

# Coming into the National Assembly 2009

Lê Thanh Liêm

The Holy Spirit indeed works in a most mysterious way. I oftentimes remind myself of a writing of Archbishop Oscar Romero, in which he reminded us that it is good sometimes to take a long look back to see how the Holy Spirit had led us.<sup>1</sup>

We started the planning for the National Assembly last July in St. Louis during the annual NCC Meeting, mainly designing a framework for logistics. But our Loving God might be already at work on the essence long before that.

## **The D&O Journey**

D&O is short for Diversity and Organization. The committee was formed following the Miami Assembly in response to a future reality of the Society's provincial restructuring. It was charged with studying and proposing a new structure for CLC-USA. It has representation from the various cultural reality of our community, mainly speaking the cultural diversity that is defined mainly by the prominent languages spoken – English, Spanish, Korean and Vietnamese. Shortly after it added the representation for youth and young adults (YAYA).

We thought that the committee would have some clear picture of a concrete structure in 3 years. Two years into the process, the committee gradually came to a new realization. A new structure must not be for the sole purpose of management effectiveness. But the primary purpose of a new structure must be one that would effectively facilitate and empower communities to grow more fully in the CLC Charism. However, that natural growth is closely related to and associated with the native cultures that are being lived out right now in our community. That realization made a paradigm shift in vision and process; a new structure for us must be one emerging from our lived nature of Ignatian spirituality, communal connectedness and apostolic actions. The committee realized that its function will no longer to draw up a structure but to facilitate a process so that the community itself will draw and make real that supporting structure. The committee realized it is most important to usher the community into this paradigm so that the community can participate in the process from the grassroots level for only grassroots participation would allow such structure to emerge.

The Pittsburgh Conference last year was the first step to bring the community into the process by inviting communities to reflect and share with other communities the graced histories of the regions and the cultural groups.

## **The First Pittsburgh Conference: The discernment on our graced histories**

“It looks like a sheet of music.” That was an observation of one participant at the First Pittsburgh Conference upon seeing all the history timelines of all the regions and cultural groups and the Youth and Young Adults neatly stacked together. “It was beautiful,” she continued.

The conference at first was meant to be a workshop to follow the Leadership Workshop in Rome that Lois and Mong-Hang attended in November of 2007. It had 2 parts. The first was a reflection on the graced histories of the regions and the cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Minister to the Future, Archbishop Oscar Romero.

groups – that includes YAYA. The second part was workshops dedicated to 2 leadership modules on communal discernment and conflict resolution. Many were looking forward to learning new things on leadership but it was the reflection and sharing on the graced histories that opened us up as a community to a new consolation and a glimpse of new vision. Listening to the sharing, we came to see clearer how God has gathered and nourished each regions and cultural groups through all those years in their uniqueness of proceeding and circumstances; each story is a sign of God's presence and love. We saw clearer the graced history of CLC-USA as an apostolic body – each local community is like a stream pouring its water – life and energy – into a larger river heading out to the vast ocean, which is our world. We were invited to contemplate, even only briefly, the potential vitality of CLC-USA when all its communal and personal components would converge into one single body that is apostolic in nature. Our diversity is actually a gift, not a problem to be resolved. Could our diversity actually be our best strength? Where is the Holy Spirit leading us as a community with this new realization?

### **The World Assembly's Fatima experience**

Right after the Pittsburgh Conference some of us gathered in St. Louis in July for our annual NCC meeting. Two main tasks: prepare for the World Assembly in Fatima and kick off the preparation for the National Assembly 2009. We spent a great deal of time discern and discuss about a visual symbol that would embody who and what we are at this juncture.

The 2 symbols that we brought to Fatima both embody the celebration of our diversity but called to be one body in our uniqueness: The wreath of different color threads weaving together but remain distinct, the circles of quotes of Ignatian Spirituality in different languages embracing the radiating Christ in the center. The Fatima Assembly was a confirmation on the gift of diversity. We witnessed over 60 countries with many languages and cultures gathered to celebrate the sense of being called to be one apostolic body around Christ. All communities have their unique way of responding and journeying to into this one apostolic body, but all also share the same "DNA" of sort. The beauty and the graceful harmony are in the differences made possible by sharing the same core and embracing one another as they are.

At Fatima, we also received a message of both an invitation and a challenge from Father General Adolfo Nicolás. That is to deepen our sense of God through Ignatian Spirituality and CLC Charism: to see with the Eyes of God, to hear with the Hearing of God, to feel with the Heart of God, and finally to speak with the Word of God. It is a challenge and an invitation of becoming a prophetic lay community for the Church and for our world. That challenge places formation of our members to be the priority of priorities, very much in line with the voice raised unanimously in the summer of 2004 in our Miami Assembly.

### **The National Assembly 2009**

It has not happened yet but there is a sense of convergence at this assembly in Washington this summer.

Will the graces of the two Pittsburgh Conferences culminate into an experience?

Our country is experiencing a unique moment in its political history, and Washington, despite all of its negative perception, is the epic center of this reality of

national politics. How will we embrace this reality of politics so that we can effectively articulate the Word of God to a secular world?

How concretely apostolic are we?

What is exactly Formation, personally and communally?

Will we enter a process for national discernment as one community rich in its diversity to be a more effective apostolic and prophetic body? And for what?

What will we bring to the assembly, and what will we take back to our communities?

There are indeed more questions that can be answered. “God is the architect in this enterprise but we are the workers. Christ is the messiah but we are the ministers.”<sup>2</sup> All the answers lie with each one of us, in our hands, in our hearts. Thus we are invited to gather in Washington this July:

- To be fully alive,
- To be fully ourselves,
- To take our rightful position in the community.

Much is waiting for us to witness, to live, to experience, and to permeate, in Washington this July. Please come!

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<sup>2</sup> Minister to the Future, Archbishop Oscar Romero.