Link between the World Executive Council and the Christian Life Community

PROJECTS

World CLC Day 2021:
Rejoice in the Holy Spirit. Let us Gather to Discern and Act!

Nº 175, December 2020

Original: English

"Mary said, *«Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.*
May it be done to me according to your word.»
Then the angel departed from her."
Luke 1,38.

Next year we commemorate the 500th anniversary of St. Ignatius' conversion to a life in the Spirit. The Society of Jesus and many in the Ignatian Family are observing this time as an ignatian year – "*Ignatius 500*" (20 May 2021 – 31 July 2022). Like Mary who heard and responded to the invitation of God through the angel Gabriel in bringing forth the birth of Jesus, St. Ignatius noticed the movements of the Holy Spirit stirring in his being and experienced a newness of life. It is worth noting that St. Ignatius experienced this conversion over the course of a year as he was convalescing from an injury. It is about a year now that our world has been in various stages of lockdown or restrictions of movement due to the pandemic. As an Ignatian community, we can still celebrate how the Holy Spirit works through these setbacks and brings forth gifts that generate such lasting graces.

Among these graces, we are especially grateful for those Ignatian spiritual and communal practices that help us foster a culture of discernment as we strive to live out the Mission of God in our lives. In particular, we are grateful for the process of **communal discernment** to help us work together with our CLC members and many others in the decision-making and engagement of action to create beloved community, especially on those frontier areas where life is especially vulnerable or marginalized.

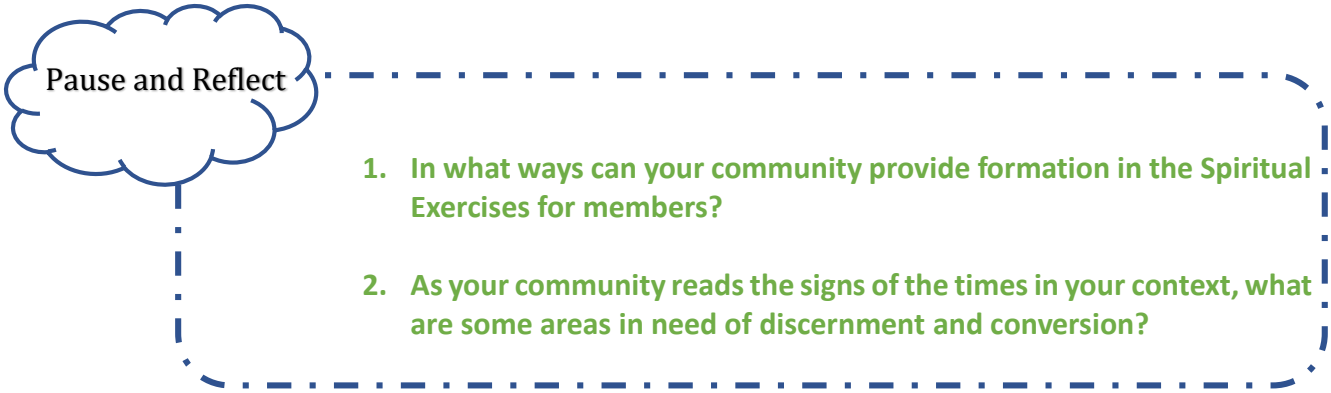
I. Promoting a Culture of Discernment

In the General Assembly in Buenos Aires, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we recognized our experience of communal discernment, based on Ignatian Spirituality, as a special gift that we can share with the Church and the World.

Personal and communal spiritual life are needed for discernment. Promoting discernment is to promote a culture where we will be able to find the movements of the Spirit to help people in

making better decisions for the common good in ordinary relationships, in family, in the social life, organizations, Church, ecology, economy, education, politics, etc. Pope Francis has insisted upon the importance of discernment in every remarkable document: *Evangelii Gaudium, Amoris laetitia, Laudato Si´, Gaudete et exultate, Christus vivit, Querida Amazonia and Fratelli tutti*. To share and support the practice of communal discernment in different social realities, especially where life is more fragile, is one of the best services of CLC to the Mission.

