city or state or country. It is one united community worldwide. Moreover, it is a public association, not simply a private or clandestine one – that is, CLC is recognised as a community within the Church.

The paragraph goes on to spell out the origin of this public and universal recognition. It speaks of our origin “in those groups of lay people that developed after 1540 in different parts of the world through the initiative of Saint Ignatius Loyola and his companions”. 1540 was the year in which the Society of Jesus was recognised as a religious order within the Church. In 1563, a young Jesuit named Jean Leunis gathered together a group of students at the Society's Roman College to help them grow spiritually by integrating their faith with their daily life. At the time, this group was called the Sodality of Our Lady. Effectively, though, it was the first CLC. These 'Marian Congregations' spread very quickly to other Jesuit colleges throughout the world and in 1584 received papal approval. In the middle of the 20th century, they were renewed and re-formed as a world federation, eventually taking on a new life and a new name (Christian Life Community) and after the Second Vatican Council.

Principle 3 goes on to speak of our ongoing communion with all those who have preceded us – all those in CLC, in the Marian Congregations, and ultimately back to all those lay people with whom Ignatius had 'spiritual conversation' from the time of his conversion. These people, with all “their efforts and apostolic accomplishments”, are part of our story, of our history, of the foundation on which we build, and of the tradition from which we draw life. We are invited to be grateful for them and all they have done and passed on to us.

The final sentence of this Principle locates CLC once more within the life of the Church. We are pointed beyond those who have been part of our CLC story to all those saints and blessed the Church offers us “as friends and valid intercessors”. These “help us” – by their example, by their friendship, and by their prayers. Help us to do what? To do what they did - “to fulfil our mission”. Yet again we are reminded that CLC is about mission – about sharing in the mission of Christ in his Church. And to live this out, one means of grace we have is being related “in love and prayer” to those who have shared this mission before us, the Church now in glory.

Questions for group reflection:

1. How aware are we as a group of being part of a world community? What are ways we can deepen this sense?
2. How aware are we as a group of the history of CLC, of our roots? What are ways we can deepen this sense?

CLC General Principle 3

The Christian Life Community is a public world association whose executive centre is presently in Rome. It is the continuation of the Marian Congregations, started by Jean Leunis SJ and first officially approved by Pope Gregory XIII's bull, Omnipotentis Dei, of December 5, 1584. Going back beyond the Marian Congregations we see our origin in those groups of lay people that developed after 1540 in different parts of the world through the initiative of Saint Ignatius Loyola and his companions. We live this way of Christian life in joyful communion with all those who have preceded us, grateful for their efforts and apostolic accomplishments. In love and prayer we relate to those many who have been proposed to us by the Church as friends and valid intercessors who help us to fulfil our mission.

3. How aware are we as a group of the links of CLC with the Society of Jesus? What are the ways we can deepen this sense?
4. How aware are we as a group of being situated within the Body of Christ, the Church? What are ways we can deepen this sense?

The fruit of these group reflections could also be taken into conversation with God in each member's personal prayer.

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

Having completed the Preamble to the General Principles (##1-3), we now turn our attention to Part One (## 4-9), entitled *Our Charism*.

This theological word, *charism* (adjective *charismatic*), comes from St Paul's account of the gifts or *charismata* which the Spirit gives to Christians (1 Cor 12; Rom 12; Eph 4). Paul teaches some key points about charisms:

- a. it is the Spirit who gives charisms;
- b. they are meant for the building up, the edification, of the body of Christ, the Church;
- c. there is a wide variety of such gifts;
- d. each person receives a charism (maybe more than one).

The first two points highlight what unites the Church in which different charisms are at work; the last two points highlight the diversity within this united body.

Charisms enable us to fulfil our mission in the world. We all have the "pre-eminent responsibility" of making the Gospel known in the world and helping all to receive it (Vatican II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* #3). This is our apostolate – i.e. our share in the mission of the apostles. But we cannot do this without the Spirit's power – recall that Jesus told the apostles to *wait* until they received power from on high, and then they would be his witnesses (Acts 1:4-8).

Vatican II reminded us that it is not just for religious or priests who are called to be witness, and hence not just religious and priests who are blessed with charisms. Rather, the Spirit "distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank" and so "makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church" (Vatican II, *Decree on the Church* #12). Ever aware of having freely received these gifts, we are able to administer grace to others just as we have received it, freely giving what we have freely received (Mt 10:18; Vatican II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* #3).

The word charism can be used not simply of an individual person, but of a group of Christians. It still refers to a gift (or in this case often a set of gifts) which the Spirit gives to a group and which forms the distinct identity of that group. A person committed to such a group is able to draw upon this common charism. This way of speaking of a common charism has traditionally been more associated with religious congregations; it is a way of describing the different spiritualities and ways of proceeding they have. Thus we speak of the Franciscan charism, the Ursuline charism or the Jesuit charism. Yet now we are more aware that lay people not only receive charisms as individuals, but as members of groups and communities. The St Vincent de Paul Society has a particular charism; so too does the Legion of Mary. And

so too, as this section of the Principles tells us, does CLC. That is, there are particular elements of CLC spirituality, of its ways of proceeding, of its way of being in the world, that are distinctive. By officially approving CLC, the Church is saying that it has discerned the authenticity of the charism of this Community.

A large part of the CLC charism is, of course, Ignatian spirituality. But this does not specify precisely enough the uniqueness of the CLC charism. After all, Ignatian spirituality grounds the charism of a range of groups – the Society of Jesus, of course; various Jesuit ministries; other religious congregations; other lay groups like MAGiS; and CLC. What is distinctive about the CLC charism is precisely what the General Principles set out to articulate. "The General Principles... express the fundamental identity and charism of the Christian Life Community and therefore its covenant with the Church" (GP 16). That is why we have this series of reflections which seeks to open up what the Principles say about our charism.

In the coming issues of Annotations, we shall reflect on the six paragraphs which make up this section of the Principles on Our Charism. As we do so, we should keep in mind that they attempt to put into words what cannot ultimately be expressed in words. To really see what the CLC charism is, we need to turn to those people who have imbibed that charism and who seek to embody it – the CLC people we meet in our groups and at our larger gatherings, or about whom we read in Annotations or in world CLC literature. It will be good to keep these people in mind as we see how CLC articulates its charism.

