

Blogs

#1 Letter

Hello everyone,

I just arrived after seven or eight hours ... planes were late but arrived safe and sound....No room in the inn! They didn't have keys or envelope for me, so thanks to the security guards on this campus, found my room....

I'm using a public computer in students lounge.... Hope I can get to use my own to send some reflections on meeting...

It's warm but not stifling, as I thought it might be.....

Tomorrow we'll meet with other EA's.....We're on Trinity College campus of Catholic University, opposite the National Shrine in Washington....

Will say goodnight.....

Blessings to you all
Charles

Tuesday evening, July 7

#2 Letters

Greetings everyone,

Woke up to a bright sunny day here in Washington, DC. It was very pleasant to start but warmed up as the day went on.

Our Ecclesial Assistants' 2 day meeting prior to the national Assembly of CLC-USA began with introductions of the 8 EAs present, including Alberto Britto, sj (world vice-EA - until next Feb). EAs from New York, St. Louis, New Orleans, Maryland, Nigeria (an American working through and on leave here this summer), a Korean Jesuit, and myself from Canada.

Alberto B. gave us some worldwide perspective on the importance of FORMATION in CLC, and esp the formation of guides. He used a neat image: without guides, local CLC groups can float but they can't set off and sail forward! He gave us a number of very good points of how to discern these guides, how to organize sessions for forming them, some basic content of these sessions: Spiritual Exercises; knowledge of Scripture, some theological knowledge, know the Ignatian tools and the specific CLC tools (GPs and Charisms, etc), personal growth and group dynamics.

Sound familiar? We had lots of discussion on this. I was surprised that, even though the EAs were in agreement with what he said, they seemed to say that not a lot of this going on in the USA. I thought with gratitude of how we in Canada have been growing well in this area in the last number of years. We still have room for growth in some regions.

We then spent a good time on the Profile and Responsibilities of the EA - I think you are all familiar with this document from the last 2 succinct overview of the role of EAs - internationally, nationally and regionally. Again there was appreciation for this succinct overview of the role of EAs - internationally, nationally and regionally. But a number of them hadn't seen it before! Again good discussion and questions around a number of the points. One in particular was the role of the EA in fostering good relations with the local church. Alberto insists that CLC is a lay association of the Church, and NOT a Jesuit ministry.

We spent some of the afternoon in discussing how to promote CLC among our highschools and in young people (university). And how to get young Jesuits interested in working with CLC people when they are in training and after ordination. The Jesuit from Miami, also President of school, referred to their work with Pre-CLC at the high school. They have it on their website: www.belenjesuits.org. I looked at it. Impressive.

The last part of the afternoon was on how to promote faith and justice awareness in CLC. Some of them spoke of local communities who are "satisfied" with just remaining on a faith-sharing level and community and not experiencing the impulse toward mission, especially in the area of justice and option for the poor. We had a good sharing on this as well.

We ended with the Eucharist together - using the Mass formula for the Holy Spirit, but with the readings of the day - Genesis - and Jacob's wrestling with the angel, and Matthew's Jesus healing the seek and looking at the crowds with compassion - both fitting Scripture text that threw light on our day and its discussions.

After supper I went for a walk to see the National Shrine just 5-7 min walk from here. Got in just before it closed.... What a massive building! Not sure what else to say about it!

Then I went for a relaxing swim at their pool here on campus.... was great.

So that's a full day but well worth it.... John English was mentioned by a number of the guys and tomorrow I will share a little of new Revised Manual I with them...

Hope you are enjoying the summer rhythms.....

Peace in Him....

#3 & 4 days

Hello Everyone,

Sorry, I didn't write last night. Had a problem - a serious one with computer - while trying to delete a virus, I threw the baby out with the bath - that is, all my Netscape files -messages, addresses..... I am using the Jesuit site to write you.... so I will try to see if I can find them on my computer....

Wednesday the EA's met at 9 am and started with (to finish a discussion from yesterday afternoon) the common agreement to do an Open Space session at the Assembly on: Called to be a prophetic community. Concrete proposal - to engage CLC members to do literacy (teaching English) to new immigrants)....

