By the Spirit of the Gospel and the Interior Law of Love

Praying with the General Principles of Christian Life Community

Part One

Larry Gooley, SJ
2003
Ignatius could not work with passive people, those without an ideal or plans. It matters little whether the plans be crazy and the desires excessive; the important thing is to have a yearning to become like Jesus Christ in some way. If we do not feel such a burning desire, at least we must feel the desire for the desire. Ignatius could do nothing with an apathetic person who is not inflamed by extreme desires. For CLC, people must have a wide and generous heart and desire profoundly to share in Christ’s mission.

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, Superior General of the Jesuits in a speech given at the World CLC Assembly in Itaici, Brazil, on July 26, 1998.
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Introduction

The General Principles are the charter of Christian Life Community, a description of its vision and charism. They are best interpreted "not so much by the letter of this text as by the spirit of the Gospel and the interior law of love", as stated in Principle 2. These principles are not a set of rules and regulations, they are an inspiration, a particular vision for living out in community Christ’s invitation to be His Church.

You are invited to reflect prayerfully on these principles according to the Ignatian method of noticing what catches your attention, whether in a positive or negative way. This is what you spend time with. Today one particular aspect may strike you, next week it may be another. In this way, the General Principles remain a living inspiration relevant to who and where you are in your many-faceted life.

This booklet includes only the first nine Principles since they are the most frequently cited. The complete "General Principles and General Norms" were revised in 1992. The table of contents for them is found on page 20. It would be fruitful to consider all of them some time. Having already experienced the Spiritual Exercises, you would do well to reflect on how these General Principles are a particular adaptation of them and whether they give the kind of framework for how you want to live your life.

May God's Spirit bless you on your way.
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The New Focus of Faith-Sharing

The faith-sharing used in this booklet will differ from what you have been doing. Until now, your sharing has been about what has been happening in your life since your last meeting and how you found God in it.

The sharing now will be around your response to the Principle you are considering and whether or not you desire it to be the spiritual focus of your life. Any sharing about your life would be in terms of this - how you view the General Principles for yourself as a way of living.

This represents a movement forward in that your sharing will now be more focused, more specific in terms of what you and your community are moving towards.

How Long to Use this Booklet

There are nine exercises in this booklet. It will be up to each community to spend as much time on each exercise as seems fruitful.
Meeting Format
(adapt this format in whatever way you find helpful)

Check-in: Share how you are feeling as you begin this meeting. (10 minutes total)

Opening prayer: Use music, scripture, a reading, silence - whatever helps move into the spirit of the meeting.

* Sharing: What strikes you about this Principle? What feelings does it surface in you? What attracts you in it, what doesn’t?

* (OR ... if it seems to work better for your community, you may wish to focus your sharing on "How I have encountered God since our last meeting?" and then discuss your reaction to the General Principle during the Reflection time after the Break.)

Break

Reflection: Read aloud the General Principle and the Questions that you are considering for this meeting. Share in open discussion your reaction to it. How does it strike you? Is it something with which you resonate?

Planning for the next meeting: When finished with the Reflection, review the Principle you will be considering for the next meeting.

Business: Facilitator, place of meeting, etc.

Review of meeting: How was I moved during this meeting? Where did I feel positive energy? Where did I feel discomfort?

Closing prayer and Social
**General Principles**

of

**Christian Life Community**

**General Principle 1** (see meeting format on pg. vi)

Response to God’s Love: The Three Divine Persons, contemplating the whole of humanity in so many sinful divisions, decide to give themselves completely to all men and women and liberate them from all their chains. Out of love, the Word became human and was born of Mary, the humble Virgin of Nazareth. Living with the poor and sharing their condition, Jesus invites all of us to give ourselves continuously to God and to bring about unity in our human family. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we respond with gratitude to God for this gift of Jesus in every circumstance of our lives. Therefore we, members of the Christian Life Community, have composed these General Principles to aid us in making our own the choices of Jesus Christ and taking part through Him, with Him, and in Him in this loving initiative which expresses God’s promise of faithfulness forever.