Questions for reflection:

1. Read 1 Cor 12 and see where Paul makes the four points noted at the start of this article. What other points does he make about charisms?
2. How confident am I that I have received a gift of the Spirit for service to others?
3. How would I articulate the CLC charism in my own words?
4. To what extent is my personal charism consonant with the CLC charism? (This is the question of CLC as a vocation.)
5. Who are the people who embody the CLC charism for me? What is it about them that helps me understand the CLC way of life?

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

The first paragraph under the heading “Our Charism” speaks of CLC as a community of Christians, without distinction of gender, age or social condition. All in CLC are united by two things. Firstly, by Christ – the desire “to follow Christ more closely and to work with him for the building of the Kingdom”. This much is simply what we have in common with all Christians. The second part is what is distinctive about CLC – it is made up of those Christians who have recognised CLC “as their particular vocation”. There’s that V word again! And this vocation, like any properly Christian vocation, is a vocation within the Church – i.e. not separate from the rest of God’s people, but recognised by the Church and for the building up of the Body.

The next two paragraphs spell out further what working with Christ for the building of the Kingdom means in CLC. We aim to witness to those “values ... which affect the dignity of the person, the welfare of the family and the integrity of creation”. Here we are presented with an interesting triumvirate of values. Respect for the innate dignity of each person, created in God’s image, lies at the heart of all work for justice. In recent decades, we have become more aware that such work cannot be simply about the human community in isolation; while we are unique in being formed in God’s image, we remain creatures intimately interconnected with the whole of creation. The middle value is worth noting in particular, since it does not often get attention in secular discussions of justice – “the welfare of the family”. The Church’s social justice teaching recognises that the family is the basic unit of society, and that the health of a society – a key concern for social justice – depends on the health of the family. This is a particular focus which CLC, as a Christian community, can bring to action for justice – an awareness that concern for the dignity of each person and for the wellbeing of creation go hand in hand with a concern for the welfare of the family.

A further spelling out of this concern for justice in the third paragraph points us to Church’s “preferential option for the poor” or, as it is sometimes referred to, “preferential love for the poor”. This love for the poor flows from the love for the poor Christ, the Christ Ignatius would have us ask the grace to imitate as we seek poverty, insults and humiliations in the Second Week. It is not about exclusion of others, but precisely about including all by including those least able to insist on their own inclusion – those without voice, on the margins, with no monetary or social clout. As Pat O’Sullivan puts it, salvation is for everyone, but it comes through the poor. One concrete expression of this preferential option is “the pressing need [for] a simple lifestyle” – to live simply, as the saying goes, that others may simply live. Such a simple lifestyle “expresses our freedom and solidarity” – our freedom from a disordered attachment to material things and our solidarity with those who have no choice about the circumstances in which they live. We might also add that it not only expresses our freedom and solidarity, but it can

CLC General Principle 4

Our Community is made up of Christians: men and women, adults and youth, of all social conditions who want to follow Jesus Christ more closely and work with him for the building of the Kingdom, who have recognised Christian Life Community as their particular vocation within the Church.

We aim to become committed Christians in bearing witness to those human and Gospel values within the Church and society, which affect the dignity of the person, the welfare of the family and the integrity of creation.

We are particularly aware of the pressing need to work for justice through a preferential option for the poor and a simple life style, which expresses our freedom and solidarity with them.

To prepare our members more effectively for apostolic witness and service, especially in our daily environment, we assemble people in community who feel a more urgent need to unite their human life in all its dimensions with the fullness of their Christian faith according to our charism.

We seek to achieve this unity of life in response to the call of Christ from within the world in which we live.

become an asceticism which enables us to grow in freedom and in solidarity.

As an aside, we note that the Principles talk of the values at stake as “human and Gospel values” and of them being “within the Church and society”. That is, all people of goodwill will be attracted to these values and seek to live them out. In fact, this might well be a definition of what it means to be a person of good will. Whether we find people living out these values in the Church or in the wider society, we are invited to labour with them for the promotion of a faith that does justice.

If our aim, then, is “to become committed Christians in bearing witness”, we are told in the next paragraph how CLC goes about preparing its members “more effectively” for such witness and service in their daily environment. Basically, this is through the core CLC way of proceeding – “we assemble people in community who feel a more urgent need to unite their human life in all its dimensions with the fullness of their Christian faith according to our charism”. Moreover, this sense of the need to bring together life and faith in a unity is the call of Christ to us from within the real world in which we live.

Questions for reflection:

1. How open is CLC in your area to people of “all social conditions”?
2. Where am I in my journey with CLC? Am I at a stage where I recognise CLC as my vocation within the Church?

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3. How does my CLC group concern itself with the dignity of the person, the welfare of the family and the integrity of creation?
4. How might we support each other in CLC in living more simply?
5. To what extent is my CLC group focused on preparing its members “more effectively for apostolic witness and service, especially in our daily environment”?

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

With Principle 5, we continue our reflection on the CLC Charism. In the previous Principle, we reflected on that charism in terms of the aim of CLC, expressed as “bearing witness to ... human and Gospel values”. In Principle 5, the focus is what enables us to pursue that aim, namely the “spirituality of our Community”. As we have seen in other Principles, so too here the text begins with what we hold in common with other Christians in terms of spirituality. Firstly, CLC spirituality, like any genuinely Christian spirituality, is “centred on Christ”. As St Paul would have it, “I regard everything else as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ” (Phil 3:8).

More specifically, we read that our charism is to be centred on “participation in the Paschal Mystery” – entering into the mysteries of Christ’s life, and particularly the key mysteries of his passion, death and Resurrection. This is what Paul goes on to say in that same passage: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil 3:10-11). This is what happens to us sacramentally when we are baptised – we die with Christ, so that we may rise with him. It is what we do every time we celebrate Eucharist – we unite our offering of ourselves to the Father with Christ’s self-offering in this sacrament of his sacrifice on the Cross. It is what we do daily as we take up our cross and follow him (Lk 9:23), whenever we are prepared, as Jesus was, to love to the end (Jn 13:1).

