



CLC World Day of Prayer - 2007

40 years of General Principles - What happened to our dreams?

Forty years ago, from October 19-21, 1967, the General Assembly of the World Federation of Christian Life Communities finished formulating the new "General Principles". These replaced the 1910 edition of the "Common Rules".

After this change there was a dream, a vision of a Church in which we wanted to play a part. Today, forty years later, let us bring two elements of this dream to our prayer¹.

1. Our vision was "to serve the Church better" and to "consecrate ourselves with greater simplicity and effectiveness in the service of God and humanity in the modern world".

Up to those days, the most common meaning of "to serve the Church" was for the laity to collaborate with the hierarchy, or with religious communities in their mission. In our dream, which was also the dream of the Church, "to serve the Church" meant much more. We wanted to participate actively in the mission that we, in the Church, share with all the baptized, which is none other than spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, building the Reign of God. Serving the Church meant assuming that, not only are we (lay people) a part of the Church but, rather, we are the Church in communion with all the Christians: a pilgrim people where there is a unity of mission and diversity of charisms and ministries. Our service to the Church envisioned dialogue with those who are different,

¹ These two points have been selected from the "Letter of Confirmation," Secretary of State of the Holy See, N.106352, March 25, 1968. The use of quotation marks indicates that they are textual references.

beginning with ecumenism and proceeding to dialogue with the cultural and social expressions of the modern world, including inter-religious dialogue. Our service to the Church would lead us to collaborate with many, including the hierarchy, organizing ourselves to take on apostolic initiatives and acquiring the appropriate formation in view of the mission. Perhaps, we understood that our "service to the Church" was service to the mission of Christ...that its purpose is not specifically to the Church itself, but that only *in* the Church and *through* the Church could we, as CLC, live and develop this dream.

However, we also understood that whatever its form, this dream urged us outward, as an adult person relates to his/her mother, or as a mature married couple able to develop a non-possessive union of the two spouses. We wanted to drink from the source and generously pour our water into our daily milieus of work, family, society, economy, politics, studies, etc. Communion and mission, discipleship and apostolate, adulthood in the faith - that is what we dreamed of. We started out with a new spirit in a Church that wanted us free so that we could serve and be available and enterprising.

In the 1990 modifications introduced into the General Principles, we sought to complete the 1967 version with all we had learned since then. In particular, this call for emphasizing the apostolic character and consolidating the great step forward of being one World Community in the service of one world: a body for the mission.

No doubt, we are still developing this dream, taking steps backward and forward. Often, we want to return to old securities, to having others telling us what to do, where and how. On the other hand, there are times when we are audacious and even irresponsible. We presume to do everything ourselves not taking advantage of the help and contributions that are offered us. The reassessment and emergence of the lay state in its purest form is not a process of auto-affirmation or a re-vindication, but a process of maturation that includes the hierarchy and the religious.

What kind of service do we give today to the Church, to God and to the men and women of today's world? How do our General Principles help us? How do we relate to others in the Church and beyond?

2. It was a question of "renewing our association according to the spirit and norms of the Second Vatican Council".

In the historical narrative of Louis Paulussen, we read²: "... little by little we began to discern more clearly the excellent aspects of our General Principles. They were practically ready in 1964 and could have been submitted to the General Assembly in Bombay in December 1964. But it was evident that we thought it was best to wait until the closing of Vatican II before presenting the new Principles in their definitive form."

These were, without doubt, times of grace for the Church. The dream of CLC was inserted into the Council renewal which included, among other things, the vision of a freer and more missionary Church; a humbler Church, servant of all, nearer to the poor, simpler in its practices and customs, respectful of those outside her and grateful for the part of truth that they possess, free of political and economic powers and of the complications of their influences. In this vision, important topics arose: liturgical reform, openness to dialogue with the modern world, theological renewal, Episcopal collegiality, ecumenism, the recovery of the origins and traditions that go beyond the last centuries.

