

The Process of Communal Discernment on CLC HOPE School Yongin

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1. Background

◆ Opening the CLC Center for Migrants in Yongin (2002)

- In 1998, many Asian countries experienced economic difficulties due to global financial crisis and many workers came to Korea from Asian countries. As most of them were undocumented, they couldn't get legal protection. In many cases they suffered from discrimination at work and failed to receive their already low wages. There were only few organizations and groups to support them. They paid a lot of money to brokers but some even died while attempting to enter Korea.

Moved by empathy toward those migrant workers in dire situations, CLC Korea discerned to open a center for migrants in 2002 in order to help those migrant workers experiencing discrimination. The goal was to restore their human dignity through diverse activities such as protecting their human rights, changing policies and systems, and enhancing the awareness of Korean people of this issue.

❖ Activities : labor counseling, legal support, Korean classes, dialogues among people from different cultural backgrounds, vocational skills training, etc.

◆ Changes in Korean Society Regarding Migrants (2004– 2011)

▪ As the number of migrant workers grew and as support organizations like CLC Korea worked together to demand the government to improve its policies regarding migrant workers, the Korean government started to change its

programs and policies. It enforced the Employment Permit System in 2004 and abolished the Industrial Training System in 2007. It legalized undocumented migrant workers with less than four year stay in Korea, helping 184,199 migrants. It also made social insurance mandatory and enacted a law to support multi-ethnic families and revised the immigration control law. In 2011, it adopted a policy to allow loyal migrant workers to re-enter. (When they pass a special Korean test, they can re-enter within six months and get employed.)

▪ Simultaneously, from the mid-1990s, many foreign women started to come to Korea for international marriage. (As part of the improvement program of rural living conditions starting in 1999, there began an international marriage business through which many women entered Korea from China, Southeast Asia, Uzbekistan etc. to get married to Korean men living in rural areas) In the 2000s, the government began to provide legal support to them, establishing multi- ethnic family support centers and schools. With this, social as well as national concerns grew with regard to these migrant women who married Korean men and raised children.

◆ Request from the Executive Council of CLC Korea (2012)

Against this backdrop, the Exco asked the CLC Center for Migrants to form a team to answer the questions: Are migrants the people who are in the most desperate situations economically and socially in our society? As an apostolic center of CLC Korea, does the CLC Center for Mi-

grants always try to meet the demands of the times that are changing?

◆ Research Team, Its Purpose, Activities and Results

- Research Team 1: October 2012 - January 2013.

- ❖ Purpose: Evaluation and reflection on the 10 year activities of the center.

- Research Team 2: June 2012 – December 2012

- ❖ Purpose: Carrying out a research on the current situations of migrant workers and foreign migrant women by marriage in order to respond better to the medium and long term calls of the times

- ❖ Result: The situations of migrant workers and migrant wives had greatly improved. There still remained some undocumented migrant workers but government agencies and civic organizations continued supporting them. The government provided a lot of services to migrant wives, so their situations were expected to get better, while most of them appealed their difficulties and anxieties in raising and educating their children. Although the government as well as civic organizations supported their infants and school-age children, it was not clear whether the supports were proper and sufficient. Considering

the fact that the number of the multi-ethnic family is growing rapidly (It is estimated that one-fifth of children will be multi-ethnic in 2030), it may become a serious social issue.

◆ Request of the CLC Korea ExCo (2013)

Based on the researches, CLC Korea decided to close the CLC Center for Migrants and change it into an apostolic center to support the multi-ethnic families by educating their children. The Exco requested the Department of Social Apostolate to organize a task force team to plan a new apostolic center.

2. The Task Force Team to Plan a New Apostolic Center

- ❖ Goal: To draw up a concrete vision to support multi-ethnic children.

- ❖ Formation: Seven CLC members

- ❖ Period: May 2013 - December 2013

◆ Data analysis (May – June, 2013)

- All kinds of accessible statistics, dissertations and various papers from the Education Office, Yongin Municipal Office, and the research centers on multi ethnic children were collected.

- In our weekly meetings on Saturday mornings, we shared and discussed all the available materials



we have read on the subject. These materials became the basis for the first discernment.

❖ **Result** : When we started the research, we assumed that multi ethnic children would have difficulties with language development, social and family relations, hyperactivity disorder, and depression. They did show some problems when they were under around nine, but as they grew older, no significant differences were noted between the multi-ethnic and the Korean children. The longer the migrant mothers stayed in Korea, the better the economic situations of the families became. The older multi-ethnic children also improved in their development and showed less and less differences from Korean children. Thus, we learned that poverty is the basic problem for the multi-ethnic families and their children.

We also found out that a lot of support has been provided to multi ethnic babies and elementary school students. In this regard, it seemed better to carry out activities for young people (middle school and high school students). It seemed especially important as the number of young juveniles grew who came to Korea as their mothers got married to Korean men. They suffered from a lot of difficulties due to the different language, different culture, and poor financial situation. However, there were few organizations that could help them to settle in Korea and study in alternative schools for multi ethnic children. It seemed likely that this situation, if not handled properly, could lead to serious social problems like crimes.