The next sentence names the sources of our spirituality, again in terms of the sources of all genuine Christian spirituality – “the Sacred Scriptures, the liturgy, the doctrinal development of the Church, and the revelation of God’s will through the events of our times”. We draw from the wells the Church makes available to us – the Scriptures and the Church’s Tradition, notably in her liturgy and her ongoing doctrinal expressions. And we draw also from our reflection on God’s movement in our own time – that reading of the signs of the times to which Vatican II calls us. All of these can nourish our spiritual life.

In the remainder of Principle 5, we focus on aspects of our spirituality that are more particular to CLC. At the heart of this is what we share with other Ignatian communities – the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. These are “the specific source” within the context of “the universal sources” of our spirituality – they help ‘specify’ CLC’s uniqueness. They are also the “characteristic instrument of our spirituality” – ‘instrument’ in the sense of a means, and ‘characteristic’ meaning something which characterizes us, which is distinctive of us as CLC.

Ignatian spirituality, like any spirituality, is about how we live our lives, and the CLC vocation (that V word again!) “calls us to live this spirituality”. Living Ignatian spirituality “opens and disposes us to whatever God wishes” for us – i.e. it frees us to be willing to follow where God leads. And whatever God wishes for us, as we know, is not to be

CLC General Principle 5

The spirituality of our Community is centred on Christ and on participation in the Paschal Mystery. It draws from the Sacred Scriptures, the liturgy, the doctrinal development of the Church, and the revelation of God’s will through the events of our times.

Within the context of these universal sources, we hold the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius as the specific source and the characteristic instrument of our spirituality.

Our vocation calls us to live this spirituality, which opens and disposes us to whatever God wishes in each concrete situation of our daily life.

We recognise particularly the necessity of prayer and discernment, personal and communal, of the daily examination of consciousness and of spiritual guidance as important means for seeking and finding God in all things.

found somewhere outside of ourselves, outside the reality of our lives, but “in each concrete situation of our daily life”.

Finally, this Principle points to elements of Ignatian spirituality which are particularly “important means” in this task of “seeking and finding God in all things” in our daily lives. These are personal means – prayer, discernment, the daily examination of consciousness, and spiritual guidance; and, being a community, there are also communal means – prayer and discernment in our CLC groups and the wider CLC community.

Questions for reflection:

1. How centred is my life, on Christ and participation in His Paschal Mystery?
2. How centred is my CLC group’s life on Christ and participation in His Paschal Mystery?
3. How much do each of these elements serve as sources for the deepening of my own spirituality?
 - a. Sacred Scripture
 - b. Liturgy
 - c. Church teaching
 - d. Reading the signs of the times
 - e. The Spiritual Exercises
 - f. Personal prayer
 - g. Communal prayer
 - h. Personal discernment
 - i. Communal discernment
 - j. Daily examination of consciousness
 - k. Spiritual guidance
4. What role do these same elements play in deepening the spirituality of my CLC group?
5. In what ways do I live Ignatian spirituality, rather than simply know about it?

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

General Principle 5 reflected on the elements of the spirituality of CLC that enable us to be centred on Christ. In GP 6, we are reminded that Christ is never separate from the Church: "Union with Christ leads to union with the Church." The Church is, truly, the Body of Christ; it is "where Christ here and now continues his mission of salvation." GP 5 mentioned a number of sources of our life in Christ, including "the Sacred Scriptures, the liturgy, the doctrinal development of the Church". GP 6 lists these also in relation to life in the Church: participation in the liturgy (involvement in sacraments and common prayer), meditation on Scripture (such an important aspect of Ignatian meditation and contemplation, and of the Exercises), and learning, teaching and promoting Christian doctrine. All of this is as much a part of our union with the Church as of our union with Christ.

GP 5 also mentioned a fourth element from which CLC spirituality draws: "the revelation of God's will through the events of our times." This too is echoed in GP 6, which speaks of "making ourselves sensitive to the signs of the times and the movements of the Spirit". Our life in the Church is not to cut us off from reality but to enable us to enter into it with discerning eyes, attentive to God's action and the movement of that Spirit that blows where it wills (John 3:8). In this way, we will come to see Christ present and encounter him not only in the Church his Body, but "in all persons and in all situations."

The liturgy, Scriptures and Christian doctrine are "riches of membership of the Church", and we are said to share these riches. This can be taken in two senses. Firstly, we share them in the sense of having a share in them. As co-heirs with Christ, his adopted brothers and sisters, the Father "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing" (Eph 1:3). These are ours to savour, to delight in. Secondly, though, it means that these riches that we share in as members of the Church are to be shared – we are to give freely what we have freely received (Matt 10:8).

Since we are members of the one Body of Christ, we are called to "work together with" others within the Body, particularly those who have particular responsibility for the Church's mission, "the hierarchy and other ecclesial leaders". We in CLC share their motivation - "a common concern for the problems and progress of all people". The problems of people calls to mind the opening lines of Vatican II's document on the Church in the Modern World: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." [Gaudium et spes 1]. The progress of all people calls to mind Paul VI's social encyclical *Populorum progressio* (The Progress of Peoples) with its call for an integral human development – the development of the whole person and of every person.

As well, our cooperation within the Church involves openness "to the situations in which the Church finds

CLC General Principle 6

Union with Christ leads to union with the Church where Christ here and now continues his mission of salvation. By making ourselves sensitive to the signs of the times and the movements of the Spirit, we will be better able to encounter Christ in all persons and in all situations. Sharing the riches of membership of the Church, we participate in the liturgy, meditate upon the Scriptures, and learn, teach and promote Christian doctrine.

We work together with the hierarchy and other ecclesial leaders, motivated by a common concern for the problems and progress of all people and open to the situations in which the Church finds itself today.

This sense of the Church impels us to creative and concrete collaboration for the work of advancing the reign of God on earth, and includes a readiness to go and serve where the needs of the Church so demand.

itself today" – sensitivity to where the Church is suffering, where it is persecuted, where it is in need, where it is under-resourced. Having this "sense of the Church" should impel us to "collaboration for the work of advancing the reign of God on earth". Such collaboration is to be "creative", drawing on all the creative desires that arise in us as we live out our Ignatian spirituality in the CLC community. It is also to be "concrete" – not remaining as nice desires, but embodied in real ways.