We then got into the "financial co-responsibility" theme. Very interesting and many of same themes from World and our own National Assembly. Alberto gave us examples from around the world how diverse the living out concretely of financial responsibility was.. The National EA has had a budget from the Jesuit Assistency. but this is going to cease in a year or two. How to encourage CLC members to take ownership of CLC financially. The notion of being one Apostolic Body and sharing resources was talked about. I shared our situation. We were told that 70% of USA members do not donate any dues! This can't continue, we said. A very lively discussion moving in the line of what we have been talking about.

I then shared where we were with the Revised Manual I. A number of them had been familiar with our Manuals. But not all. Gave them one of copies of cover and index of the new Manual. They seemed quite interested in it.

We then brought up the question of how to make CLC more known to younger Jesuits and to the Provincials. (Some of the USA Provincials still have an uninformed idea of what CLC is) The EAs have to relate and talk to Provincials and other Jesuits about what is going on in CLC. We then moved naturally into a discussion of the document on the Profiles and Responsibilities of the Ecclesial Assistant (nationally and regionally). Some of them had never seen this document. They found it helpful as a description of who the EA is in relation to the Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian vision, relation to the local church, relation to the National and Regional Council and finally to the Society of Jesus. I personally was delighted that this document was made available to them and that they responded so favourably to it. It has helped us very much in Canada.

Fr. Alberto mentioned that the French CLC put out a pamphlet: Accompagnateurs des groupes CLC - Formation of Guides for CLC. The USA National EA had it translated. I will look at it and then he will distribute it for a slight fee. I think it will be helpful for us as well.

We ended the morning with an evaluation of our day and a half. It was very positive - good content, good process, good listening, good pace, good companionship; good diversity; energy in the group, Fr. Alberto's presence with us, among friends, a need for on-going formation of EAs. then in the afternoon, we had some input from various people:

JEN HORAN - who works with the NEA (Bob Costello, sj) with the young adults - the university groups from LMU in California; the Cura Personalis program - training university CLC people to be facilitators and guides for their peers. It has now grown across the USA in Jesuit universities and others where there are CLC groups beginning (17 groups). A very hopeful sign. This "Cura Personalis" group of 30+ young people (university) are here with us with their EA, Fr. Tri (Vietnamese) who works at LMU.... the challenge is the transition from University style CLC to a post-university adult type of CLC.

then LOIS CAMPBELL - talked with us and both her world ExCo concerns and the Regional. They are integrating more of the Vietnamese and Korean groups into the USA body. There are about 70-80 of both groups here at this Assembly. Another interesting fact I didn't know: the USA CLC does not yet use the World model of Assembly - delegates from each local community and being a decision making body. It's more a "come whoever wants". Has disadvantages because it's hard to come to focus on concrete orientations for the National Body for the next 5 years.... She also mentioned that the Society of Jesus and CLC are beginning to understand the partnership they share - one learns from the other.....

Finally ANNE MARIE AND LIEM - outgoing President and incoming President - were with us and gave their impressions of CLC USA and how we they see it developing and how the EAs could assist in this. Liem especially is strong on a different kind of formation needed - one that is rooted in being called by Christ and having this awareness experientially and moving us to Mission - where Christ is calling us.

We ended with the Eucharist. And we had the evening free. A rich day of sharing. I enjoyed my swim in the evening.

Today, Thursday,

There were optional pre-Assembly sessions on various topics (Just Faith, for example). I decided to go to the Holocaust Museum at the Smithsonian Museum. It was a wrenching kind of experience to see all that horror of the Holocaust laid out in one place - its social and political roots with the rise of the Third Reich, the propaganda against the Jews, the systematic annihilation of a people, the "final solution". How perverse human beings can be to other human beings. I came back better informed but also sobered and questioning how we could have let this happen. And then there was a short video of Romeo Dallaire on the Rwanda genocide - only 50 years later! And a type of ethnic cleansing is still going on - eg. Darfur, Bosnia....!!

After a good siesta I was able to begin the Assembly at 4 pm. Opened with some orientations of the theme and then an opening Eucharist. They have a beautiful chapel-church on this campus.

At dinner, which followed, I met Yvonne and Dorothee from Rwanda who will be sharing their story tomorrow morning. Good to see Yvonne (from World Assembly).

