

XV World Assembly of Christian Life Community
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Journeying as an Apostolic Body: Our Response to this Grace from God
“The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all they had done and taught.”
(Mk 6:30)

Preamble

We, the delegates of the General Assembly of the World Christian Life Community, gathered in Fátima, Portugal, have reviewed how CLC is responding to the grace of the Nairobi World Assembly, when “we felt confirmed to become a lay apostolic body that shares responsibility for mission in the Church.” (Final Document, 2003)

Gathering around Jesus, in the presence of Mary, model of our collaboration in Christ's mission (GP9), we told him and one another all that we have done, taught and learnt on our journey from Nairobi. The Assembly of the Twelve around Jesus (Mk 6: 30) became the model of the Fátima Assembly!

I.

Our graced history, 2003-2008

1.1 Ours are stories of sorrow and joy, desolation and hope, stagnation and growth, failure and success. Though it is not always easy to recognise God at work in our broken world, in symbols, if not always in words, we affirm that our stories are parts of the Great Story of Christ's saving love. Nothing more vividly expresses the hope that CLC lives day by day than the incorporation of the national communities of Cuba, Hungary and Rwanda into the World Community here in Fátima.

1.2 Thus, our stories challenge, inspire, console and teach us. Above all, they affirm that we are fellow disciples, apostles, pilgrims – one people, called from many nations, speaking the language of love, living a common way of life, sent on a common mission, bearing God's abundant gifts. With Mary, *our souls proclaim the greatness of the Lord and our spirit rejoices in God our Saviour ... for the Almighty has done great things for us ...* (Lk 1: 46-49).

II. Living more deeply and acting more effectively as an apostolic body: the graces of Fátima 2008.

2.1 Five signs of hope and challenges stand out among the many graces received in Fátima:

- Fidelity to the orientations of Nairobi
- Unity in diversity
- The call to live as a prophetic lay community
- Closer identification with Christ's mission to bring the good news to the poor, and
- Widening and deepening networks of collaboration.

2.2 *Fidelity to the orientations of Nairobi* – Our graced history confirms the World Community's fidelity to the orientations of Nairobi. At every level, our efforts clearly have a single aim, which is to live more deeply and act more effectively as an apostolic body, because “our life is essentially apostolic” (GP 8). This is evident in the growing insistence on the Spiritual Exercises as “the specific source and characteristic instrument of our spirituality” (GP 5); in efforts to improve the effectiveness of formation; in a new emphasis on leadership in mission; and in noteworthy examples of collaboration within and outside the communities. At world level particularly, within the Church and at the UN, CLC is a coherent, credible presence. Collaboration between CLC and the Society of Jesus is also growing appreciably. We have considerable experience of exercising the dynamic of *Discerning - Sending – Supporting – Evaluating*, although *the Assembly acknowledges there is much room for growth and consistency in this area, and that formation should take greater account of its importance.*

2.3 *Unity in diversity* – The Assembly vividly demonstrates both the unity and the diversity of World CLC. There is growing awareness that this is characteristic of our charism, a source of creativity and potentially a powerful instrument in mission. Because of this unity in diversity “the field of CLC mission knows no limits.” (GP 8)

2.4 The Assembly recognizes that it is not always easy to reconcile unity and diversity. As our common mission grows and our realities become more complex, only an ever clearer understanding of our charism will enable us to transcend the differences among us. Thus, by living our charism more deeply, we will also act more effectively as an apostolic body. A more explicit adherence to CLC, such as the one implied by CLC *commitment* (GP7), appeared to us especially relevant for the World Community's present stage of development.

2.5 The Assembly recognizes that an individualistic culture and the specific social or historical circumstances of some communities may raise resistance to CLC commitment. However, the idea that the apostolic strength of the body depends on the depth of commitment to our way of life, as articulated in GP 12, leads the Assembly *to call for a review of the meaning and importance of CLC commitment, both temporary and permanent.* Therefore, “as the wise head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old” (Mt 13, 52) *the Assembly urges the World Community to rediscover commitment as*

an invitation to a personal spiritual journey and a discerned vocation lived in and through the apostolic body.

2.6 The Assembly also recognises the difficulties entailed in expressing our hope and experience of “commitment” within an “apostolic body” using different languages and in different cultures: *we therefore invite the World Community to on-going dialogue and reflection about the language and forms through which these are expressed.*

2.7 *The call to live as a prophetic lay community* – “Our mission, in good biblical and Church tradition, has to be a prophetic mission, carried out in the name of God and under His guidance. And we can meaningfully ask ourselves: Can we *really* be prophetic?” – seeing with the Eyes of God; listening with the ears, the Hearing of God; feeling with the Heart of God; and speaking the Word of God, “a word of compassion for those who suffer ... and a word of Conversion and Solidarity for those who can do something about that suffering.” (Address of Fr A. Nicolás, World Ecclesiastical Assistant, to the Assembly) We received this challenge as *the defining grace of Fátima 2008*, finding inspiration and consolation in his words: “this is the time for prophetic communities ... and I feel that you are decidedly moving in this direction.”