**Reflection**

"God’s Gift and the Gift of Self". God’s love is always and forever faithful. The General Principles offer a context for our response to this love. Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach, the superior of the Jesuit Order, states, "Until we have given of ourselves, we have given nothing." God’s work of love in freeing all women and men from their bondage is carried out in the love in our hearts and the work
of our hands. This is the key -- that as did Mary in Nazareth, we
"give ourselves continuously to God to bring about unity in our
human family".

We have all in some ways experienced this truth.
We come alive when we give and receive con-
cern, friendship, and even compassion of another.
Self-giving love, what the Greeks called Agape,
leads us to compassion and even the love of God.
It brings all other loves -- natural affection, friend-
ship and romantic love -- to perfection. Agape
gives us an inner peace that we cannot give our-
selves. This energy, which manifests the will of God, holds the key
to love.

Mike and Doreen with their whole family went out together every
year on Christmas day to assist programs that handed out free
meals to the needy and homeless. Their children learned that the
love they experienced at Christmas was a self-giving, compassion-
ate love. This developed in them the eyes to see people not as
problems but as mysteries, a unity of transcendent human beings
who image God.

Questions for reflection

1. What interests you in this principle? How do you react to it?
What memories, questions, feelings does it surface in you?

2. How do you see yourself and your community living this out?
How might you do so even more?

* * * * * *

It is indeed a profound spiritual experience to know and feel
myself so totally in God’s hands. Pedro Arrupe, SJ
Guided by the Spirit

Because our community is a way of Christian life, these Principles are to be interpreted not so much by the letter of this text as by the spirit of the Gospel and the interior law of love. This law of love, which the Spirit inscribes in our hearts, expresses itself anew in each situation of our daily lives. This Spirit-inspired love respects the uniqueness of each personal vocation and enables us to be open and free, always at the disposal of God. It challenges us to see our responsibilities and constantly to seek answers to the needs of our times, to work together with the entire People of God and all peoples of good will to seek progress and peace, justice and charity, liberty and dignity for all.

Reflection

"The Spirit is Our Guide." The General Principles are not a bureaucratic imposition on life. They are more than anything a description of the interior law of love which the Holy Spirit inscribes in our hearts. Put another way, the text of the General Principles is not a legal document to be studied and analyzed, it is a spiritual text for personal and community discernment. CLC is a sister and brotherhood of the Gospel. What unites us is the spirit of love which creates in us a unity in love and action that constitutes our vocation and identity.

This unity develops a spirit of freedom and a listening attitude which characterizes our encounters with God and each other. The task of every CLC member is to be at God’s disposal. All the General Principles ask of us is this openness, this freedom, this availability to God and each other. This will enable us to live into whatever is before us.
One of the dangers that can kill the life and creativity of a CLC community is settling down into a routine of what has always been done. The Spirit militates against this, the Spirit of CLC will die. We are not there for ourselves any more than Jesus’s Nazarean community was together for itself. We come together to carry on Christ’s mission. Our vocation is of and for the whole Church. 

There is a woman on the Texas border who works in a house that offers assistance to the Mexican people who cross the US border illegally. When her neighbors asked her, "Do you know who these people are," she replied, "But they're hungry." Her actions are motivated by the spirit of the Gospel and the interior law of love.

Questions

1. What interests you in this principle? How do you react to it? What memories, questions, feelings does it surface in you?

2. How do you see your community living out this ideal? How might you do so even more?

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Come, you have my Father's blessing! For I was hungry and you gave me food.  Mt 25:34-35
General Principle 3  (see meeting format on pg. vi)

Graced History  The Christian Life Community is a world association whose executive center is presently in Rome. It is a continuation of the Sodalities of Our Lady, started by John Leunis, SJ, and first approved by Pope Gregory XIII's bull, "Omnipotentis Dei", of December 5, 1584. Prior to these Sodalities of Our Lady we find our origin in those groups of lay people that developed in different parts of the world both before and after 1540 through the initiative of St. Ignatius of Loyola and his companions. We live this way of Christian life in joyful communion with all those who have preceded us, grateful for their efforts and apostolic accomplishments. In love and prayer we join those many men and women of our spiritual tradition who have been proposed to us by the Church as friends and valid intercessors who help us to fulfill our mission.