This evening the 225 participants me to tell the story of each Region, like we did at our NA. Wonderful. Each region had brought a poster of their apostolic work to be put on walls. Then they brought a poster with a painted symbol of their region as well and talked about where they have come in past 5 years, what their outreach is, and what challenges. It went quite well. Our Julie got up at the last and gave a brief summary of some of our national assembly's directions. Lise Baillareon and Nil-Luc Lariviere from Montreal arrived just at the beginning of this session. We were welcomed at the beginning by Anne Marie and Liem. We heard the many sounds of children this evening, with a number of families who were here with their young children.

the Assembly participants is quite a diversity - more so than they have every had before - a diversity in cultures and in age. Lots of young adults there which brings much vitality - not unlike what our young people brought in Guelph..... A good beginning.....

I'm off to bed.....

Pray for us....

Blessings to you all

charles

#5 Letters

Hello Everyone,

It's Friday night here in Washington and I'm not going out to see "Washington by night"! I'll try to give you a summary of "Washington by day"!

Friday morn. began with a beautiful prayer together in Asian style. we brought up symbols of earth, water, fire (candle) and Bible. We were led by a young adult moving slowly in two opposite circles and guided with meditation on journeying with Christ, with our Ignatius and other Jesuit saints. We stopped to hear God's word proclaimed and then we did a profound bow with our bodies and hands in Asian style towards the Scriptures. A final prayer led by leader and then a bow of reverence to each other as we all faced into the centre looking towards each other. Very quieting and engaging. One of the best done prayers so far.

The Pat Carter - our Assembly guide - gave her reflections on the mood and response of the Assembly to this point.... she gave an orientation - of listening to the Holy Spirit in the events of today.

Then Angelique who was one of USA delegates at Fatima, gave Power Point presentation of theh world Assembly. Was good length and good to hear another viewpoint on the World Assembly.

She then introduced Yvonne and Dorothee - two CLC people from Rwanda. They gave us a very clear presentation of the reality of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the process of the reconciliation and peace commission after this horrible event, and how CLC members discerned their common mission (working with diocesan commission and the larger Reconciliation commission) - to work with the AIDS victims that resulted from the ravages of the genocide - victims and perpetrators in this 100 days genocide of 1 million people. Very encouraging and inspiring how they kept a sense of hope in all this, and the response to their Mission with Christ's mission in their situation. It was long - perhaps too long to take in all this data - but I believe people appreciated deeply what they witnessed to and were touched by this presentation - not unlike our experience of presentation of Romero House at Guelph, though obviously a much more painful situation in Rwanda.

We didn't have the time for reflection on this experience as was planned. We followed this with a short break and then some orientations for the IMMERSION experiences planned for the afternoon. After lunch we went by buses (some had their sessions right on campus) downtown and to Capitol Hill. they were several choices - advocacy groups for justice, Native peoples' museum, meeting a congressman, health care, etc. I went to the group called " BREAD FOR THE WORLD' - a collective christian advocacy group towards alleviating hunger in US and in foreign countries. We sat around a table and we led by their team to think about what we are doing about hunger in our local situations (I went because of experience of our Drop In on Sundays at Immaculate Conception parish in Winnipeg) and discussed the causes of hunger. Then this team put this question of hunger in the context of the biblical perspective - God's desire that all people be fed from the earth and the work of human hands - and how because of our social sin, there are people who do not have equal opportunity for enough food. One of the concrete ways this group works is writing to members of Congress to improve bills that provide for the hungry in USA and in foreign aid. All of the Americans wrote a letter before we left. They had the names of their congress representatives and one of thier team was to bring this over to the government body that relates to Congress. Very practical for people in parishes and groups, such as CLC.... I believe we have a simiilar group in CANada - Micah challenge?Was very informative and helpful to us all - to put our call to prophetic mission into practice.

we had some free time. So I went for a good swim before supper. We had the Eucharist at 6 pm, presided by Fr Alberto. It was supposed to be as a "Spanish liturgy". But except for a couple hymns (that most people didn't know) it didn't have the vitalilty that I have experienced with Spanish speaking groups. Fr.Alberto gave a long talk on meaning of prophetic (based on fr.Nicolas' talk).