2.8 The Assembly responds to this with another question: in what issues is God’s Spirit prompting World CLC to be prophetic?

2.9 The Assembly reaffirmed three important desires that were first identified in Itaíci: “to promote family life as a basic unit in building the world into the Kingdom of God; to accompany young people on the way to meaningful life ...; and to integrate professional and other working activities into ... our Christian faith” (Itaíci Final Recommendations). The Assembly observed the growing prominence of “family CLC” – ie, living the CLC way of life together as a family unit – as an expression of “our urgent need to unite human life in all its dimensions with the fullness of our Christian faith according to our charism” (GP 4). We listened to other calls for prophetic witness, in areas such as the dignity of creation and the environment; a vision for women in society and in the Church, with Mary the mother of God as our model; ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

2.10 *Closer identification with Christ’s mission to bring the good news to those who are “excluded” or “strangers”* – When Jesus healed the daughter of a Caananite woman (Mt 15: 21-28), “a new, Christian era, where all can see and treat each other as brothers and sisters” was announced (Homily, Fr A Nicolás). As the Assembly progressed, the call for a closer identification with Christ’s mission to bring the good news to those who are “excluded” or “strangers” rang ever more clearly. We recognize the urgent need to bring the experience of the Spiritual Exercises to those who are marginalized and less powerful in our societies, and to invite them to join our communities, if necessary by creatively adapting programmes of formation and our way of life to their realities.

2.11 *Widening and deepening networks of collaboration* – Finally, reflecting on the World Community’s experience of collaboration with other ecclesial bodies in the UN and elsewhere, and especially our collaboration with the Society of Jesus, the Assembly

recognizes *the urgent need to widen and deepen networks of joint discernment and action at world, regional, national and local levels.*

2.12 The Nairobi Assembly called for greater collaboration with the Society of Jesus and greater clarity of roles in our relationship. The Assembly in Fátima gratefully acknowledges this collaboration and our desire that it continue to grow, not only between individual Jesuits and CLC members but also between CLC as an apostolic body and the Society of Jesus as an apostolic body. Three important documents outline our relationship and give direction for this to develop: *CLC – Society of Jesus Collaboration* (Appendix to the Nairobi Final Document); *The Relationship between the Christian Life Community and the Society of Jesus in the Church*; and *The Role of the Ecclesiastical Assistant*. *We urge our communities to become familiar with these documents. We encourage our Jesuit brothers, perhaps through our Ecclesiastical Assistants, to become aware of these documents so that our cooperation can be more fruitful.*

III. Building knowledge and orienting action: the Assembly's recommendations

3.1 In response to the graces outlined above, the Assembly identified nine themes around which to build our understanding of the signs of the times, and to orient apostolic action, namely:

- a) The nature of our “apostolic body” and the processes through which it acts
- b) Increasing membership in numbers and diversity
- c) Commitment to the CLC way of life
- d) Formation, which is closely associated with greater availability of the Spiritual Exercises
- e) Leadership
- f) Networking apostolic initiatives, which is closely associated with SJ-CLC-Church collaboration
- g) Financial co-responsibility.

3.2 *The nature of our “apostolic body” and the processes through which it acts* – While the signs confirm that CLC is becoming an apostolic body, numerous questions originating from our diversity were also raised in the Assembly. Thus, it is not (yet) possible to give a clear description or definition of a “lay apostolic body”, because ours is a new way of being in the Church. Questions also arise about the relationship between the common mission and the discerned commitments of individual members. We need patience in this process and have to live with the questions as a challenge. The Assembly acknowledges the dynamic of DSSE practised on all levels – local, national and regional – as *the* means to build the apostolic body.

3.3 In light of our reality, the Assembly **recommends** that –

- a) national and local communities integrate the *Discerning, Sending, Supporting, Evaluating* dynamic into their formation programmes;
- b) exchanges of information, formation material and personal experiences be actively promoted at all levels, so that all members can identify more closely with our emerging apostolic body.

3.4 *Membership* – Clearly, membership is crucial not only to our desire to be an effective apostolic body, but also to the survival and spread of CLC. Though membership should always be discerned as a personal vocation (G.P 10), we feel called to propose CLC as a way of life for people from all social classes, economic conditions and states of life, seeking out those who are often excluded from community or ecclesial life.

3.5 The Assembly therefore **recommends** that –

- a) communities at all levels improve the “visibility” of CLC through prophetic stances in favour of justice and the poor;

- b) demonstrate the value of CLC as a community for the laity which participates in the mission of the Church through insertion in the world (apostolate);
- c) promote the experience of the Spiritual Exercises among lay people, and invite them to continue the experience in CLC;
- d) search creatively for new members in contexts other than the traditional ones and explain our charism in a language which is more accessible;
- e) promote and support CLC among families who wish to live the CLC way of life as a family unit.

