



Christian Life Community

Australia

CLC and Non-Catholics

Someone in CLC has asked NEXCO about non-Catholics and membership of CLC, and I was asked to share some reflections on this question.

At one level, this is not an issue. CLC in Australia has always welcomed people who are not Catholics and who wish to be involved in CLC, and they have contributed their presence, gifts and commitment to CLC. For this, we are very grateful.

What is important, though, is that we not mislead people when we welcome them into our community. CLC is a Catholic lay community. By this I do not mean it is a community which just *happens* to have begun within the Catholic Church. Rather, I mean it in the stronger sense that CLC is established as a lay community within the structures, procedures and canon law of the Catholic Church.

In fact, this point is important for all of us, and not just those who are not Catholics, because it once again provides an opportunity to reflect on the identity of CLC. If CLC is simply seen as a loosely connected network of Ignatian prayer groups, then it would seem that membership should be as open as possible to anyone who might be interested in Ignatian prayer. If CLC is, however, what our foundational documents describe – “an apostolic body that shares responsibility for mission in the Church” (Nairobi World Assembly) – then further questions arise.

This is not a matter of excluding people, but of being honest and open with people about what they are getting involved in. Even some Catholic members are surprised to discover, some time after being in CLC, that CLC has a formal association with the Catholic Church! It is important that people be aware that they are entering into a World community with canonical status in the Catholic Church, with commitments and responsibilities shaped by that relationship.

The membership form for CLC Australia involves the statement: “I want to be a registered member of the world community of CLC and I accept its General Principles and General Norms.” Several elements of those General Principles and General Norms highlight or presume a strong link with the Catholic church, both in terms of structure and in terms of our spiritual life. Some of these are:

1. Structural elements:

- a. **Connections to canon law, the Pope and the Holy See:** It was a Papal bull, *Omnipotentis Dei*, that gave approbation to the forerunner of the modern CLC, the Marian Congregations, back in 1584 [GP 3]. The World CLC is “canonically approved by the Holy See” [GN 32]. The General Principles express CLC’s “covenant with the Church” and were “confirmed by the Holy See”. Hence any amendment to the General Principles requires “confirmation by the Holy See” [GP 16]. “The World Ecclesiastical Assistant to the Christian Life Community is appointed by the Holy See.” [GN 42] “A list of candidates for the presidency of the Christian Life Community [i.e. at world level] is to be presented to the Holy See at least three months prior to the election.” [GN 29]. Ecclesiastical



CLC Administration, PO Box 5207, MANLY QLD 4179

Phone: (07) 3893 0958 • Mobile: 0434 223 022 • Fax: (07) 3393 4483

Email: admin@clcaustralia.org.au • Web: www.clcaustralia.org.au

ABN 78 933 416 295 • Inc. Reg No A0029889G (Vic)

assistants, at different levels, are designated not simply in accordance with the General Norms but also “in accordance with Church law” [GP 14].

- b. **Relation to the Church leaders** and other communities and agencies in the Church: “We work together with the hierarchy and other ecclesial leaders, motivated by a common concern ... and open to the situations in which the Church finds itself today” [GP 6]. Our responsibility to develop the bonds of community extends [beyond CLC] to the ecclesial communities of which we are part (parish, diocese), to the whole Church and to all people of good will. Statutes for national communities will “ordinarily deal with”, amongst other things, our “relationship with the hierarchy” [GP 7].

2. Spiritual elements:

- a. **Eucharist:** The Eucharist is mentioned as an important element of CLC life. The local community is to be “centred in the Eucharist” (GP 7). The CLC way of life “commits its members [to] participation in the Eucharist whenever possible” [GP 12]. While such a focus on Eucharist is not exclusive to Catholics, it is a central element of Catholic life and, as these quotations suggest, of CLC life. Questions arise for how we live this as a community while respecting the Catholic Church’s discipline in relation to eucharistic sharing with those who are not Catholic.
- b. **Relation to Mary:** While devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, is not exclusive to Catholics, it is a notable part of the Catholic tradition, and of CLC in particular, with its origins in the Marian congregations. This aspect of CLC life is noted a number of times in the GPs. One thing which binds us is “our recognition and love of Mary as our mother” [GP 7]. “She is the model of our own collaboration in Christ’s mission. We honour Mary, the Mother of God, in a special way, and we rely on her intercession in fulfilling our vocation.” [GP 9] The CLC way of life, in practice, involves “a love for the Mother of God”. [GP 12]

One might, of course, mention other aspects of CLC life where its Catholic grounding comes into play. Discussion of Commitment – temporary and permanent – is about those wanting to embrace CLC as their way of living their vocation within the Church. There are also times when matters of specific concern to Catholics will be discussed – e.g. the request to discuss what input CLC might offer to the Bishops Synod on the Laity.

The main point here is that we be welcoming and open to those who wish to be part of CLC, and that we welcome them with honesty and not under false pretences. It should also be clear that the canonical structure of CLC means that some leadership positions, especially at World CLC level, may not be open to those who are not Catholic. For those of us who are Catholic, too, it reminds us that CLC is not a parallel Church, or a church within a Church but, as noted above, it is about being “an apostolic body that shares responsibility for mission in the Church”.

Robin Koning SJ
CLC Ecclesiastical Assistant
February 2013