Foundational to our spirituality and way of proceeding are the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola which began with Ignatius' convalescence after the battle in Pamplona 500 years ago. A source for deepening one's personal relationship to Christ in the context of one's life, the Spiritual Exercises offer methods of reflection to integrate experience, inner movements, understanding and moral decision-making. In our context today, there are many battles and convalescences that also need our discernment and conversion.

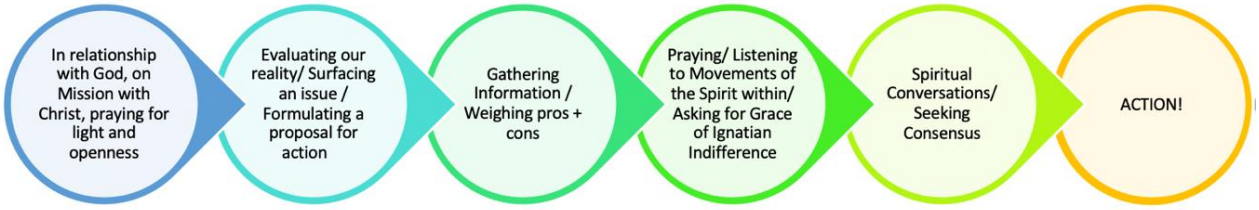


II. Communal Discernment

Our World Ecclesiastical Assistant, Arturo Sosa SJ, wrote a *Letter on Discernment in Common* to all in the Society of Jesus (27 September of 2017). He noted several properties of communal discernment: **(a)** choosing the matter well, **(b)** knowing who should take part in the discernment and why, **(c)** interior freedom, **(d)** union of minds and hearts, **(e)** knowledge about how to discern, **(f)** prayer in common, **(g)** spiritual conversation, **(h)** the systematic practice of the *examen* and **(i)** establishing how the final decision is to be made, placing all our confidence in God.

Communal discernment for action can begin in a variety of ways: a suggestion by one or more members who observe a need or injustice, a prompting by the guide or coordinator who notices patterns in the desires for action among the members, a request from outside the group, an experience which inspires one or more members of the group, a recognition that a group is too insular or inward looking and would do well to turn outward toward others, etc.

The graphic below shows the elements that "flow throughout the process" of communal discernment. The elements do not necessarily follow in this exact order, nor are they necessarily inclusive of all possible steps. The graphic offers a general overview of the process. A more in-depth explanation would require more time and space. We offer this as a taste because we really want to hear from you, our world community. We believe that your stories can help better illustrate the experience, the depth, the details, the nuances of the processes of communal discernment—for the benefit of improving and deepening all our understanding!



III. Learning from our own experiences

The best way to learn how to discern is to practice discernment in our community. We know that there is a wealth of experience in each and every community, and we are very interested in learning about and sharing your stories on communal discernment, stories that can illustrate and inspire others to engage in this process.

In Buenos Aires, our members participated in processes of communal discernment and were encouraged to move the tent to their communities and other places for a communal encounter with God and to look together for the gifts of discernment. Many National Communities from different continents have been doing this, replicating the discernment processes in their unique reality in order to listen to the call of God. Many have shared how they benefitted from the experience and gained a deeper understanding of what communal discernment is about.

Below are some brief examples of communal discernment processes and projects from our community in different parts of the world.

1) **A Parish Project.** A new CLC group in a parish feels a strong sense of being on mission with Christ; each expresses a strong desire to do something together. They also express concern about the isolation and disconnection that people in the community are experiencing during this time of pandemic. The guide invites them into a process of submitting proposals for a common project, and together they dedicate a couple of meetings to prayer, gathering information from the pastor of the parish, formulating proposals, sharing pros and cons, spiritual conversations until they find consensus on a simple project to write letters to members of the parish community who may feel isolated during this time of pandemic.