Reflection

"Graced history". The history of Christian Life Community has its roots in the time of Ignatius in the sixteenth century. His first companions formed groups of lay people who helped each other to follow Jesus and to put into practice the attitudes of prayer and service awakened by this spiritual experience. These groups were given the name, the Sodality of Our Lady, the name of a group of students founded in Rome by a Belgian Jesuit named John Leunis.

These became effective apostolic groups until the mid-Eighteenth century when the Jesuit Order was suppressed by Pope Clement XIV. The guidance of these groups was given over to local bishops, causing them to lose their roots in the Spiritual Exercises. By the mid-twentieth century, these groups, numbering over eighty thousand, had become pious associations with a special devotion to Mary. The role of Mary changed from being the model of mission
to the Church to becoming the protector against the perils of the world.

In 1948 Pius XII called for the renewal of the Sodalities to get back to their roots in the Spiritual Exercises. The "General Principles", the charter of CLC, were completed in 1968, and the new name of "Christian Life Community" was chosen. These Principles call us back to the Ignatian principles upon which the Sodality/CLC was founded. They also affirmed CLC as a lay movement, separate from, but collaborating with, our Jesuit companions. This movement has a long history of grace. Today CLC exists in approximately 60 countries around the world.

Questions for reflection

1. What interests you in this principle? How do you react to it? What memories, questions, feelings does it surface in you?

2. What kind of kinship do you feel with those who have gone before in the tradition of CLC?

3. The early Sodalities were effective apostolically. How do you see your community continuing in this same tradition? How might you do so even more?

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The memory of the just will be blessed.
Proverbs 10:7
General Principle 4 (see meeting format on pg. vi)

Missional Communities

Our Charism: Our Community is made up of Christians: men and women, adults and youth, of all social conditions who want to follow Jesus Christ more closely and work with Him for the building of the Kingdom, who have recognized Christian Life Community as their particular vocation with the Church. We propose to commit ourselves as Christians in bearing witness to those human and Gospel values within the church and society which affect the dignity of the person, the welfare of the family and the integrity of creation. We are especially aware of the pressing need to work for justice through a preferential option for the poor and a simple life style which expresses our freedom and solidarity with them. To prepare ourselves more effectively for apostolic witness and service in our daily environment, we assemble in community those who feel a more urgent need to unite their human life in all its dimensions with the fullness of their Christian faith. Responding to the call of Christ and following our charism, we seek to achieve this unity of life in the world in which we live.

Reflection

"The Purpose of Christian Life Community." The core of CLC is to work with Jesus in building up God's way in our world today. This work is twofold. On the one hand, the CLC call comprises every area of life: the dignity of the person, the welfare of the family, and the integrity of creation. At the same time, it is specific: working for justice in our lives.

There is an unbreakable bond between authentic faith and work for justice. This becomes concrete in our simple lifestyle which expresses both our inner freedom for God and our solidarity with the poor as we try to look at our world and society through their eyes.
The community itself is apostolic by being a "concrete experience of unity in love and action". It is a community of love.

A CLC community in Canada became aware of a small village in Central America in which the people had to walk miles to obtain water. The community came together in discernment and decided to finance digging a well in the village. They recognized the needs of these poor and responded out of their own substance. In this they expressed their preferential option for the poor and gave witness to a life style that expressed their solidarity with them.

Questions for reflection

1. What interests you in this principle? How do you react to it? What memories, questions, feelings does it surface in you?

