

Gathering to be Leaven

Pat Carter



Pat Carter is the single mom of an adolescent son, Josh. She works as a marketing director in a manufacturing firm in St. Louis. She is on the RENEW core team in her parish, the liturgy committee, and parish council.

She participated in the Bridges Program in St. Louis both as a director and guide. She has been a member of Sodality/CLC since her sophomore year of high school (a while ago) and has held several national leadership roles including office manager, regional rep, and is past-president of NCLC. She is currently the webmaster for NCLC's web site and is the layout editor for HARVEST.

After the 1999 National Assembly, the National Coordinating Council (NCC) discerned that CLC-USA would have national assemblies every five years instead of every two. Because of the length of time between assemblies, it was suggested that in the years between assemblies, CLCers attend conferences and gatherings of other Ignatian and like-minded groups. The purpose for this was two-fold. One, it would give CLCers an opportunity to come together and share with each other beyond regional activities between national assemblies, and secondly, it would enable CLC to be more visible. So leavening would happen two ways: insights from the conference that were shared with other CLCers would enliven CLC, and CLC's participation would provide an additional ingredient that would add a special flavor to the gathering.

Since then, CLCers have attended: Encuentro 2000 in Los Angeles, the Ignatian Spirituality Conference in Seattle in 2001, the Small Christian Community Convocation in San Antonio in 2002, and the Ignatian Spirituality Conferences in St. Louis in the summers of 1999 and 2002. At each of these events, CLC members have gathered as a community to reflect together on the graces and challenges being received at that particular event. Some of these have been gatherings of less than 10. Others, like the Ignatian Spirituality Conference in St. Louis in 2002, brought together about 60 people which represented about 10% of the attendees.

The Ignatian Spirituality Conference 2002 included CLCers not only from every region in the USA, but English-Canada, and even from the World CLC in the person of Fernando Salas, S.J., the Ecclesial Assistant to WCLC. CLCers were very visible in many activities of both of the Ignatian Spirituality Conferences in St. Louis as planners, panel members, and workshop presenters. CLC was certainly a leaven for this event.

I was privileged to be the facilitator at the gathering in St. Louis last summer, and I would like to share some of those reflections with you. The first gathering was a rather informal one right before the conference actually began, during registration time, so many people had not arrived yet or were getting themselves registered and settled. But for those who were able to come, it was an opportunity to meet other CLCers from around the country and be able to connect with them during the conference.

The second gathering was held on Saturday afternoon during a time that had been set aside to provide this type of opportunity to groups. Besides people from all over the country and world, the gathering also included a wonderful diversity in age of members and length of membership. Some had been CLC members for 40 or more years and others were brand new to CLC. The gathering followed an intense day of talks and workshops on Friday and a panel of speakers Saturday morning which included: Jim Hug, S.J., from Center of Concern which focused on the disproportionate amount of resources used by First World countries, especially the United States; Dr. Trileigh Tucker, Co-Director of Ecological Studies at Seattle University who focused on our oneness with the universe and with each other; Dr. Timothy Muldoon, Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies, Philosophy and Theology at Mount Aloysius College in Cresson, Pennsylvania, touched on the young adults' need for Ignatian Spirituality; and Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., the Executive Director of the Loyola Institute for Spirituality, attuned us to Hispanic ministry and the Exercises.

After introductions, the participants were asked to reflect and share on three questions:

*What concerns did I hear in the morning's sessions; what resonated within me?
What graces do CLC and our Catholic faith offer in response to these concerns?
What can we take back home to affect our inter/national movement?*

Responses to these questions varied from personal insights to challenges to CLC and the broader church to respond to the needs of the world. Here are some of my reflections on these responses.

WHAT CONCERNS DID I HEAR IN THE MORNING'S SESSIONS? WHAT RESONATED WITHIN ME?

As I look over the responses the common thread that seems to run through them all is a sense of connectedness with others and all of creation. That the smallest act of one person can have an impact on the world. Whether people spoke of recycling, breathing the breath of God, bringing Generation Xers into CLC, developing a collaborative relationship between CLC and the Jesuits, they were all speaking of relationship.

WHAT GRACES DOES CLC AND OUR CATHOLIC FAITH OFFER IN RESPONSE TO THESE CONCERNS?

The responses to this question seemed to be a call to go back to our roots of Ignatian Spirituality and CLC to gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for these two foundations of our way of life. A great amount of CLC history was present in the room with about 9 or 10 past presidents of NCLC there. But how much of our history as a national and world movement are we aware? How much are CLCers exposed to the General Principles in their formation? Ignatian Spirituality offers wonder tools like the Examen and discernment processes. Do we use these in our individual lives and the lives of our communities?

WHAT CAN WE TAKE BACK HOME TO AFFECT OUR INTER/NATIONAL MOVEMENT?

The responses to this question again ranged from personal, concrete decisions (abstain from meat one day a week), to suggestions for particular CLC response (encourage the use of the Spiritual Exercises in whatever format that works), to broader visions (see our own age and ethos more clearly). Janice Brown, who had been one of the pioneers in developing CLC formation programs, reminded us that CLC's spirituality has always been grounded in mission.

So what do we take home with us? In Paul Duckro's talk, he refers to the reality that once we leave a gathering, no matter how inspiring the event may be, the concerns of daily life begin to overwhelm the spirit of the event and we become drawn back into the everyday details of our lives. It seems to me though, that even if the inspiration seems to fade, it is not completely gone. It is like leaven that continues to work quietly under the surface. Perhaps there is not a perceptible change, but there is a slight shift in our world view. When we come together as CLC and share our reflections with each other, the experience is shared and multiplied. One person's experience resonates with another's and a greater communal consciousness develops. We are leaven to each other.

As we prepare for the World Assembly, it seems that this sense of developing a deeper communal consciousness needs attention. As we discuss how we are moving from a community of apostles to an apostolic community (at local, regional, national, and international levels), we need to be more aware of the importance of each individual's input into the discernment process that is already happening. While a particular discernment process will happen in Nairobi among all the delegates, the delegates come with the deliberations and input from all the local communities around the world. This collective wisdom is then the material for discernment.

But the leavening does not stop at the World Assembly. The fruit of the Assembly then comes back to the national and local communities for further reflection, testing, evaluating. How does this new awareness work in the practical living out of our lives? This on-going reflection together begins a new cycle of leavening as new awarenesses begin to emerge. The process may seem slow and even imperceptible. But as Paul Duckro says at the end of his talk, "The implications, it seems to me, are irresistible."



Questions for Discussion

1. *Do your regional gatherings allow time for community reflection on graces and challenges/concerns?*
2. *How does your local CLC integrate the General Principles into formation programs?*

Is there a regional guide/model for doing so?
3. *Can you recall a particular instance when you realized your own CLC had developed a "communal consciousness"?*