

# Being EA<sup>1</sup>: Graces of a 20-Year Journey in Facilitating Growth



Terry Charlton SJ

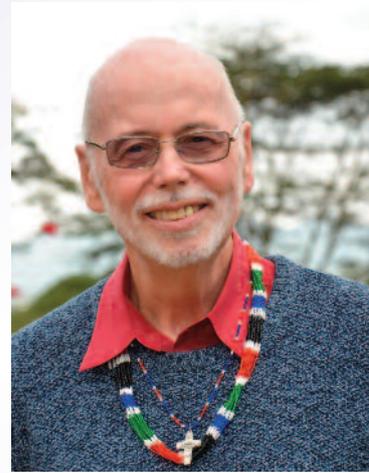
I am so grateful to the Editor of *Progressio* for inviting me to reflect on my 20 years as Ecclesiastical Assistant for CLC-Kenya from 1990 to 2010. It is a great pleasure to reflect upon one of the great blessings of my life. Though no longer EA, I think I could not live without CLC being a part of my life.

Let me say a little about myself. I managed to attend high school as part of the first graduating class at Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School in my home town of Indianapolis, Indiana, USA in 1966. I joined the Jesuits, right after high school, in the Chicago Province. Eventually, I earned a Doctorate in Systematic Theology from Boston College with my dissertation on a very Ignatian topic, “The Incarnation in the Thought of Teilhard de Chardin”. In fact, the Teilhardian perspective has greatly informed my worldview and, indeed, how I conceive my ministry. During doctoral studies, I caught the African bug and was blessed by superiors who sent me to Africa.

## Abruptly “invited” into CLC

I came to Nairobi in September, 1990, after having worked for three years at a spirituality centre in Kumasi, Ghana; that was my

first mission in Africa. My new mission was to lecture at Hekima College Jesuit School of Theology in Nairobi. One of the few things I was sure of, when I arrived in Nairobi was that, if I was going function well at a continental school with very few East Africans, let alone Kenyans, in attendance, I must have a connection with the local church. I was hardly in Nairobi a week when then Scholastic Gerry Whelan, S.J., approached me and explained how, a year earlier, he had been invited by the CLC World Secretariat and the Jesuit Provincial of Eastern Africa to begin CLC in Nairobi. Gerry was entering into his last year of theological studies in Nairobi and wondered if I would work with him in shepherding CLC during the year ahead and then continue on as EA into the future. He invited me to a gathering of the 30 or so CLCers who had joined over the course of CLC-Kenya’s first year in existence. Of course, I said I would come with him to experience CLC-Kenya in order to have a basis for discerning whether the Lord was inviting me to work with CLC-Kenya. When we arrived at the venue of the meeting, I had several minutes to chat with CLCers as they arrived. When the meeting was called to order, Gerry, a typical Irish, good at getting his way, introduced me as the one, taking over from him as the Jesuit who would journey with CLC-Kenya. Well, I



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Below from left to right:  
First CLC National Assembly  
at watakatifu wote- 1995;  
Hekima College Chapel



guess it was a first-time election. Despite my little experience with CLC in general and these people in particular, it seemed so right, like a marriage made in heaven, so I did not object and the journey began.

## Finding a Place in Fertile Grounds

CLC Kenya was greatly blessed by some wonderful gifts that enabled it to develop quite well over its first years. I have always named three in particular: (1) an extraordinary number of talented members who really took to Ignatian spirituality and dedicated themselves to living the CLC way and to working for the development of CLC-Kenya; (2) the support of a good number of Scholastics studying Theology at Hekima College, who were able to guide groups and accompany CLCers in the Spiritual Exercises; and (3) my organizational ability; I have always been pretty good at seeing the steps needed to get from Point A to Point Z. This helped, for example, in such areas as drafting the Constitution of CLC Kenya and Procedures for Temporary and Pemanent Commitment.

If I could use one word to speak about how I have seen my role as EA, it would be “facilitator”. I see facilitation as bringing out the best in persons, in organizations and in situations.