Ignatius' sense of the Church always involved availability for mission. When their plan to go to Jerusalem was thwarted, Ignatius and his companions put themselves at the disposal of the Pope, trusting that he would have the needs of the Church universal at heart and know where they might best serve. Having begun this Principle with the Church as a place where Christ continues his mission, we end with our availability for mission within the Church – our "readiness to go and serve where the needs of the Church so demand" just as Ignatius did.

Questions for reflection:

1. How closely do I hold together union with Christ and union with the Church?
2. How do I draw life from the riches of the Church so as to be sensitive to the Spirit's movement in all people and situations?
3. Does my CLC group see itself as somehow distinct from the Church, or as fully part of the Body and seeking to "work together with" others in the Body and with the Church's leaders?
4. Am I able to apply the presupposition of the Exercises (#22) to the leaders of the Church? Is my group able to do this in any discussions of Church issues?
5. Do I find myself growing in "concern for the problems and progress of all peoples"? In what ways?
6. How ready am I, within the parameters of my vocation, to "go and serve" where the needs are?

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

This Principle continues to examine Our Charism (GPs 4-9). The opening phrase, “Our gift of self ...” refers immediately back to the last line of the last principle, which spoke of “a readiness to go and serve where the needs of the Church so demand”. But it takes us back further to GP 1, which also speaks of our self-giving: “Jesus invites all of us to give ourselves continuously to God and to bring about unity within our human family.”

For CLC members, this gift of self “finds its expression in a personal commitment to the World Community, through a freely chosen local community”. Note the order here – commitment is primarily to the World Community, and this commitment happens through the local community. This is perhaps different from how many of us envision our place in CLC, where our primary commitment tends to be to the local group, with perhaps only a vague sense of the wider CLC in our city or state or country, and perhaps even vaguer about World CLC. At the end of this Principle, our membership of a World Community is emphasised once more when it is suggested that, as CLC members, our responsibility “to develop the bonds of community does not stop with our local community but extends to the National and World Christian Life Community”.

This Principle further points us to our unity not simply with CLC but to the Church of which CLC is a part. It notes that each CLC community “is a gathering of people in Christ”, and, like any such gathering where two or three come together in his name (Mt 18:20), it is “a cell of his mystical Body”. Thus our responsibility to develop the bonds of community goes beyond local or world CLC “to the ecclesial communities of which we are part (parish, diocese), to the whole Church”. And since the Church is the sacrament of the unity of all people, the call to unity extends to “all people of good will”.

GP 7 notes a series of things that bind us together. There is our common commitment, which, as we have seen, is to the “World Community, through a ... local community”. There is our common way of life – all that we’ve been reflecting on in this section of the GPs on our charism. And there is “our recognition and love of Mary as our mother”. Here the Principle taps into CLC’s roots in the Marian Sodality. It invites us to reclaim this aspect of our tradition – to recognise the reality that Mary is our Mother, given by her Son to each of us through the Beloved Disciple, and to love her as our Mother.

The centre of our union “in love and action”, however, is the Eucharist. But what can this mean if few of our groups ever has the chance to have the Eucharist celebrated for their group? The first thing it means is that the Eucharist needs to be at the centre of the lives of each member of the group. This involves allowing the Eucharist to be “the source and summit of the Christian life” as Vatican II called it. We can do this in a variety of ways. We can read and pray with the Sunday scriptures during the week. We can consciously bring the whole of our life to the Mass to offer it to God along with Jesus.

CLC General Principle 7

Our gift of self finds its expression in a personal commitment to the World Community, through a freely chosen local community. Such a local community, centred in the Eucharist, is a concrete experience of unity in love and action. In fact each of our communities is a gathering of people in Christ, a cell of his mystical Body. We are bound together by our common commitment, our common way of life, and our recognition and love of Mary as our mother. Our responsibility to develop the bonds of community does not stop with our local community but extends to the National and World Christian Life Community, to the ecclesial communities of which we are part (parish, diocese), to the whole Church and to all people of good will.

We can take seriously our being missioned at the end of Mass, and take this as a missioning to go and live out our CLC vocation in full in the world. We can pray for members of our CLC group by name during the Mass. More than this, at each Mass, we can offer into God’s hands the whole group and all that was shared in our last meeting as we fed one another through our sharing on the Word and on the presence of Christ in our lives. Hopefully, this will flow into the whole of our lives as we seek to live our lives eucharistically – in the dynamism of divine initiative and human response; in thanksgiving and praise to God; in calling down the Spirit to transform our lives; in being bread broken for the world; in ever-deepening union with Christ, the source of our unity.

Questions for reflection:

1. Have I made a personal commitment to the World Community of CLC? What shape does this commitment take – i.e. what are its concrete expressions for me?
2. How aware are we as a group of being a cell of Christ’s mystical body, the Church?
3. To what extent is our recognition and love of Mary as our mother a binding force in our group?
4. Does our ‘union in love and action’ within the group overflow into the development of bonds with the wider Church?
5. In what ways am I centred in the Eucharist?
6. In what ways is my CLC group centred in the Eucharist?

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

Our last few reflections on this CLC Charism section of the General Principles have given attention at various points to the mission of CLC, without using that language. Here in GP 8, we find a more focused discussion of CLC mission, and explicit references to 'mission' and 'apostolate'. It is a long Principle, so we shall discuss here just the first two paragraphs.

The starting context is the Church, which has already been mentioned nine times in this section. Here we are reminded that we are “members of the pilgrim People of God”, picking up one of Vatican II's key images of the Church. And as members of this pilgrim people, as baptised persons, each of us has a mission. This mission is not mediated by priests or Church leaders but is directly “received from Christ.” In the broadest terms, the nature of this mission as CLC members is the mission of the whole Church – “being witnesses before all people”, an allusion to the commission given by Christ before his Ascension (Acts 1:8). This link between 'mission' and being a pilgrim Church is mentioned in the Vatican II decree on the Church's missionary activity. “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature.” (AG 2)

GP 8 next goes on to mention two elements of the witnessing we are called to do. Firstly, it operates at a range of levels – attitudes, words and actions. We do not simply speak the Gospel in words, but also live it out in our actions. Indeed, as the Exercises put it, “Love shows itself more in deeds than in words” [230]. But beyond both deeds and words, the Principle mentions 'attitudes'. The right deeds and the right words will not be a true witness if people detect in us an attitude that is awry. We need, as St Paul says, to “put on the mind of Christ” (cf. Phil 2:5) – allowing him to transform us from within, so that any words and actions flow from our union with him and our growing into his image.