After supper Eileen Burke Sullivan gave the presentation on Formation - I believe it used the world exco document. There is a new document being prepared (end of summer) on the formation of Guides that Alberto told me about. Don't know if we can integrate this into our new Manual I....Must send it to Gilles and Barbara to see if this is possible.

It was an intense and tiring day. But well worth it.

Saturday is dedicated to the OPEN SPACE process..... will report on this later this evening...

Blessings on you all.....

Charles

#6 Letters

-Greetings all,

Saturday evening here. End of a long and full day.

We begin with a group meditation on Jeremiah's text on the potter. It was a lectio divina guided with some questions for reflection, ended with song "We hold a treasure". It was very calming. But not engaging like yesterday's Asian type prayer.

After this Pat Carter - our Assembly guide - gave her reflections. For some reason she did a kind of examen on yesterday's event, preceded by another "get in touch with your body" exercise. She ended by orienting us to the Open Space mood.

Today was the OPEN SPACE sessions - a forum for gathering priorities and concerns from the grass roots. We had done this at the World and it was very effective. Liem (the incoming president) had trained people in this process and they presented how it functioned very well. We did it in 3 languages in Fatima! One language was easy! Anyway, it generated lots of energy in the assembly. We had 3 time slots with 15 groups possible in each time slot: 10:30 -12 noon; 1pm to 2:30; 2:45 to 4:15. Some similar themes that we had at the World and at our National Assemblies All the notes from the groups were to be assembled and put in a booklet which will be given out tomorrow morning (Sunday)!.... After lunch, I went for a swim, then I went to the last session on how to do communal discernment for a common mission, or how to be more authentically a prophetic apostolic body. There was a lot of good sharing in the group. It was well facilitated. And we ended by doing a round on what highlights or significant points we heard from the group. I thought there was a lot of desire to respond to the call to be prophetic community and still the struggle on how, what process best helps towards concretising this desire. I left quite hopeful from this group.

At our "nutrition break", we had Korean and Vietnamese foods - crab dip (not unlike Sharon's!), crab cakes, special rice cookies, crackers and humus, etc. Everything was delicious. The local Vietnamese & Korean CLC groups must have organized it. During this time our Canadian observers - Lise, Luc, Julie and myself - met in the corner to reflect on our experience - the consolations and desolations - and what might we bring back to our Canadian scene. Being an observer and in another country had its disconsolate moments. But the common bonds of our Christian and Ignatian roots was clearly affirmed. I think one very positive gift was to see all the young people present (the group from the Universities) plus the children of parents in CLC. Also the large number of

Corean and Vietnamese members in CLC was quite a change from 5 years ago, Lois Campbell told us. And this brought a new face and life to CLC USA. We also realised that in Canada we are doing well, if not better, when it comes to formation of new members, of guides and facilitators. Some groups are still struggling with this. A common struggle in both countries is, I would say, to keep our eyes focused on how we are to keep moving into the mission in the world that Christ calls us to. And how to be concrete about this. We were glad to have this time of evaluation and appropriation together. Julie left after the Eucharist.

At 5:30 we had the Eucharist led by the Asian contingent (Vietnamese, Corean, Philippino). It was very alive with music and with dance and ethnic dress. They had invited the local Vietnamese and Korean CLC groups with their families. What a crowd. One felt was in an international setting, with all the additional people at the Eucharist. The 2 Rwandan members - Yvonne and Dorothee - brought up the gifts of bread and wine. The presider was Fr. Tri - the EA from California, the one who works with all the young adults at Loyola Marymount University. He gave a fine homily on the prophetic tears, prophetic love and prophetic joy. Quite moving. Though it went on quite long. With all the other added elements for this Mass, it was almost 2 hrs long! But there was a wonderful spirit. We did a prayer of sending for 3 CLC members who were entering religious life (one a Jesuit, one a Carmelite sisters community) and the third to the diocesan seminary.

At the end of the Eucharist, we attempted to take a group photo on the steps of the chapel. They took it but it was hard to get everyone in..... Then we went and had a banquet in the dining room. The room was buzzing with excitement. Tables had been set with tablecloths and a flower. Very tasteful.