3.6 *Commitment to CLC way of life* - As already explained, the notion that the apostolic strength of the body depends on the depth of commitment to our way of life, led the Assembly to call for a renewed look into the meaning and importance of temporary and permanent commitment in CLC.

3.7 The Assembly therefore **recommends** that -

- a) national communities evaluate their current approach to CLC commitment; and
- b) the World ExCo make available documentation which evaluates the current national practices and articulates the concepts of vocation, apostolic body and commitment, drawing from already existing materials.

3.8 *Formation* – Attention must be paid to adapting formation to different stages of life, different social and cultural environments, families and younger members. It must adapt to changing realities within and outside CLC. The Assembly **recommends** that -

- a) the revised *Guidelines for Formation: The Process of growth in CLC* be circulated as soon as possible;
- b) formation that is oriented towards mission and financial co-responsibility be emphasised, especially by deepening the use, in all our discernments, of the methodology of *Discerning, Sending, Supporting and Evaluating*;
- c) formation resources, materials and expertise be made widely available to all CLC national communities, for example, by developing a central sharing and distribution centre.

3.9 *Experience of the Spiritual Exercises* – Together with our General Principles, the Spiritual Exercises constitute one of the three pillars of CLC charism. We are aware that the existence of many different social and cultural realities calls for creativity and flexibility in offering the experience to more people. The Assembly therefore **recommends** that –

- a) such creativity be encouraged;

- b) those experiencing the Exercises be informed that they are a specific source and the characteristic instrument of our spirituality, and a constitutive element of our way of life;
- c) the formation of guides (especially lay guides) be promoted, and the guides themselves supported, in collaboration with the Society of Jesus.

3.10 *Leadership* – Following the example of Jesus Christ, CLC desires leaders who will serve their communities and who can facilitate the DSSE process. The Assembly is gratefully aware of CLC’s distinctive pattern of leadership, the range and quality of formation resources, and the gifts that many CLC members bring to leadership. It also acknowledges the challenges involved in fostering leadership development, encouraging suitable people to come forward for leadership roles, and supporting them.

3.11 Thus, the Assembly **recommends** that –

- a) the World Community continue to clarify the nature of CLC leadership and the characteristics of various CLC leadership roles;
- b) the World ExCo make more visible and accessible modules from the Rome International Formation Encounter leadership course for use by national communities; and
- c) the World Community identify persons having leadership qualities to be available to facilitate leadership development where needed.

3.12 *Networking apostolic action and promoting solidarity* – The Assembly listened attentively to the call for greater solidarity among the national communities and for a more effective response to the signs of the times. The experience of the UN Working Groups and other experiences of networking apostolic action and promoting solidarity demonstrates the greater effectiveness of collective action in promoting justice and human dignity; it offers important lessons for world, regional and local projects. Thus, the Assembly **recommends** that -

- a “World Coordinator of Apostolic Initiatives and Advocacy” should be appointed to facilitate joint action and networking; this could be a role assumed by a World ExCo member;
- a) each national community should appoint a “contact person” to provide information and respond to international apostolic concerns;
 - b) each national community should actively collaborate, where possible, on international issues with the CLC Working Groups at the United Nations;
 - c) national communities should consider twinning as an effective means of fostering solidarity among communities around the world.

3.13 Part II of this Document proposes specific measures to promote *collaboration between the Society of Jesus and CLC*, which need not be repeated here.

3.14 *Financial co-responsibility* – The Assembly listened to the World Executive Council’s frank account of its difficult financial circumstances and of some national communities. It considers financial co-responsibility to be an essential expression of our belonging to one World Community, and a necessary means for becoming an Apostolic Body. Being responsible for one another is an essential aspect of community life. We recognise the need to develop existing and new ways of financing operating expenses as well as special apostolic initiatives. To inspire in CLC members an appreciation of financial co-responsibility, the Assembly **recommends** that the World Executive Council should –

- a) ask each national community to assume greater responsibility in gathering and sharing financial information;
- b) establish five-year financial plans;
- c) establish an “apostolic fund for national community projects”;
- d) seek professional expertise where needed;
- e) propose a strategy for reducing the World Executive’s financial deficit as a specific project for World CLC;
- f) consider, at national level, the development of guidelines concerning the financial contributions of members of the communities.

IV. Conclusion

4.1 The orientations and recommendations sketched out in this Final Document of the Fátima Assembly will be followed by a record of the Assembly’s Proceedings, which gives a full account of the insights, proposals and projects brought before the Assembly.

4.2 May all members of the World Community “store up all these things in their hearts” (Lk 2, 51), that we might live more deeply and act more effectively as an apostolic body journeying with the poor and humble Christ through human history, and become ever more closely identified with his mission (GP 8).