Secondly, our mission is not simply our mission – it is 'his' mission – the mission of Christ. We witness to people to the extent that we are “identified with [Christ's] mission”. This is further spelt out in terms of Jesus' own inaugural statement of his vision in Luke 4 – “bringing the good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, setting the downtrodden free and proclaiming the Lord's year of favour.” We have already seen various ways in which this theme of solidarity with the poor has arisen in earlier Principles.

Now we come to a strong statement about CLC identity, encapsulated in a very short and sharp sentence: “Our life is essentially apostolic.” 'Our life' refers to our CLC life, as the next sentence makes clear when it spells out the breadth of CLC mission. CLC life is apostolic – it has an outward focus, carrying on the mission initially entrusted to the apostles. And it is essentially apostolic. This means that mission is not something secondary; it is not simply tacked on to the CLC way of life; it is not an optional extra to be considered if it suits. It is part of the very essence, the very nature, of the CLC vocation. Whatever else we may be doing as individuals or CLC

CLC General Principle 8

As members of the pilgrim People of God, we have received from Christ the mission of being his witnesses before all people by our attitudes, words and actions, becoming identified with his mission of bringing the good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, setting the downtrodden free and proclaiming the Lord's year of favour.

Our life is essentially apostolic. 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.

groups or as a national or world community, without this apostolic focus, CLC is simply not CLC.

What is the field of our CLC mission? What is the vineyard in which we are called to labour? Here we read that there are “no limits” to the field of mission. This does not mean that we take on anything and everything, which no group or movement within the Church can do. What it means is that there are no limits in principle, that nothing should be excluded a priori. This is then spelt out in a number of ways. Firstly, CLC mission is not simply a mission to the Church – to those already part of this pilgrim people. No, our mission goes beyond the bounds of the Church to the world. Secondly, it is about bringing “the gospel of salvation to all people” – i.e. none should be excluded arbitrarily from being the focus of our concern because of factors like race or social status. Thirdly, CLC mission is about serving both individual persons, helping them connect with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and also society. We are called to evangelise not just individuals but cultures, and to transform not just individuals but social structures. Finally, GP 8 speaks of “opening hearts to conversion and struggling to change oppressive structures.” At first glance, this may seem to be in simple parallel to the previous clause about “serving individual persons and society” – that we serve individuals by opening their hearts to conversion and we serve society by changing oppressive structures. But it also works the other way: changing oppressive structures is also a service to individuals, while helping open the hearts of particular people to conversion is also a service to society as a whole.

One way to think of this point about CLC mission having no limits is to return to GP 1 and its vision from the Exercises – the vision of the Trinity contemplating the whole world, and desiring its salvation.

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

The final paragraph under the heading of 'Charism in the General Principles' focuses on Mary's place in our charism, and so returns us to where the Principles began – with the Trinity contemplating the world and deciding to send the Son to take flesh “from Mary, the poor Virgin of Nazareth” (GP 1).

GP 9 begins its treatment of Mary by noting that our spirituality is “centred on Christ”, and as such, we are always to see “the role of Mary in relation to Christ”. Flowing from our spirituality is our “collaboration in Christ's mission”, and for this Mary is our model because of her own collaboration with Christ and his mission.

The paragraph then points to some key expressions of Mary's co-operation with God that make her such an important model for CLC. Though she clearly co-operated with God from her earliest days, her journey makes a new beginning “with her 'yes' to God in the mystery of Annunciation-Incarnation”. Our CLC “action for justice in the world” finds an inspiration in Mary's life – in the “effective service” she displays by visiting Elizabeth, and in her “solidarity with the poor as reflected in the Magnificat”. While these moments occur early in her new journey of nurturing her beloved son, we know that her “yes” to God and her union with her Son as he does the will of his Father “continued all through her life”, as is evident from her sharing in his suffering at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25-27) and her presence with the disciples in prayer as they await the gift of the Spirit (Acts 1:13-14).

In faith, Mary accepted “the designs of God”, and so “became our mother and the mother of all” – in becoming the mother of Christ, she became the mother, too, of his Body. Thus, from her first 'Yes' to her last breath, “Mary's co-operation in her Son's mission... inspires us to give ourselves totally to God in union” with her. This self-surrender to God, which we express so powerfully in the “Take, Lord, receive” at the end of the Exercises, is, in true Ignatian fashion, never simply about us and God – it is also expressed concretely in our self-surrender to others in loving service. “Thus we confirm our own mission of service to the world received in baptism and confirmation.” Again, the Principles remind us that CLC is inserted in the life of the Church – that our CLC mission is a particular specification of the baptismal mission we share with all Christians.

Finally, this Principle points us beyond Mary as our model to the call to honour her “in a special way” as the Mother of God, which she came to be precisely through that “Yes” into which we are all invited. Later on the Principles will speak not simply of honour for Mary but of “love for the Mother of God” as one element of the CLC way of life (GP 12). We are also reminded in the present Principle that we cannot hope to imitate Mary's “Yes” to God, nor its expression in service, without grace, and to be open to that grace, “we rely on her intercession” so that we may

CLC General Principle 9

Since the spirituality of our Community is centred on Christ, we see the role of Mary in relation to Christ: she is the model of our own collaboration in Christ's mission. Mary's co-operation with God begins with her "yes" in the mystery of the Annunciation-Incarnation. Her effective service as shown in her visit to Elizabeth and her solidarity with the poor as reflected in the Magnificat, make her an inspiration for our action for justice in the world today. Mary's co-operation in her Son's mission, continued all through her life, inspires us to give ourselves totally to God in union with Mary, who by accepting the designs of God became our mother and the mother of all. Thus we confirm our own mission of service to the world received in baptism and confirmation. We honour Mary, the Mother of God, in a special way, and we rely on her intercession in fulfilling our vocation.

fulfil our CLC vocation.