The evening ended with a kind of celebration. Began with Korean group of singers and dancers and a group of young drummers. Very good. Then a few skits with the children. And one with the adults. But then it lost energy with a few talks. They perhaps needed to let people sing and dance. So by 10 pm I left.

Tomorrow morning is the presentation of the OPEN SPACE booklets as orientations and concerns to bring back to the local communities. I don't think it will have the succinctness of our Assembly's final document. Perhaps our supplement with the results of the Open Space groups will be similar to what we did today.. But there were a lot of good themes and concrete suggestions discussed to work on for the next 5 years.

We will have the Closing Eucharist and then people leave by car, plane, etc. for their homes.

I am glad I came and that Julie and Lise and Luc from Montreal were here as well. Our Canadian reality and CLC across our country have some clear differences from the USA reality. There are things we can learn but also things we can be thankful for in our own ongoing evolution.

Blessings and thanks for your prayers..

Charles

#7 Final

Hi Everyone,

It's Sunday afternoon and I am waiting in Chicago airport for my flight back to Winnipeg. It'll be good to get back to "our home and native land", after almost a week in USA. Thought I would send a last "report" from the USA Assembly.

I had breakfast with 2 delightful Korean women, and an American. The Korean women looked younger than they really were - they said they were 51. They were enjoyable to be with for the last breakfast. This Assembly has been so greatly enriched by the presence of the Korean and Vietnamese communities. They bring a wonderful vitality- a number of them came with their children, as well - to the whole CLC USA. Many people remarked on this.

We began at 9 am today with the Assembly guide reflecting on the past day, and then on the past 3 days. She did another kind of examen with the group. It was a different way of doing the role of the process guide for the Assembly. It didn't quite have the same quality as our process guide at the World Assembly, and at our own National Assembly. It went on a bit long, I thought.

They had scheduled a lot of concluding things for the morning. So it seemed a very rushed morning. They presented the booklet with all the sheets of the Open Space - 45 pp +. I wondered at the value of using all this paper, only one sided, when it could have been sent by email. We then spent 10 mins or so in small groups with people around us sharing the overall experience of the weekend. Then there was time for an open forum. People could come to the microphone and say what they had received from the weekend. There was certainly some rich experiences - the internationality, world-wide sense of CLC came through with the Korean, Vietnamese, Rwandan and even Canadian presence; a great sense of the importance of mission and being called to be a lay prophetic community, etc.. We did a collection, at the suggestion of one of participants, for the Rwandan women and children. They collected over 2000\$. "Stephen's pocket" - re-visited. Good gesture for the closing.

Then they did all the thank you's. It was done fast. Many more mentioned than we had done at our National. Then we had to have a break before starting the Eucharist. Already we were behind the schedule. A number of us had to get the shuttle for the airport leaving at 12:30. They just started the Eucharist at 11:45. Then there were 3 long readings (not the day's readings). And when a number of us had to leave, the homily (by the National EA, Fr Costello), was still going on. It was disappointing to have to leave the final Eucharist. In addition, they were going to do a permanent commitment for someone, plus the sending of the outgoing President and the incoming, and I think something else before the conclusion of the Eucharist.. They had enough for another 50 mins. The kitchen staff was waiting patiently in the dining room when I passed through.....

Had a great chat with one of participants who was heading to the airport in the same Shuttle. We talked about some of the differences of the two Assemblies – since she asked me about it. Certainly, this USA assembly was a wonderful experience, well planned and an enormous number of people involved in making it happen. There were over 200 people at this “conference”. And many rich graces for all of us. I was glad we – Julie, Lise and Luc (from CVX in Quebec), and myself- came. But as I think of our own Assembly in Guelph, I am grateful for all that went into that Assembly and those who put such energy and efforts into preparing for what did happen to us when we finally gathered at Guelph. In both of these events, I have seen the powerful action of the Holy Spirit of the Risen Christ doing what only God’s transforming love can do in us and through us, in our world.

For both Assemblies, it is the ongoing living out of this mission as a prophetic lay community that will manifest concretely what we have received, and continue to receive, so generously from God.

Blessings on you all,

Charles