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## PROJECTS

### Our Gift to the World - Our Responsibility

### Personal and Communal Discernment

Nº 174, June 2020

*Original: English*

**“But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels,  
that the surpassing power may be of God  
and not from us.”**  
2 Corinthians 4: 7

We are living in strange times, unprecedented times, worldwide. More than ever, we are invited to be contemplatives in action, to be present to the situation and discern our response.

#### 1. The Crisis

We are living in the global pandemic of covid-19. In **today’s interconnectedness**, the measures taken to treat those infected and slow the spread are similar worldwide. The whole world is in lockdown, with governments requiring us to stay home. Many of us are working and studying from home. Families are spending more time together. Yet in other situations, some people cannot be with family at all. Those who live alone can suffer even longer isolation. In some cases, the dying are without the comfort of loved ones being close to them.

Travelers are put in isolation before being allowed into their destinations and those infected are treated in quarantine to prevent further infection to others. In some places, doctors must decide who lives and who dies when resources are not available for all who are sick.<sup>1</sup>

Access to goods and services has been reduced. Businesses are collapsing. Economies are shrinking. People are losing jobs. Many are having to take pay cuts. The poor are suffering even more lack than they had already been living with. We can no longer meet each other physically. We can no longer attend Mass and receive the Holy Eucharist; no longer visit the Blessed Sacrament.

**Nature has found a place again that we had taken away.** Nature is responding positively to the decline of harmful human activity. Geographic structures like the Himalayas and Mt. Kenya that were hidden from sight by artificial fog” are now visible. The sky is blue again.

In some places, the lockdown restrictions are being lifted. Social distancing and wearing masks is now required in these places for fear of a second wave of infection.

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<sup>1</sup> Watch the video of the World Executive Council Meeting with the Regional Teams: <https://youtu.be/U0uZmrVzvo0>

## 2. Immediate Response

Families are using this time together to build relationship, although sadly, in others, domestic violence is increasing. The family being the first church is now real as it is the only legitimate Church gathering allowed in these days.

Church services have gone digital, and many admit that while they are less than the ideal in-person gatherings we may have taken for granted, they offer it is much needed support for the Christian community journey through spiritual communion. **We have discovered new ways of being in communion, in community.**

People are reaching out to each other more. Medical staff are being more compassionate, sitting with the sick and dying, without family and friends, to offer comfort. Many are reaching out to the vulnerable to offer necessities everywhere.

The digital world has lit up everywhere. New ways of working together are being explored and discovered every day, and while we work from home, we develop new ways of living together with new realities. CLC has activated its creativity to continue celebrating and sharing faith in community as well as collaborating on different initiatives with others, especially with those who are most in need. Many national communities celebrated the World CLC Day (March 25th) virtually. The World ExCo annual meeting for 2020 that was to be Rome in April has instead been lived digitally.

## 3. Mid- and long-term Change but short-term Opportunity

The world as we knew has changed. The world we live in might change. No, it will change. **Let's be protagonists of this change.** The huge shifts we are seeing in our daily way of life will completely change the way we live in many ways. We wonder what the future will look like. The situation is calling us to peel off externalities and get in touch with our humanity and our values. We are now searching for new meaning in the midst of the current crisis. We are pondering upon who family is and what family means to us. We are appreciating the value of friendship even more. As people of faith, we may have many questions of the Lord and for each other. **We strive to find the deep meaning and incorporate the learnings that this experience leaves behind.**

The crisis has provided us with an opportunity to change our individual lifestyle and state of mind. We are deepening our appreciation of being one world, one human community. Like never before, we are becoming more aware that the old ways are never sufficient. Isaiah 43:19<sup>2</sup> and Revelations 21:5<sup>3</sup> - God is always making things new. Along with Pope Francis, many Christians and people of faith everywhere are praying more and thinking of their responsibilities now and into the future, in new perspectives.