Questions for personal or group reflection:

1. How would I describe my relationship to Mary in my own life at present?
2. How does my group live out this Marian aspect of the CLC way of life?
3. What has been my experience of the contemplation on the Incarnation from the Exercises?
4. Are there other Marian passages in Scripture that have been important to me in my prayer?
5. What can we learn as a group from Mary's openness to God, her service, and the solidarity with the poor that she expresses in her Magnificat?

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

With GP 10, we begin a new major section of the Principles: “Life and Organization of the Community” (GP 10-15). This section, which is more about structures, which are necessary for any community, flows from what is most important, what animates the structures, which is our charism (GP 4-9).

The opening sentence of GP 10 states that membership of CLC “presupposes a personal vocation”. Clearly this is referring to full membership. Few people, when first introduced to CLC or joining a local group, would be immediately ready to discern that CLC is their personal vocation – the way of life in which they are called to live their foundational baptismal vocation. This paragraph, then, describes in outline the basic steps in the journey from being a “candidate”, as this text puts it, to being a member in this full sense. Those basic steps are: a period of induction, a time in temporary commitment and, finally, permanent commitment.

Induction is a time when “the candidate is introduced into the way of life proper to CLC”. Different national communities do this in different ways. There may be new groups in which everyone is at this initial stage of their CLC journey except for an experienced guide, or the candidate may join an established group and be formed in the CLC way of life amongst experienced CLC members. Whatever the process, it involves learning how to live this way of life. The purpose is, as the Principle goes on to say, discernment of vocation: “This time is allotted for the candidate and the wider Community to discern the candidate's vocation”. Note that this discernment is not simply about the person coming to feel that CLC is right for them but involves the wider CLC community who, from their knowledge and experience of CLC, are also discerning the person's vocation. Any true vocation always involves both these elements.

If this two-way discernment leads to the person making a decision for CLC – a decision again that needs to be “approved by the wider Community” – then he or she assumes a temporary commitment to CLC. This is an initial commitment to a further process of ongoing discernment in which the person “tests his/her aptitude for living according to the end and spirit of CLC”. This ‘end and spirit’ are what is spelt out especially in the Charism section of the GPs. Once more, this testing is not something the person sorts out on his/her own – rather, they do it “with the help of the Community”.

This testing and discernment take time, certainly, since it is about something that is key to a person's identity - personal vocation. But this Principle does not envisage temporary commitment as an abiding situation. Rather, “after a suitable period of time”, permanent commitment is the usual end for someone who discerns CLC as their personal vocation.

GP 10 refers to the General Norms as determining the period of time to be spent in induction and in temporary

CLC General Principle 10

Members: Becoming a member of Christian Life Community presupposes a personal vocation. During a period of time determined in the General Norms, the candidate is introduced into the way of life proper to CLC. This time is allotted for the candidate and the wider Community to discern the candidate's vocation. Once the decision has been taken, and approved by the wider Community, the member assumes a temporary commitment and, with the help of the Community, tests his/her aptitude for living according to the end and spirit of CLC. After a suitable period of time, determined by the General Norms, permanent commitment follows.

commitment. GN 2 speaks of induction as usually being between one and four years. During this time, one discerns whether to continue one's journey in CLC in temporary commitment or to seek one's vocation elsewhere. GN 3 speaks of the time in temporary commitment as usually being between two and eight years. Again, this is a time for discerning if one's vocation is elsewhere or if one is called to permanent commitment in CLC as one's personal vocation.

Questions for personal or group reflection:

1. Do I see my involvement in CLC as a journey of discernment about my personal vocation?
2. How does my group help members to undertake such a journey of discernment?
3. Where am I in my own vocational discernment in CLC?

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

At 48 words, this is the shortest of the Principles we have looked at thus far.

The brevity of this paragraph is significant because this Principle describes what for many is their primary experience of CLC – the local CLC group. We should not take the brief span in which this experience is outlined as suggesting that these groups are not important. Far from it. In fact, the opening clause refers to their foundational importance as “the primary means of formation and continuing growth” for CLC members. Rather, I imagine that it was considered little need to be said directly about them precisely because small groups are so central to CLC members, so much part of the lived experience of CLC. And the Principles seek to express something of what CLC is as a World Community, so that much of the focus is at that level.

Still, we can look back and see where other Principles have already referred to the life of the local communities. GP 4 spoke of the role of small groups as gathering people who feel the need to unite their lives with their faith so as to be prepared more affectively for mission, especially in daily life. GP 5 spoke of the necessity of “prayer and discernment, personal and communal”; one presumes this communal discernment is most often done within the local groups. Communal discernment is mentioned again in GP 8 in the context of group apostolates. GP 7 speaks of CLC members giving themselves through commitment to the World Community but through “a freely chosen local community”. Such a community is “centred on the Eucharist”. It is “a concrete experience of unity in love and action”, “a gathering of people in Christ”, and “a cell of his mystical Body”. This Principle goes on to speak of the things that bind us together in community (common commitment, common way of life, love of Mary as our mother), noting that these bonds need to extend beyond the local group to the National and World Communities.

GP 11 takes up a number of these themes and groups them together under the heading of Community Bonding. The small group is “the primary means of formation and continuing growth” for members. There may well be more formal regional or national formation events, but we should never underplay the basic formative nature of the CLC group operating according to CLC process. Here I contemplatively receive the sharing of other members and vulnerably share of myself and my life. This simple, honest sharing within the CLC process forms me and helps me grow, and enables me to contribute to the ongoing formation and growth of other members.

Small groups are to meet on “a regular basis” and with some stability. A rhythm of meetings is essential for this formation and growth, as is some measure of stability, which presumes members make a serious commitment to being at the group meetings. This helps assure three things. Firstly, “a deep sharing by members of their faith and human life”. Depth of sharing is helped by the fact that we have come to know each other over time and

CLC General Principle 11

Community Bonding: As a primary means of formation and continuing growth, members come together on a regular basis in a stable local community, to assure a deep sharing by members of their faith and human life, a true community atmosphere and a strong commitment to mission and service.

through the regularity of meetings. The focus of sharing is also clear – faith and life, and how the two come together for each person sharing. CLC sharing is never an abstract discussion of things 'out there' – the state of the world or the Church, for example, or some justice issue. These matters may come into my sharing, but only insofar as something has affected me and entered concretely into my prayer and my life.