2. How do you see your community living out this ideal? How might you do so even more?

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*Did not God choose those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom he promised to those who love him?*  
James 2:5
Discerning Communities

The spirituality of our Community is centered on Christ and on participation in the Paschal Mystery. Our spirituality draws its life from the Sacred Scriptures, the liturgy, the doctrinal development of the Church, and the revelation of God’s Will through the events of our times. Within the context of these universal sources, we hold the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as the specific source and the characteristic instrument of our spirituality. Our vocation calls us to live this spirituality, which opens and disposes us to whatever God wishes in each concrete situation of our daily life. We recognize particularly the necessity of prayer and discernment, personal and communal, of the daily examination of consciousness and of spiritual guidance as important means for seeking and finding God in all things.

Reflection

"Sources of Our Spirituality." The spirituality of CLC is the mystery of Christ’s life-death and resurrection. Its spirituality is based on Scripture, the liturgy and the Spiritual Exercises which lead us into an intimate relationship with God. We are people of process and discernment. Prayer for CLC is always within the concrete world situations of life. It leads us to take on the mind and heart of Christ. Familiarity with Christ is integral to our discernment, helped greatly by the Consciousness Examen and a Spiritual Guide.
A member of a CLC community was experiencing difficulties in her work in a church institution. She couldn't decide whether to continue in the position or resign. She came to her community and asked them to spend a series of meetings with her to help her discern what to do. They devised a process in which the members took to prayer what she had shared with them during the meeting. They didn't tell her what she should do, they simply expressed what occurred in their hearts as they prayed over her story. With their discerning support, she came to a decision regarding what she should do. This was a discerning action on the part of the community.

Questions for reflection

1. What interests you in this principle? How do you react to it? What memories, questions, feelings does it surface in you?

2. How do you see your community living out this ideal? How might you do so even more?

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Make every effort to understand your virtue with faith, your discernment with virtue, and your self-control with discernment.

2 Peter 2:5-6
General Principle 6 (see meeting format on pg. vi)

Union with Christ leads us to union with the Church where Christ here and now continues his mission of salvation. By making ourselves sensitive to the signs of the times and the movements of the Spirit, we will be better able to encounter Christ in all persons and in all situations. Sharing the riches of membership in the Church, we participate in the liturgy, meditate upon the Scriptures, and learn, teach and promote Christian doctrine. We work together with the hierarchy and other ecclesial leaders, motivated by a common concern for the problems and progress of all people and open to the situations in which the Church finds itself today. This sense of the Church impels us to creative and concrete collaboration for the work of advancing the reign of God on earth, and includes a readiness to go and serve where the needs of the Church so demand.

Reflection

"Sense of the Church". This is best understood as being in a unity of love with others who are all working to continue Christ's work of love in our day. This sense of the Church is not just a matter of intellectual knowledge but of an instinct for adapting to the current realities of the world. This instinct, springs from love and an inner sense of mission. This "includes a readiness to go and serve where the needs of the Church so demand". The idea of "going to serve" is not merely a geographical notion. It means being present where Christ's love is lacking, even within Church structures themselves.

The sense of Church is a matter of adapting to the realities of the world. This instinct springs from love and an inner sense of mission.
The sense of Church is something very demanding. How could it be otherwise? We are a pilgrim Church; the sense of Church develops slowly. Many feel disenfranchised by its dogma and practice. The Church community is clearly imperfect, as we all are imperfect. Christ's post-resurrection visits to his disciples were framed in the Gospels as visits to his Church. His call was that we as a community live and work together in the way that God loves and works among us.

Becoming Church calls for ongoing spiritual transformation, not as something rigid and objective, but more as interactive exchange in the way Jesus formed his apostles. The Church community is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved.

Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle displayed a remarkable sense of Church during the 1980's. Many harsh criticisms were leveled against him. He responded openly to all with a spirit of inner peace and forgiveness that defused his accusers. He was open to wherever the investigation might take him. It was undoubtedly a very painful time for him. Yet he maintained his own sense of personal integrity and at the same time remained faithful to the Catholic community which he so deeply loved.

Questions for reflection

1. What interests you in this principle? How do you react to it? What memories, questions, feelings does it surface in you?