◆ **Carrying out Research on Yongin Region and Visiting Centers (July – October, 2013)**

▪ To verify the result of the data analysis, it was required to carry out a field study. We also needed to determine whether it was proper to establish our apostolic center in Yongin where the CLC center for Migrants had operated. If so, for which age group should the center operate and exactly where should it be established? We needed to have a concrete ground to discern.

● **Visits of Related Institutions**

✓ About ten local community centers in the region which ranked high in the list of the number of multi-ethnic children. (Singal-dong, Jukjeon 1-dong, Pogok-eup, Jungang-dong, Yurim-dong)

✓ Yongin Municipal Office : Children care, welfare policy and Dream Start Center, Cheoin-gu Distric Office : welfare department and other government offices

✓ Schools : Yongin elementary school (Specialized elementary school for multi ethnic children), Pogok middle school, which ranked 2nd in terms of the ratio of poor multi ethnic students.

✓ About twenty of local children's centers (Social welfare facilities) in the region.

● **Results and the first discernment.**

In the case of elementary school students, multi ethnic students didn't manifest serious differences from Korean ones. Most of them didn't experience retardation in language development or get bullied by peers. Multi ethnicity itself didn't cause pro-



blems. Rather, it was the poor economic conditions of the family that increased the cases of learning retardation, emotional instability, and problems with peers, which concurred with the results of the previous data analysis.

Workers and teachers of the visited institutions said that in the case of multi ethnic children born in Korea, many difficulties were resolved when they entered elementary school. When they reached their third grade, they didn't show many differences from others. On the other hand, those who entered Korea in their youth had difficulties as there were no formal language courses for them (few, if any, only in Seoul).

We consequentially reached the conclusion that our new apostolic center should be not only for poor multi ethnic youth but also for all poor youth in general. The place should be one of the two, Singal and Pogok which has the 1st and 2nd highest ratio of poor young students in Yongin respectively. We discerned to open the center by February 2014, before the new semester started.

● *Last On-the-spot Visit to Discern the Place of the Center*

In order to finalize our discernment, we reviewed the data and statistics again and visited Singal Pureun school (a local children center for the youth) and Pogok middle school. We found out that Singal is near big cities like Suwon and Bundang, so residential areas were shrinking while commercial areas were expanding. This caused the number of young students to decrease. We also found out that

there were already more than 10 children's centers so they had enough support. On the other hand, a quarter of Pogok middle school students were from poor families who received the government support and there was no children's center in the region. The region was in a remote rural area and public transportation was inconvenient so it was not easy for volunteers to reach. There is a big amusement park (Everland Yongin). So many poor people came to look for daily job, some of whom used to use the CLC Center for Migrants.

3. Final Discernment

We discerned to open an apostolic center to support the education of young people from poor families including multi ethnic young children (including migrant multi ethnic children). As they are in the period of preparation for their future, we needed to establish the center's identity as an educational institute, whose focus was to be more than just providing protection. We needed to establish an after-school institute which provides education necessary for them to break the vicious cycle of poverty. We discerned to open the center by February 2014 so we formed a working group which carried out practical work like renting a house, interior decorating, hiring, furnishing as well as recruiting students.

For about two months, the working group visited most of the CLC members from seven regions, sharing the whole process and their experience of God's presence with them as well as their gratitude and joy. They also sha-





red the required cost and asked members to participate as volunteers and to recruit financial contributors.

4. Things learned from the communal discernment process

1. At that time, the CLC center for migrants had worked quite well and was recognized as a reliable center in the region. However the national ExCo realized that Korea has been changing a lot with regard to migration issues. Thus, it raised the questions as to whether we needed to stick to it even in this changed situation and whether they still belonged to the neediest (desperate) people. CLC always responds to the call of the people in more desperate need here and now. In that regard, our discernment is not a one-time decision but a continuing process and we need to be alert, open and flexible.

2. Accepting the call from the ExCo, the CLC members around the CLC Migrant Center went through a two-year long discernment process. Several working teams were formed during that period, carrying out research using various data and on-the-spot visits. They trusted each other fully, worked closely together and shared their process, information and the

fruits through the whole period. Thankfully in this way, we could keep the same flow till the final communal discernment.

3. When we first discerned to open a new apostolic center to support multi-ethnic children, we carried out research on various aspects. We tried to cover as many statistics and data and documents as possible and carried out a field study for numerous times, which required lots of efforts and patience. At every step where we were not sure or did not agree with each other, supplementary researches and checkup processes were carried out, which led us to the concrete final discernment.

4. After making a united communal discernment within the team, we shared the process with the national community members. We visited each region and had sessions, where we shared not only the whole process but also the feelings and inner movements. We shared how much we felt confused and discouraged, how slowly the process moved, and how often we felt at a loss. Despite all this, we expressed how deeply we felt and experienced God's grace and how he continuously encouraged us and walked with us. Everyone in the team shared his or her own experiences so that all the other CLC members could feel the grace, fully understand and accept the communal discernment. Thus the communal discernment of the team became the communal discernment of the whole community, which inspired and encouraged each member to think about what they could do in their place. They supported the establishment and operation of the center passionately by finding donors and volunteers and of course by volunteering as teachers and helpers themselves. We believe the sincere sharing process can make a discernment of one team or one apostolate become a precious asset and gift of all the members in the community not just that of those in the team.