Secondly, authentic CLC sharing helps assure “a true community atmosphere”. A sharing which is not from the heart does not help build community. What enables growth of a true communal intimacy is my sharing at the affective level - my desires and longings, my fears, my joys, the consolations and desolations I have experienced in my life since the last meeting.

Finally, genuine CLC sharing helps assure “a strong commitment to mission and service.” If members are allowing the Gospel to interact with their lives in their personal prayer, and sharing about this engagement in the group, then questions of mission cannot fail to arise within the group sharing. Certainly there will be seasons of greater inner focus in any Christian life, such as times given to inner healing. But if sharing in groups is always simply at that level of healing and growth in friendship with Jesus, never touching on the service to which members are called as individuals and a group, then it may well be time for some review of the meeting process to see how the small group can serve its function as “the primary means of formation and continuing growth” for all members.

Questions:

1. In what ways do I find my small group to be formative and enabling of my continued growth?
2. How deep is the level of sharing I bring to my group? Am I challenged to move beyond my comfort zone and share more vulnerably?
3. Is my sharing and that of the group as a whole focussed on faith and life, or do we get distracted by more general discussions of issues 'out there'?
4. How does the sharing in our group ensure a strong commitment of the members, and of the group as a whole, to mission and service?

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

GP 12 is about the CLC way of life. A way of life for a Christian is another way of talking about a spirituality – how do I live out my life with Christ day by day? This GP begins with a generic description of this way of life that is applicable to any fully Christian life: it is a commitment to strive for holiness, in line with Vatican II's emphasis on the "universal call to holiness" (Lumen Gentium Ch V), and to do so "with the help of the community". We are in this together, seeking to grow, and help each other grow, in true holiness – love of God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and love of our neighbour as ourselves.

Of course, this Principle does not expressly use the term "growth in holiness". But it expresses the same meaning when it speaks of commitment to "continuing personal and social growth which is spiritual, human and apostolic". Our growth is to be continuing; when we stop growing, we start dying. It is to be both personal and social, consistent with that crucial Christian interplay between myself as a unique person, formed in God's image, and the reality that I am always a person in community, shaping and being shaped by that community. Our growth is also to be a spiritual growth, so that I come, with St Paul, to recognize that nothing at all "can outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3:8). At the same time, our growth is to be human; any genuine spiritual growth is not an escape from our true humanity, but a deepening of it, as grace builds on and fulfils nature. And our growth is to be apostolic – never simply about me, or my community, but about drawing all people to experience the life to the full that Jesus offers.

What does this mean in practice? GP 12 goes on to note seven elements of the CLC way of life in practice:

1. "Participation in the Eucharist whenever possible":- Since we are speaking of a way of life grounded in the Catholic Church, this would mean at least on Sundays, unless that is impossible, and where it is possible in the concrete commitments of each one's daily life, during the week as well.
2. "An active sacramental life": Since the Eucharist has already been mentioned specifically, presumably this refers to the other sacraments, and particularly Reconciliation which is the other sacrament open to regular reception. For those who are seriously sick or becoming frail with age, reception of the Sacrament of the Sick may also be appropriate.
3. "Daily practice of personal prayer, especially that based on Sacred Scripture": An active sacramental life is nourished by and finds fruit in a life of daily prayer, that day to day, heart to heart presence of myself to Jesus and of him to me. While we all find different resources and forms of praying more helpful at different phases of our lives, a regular attention to Ignatian meditation and contemplation of Scripture is especially recommended for the CLC way of life.

CLC General Principle 12a

The way of life of Christian Life Community commits its members, with the help of the community, to strive for a continuing personal and social growth which is spiritual, human and apostolic. In practice this involves participation in the Eucharist whenever possible; an active sacramental life; daily practice of personal prayer, especially that based on Sacred Scripture; discernment by means of a daily review of one's life and, if possible, regular spiritual direction; an annual interior renewal in accordance with the sources of our spirituality; and a love for the Mother of God.

4. "Discernment by means of a daily review of one's life":- The Examen is a uniquely Ignatian form of prayer, enabling one to reflectively discern the movements of the spirits in one's daily life. This regular practice then feeds into the discernment of particular important decisions as that becomes necessary in one's life.
5. "If possible, regular spiritual direction": It is not always possible to find someone to guide one with regular spiritual direction. But even occasionally touching base with someone can be helpful, especially when the movements of the spirits are more confusing. Or one could do a retreat where one-to-one direction is available. This leads us to our next point.
6. "An annual interior renewal in accordance with the sources of our spirituality": This is deliberately left general, since circumstances will differ for each member. For some, an annual silent retreat is a possibility. For others, a weekend retreat with some input and/or individual direction might be possible. Others may take advantage of a retreat in daily life, perhaps following the First Spiritual Exercises. Others may make use of the Church's seasons of renewal, Lent and Advent, for their own interior renewal. There are many possibilities. It is noted that any renewal time should draw on "the sources of our spirituality". These are laid out earlier in the GPs – the universal sources common to all Christian spiritualities (centred on Christ and his Paschal Mystery, and drawing on Scripture, the liturgy, Church doctrine, and reflection on the signs of the times), and "the specific source... of our spirituality", the Spiritual Exercises (GP 5).
7. "A love for the Mother of God":- This aspect of CLC spirituality is presented more fully in GP 9, already discussed in a previous reflection, which looks at Mary as "the model of our collaboration in Christ's mission".

These are seven practical ways for each CLC member to strive for, and receive as God's gift, the holiness that God desires for us – that "continuing personal and social growth which is spiritual, human and apostolic".