2. How do you see your community living out this ideal? How might you do so even more?

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I call you friends since I have made known to you all all that I heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you. John 15:15-16
General Principle 7  (see meeting format on pg. vi)

We express the giving of ourselves by a personal commitment to the World Community, through a freely chosen local community. Such a local community, centered in the Eucharist, offers a concrete experience of unity in love and action. In fact, each of our communities is a gathering of people in Christ, a cell of his Mystical Body. Our common commitment, our common way of life, and our recognition and love of Mary as our mother bind us together. Our responsibility to develop the bonds of community does not stop with our local community but extends to the National and World Christian Life Community, to the ecclesial communities of which we are part (parish, diocese), to the whole Church and to all people of good will.

Reflection

"Community Bonds." The primary commitment in CLC is to a common worldwide way of life through belonging to a local group. Historical sources show a strong communal spirit in the first group in Rome. Ignatius himself was led from purely personal service of God to the communal. He with his companions reflected on their experience, noticed the movements within them, sifted and discerned those movements in community, and then responded to God. This is the core of CLC's way of life.

CLC at its deepest level is an apostolic community, as distinguished from a community in which some members are apostolic. An apostolic community is one in which all members participate in discerning a decision, wait for confirmation, and then live out the decision openly in their own ways. Learning and experiencing this way of life takes considerable time. Those who are not called to this way should be helped to find another group or way.
Our experience of discerning community is not limited to our local community. This same experience is lived out in hundreds of CLC communities around the world. Our commitment to be Christ for others is common at all levels of CLC life -- regional, national, world, as well as to other ecclesial communities and even beyond, wherever we find people of good will.

A delegate from one of the African countries needed financial assistance to attend the recent World CLC Assembly in Guadalajara, Mexico. The communities in CLCNW took up collections totalling $600 which provided him with the necessary means to attend. A number of delegates from around the world were able to attend the World Assembly in Brazil this summer because of donations received from CLCNW and other communities around the world. This is an immediate and very positive way for communities in one area to be in union with those in other parts of the CLC World Community.

Questions for reflection

1. What interests you in this principle? How do you react to it? What memories, questions, feelings does it surface in you?

2. How do you see your community living out this ideal? How might you do so even more?

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It was in one Spirit that all of us were baptized into one body.  
1 Corinthians 12:12
General Principle 8  (see meeting format on pag. vi)

Christ has sent us on mission as members of the pilgrim People of God to be His witnesses before all people by our attitudes, words and actions. We are to become identified with His mission of bringing the good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives and to the blind, new sight, setting the downtrodden free and proclaiming the Lord's year of favor. Our life is essentially apostolic. The field of CLC mission knows no limits: it extends both to the Church and the world, in order to bring the Gospel of salvation to all people and to serve individual persons and society by opening hearts to conversion and struggling to change oppressive structures.

a. Each of us receives from God a call to make Christ and his saving action present to our surroundings. This personal apostolate is indispensable for extending the Gospel in a lasting and penetrating way among the great diversity of persons, places and situations.

b. At the same time, we exercise a corporate or group apostolate in a great variety of forms, whether through group action initiated or sustained by the Community through suitable structures, or through involvement of members in existing secular and religious organizations and efforts. Through the daily faith-consciousness examen and through personal and communal discernment, we try to give an apostolic sense to even the most humble realities of daily life.

c. The Community urges us to proclaim the Word of God and to work for the reform of structures in society, participating in efforts to liberate the victims from all sorts of discrimination and especially to abolish differences between rich and poor. We wish to contribute to the evangelization of cultures from within. We desire to do all this in an ecumenical spirit, prepared to collaborate with those ini-
Initiatives that bring about unity among Christians. Our life finds its permanent inspiration in the Gospel of the poor and humble Christ.

Reflection

Mission in CLC is not a matter of adopting a certain plan of action, but of focusing one's energy on living as Christ. It is not a matter of adding on apostolic activity to what you are already doing as it is in making everything you do be of Christ. Apostolic life is focused passion.