*"I'm living this as a time of great uncertainty. It's a time for inventing, for creativity", says Pope Francis... "The creativity of the Christian needs to show forth in opening up new horizons, opening windows, opening transcendence toward God and toward people, and in creating new ways of being at home. It is not easy to be confined to your house.... This is the tie to take the decisive step, to move*

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<sup>2</sup> "See, I am doing a new thing; now it springs up. Do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

<sup>3</sup> "And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trust worthy and true."

*from using and misusing nature to contemplating it. We have lost the contemplative dimension; we have to get it back at this time.*"<sup>4</sup>

The current time invites us to creativity, novelty, newness. To have courage, depth and an integral look **to make discernment lead us to transform reality**. There will be no change that is sustainable if it is not rooted in a **true personal conversion**.

	<b>What concrete lessons I am learning from what we are experiencing?</b>	<b>Change / Opportunity: What / How am I invited to live concretely?</b>
<b>In our lifestyle and daily life: what is really important?</b>		
<b>In my relationship with others (family, classmates or work, friends, neighbors, my community)</b>		
<b>Our Common Home: How do I take care of it? What importance do I give to it, taking into account future generations?</b>		
<b>In caring for the most vulnerable</b>		
<b>In my relationship with God: the domestic church, an ecumenical and spiritual</b>		

\*The illustration can be a guide to reflect on the effect of the Covid-19 crisis in four dimensions.

#### **4. Our Call and Responsibility**

Most of the world population is sensing that important and possibly irreversible changes are coming. Many are thinking about their purpose in life, some wanting to change what they do to what they feel called to do. There are many decisions to be made, big and small. As members of CLC, as Christians, as humanity, we must therefore discern to know what the Lord wants of us in this situation now; how to walk into the future irrespective of our religious affiliations and philosophical leanings. This is the unique opportunity that we cannot miss: to be active beyond the frontiers of the Church and even beyond the circle of those who believe in God.

As members of the Ignatian family, sharing the skills of discernment is not an option any more. Many people are open to change now, creating the room and the need for discernment. As members of CLC, we have been practicing discernment, daily, for many years. We know that many around us do not know what discernment is, have never heard of it. It is our responsibility to bring discernment to them. Discernment is our gift to the church, and especially Communal Discernment as experienced in Buenos Aires.

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<sup>4</sup> Pope: How I am living through the Covid-19 pandemic: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-04/pope-how-i-am-living-through-the-covid-19-pandemic.html>

*“Discernment is complex and demanding. It involves acquiring and maintaining that Ignatian indifference that derives from that inner freedom by which we overcome any attachment to our own interests, possessions, or the use of instruments. It also involves developing a sensitivity to the signs of the times, learning to perceive where and how the Spirit is acting in today’s world, in the social context in which the life of each one of us, of our society and our environment unfolds. Discernment demands that sort of silence that sets itself apart from the noise that hampers the opportunity of listening to the Spirit.(...)Discernment is always an exercise that consists in looking at the world, in all its reality, while letting oneself be moved internally and dedicating oneself to the greater service.”<sup>5</sup>*  
(Fr. Arturo Sosa S.I.:2018)

The experience we are living in these days invites us to think of new ways of living and of sharing this gift in every setting. We are called to help the world identify the work of the Holy Spirit among us and to follow its lead. **To be open to being led by the unpredictability of grace by listening to the Spirit of Truth.** We know that discernment can make a huge difference when we live it as individuals. Imagine what difference it will make as we share it as a community and practice it in communal discernment! Our mission is not only within the church, so we must use wisdom language in sharing discernment as a precious way to address those who do not believe in any transcendental being.

## **5. We can do this in many ways, big and small.**

At the individual level, by living lives of discernment, ourselves, in our daily lives, daily prayer. What concrete lessons do we draw from this experience? What does what we have lived through invite us to do? Where is the Incarnate Lord present today as we contemplate in the Spiritual Exercises? We have the opportunity to think more, to pray more, to focus even more on the essential things.

At family level, practicing discernment with our families involves learning how to listen to one another and how to speak openly what one feels in the Lord, what one feels the need to say: without polite deference, without hesitation, so that we can listen to each other in families, in order to listen to the Holy Spirit together.