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Questions:

1. In what ways does my growth in love of God and love of neighbour show the following qualities: continuing? personal? social? spiritual? human? apostolic?.
2. Perhaps I could do a particular examen on the seven practical ways of living out the CLC way of life that are mentioned in this GP.
3. Does my CLC group encourage my practice of these elements of the CLC way of life?
4. Do some of these elements of the CLC way of life find expression in my CLC group – eg Prayer grounded in Scripture? Discernment and review of daily life? Love for Mary?

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

As we saw last time, GP 12 (a) spoke of our CLC commitment to “continuing personal and social growth which is spiritual, human and apostolic”. It then went on to list seven ways to the spiritual and human side of that growth – participation in the Eucharist whenever possible, an active sacramental life, daily personal prayer, discernment using the Examen, spiritual direction where possible, annual interior renewal, and love for Mary, the Mother of God.

In paragraph (b), this Principle turns to the apostolic aspect of that “continuing personal and social growth”. It begins by situating our apostolic work within the work of Christ and of God – as CLC, we aim “to work with Christ for the advancement of God's reign”. This reminds us of the Call of the King from the Exercises, where we contemplate Christ calling the whole world, and each in particular, in these words: “It is My will to conquer all the world and all enemies and so to enter into the glory of My Father; therefore, whoever would like to come with Me is to labor with Me, that following Me in the pain, they may also follow Me in the glory.” [Exx. 95]

Because of the response to this call is what CLC is on about, all members are to actively participate in apostolic service, which is indeed a “vast field”. Choosing which part of this vast field to get involved in requires discernment – apostolic discernment. This is the “ordinary way” of discovering how we are called to serve, to advance God's reign, or, to put it in other words, “how best to bring Christ's presence, concretely, to our world”. Note the language of the magis here. We are not asked simply to discern how we might bring Christ's presence – that hardly needs discerning, in a way, since each of us daily is faced with multiple opportunities to be Christ's embodied presence in our situation. Ignatian discernment is about seeking the greater good, how we might best do this.

The focus in this section is on our apostolic work as individuals, speaking of the call of “all individual members” and what is asked of “each member”. Still, even the discernment of our individual apostolate will normally be both individual and communal. Primarily, it will be our local CLC group that will help us discern our individual apostolate, while recognizing that a key part of the context of discernment will be any apostolic priorities that World and National CLC have put before us all.

The Principle goes on to make clear that it is not speaking simply, or even primarily, of apostolates within the Church community. Rather, it points to the key locus of the lay apostolate – the world of social life, of work, of politics. This apostolate is “broad and demanding”, and requires of us willingness to be involved “in social and political life”. But while willingness is essential, participating without competence is not the Ignatian way. Hence we also need to “develop human qualities and professional skills in order to become more competent workers and convincing witnesses”.

CLC General Principle 12b

Since the Christian Life Community aims to work with Christ for the advancement of God's reign, all individual members are called to an active participation in the vast field of apostolic service. Apostolic discernment, both individual and communal, is the ordinary way of discovering how best to bring Christ's presence, concretely, to our world. Our broad and demanding mission requires of each member a willingness to participate in social and political life and to develop human qualities and professional skills in order to become more competent workers and convincing witnesses. Furthermore, it demands also simplicity in all aspects of life, in order to follow more closely Christ in His poverty and to preserve inner apostolic freedom.

Finally, the reference to being “convincing witnesses” leads again to the need to do all this “with Christ” and in imitation of him with “simplicity in all aspects of life”. Only in this way can we “preserve inner apostolic freedom” – by authentically taking up the challenge of that Contemplation on the Call of the King “to follow more closely Christ in His poverty”.

Questions:

1. In what ways do I see my life as “working with Christ for the advancement of God's reign”?
2. How much of my involvement in apostolic service have I discerned, individually and communally?
3. Does my local group provide space for members to discern their apostolate? Where are we with using the DSSE process?
4. How can we help each other grow in simplicity in all aspects of life so as to preserve inner apostolic freedom and follow Christ poor more closely?

PRAYING THE PRINCIPLES

Principle 12 looks at the CLC way of life. We have already examined the first paragraph which looks at the CLC member's spiritual growth through participation in the Eucharist, the other sacraments, prayer (especially with Scripture), discernment through the Examen, spiritual direction, annual interior renewal, and love of Mary (12a). We have also studied the second paragraph which turned to our apostolic service – bringing Christ's presence to the world through involvement in political, social and professional life, and by way of simplicity of life (12b).

The earlier paragraphs had referred, in passing, to the ways the community aids the individual member – his or her growth occurs “with the help of the community” (12a) and the discernment of what apostolic service to undertake is “both individual and communal” (12b). In the third paragraph under consideration here, the focus is on how each member contributes to the life of the Community. “Each one assumes responsibility” for the ongoing life of the Community. Note that this is Community with a capital C, which in the Principles is never used of the local community or small group where we gather regularly, but rather to the World Community or the National Community. Commitment to a local group has already been addressed in Principle 7, with its careful interplay of local community and National and World Communities, and in Principle 11, on Community Bonding. The current Principle addresses the members' responsibility for “participating in the meetings and other activities”, not of the local group, but of the wider CLC Community.

A further responsibility of each member is to support other members in living out their personal vocation. That each member has a personal vocation to CLC has been noted elsewhere in the Principles. The Community comprises those “who have recognized Christian Life Community as their particular vocation within the Church” (GP 4). Indeed, membership “presupposes a personal vocation” (GP 10). But this vocation is not so personal as to be private. It is incumbent on each CLC member “to help and encourage other members to pursue their personal vocation”. This responsibility is a co-responsibility. We should be ever ready not only to help and encourage our fellow members by giving them “advice and aid” in living their CLC vocation, but equally ready to receive such advice and aid. In this way we can advance together in our personal but shared vocation “as friends in the Lord”.

Questions:

1. In what ways have I taken up my responsibility “for participating in the meetings and other activities of the Community” – ie the wider CLC Community?
2. Does my local group encourage me to take up this responsibility?
3. How do I “help and encourage” other members to pursue their personal vocation?

CLC General Principle 12c

Finally, each one assumes responsibility for participating in the meetings and other activities of the Community, and to help and encourage other members to pursue their personal vocation, always ready to give and to receive advice and aid as friends in the Lord.

4. How readily do I welcome “advice and aid” about my personal vocation?