

GROUP GUIDES: Their Role and Formation

General Norm 41 (b)

“The guide, well formed in the Ignatian process of growth, helps the community to discern the movements at work in the individuals and the community, and helps them to maintain a clear idea of the CLC goal and process. The guide assists the community and its coordinator to find and to use the means needed for the community’s formation and its mission. The guide’s participation in the life of the community is conditioned by the objectivity needed to carry out effectively the role of the guide. The guide is chosen by the community with the approval of the national or regional community.”

Some publications of the World Secretariat which talk about the role of the guide are

- “Towards Christian Life Community Beginnings and Growth” Progressio Supplement 9, 1977
- Survey of the Formation Process in the Christian Life Communities. 1981
- Clarifying Different Roles A Supplement to the Survey. 1981

The thoughts and insights expressed in the above works have been implemented in CLC life over these years. Reflecting on these experiences, the Secretariat in 2009 published Progressio Supplement n. 64 “**The Process of Growth in CLC: Guidelines for Formation.**” This is available on the website, under the heading ‘Resources’ – CLC Documents. This document outlines the four stages of CLC formation

Stage One: First Contact and Reception/Welcome

Stage Two: Laying the Foundations for Vocation

Stage Three: Discernment of Vocation

Stage Four: Apostolic Discernment

The guide’s role - in general and for each stage – is described in numbers 193 – 204.

The Process of Growth in CLC

Role of the Guide in general

- Suggests and facilitates the contents, means and experiences of the relevant stage
- Takes forward the community process
- Follows each individual closely
- Maintains close contact with the coordinator, EAs and other guides

STAGE I : PERIOD OF RECEPTION

This is the CLC induction period. Corresponds to the desire for a deeper life “Lord, where do You live?” This stage can go on for several months and ends when the person actually joins CLC. The **Objectives** at this stage are

Knowing others in the group - Self knowledge and personal acceptance - Basic information about CLC structures and spirituality

Content	Means	Role of Guide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know oneself • Draw nearer to Jesus • Sharing of life & faith • Relating with others • Take responsibility in the group • Explanation of CLC vocation • Sacramental view of the world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular meetings, based on CLC format – sharing, listening, mutual respect • Initiation into Ignatian and other methods of prayer • Bible study, • Learn about CLC history and documents • Participate in CLC programme • Experiences of service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educator in the faith • Initiating others in spiritual life • Handle the dynamics of the group • Initiate the group to CLC meetings • Help them discover and express inner movements • Encourage participation in community life and mission • Provide examples of CLC vocations

STAGE II : LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR VOCATION

This is the first stage in the formal process of CLC formation. It corresponds to the First Week and Call of the King in the Spiritual Exercises. It could go on for 1 to 4 years and is completed with Temporary Commitment or the search for another vocation. The **Objectives** of this stage are

Conversion to the way of Jesus – experience of God’s unconditional love – responding to God’s call – knowing others in the community – deeper grasp of CLC way of life.

Content	Means	Role of Guide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal experience of God • To know and be known in the community • Christian view of Sin and Forgiveness • Experience of Ignatian Spirituality • CLC structures, way of life, mission • Social analysis and Option for the Poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal spiritual guidance • Sacramental life • Basic psychology • Practice of Examen • Experiences of the Exercises 4–8 days • Autobiography of St. Ign, nos 1 -24 • Discernment • Study of GPs and CLC documents • Participation in formation courses • Service of the Poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable a first experience of the Exercises • Encourage sharing, community Review of Life and personal Examen • Be a spiritual guide for some • Support the coordinator • Create climate for discernment and election • Promote awareness of social injustice and provide opportunities for service • Prepare members for Commitment

STAGE III : DISCERNMENT OF VOCATION

This stage poses the question “What must I do for Christ?” It corresponds to the Second Week of the Exercises. People in this stage have embraced the CLC way of life. It goes on for 2-8 years and is completed with Permanent Commitment. The **Objectives** are

Discernment and Choice of State of life (lay, priest, religious) – Discernment and choice of Way of Life (fidelity and depth in all areas) – confirming the personal CLC vocation

Content	Means	Role of Guide
✓ Integration of Christian values	✓ Continue those of stage II	✓ Encourage sharing and discernment of inner movements
✓ Personal love for Christ and Church	✓ Theology courses for the lay faithful	✓ Encourage making the full Exercises
✓ Total experience of the Exercises	✓ Retreats leading to the full Exercises	✓ Focus on Ignatian insights
✓ Deeper grasp of Discernment	✓ Discernment of inner movements	✓ Clarification of desires and choices with regard to vocation
✓ Universality of CLC vocation	✓ Election	✓ Encourage participation in CLC courses and gatherings
✓ Christian view of globalization, ecology, justice ...	✓ Undertaking responsibilities in CLC structures	✓ Provide openings to the world of the poor
✓ Option for the poor	✓ Study of CLC history & documents	
	✓ Participating in CLC apostolate	

STAGE IV : APOSTOLIC DISCERNMENT

Members at this stage seek to give an apostolic meaning to all dimensions of life. They live out the Third and Fourth Week of the Exercises, keeping in mind that “A pure love bids us to serve much”. This stage continues all through life and has the following **Objectives**

Integration of human and Christian life – growing in openness to reality – using one’s skills for service of Christ and the Church – creating apostolic communities.

Content	Means	Role of Guide
✓ Attitudes of discernment, availability, mission	✓ Permanent formation for mission	✓ Encourage an active apostolic life
✓ Integration of mission into personal life	✓ Frequent reception of Sacraments	✓ Helps to order the rhythm of life
✓ Deeper experiences of the Exercises	✓ Annual inner renewal	✓ Guide communal apostolic discernment
✓ DSSE dynamic	✓ Spiritual guidance	✓ Promote compassion towards the poor
✓ Universality	✓ Share and evaluate apostolic priorities	✓ Sharing of inner movements
✓ Co-responsibility as members of an Apostolic Body	✓ Meetings in the DSSE format	✓ Identify personal and group stagnation
	✓ Common solidarity fund	✓ Suggest ways to achieve deep integration of life and faith

Formation of the Guide

Once we have a clear idea about the role of the guide, it is easier to plan out the formation required. While there are certain universal guidelines/ orientations, we must remember that formation must be linked to the local, national and regional context.

There are a variety of practices whereby national communities offer formation to group guides. The formation programs may comprise a series of weekends or a series of evening sessions. Alternatively, it could take on the form of an intensive course of several days together. It is also recommended to provide peer group support through occasional meetings among the guides themselves. At these meetings, guides can enrich and support each other through sharing their experiences and helpful practices.

You are urged to read Progressio Supplement n. 33 “**Formation of Group Guides: Methodological Orientations**”. This document includes

- A. Principles for formation:** communicating a spirit – developing some attitudes – transmitting some techniques – integration
- B. Types of formation for Guides:** basic formation before becoming a guide – ongoing formation while functioning as a guide – specialized training to deepen some aspect
- C. Areas/Topics for Formation of Group Guides**
 - 1. Familiarity with Scripture and Tradition:** A good comprehension of Scripture, Christian tradition, Christology, Ecclesiology, Vatican II, etc.
 - 2. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius:** An experience of the Exercises – Reflection on this experience
 - 3. Christian Life Community:** The General Principles – History of CLC – application of the Spiritual Exercises to CLC life and formation
 - 4. Human Skills:** Human growth – Group dynamics - Listening skills – Intervention skills
 - 5. Awareness of Social Dimension:** Gospel values and social reality – social analysis – social teachings of the Church – challenges for the local church

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