We can discern with our friends whenever decisions are being made, whenever we are asked to listen or advice.

We can invite our small Christian communities, of all types and nature, to discern.

Discernment is also needed at the macro level, looking at the systemic issues and problems accompanying this pandemic. As we take a look around us, who are the poor and vulnerable most negatively impacted? Where are the convergences with other crises and failures: conflict and war, ecological devastation, discrimination against indigenous, racial and gender injustices, economic inequities, etc. How can we take a look at these crises and injustices with the eyes of God? What is ours to do in the building of God's vision and reign on Earth? How can we engage discernment?

Discernment must eventually **lead to decision and action.** *“Ignatian spirituality continues to be extremely modern and relevant to our time. It has an admirable flexibility and creativity, since it depends so much on how the Spirit of God guides us. Ignatian spirituality empowers us for discernment and empowers us for action. Discernment should lead us to action, because discernment that ends in itself is useless.”<sup>6</sup>* (Fr. Adolfo Nicolás S.I.:2013) Our CLC communities can accompany us as we discern and make

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<sup>5</sup> Fr. Arturo Sosa S.I. (2018), CLC General Assembly Buenos Aires: A Discerning Lay Community in the Service of Reconciliation.

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Adolfo Nicolás S.I. (2013), CLC General Assembly Lebanon: Wisdom Language for the Frontiers

decisions, sending us to action, supporting us in our actions, and ongoing evaluation – DSSE. This should lead us to new ways of organizing ourselves within CLC, in forming a culture of discernment where we continuously look, observe and ask what more we can do.

## 6. On Discernment

Pope Francis makes discernment a constant call through all his major writings to the Church and the world. YES, discernment is not for the Ignatian family alone, it is not even for the Christian community alone. Discernment is a timely gift of the spirit of the whole world. In this context, our mission is both urgent and delightful. We share in the work of the spirit to invite all people to learn to tune in to the spirit in their hearts, in their community. **At a time when many wonder if God has deserted the world, we can play our role to remind humanity how so close and active God is in our midst and to help them to tune it to God's loving and life-giving presence. It is our responsibility. It is our call. It is not an option any more.**

Of course, discernment is not easy. We have experienced that at an individual level. To understand the movement of the Spirit within our own selves, to know the promptings that lead to life and not to death dealing. This is the grace of the First Week. Then God calls us and others in movements' characteristic of the school of discernment of the Second Week of the Exercises, a much more intricate business. In these different levels of discernment, we are much assisted by our discerning CLC community as well as by the treasures brought through individualized spiritual accompaniment. We are invited to embrace these gifts in our own lives and care to cultivate them for the use of others. To help our CLC communities become places where discernment is constantly supported is a unique responsibility of all of our members. Here we support each other in our own discernment and enable ourselves to accompany others as they learn to walk this way.

Remember that discernment is learned and deepened as we discern. To live a life of discernment, it is important to have time for **personal prayer**, to get to know our **spiritual sensitivity**, to be aware of what we are **seeing, feeling and living** in our day to day. To be well informed by gathering information, for example, identifying and reading respected sources of **information**, studying analyses by thoughtful and spiritual leaders. To be **indifferent**, which means to be clear about what we are living for. Accompanying others in various situations can assist us gain information, in addition to being of immediate service.

## 7. It is Urgent

We are making this urgent and solemn call to the World Christian Life Community, all members everywhere, to share our gift with the world.

The experience of Buenos Aries confirmed that **discernment is our way** as well as our mission. It is the most precious gift received from the Lord for the church and the world through CLC.

The world is asking questions about the future, what the new normal will be and how it will be sustained without causing harm. We are sent to this situation here and now. To be true to the grace received at Buenos Aries.

This is a call for each of the more than 23,000 CLC members worldwide, and not a challenge for just a few considered as 'experts'. It is a unique opportunity for us to act consistently as one world body across

the globe. It is a duty for each member to share and bring their experience of discernment to all we come across, in all situations, trusting the Lord and using **wisdom language** everywhere.

It is our way to live and to truly be a gift to the church and the world during and beyond COVID -19.

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