There is within the CLC way of seeing things a special relationship with the poor. They reveal the Gospel to us. They minister to us by revealing our poverty, our fears, our attachments. The poor reveal our need for God. Our need for God in turn reveals the poor, and our ministering to them becomes a gift to us. Being with the poor is more than an obligation, it is a gift.

Bill has devoted himself to being a presence to and a voice for the poorest. He established a community for the homeless and those released from mental hospitals. He has spent time in prison for acts of civil disobedience in protest to the indiscriminate killing of modern weapons and of the US training of the Central and South American military which has committed numberless acts of terror, kidnappings, and killing of civilians. Bill's whole life is on mission to protect the dignity of persons and family and to work for justice. It is with them that he finds the freedom and joy of God.

Questions for sharing

1. What attracts you in this principle? What doesn't? What memories, questions, and feelings does it surface in you?

2. How do you see yourself and your community living out this ideal? How might you do so even more?
General Principle 9  (see meeting format on pg. vi)

Union: Since the spirituality of our Community is centered on Christ, we see the role of Mary in relation to Christ: she is the model of our own collaboration in Christ’s mission. Mary’s cooperation with God begins with her “yes” in the mystery of the Annunciation-Incarnation. Her effective service as shown in her visit to Elisabeth and her solidarity with the poor as reflected in the “Magnificat”, make her our inspiration to act for justice in the world today. Mary’s cooperation in her Son’s mission, continued all through her life, inspires us to give ourselves totally to God in union with Mary, who by accepting the designs of God became our mother and the mother of all. Thus we confirm our own mission of service to the world received in baptism and confirmation. We honor Mary, the Mother of God, in a special way, and we rely on her intercession in fulfilling our vocation.

Reflection

"Mary, Model of Our Mission." Through her YES to God in Nazareth, Mary leads us to a deepening of our union with Christ. Her YES places her in the hands of God. There is a unity between the person she is and the mission she receives. Her “being” and “doing” are one. Her Yes to God in no way stymied her personality, in fact it brought her utter fulfillment. Mary is the model of Christian fruitfulness.

Mary’s Yes to God’s invitation in no way stymied her personality. In fact it brought her utter fulfillment.

Her solidarity with the poor, as reflected in the Magnificat, makes her our inspiration to act for justice in the world today. Mary’s was not a life protected from the realities of daily life. In fact, she was inserted into every aspect of her Son’s
work, from birth to death. She was available to him in every event that she faced. Her YES never ceased. Mary is our model for mission.

The young life of Sara's daughter, Betty, came to a violent end, sending her husband to prison. Sara wrote him there, "You must have been awfully angry. I know you didn't mean it. Don't let this ruin your life. You are still a young man." The power to forgive him did not come from her. The grace for reconciliation was given to her. She was close to God. She experienced in her own life the agony that Mary must have felt on Calvary. She experienced the love and forgiveness that Mary too felt. Being close to God did not stifle her, it freed her from the paralysis of her pain into a fuller participation of her vocation as mother. Mary continues to be the model of mission.

Questions for reflection

1. What interests you in this principle? How do you react to it? What memories, questions, feelings does it surface in you?

2. How do you see your community living out this ideal? How might you do so even more?

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But who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

Luke 1:43
**YES or NO**

**Is CLC for me**

You have just finished praying over Part One of the General Principles. How did they affect you? You may find the following questions helpful. "Do the General Principles describe your spiritual path? Do they give you the orientation that you want your life to have as a Christian? Do they give you the language that best describes your interior process?"

**What is unique to CLC**

CLC isn't the only way to live out the Christian vocation. It is no better than any other. It is simply one way, a particular way of living that is faithful to the Gospel. Being Ignatian, CLC is unique in that as a community, it seeks to discover how to love and serve God in all things. Its way of proceeding is discernment. Its mission is whatever fosters God's way among God's people.

**Why do some join CLC and others not**

Because they want to. They recognize that to live in any other way than what is described in the General Principles is psychologically unattractive. Desire is the key energy in Ignatian spirituality. The best reason for joining CLC is the desire to do so.