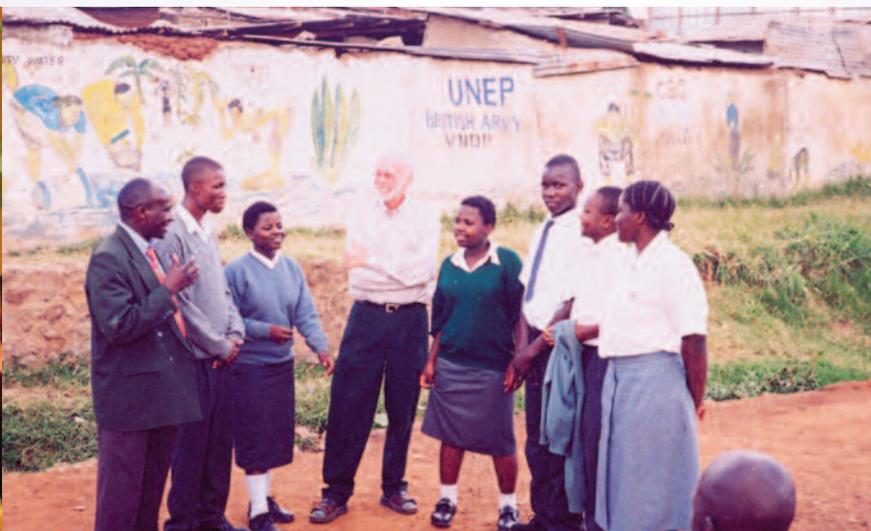
## Beginnings: Facilitating Leadership Growth

To make CLC all it can be, much work has to be done to facilitate the potential for members to lead in a whole variety of ways. We can speak about this in terms of group

coordinators and group guides. We also worked hard to develop the ability of members to be able to give effective presentations to groups about aspects of CLC and of Ignatian spirituality. Spending time helping a member with outlining a presentation and practicing giving it before me and perhaps a few others would be time well-spent before the time would actually come to give the presentation. Feedback on what went well and what went not so well is always important for presentations, but it is also important for evaluating the whole meeting or the formation weekend or whatever is involved. We did really well with this kind of development in our first years. But we relied too much and too long on the same presenters and the same leaders. And we did not give the same attention to grooming and preparing well the next generations of presenters and leaders. If we are going to succeed well with continuing to build a vibrant organization and well-formed members, we have to keep forming new presenters and leaders. The same obviously is true of guides and coordinators of small groups. As the national community grows, the EA can certainly turn more of this work over to others who have already been formed but the actual attention to development of new leaders cannot be slackened.

Facilitating the health and development of the organization is, of course, also essential. Most importantly, this means the national organization. Our national leadership group, which eventually developed into the National Executive Council (EXCO) has been key. Integrating new members after national elections or when this or that person needed to be added

Below from left to right:  
Fr. Charlton with guest at a  
Fundraising Gala Dinner;  
Meeting people at  
Kibera slum



through a resignation was important. This needed to be done by bringing these persons into the Ignatian culture of discernment and decision-making. It was also important for me to distinguish “my” way, Ignatian as it might be, from other Ignatian ways. Such new ways coming from the insight or experience especially of a new national president needed to be nurtured and fostered. At times I was clearly being called upon to let go of a certain control or from becoming set in a particular way of doing things.

What I’m calling facilitation at times could mean that I had to take a strong initiative. I remember one point when we were approaching elections of national leadership for CLC-Kenya, and I did not see persons who could at that time lead effectively in the role of President coming forward. I realized that I needed to bring how I saw the situation to the attention of a very gifted and very busy CLC member and ask this person to make the sacrifice to accept the nomination for President. At real personal sacrifice and after some negotiation with me about how the responsibilities of office might be ensured to be manageable, the person accepted nomination and was rather overwhelmingly chosen as President by the membership.