Not less important was the renewal of biblical studies and recourse to the Word of God in the framework of faith communities where one could share, in a process of integrating faith and life in the light of Holy Scripture in order to strengthen the apostolic mission.

In this framework, the General Principles were the expression of a community of lay faithful written after "continued deliberation for several years"³. These were the rich pre-conciliar years and the years of the Council itself. For this reason, we could say that the dream of CLC was to give life to the Council, leading it to life and to practice. The composition of the General Principles was simple and clear, but it sought to include all these rich topics towards which the Holy Spirit was moving the Church. The Preamble is the center and the soul of everything. The rest are concentric circles around the Preamble.

An important aspect in all this, present in the General Principles, was the reassessment of the laity not only from the point of equality in the mission, but also from the recovery of the original sources which had remained only for the religious and the clergy, although even they had moved away from them. In the

² Paulussen [s.j.], Louis: *God Works In This Way: Origins of the Community of Christian Life*. Supplement of PROGRESSIO N° 14, June, 1979, [pg] 46.

³ Secretary of State N° 106352: Letter of Confirmation, March 25, 1968.

dream manifested in the G.P., the apostolic view evolves from being with Jesus, accompanying him in his apostolic life, knowing him intimately. For this to happen, it was necessary to return to the specific source: the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

The CLC saw itself as a community of life and faith arising from the Spiritual Exercises, and having a particular vocation in the Church composed of those who would continue along this road.

But, things are not always so transparent and simple. The Council process took many years, and, in some ways, we are still living with advances and setbacks, with frustrations and joys. Since the first announcement in 1959 until the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law in 1983, the Church can speak of 24 years of the conciliar process in regard to the production of orientations and fundamental texts.

Similarly, the CLC process has also lasted many years: from the first drafts of the G.P. in 1964, to the last papal and canonical approval in 1990. We could talk about a 26 year process of shaping the renewed CLC identity. We know the difficulties in both processes and, at times, we tend to become discouraged and declare that we need another Council when we have not yet put this one diligently into practice. On the other hand, we seldom question why we have not taken seriously what these processes implied, why we tend to go backwards or abandon them, why we throw out decisions made through the Spirit. Sometimes, we are paralyzed by apprehensions, divided by personal preferences, betrayed by haste, disoriented by desires for greatness. We are blinded by idealizing the past. Contrary to what the past teaches us, we are led at times to believe that new councils or new processes won't come into contact with our sin and with the temptations characteristic of any serious effort.

Some suggestions for the period involving the CLC World Day of Prayer:

Before the day itself ...individually (personal time) and in community:

a) Reread the Preamble of the General Principles several times and, according to the time that we have, read the successive concentric circles around them. Those who participated in the Assembly in Guadalajara '90 will remember the "Groups of Community Reading," in which we read each paragraph slowly and sought connections with our basic experiences, movements, difficulties, projects, etc.

b) Pray so that we can distinguish the various disturbances that we experience in the circumstances we are living in our national or regional community: those that come from the wrong spirit and those that could be sincere and legitimate concerns for our Church and for CLC. The text of this *Project* could be of help.

The day itself:

c) Prepare the locale with murals or posters with brief and well chosen citations from the General Principles and the Second Vatican Council.

d) CLC members who participated in either the 1967 or 1990 process could give their testimony.

e) At Mass: Pray for the grace of enthusiasm and the guidance of the Spirit. Ask for forgiveness for our infidelities (there was repetition) as members of the Church and as members of CLC. Offer what has been done - the apostolate, the General Principles - as our most authentic desires.

Afterwards:

f) Continue the process in our communities, according to possibilities and opportunities. What challenges are presently offered us?

g) If we wish, we can write brief reflections in order to share them in a variety of ways with others. Consider the possibility of sending contributions for *PROGRESSIO*.

José Reyes
Vice- Président

The next World Assembly will be held from August 12th to 21st, 2008 in Fatima, Portugal. Delegates are expected to arrive on 11th and departure on August 22nd, 2008. We will send you more details as the preparation progresses.
