



## THE LOCAL CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY MEETING

For members of the Christian Life Community, growth in Christ is fostered in four ways:

- Daily personal prayer
- The regular meeting of my local CLC
- An annual retreat (in daily life or at a retreat house)
- Regional and national CLC meetings.

They are all permeated by Ignatian spirituality, the special characteristic of CLC, and have a profound effect on our everyday life. This leaflet deals with the second of these ways of growth: the regular meeting of my local Christian Life Community.

### HOW OFTEN DO MOST COMMUNITIES MEET?

Each local CLC decides how often it meets. Most groups meet every two weeks, although some manage weekly meetings. No group meeting less frequently than that has survived! It is important to meet at least fortnightly in order to build up and foster the sense of community in the group, and to keep in touch with where the other members are in their lives and their prayer. A two-fold growth is fostered here: the life of the community and the life of the individuals within it.

The commitment to community and the respect for the generous sharing which takes place in the group presupposes that each member makes the local meeting a first priority in their lives. Obviously illness or unavoidable absence will sometimes prevent someone from attending group meetings, but normally all members attend all meetings.



## WHAT HAPPENS AT THE MEETING?

Each local community decides how to run its meetings. However, it is important to include:

- \* sharing
- \* prayer
- \* a short evaluation.

### SHARING

A presupposition of Christian Life Community is that all members try to pray each day and try to see where God is in all aspects of their daily lives. Before the meeting, members spend some time in preparation, looking back over the time since the previous meeting, noticing where God has been and how their prayer has been. This is the core of the sharing at the meeting. This sharing, of course, also reflects the fact that CLC members are usually socially aware people whose daily life includes different ways of expressing their mission, even if it be 'helping others' in the simplest of ways.

At whatever point in the meeting the group chooses to share, it is usually preceded by a short time (perhaps ten minutes) of silence. Members use this to recall their preparatory time of looking back over the period since the last meeting. Sometimes the reflection will focus on only one event or one aspect of life (for example: family, work, how I spend my time or how I have responded to situations of injustice). However it is important to exclude nothing from this reflection (nothing is 'out of court') as the aim of CLC is to help us integrate all aspects of our lives with the fullness of our faith.

In this reflective review of my life, I am searching for what has been my chance for growing in this event or during this time. What is important is to be truthful with myself, learning to discover my own history as a sacred history. When I do this regularly, I discover what helps and what hinders my growth in Christ.

After the time of silence, whoever is leading the meeting invites each member to share. This sharing is both free and honest - I can share as much or as little as I want, but whatever I share is truthful and honest. As one member shares, the others listen. The challenge here is to be silent within myself, almost to forget myself in the listening, so that I can accept and respect the other person without reference to myself or my preoccupations. Above all, I respect the difference in the other and remember that God may call me in the sharing of another. Am I able to listen without distractions, without judging, without wanting to offer answers? Listening is a path towards humility and growth.

## **Response and deepening**

Beginning groups may simply share and listen. But as a group grows, and especially if it has a guide, the sharing and listening may be followed by some gentle response to prolong and deepen the sharing. This is not a discussion, not a time to suggest solutions or explain the meaning of someone's experience! Rather, it can be just a word or two to help, a way of inviting the person sharing to go deeper. So, perhaps, someone (often the group guide) may ask 'Where was God in that?' or 'Would you like to say more about that?'. This is simply an invitation, leaving the person sharing free to respond in whatever way they want.

It is important that when I feel moved to respond to the person sharing, I ask myself if I am speaking out of love for them, or if my words are a response to my own need. Each member has time during the meeting to share, and this is not my turn. My need is met when it is my turn.

Our common path means moving closer to each other; the word spoken here means loving help. If we are faithful to this way of working together, we shall be called to be men and women of reconciliation. In this we recognise the call of the Lord.

## **PRAYER**

While it is more important for a group to share on how the past fortnight's life and prayer has been, than simply to pray together at the meeting, it is important to spend some time praying together. This prayer together is usually based on scripture. Some groups use the following Sunday's readings, others choose a passage which in some way relates to where the group is. Members will have prayed on the scripture beforehand, but at the meeting the passage is usually read aloud and then the group spends ten or fifteen minutes in quiet prayer. Some groups end this silent time with another reading of the passage and then members take turns to share on what the passage has said to them or how they feel about it. It is important to note that this is not a bible study, not an invitation to a 'head trip' and there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers here! This sharing can be followed by bidding prayers.

## **PRACTICALITIES**

Practicalities are a necessary evil of any human activity and CLC is no exception. For example, the group will need to check where the venue for the next meeting is, and who is leading it. There may be matters relating to future regional or national CLC events or to something which the group has decided to do together. It is important to reserve a place in the meeting for these practicalities so that they don't get in the way of the sharing - or are missed out altogether.

## REVIEWING THE MEETING

A characteristic of Ignatian spirituality is the review, or evaluation. Ignatius is very insistent on that. It is as if he is saying that there is no point having an experience unless we reflect upon it. An important part of the CLC meeting, therefore, is a time at the end to look back and see how it has gone. Again, this begins with a short two or three minute silence. Then each person shares fairly quickly on how the meeting has gone for them. The whole evaluation takes no longer than ten or fifteen minutes.

CLCs in England and Wales usually use the following questions for the evaluation: What has been good about this meeting? What has been not so good? What do I think I might take away with me? Other questions might be: What has helped me this evening? What has been less helpful? What did I find difficult? What would I have wanted to help me more?

Notice that both these sets of questions invite me to share on seemingly 'negative' aspects of the meeting. While beginning groups may find this difficult, it is very important. It helps a group notice not-so-good aspects of the meeting before they become a problem and encourages members to trust each other enough to share more than just good things. If I have lived through the meeting with an open heart, I cannot but feel some gap within myself. I understand that something deep within me must change.

As well as the evaluation at each meeting, it is important that perhaps every six months or so, the group uses a full meeting for evaluation. This helps the group to function better, as it is an opportunity to reflect on its quality of listening, of sharing, of trust, of community. It helps the group to notice how it is growing and to see what it might need to grow better. Sometimes it is helpful to invite someone from outside to facilitate this evaluation. The CLC President or Chaplain can help groups find a facilitator.

### MEETING PLANS FOR COMMUNITIES

A series of leaflets designed for use at CLC meetings, including a wealth of reflections and helps about CLC, Ignatian spirituality and living our lives in a more Christian way is available from the CLC Office (address below) Order the first set of 7 meeting plans (address below); an order form for further sets is included in the pack.