## A Decade in: Recognizing how Giftedness and Identity Flows into Apostolic Initiative

There are so many ways in which I might speak of facilitation of situations. Let me say a few words about situations that eventuated in what became our two national mission projects of CLC-Kenya. CLC was still less than a decade old in Kenya, but already I thought I could recognize a special giftedness among Kenyan CLC members as a group in appropriating Ignatian spirituality. I began speaking about this observation, and a desire on the part of a good number of members to share Ignatian spirituality with others emerged. Certainly, there was an interest in bringing others into CLC, yet we recognized that membership was not for everyone. Discussions expanded to involve Jesuit leadership and leaders of other Ignatian congregations. Eventually, founded in 2000, we began a collaborative effort under



the leadership of CLC with the Jesuits and other Ignatian congregations participating that founded The Zaidi Centre for Ignatian Spirituality. *Zaidi* is Swahili for “Magis”. The Centre is a non-residential centre, with a non-exclusive focus on laity serving the laity, by bringing elements of Ignatian spirituality to them in a variety of ways from retreats and accompaniment in the Exercises to environmental programs with the hallmark of discernment.

Beginning in 2001, as their mission, some CLC members began visiting persons living with AIDS in Kibera Slum (arguably the largest slum in Sub-Saharan Africa); this was certainly work that was at the cutting-edge in a time when there was still tremendous stigma and isolation endured by the persons living with AIDS. Those who associated with them could be shunned as well. These CLC members became friendly with them and listened to their concerns. Paramount among these concerns was the future of their children because these people expected to die young. The children’s future was about education. All secondary education in Kenya is for a fee, and these sick parents could not come up with even the small fees for a modest high school education. These members of CLC approached me, and we were able to raise a small amount of money to send 12 of their children to Form I in 2003. Based on the evaluation of this experience at the end of the year, the members involved wanted to do more. They approached me with the idea of starting our own CLC high school for AIDS-affected youth. I was approached because of being

EA but, no doubt, also because they saw me as having fund-raising potential as an American Jesuit. My immediate reaction was, "There is so much potential for good here. I don't know if we can succeed, but we have to try." This initiative has been blessed by what has been named St. Aloysius Gonzaga Secondary School. Our program has developed into accepting 35 boys and 35 girls each year for Form 1 on scholarship and taking them through the four years of high school, followed by six months of supervised community service and then sponsorship for college or university. This CLC mission has become a great success, clearly beyond our initial imaginings. Recent and new initiatives have included accepting additional fees-paying students and initiating a boarding facility to ameliorate the devastating family and living situations of our scholarship students in Kibera slum.

### Fruits for my vocation

Of course, I have gained so much from my mission as EA for CLC-Kenya. I can begin

with this wonderful opportunity which has been an integral part of my Jesuit mission and with so many friendships that will last a lifetime. It has helped me to continue growing and taking up the challenge to be Jesuit by interacting with CLCers as they

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live their lay Ignatian vocations. Of course, I have been heartened by the opportunity to share Ignatian spirituality, which is at the centre of my vocation, in CLC. But much more, I have been challenged in living my Jesuit vocation by sharing our experience of being Ignatian with CLCers in such a variety of situations, beginning

with Uzima, my small group of 25 years. Might it even be that we EAs as well as other Jesuits involved can learn about how better to be Jesuit through CLC? I think, for example, that we can learn much about how we Jesuits are called to be together in mission as we reflect upon our participation in the DSSE (discern, send, support, evaluate) cycle of common mission in CLC. I am so grateful about how CLC has called me forth as a Jesuit. I pray that the blessing of this journey may continue for many years!

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<sup>1</sup> This Progressio Column on being a CLC Ecclesiastical Assistant is both a recognition and a sharing of the grace and challenges of the role. In the upcoming issues, you will know more about EAs around the world, as they accompany the different CLC groups in their growth as a lay apostolic body.

Fr. Charlton celebrating mass and teaching in the slums

