



Link between the Executive Council and the World Christian Life Community

*Key elements along our
Journey: Group Guides and*

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you and your families! With this issue of Projects, we wish to follow up on two important areas of our CLC way of life – Group Guides and the DSSE dynamic. In her letter to National Communities (November 2009, October 2010), the President had asked for feedback on these two areas. While thanking those who responded, we request the others to send in their responses even at this late stage. For our growth as one world community it is helpful – nay, necessary - that we have the most complete and current information possible.

A. GROUP GUIDES

The President's letter of November 2009 had reaffirmed the central role of the Guide in the life of CLC. Communities were invited to share about their situation regarding the sufficiency of Guides, perception of their role, their formation and the availability of resources for this formation. Twenty national communities sent in their responses to these questions. A summary of these responses is given below followed by a suggested plan of action.

1. Number of Guides

It is heartening to note the increased use of guides along with efforts to prepare more guides for the future. While many guides continue to be Jesuits or other religious, we also see a movement towards having more lay persons take on this role. Another positive feature is the care taken to ensure that at least the new groups receive regular accompaniment on their CLC journey.

Having noted these praiseworthy developments, it must be pointed out nevertheless that we still do not have a sufficient number of guides. The current guides are serving the community with great generosity but they are stretched beyond optimum capacity. As CLC grows in its identity as an Apostolic Community, the members will require to be accompanied in new and diverse ways, calling for a larger pool of well formed guides.

2. Role of the Guide

There is unanimity that the guide plays a central role in the life of a CLC group. He/she promotes personal and spiritual growth, safeguards the Ignatian process, leads communal discernment, facilitates the group in its dynamics and accompanies members towards temporary and permanent commitment. We also note that the guide's role is not static but evolves as the group grows in maturity. A general perception is that a guide is called upon to be more 'directive' in the initial stages. As the group matures, the guide would continue to play a key role but perhaps in a less visible manner.

In some national communities, the guide is a member of the group itself, whereas other communities require that a guide come from outside the group. In some places, when there is no one else available, the guide also takes on the role of coordinator by planning out activities and acting as a link with the national community.

3. Formation of Guides

Experienced members are invited to discern if they can take on this responsibility. The formation programs for guides may comprise a series of weekends or a series of evening sessions or an intensive time of several days together. Peer group support is provided in the form of occasional meetings among the guides themselves for sharing of experiences and helpful practices.

It appears that a lack of proper formation programs has left CLC with fewer guides than we wish to have. Fortunately some national communities have worked out comprehensive plans which are producing good results. The World Secretariat will facilitate the sharing of ideas and materials so that many more can avail of these resources.

4. Challenges faced

An important challenge is that of identifying, motivating and forming new guides. There is reluctance on the part of many members to offer themselves for this service. This reluctance arises either due to time constraints or due to the misconception that this role is reserved for the clergy and religious. Many national communities have yet to devise and implement a proper formation program for guides. Some grapple with constraints of finances and long distances. For those who have already initiated a formation program, the challenge is to update the content and link it more specifically to the DSSE process.

Plans for Follow up

- We fervently encourage all national leadership teams to make the 'Formation of Guides' one of their immediate priorities. This is of particular urgency for those national communities which lack a planned program of formation. You are requested to urgently initiate a plan for the training of Guides, starting from the needs of local groups and drawing on guidelines from our various documents.
- Communities could fruitfully use the DSSE dynamic in identifying persons who could be future guides, arranging for their formation, sending them on this mission and providing them with ongoing support.

- You are urged to read Progressio Supplement no. 64 “The Process of Growth in CLC: Guidelines for Formation” with special reference to section 5.1 “Various Community Roles”. The document is available on our website www.cvx-clc.net
- The World Secretariat will put together a set of guidelines on the Role of the Guide along with topics that can be included in the formation of Guides. This will be put up on the website around October 2011.
- Through the Progressio, we plan to share personal experiences of Guides.
- The world community needs a better sharing of formation resources and experiences. Our Secretariat will approach some national communities requesting that their formation modules be made available to others. But please, do not wait to be asked. If you feel you have something valuable to offer, do come forward and let us know.

B. The DSSE dynamic

In October 2010, our President had invited national communities to reflect on our understanding and practice of the process of Discerning – Sending – Supporting – Evaluating (DSSE). Responses were received from thirty nine national communities. This significant increase in the number of respondents is an encouraging sign of our growth as a world community. An overview of the responses is given below.

1. The Practice of DSSE

Across the world, this dynamic is still in the early stages of development. It is good to note that all the communities who responded have lived at least one experience of DSSE. In most cases, this process is experienced during national meetings and in the workings of the national ExCo. In a few communities we find that DSSE has become part of their CLC language and thought process while many other communities feel they have a long way to go. Overall we can say that CLC as a body has embraced this dynamic but has yet to integrate it properly as a communal practice at all levels of life.

2. Formation for DSSE

At one level, there has been a lot of material prepared and circulated regarding this process and its importance. Members have been informed about the process and its steps along with frequent reminders about its importance for our way of life. Local group meetings are being structured around these steps. Special formation programs have been offered for members in general and group guides in particular. In some cases, an *Ad hoc* committee has been created to study and promote the process.

At another level, the ongoing formation in Ignatian Spirituality has led to a deeper understanding about DSSE. Many are turning to the Spiritual Exercises as a key to read and assimilate the process. Members are encouraged to pray with the four steps and to share and accompany each other along this journey.

3. Our Experience with the Four Steps

Discernment and Evaluation are the two steps which are better understood and more widely implemented. Members are already familiar with these concepts and have been using them for some time already. The process of Sending is practiced by some for the installation of a new national/regional team. It is sometimes used for a common mission taken on at a national level. Communities have expressed difficulties with the step of Sending simply because it has not yet become part of our way of proceeding. There is also lack of clarity regarding who does the sending and with what degree of authority.

The weakest step is that of Supporting. This is generally practiced by praying for those who are sent. Most communities are aware that the process of supporting goes beyond that, but they are uncertain about how to express this support in a concrete manner.

4. The challenges we face

The greatest challenge before us is to grow in our understanding and practice of what it means to be an Apostolic Body in the Church and in the World. It is only within this context that the process of DSSE takes on its full significance. Another challenge is for members to assimilate and live out the Spiritual Exercises as well as to deepen their practice of personal discernment.

The Path Ahead

- All are invited to a careful, reflective reading of Projects 125 (October 2003).
- Members are strongly urged to regularly deepen their experience of the Spiritual Exercises because this is what will animate and sustain us an apostolic body.
- Communities are invited to share their experiences of DSSE in Progressio. This sharing can be seen as one form of 'Supporting' others in living out this dynamic.
- The Secretariat will facilitate sharing of formation resources through the website.
- The ExCo is working on a paper regarding CLC as a 'Lay Apostolic Body'. This will promote a deeper reflection on our identity with a renewed awareness of DSSE as *the* means to build the apostolic body (Fatima document, n. 3.2).

We express here our deep gratitude to those who devote time, talents and energy in their capacity as group guides or as initiators of apostolic action. God bless you for your generosity. Wishing all of you a very Happy Feast of St. Ignatius. May his constant intercession and example inspire us to know, love and follow Christ more closely.

In Our Lord,

Chris Micallef
Vice President

Rita El Ramy
Consultor

Luke Rodrigues s.j.
Vice E.A.