2) **In Working with them, a community discerns on how to better serve the Homeless.** Seeing the needs of the migrant homeless in their city, a CLC community discerned together and decided to build a shelter for the homeless. After the decision was made and the action taken, the CLC members realized the need for more help but also the need to raise awareness of the homeless people themselves. They organized a series of group meetings to invite several young members to reflect and discern how they could participate in that communal ministry on their personal and community level. They invited the young people to sit with the homeless, listen to their stories, to accompany them, and to see them as loved by God. It was a process of listening to the Spirit, understanding the needs of the people they serve, showing availability to the community's calling and many rounds of spiritual conversations. It is a beautiful way to show how a community can discern together to respond to a call or the reality of the society.

3) **National Ministry to Migrants.** A CLC National Community discerned together to see how the lay identity of CLC could make a difference to the Church. Therefore, they decided to contribute to the renewal of spirituality of the laity through education (formation) programs and develop apostolic centers in poor areas to serve the marginalized. The important part in their process is the sharing of the work report as well as the evaluation made in the national assembly each year. The sharing and evaluation of their ministry became the basis of the continuous discernment to be made according to the signs of the

times. As a result of their openness to God, the target of their apostolic centers was to serve migrant women and poor children when they were set up, and the centers were transformed to be multi-cultural family centers. It was not a smooth process. At one stage, when more new members thought about the scale of the work in the centers, fear and difficulties seemed to grow. Members began to have different opinions or expectations of the centers. With the help of a guide, they started a discerning process to contemplate God's love in action. From their experience, we understand that discernment is not an easy process. Sometimes, negative feelings or fear may arise, as we are all human. It is important for us to go back to the roots and start to reflect and pray together again. The more patient and calm we are, the easier we can hear the voice of God. Moreover, the DSSE (Discerning, Sending, Supporting, and Evaluating) process also contributes positively to the communal discernment.

4) **Seeds in Areas of Conflict.** CLC members live in a region where there is much polarization and conflict. With this common concern they invite members from other CLC groups in the same region to discern together on this problem. After several meetings of prayer, evaluation, proposals, and spiritual conversations, they decide to organize *spaces for reconciliation.* They invite people from all parts of the region, and they apply a methodology of listening, sharing, and identifying common principles. In creating safe spaces where people can dialogue and speak their truth, they develop a better understanding of one another, seeing each other as real people worthy of their care. By opening up this process more publicly, their witness to principles of brotherhood/ sisterhood and respectful dialogue inspired others. They did not solve the political problem, but they offered seeds of hope and brotherhood/ sisterhood in the middle of a field of battle. It is a call for a culture of discernment.

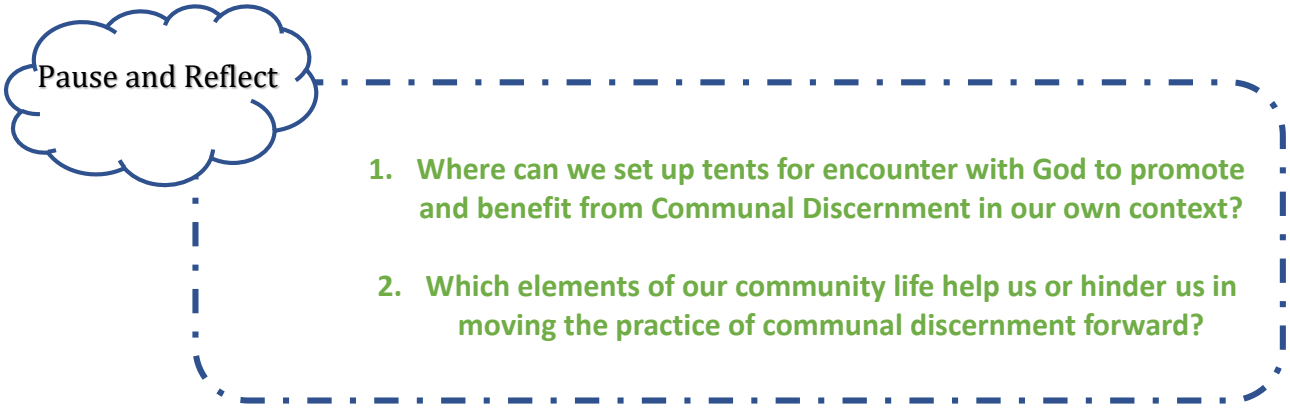
5) **Joining an International Ecological Movement.** An international movement in ecology forms and requests the membership of CLC. The Executive Council considers this request and discerns whether to join. It evaluates this proposal by considering how participation will work, how well it resonates with CLC priorities and the mandates of CLC from prior assemblies, how it will engage CLC members. In bringing it to prayer, the group feels affirmation that this movement is of the Holy Spirit, that it is in sync with the movements expressed at the Lebanon Assembly for the Ecology frontier, and that it corresponds with the Pope's message in *Laudato Si´* on the need to respond to the urgent cries of the Earth worldwide. It decides to join and encourage its members to participate through communications on *Facebook*, in initiatives with Jesuit and Ignatian networks and in its participation at the United Nations.

IV. Setting up Tents of Communal Discernment

In *Exodus*, the People of God set up a Tent of Encounter in their desert. The impressive spiritual experience of the Buenos Aires Assembly happened inside a tent—a big, white tent in the middle of a poor neighborhood of a Latin American periphery. In the tent, we felt that the main competence of CLC is to open and lead processes of discernment.

As CLC members, we are encouraged to move the tent (a sacred space to find God) to the realities in need. God is talking to us in our personal human reality-- in deserts, mountains, valleys, cities, frontiers, etc.—wherever we find ourselves. The scriptural story of the wounded man the Samaritan took care of is a stark reminder not to overlook the suffering and the poor in our very midst. Since our Lebanon Assembly in 2013, we are especially mindful of those frontier areas of family, youth, ecology, and poverty. Our communal discernment processes can assist us in deciding where and how best to act. Our competence is transversal. The tent of encounter and discernment can be set up in any event, in any place and for any person.

Inspired by the Buenos Aires experience, the World Executive Council reaffirms that Biblical idea: we are to set up a tent for the communal encounter with God and to look together for the gifts of Discernment.



Surely you can imagine how to share communal discernment practices in your daily life, where you work, where you live. If we want to find ways to build a tent for discernment, we need to experience and deepen in the true meaning of our spirituality. We need to feel the demand for discernment in our society which can be full of noise, superficiality, societal pressures, and judgment. We need to feel the compassion in sharing our learning. We need to feel in our hearts a passion for the Gospel messages of Christ's Joy, Unity, Peace and Love. We want to rejoice together in the Spirit! Like Mary and Ignatius, we want to be open and attentive to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and to be available to respond: to Deepen, to Share, and to Go Forth!

Invitations!

Send Stories!

- To all communities (national and local), please share your stories of Communal Discernment! In this way we can help improve our practices and inspire one another
- Forward to: - exsec@cvx-clc.net

Develop Practices!

- To Formation teams and Regional teams, we encourage you to develop resources and processes to help in deepening a Culture of Discernment and in sharing our practices of Communal Discernment within and among local groups, and beyond.

Share Joy!

- Art and beauty are important to celebrate and share our joy!
- We invite all communities and all members to share a photo, image, artwork, video, message, etc. on social media on World CLC Day -- March 25th, 2021.
- It can be a picture of your community or some other expression of gratitude for the graces received through CLC and Ignatian Spirituality.
- Use hashtag in our social media (Instagram: @cvx-clc; Twitter: @CVX_CLC; Facebook: CVX-CLC) #WeAreCLC, #SomosCVX, #NousSommesCVX, #Ignatian Family

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Rome, 8 December 2020

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary