

The Gift of Awareness as a CLC Process Guide
Atlantic Regional Council - October 2014, Summerside, P.E.I.



In October delegates from groups within the CLC Atlantic Region met in Summerside, P.E.I. for a regional council meeting. The purpose of this gathering was to vote on a common mission for our region... as well as to gather as a community to share the fruits and joys of our faith. As the new Ecclesial Assistant for Atlantic Canada this gathering was especially blessed for me. It gave me the opportunity to get better acquainted with my CLC brothers and sisters here in Atlantic and with all the gifts that they have been blessed with. But I wasn't here in their presence just to enjoy myself with them in beautiful Summerside (this being my first visit to P.E.I.). I was put to work... was given a task! During the voting and sharing rounds of the delegates I was asked to be their 'Process Guide', working alongside their 'Process Facilitator', Julia Donahoe-McDougald.

Though the entire voting rounds would take only the duration of Saturday morning, with a confirmation round after lunch, it was a very fruitfully packed and blessed morning... a morning rich with the witness of apostolic commitment coupled with a willingness for compromise and adaptation as a community... though this was not easy. Each of the delegates were asked to vote on either 'Poverty' or 'CLC Development/Formation' as our regional apostolic focus. For two rounds of voting our delegates were evenly split - 10 delegates split 5 by 5. Clearly a negotiated consensus was required. Clearly we needed God's guidance... as well as delegates' willingness for compromise and flexibility. In these rich, and quite honestly, dramatic, deliberations, this is what I heard as the delegates process guide.

Many delegates brought to this gathering in Summerside a misgiving that they had to choose between two very important apostolic endeavours for CLC, one that focused interiorly upon our community (CLC Development/Formation), and another that was focused upon the needs of our communities around us (Poverty). This misgiving was an echo of the misgivings of many of the CLC groups in Atlantic Canada... *we cannot focus upon one need at the expense of the other*. Were these misgivings merely a human fear of committing to one focus or another (we can find it hard as human beings to make decisions after all)? Or was God calling these delegates of CLC Atlantic Canada to something else, something unexpected, here in Summerside? As their 'process guide' I had to prayerfully discern how God seemed to be present amongst the delegates on this Saturday morning, and to share my awareness with them. As delegates they believed they were asked to chose between 1 of 2 apostolic options, as discerned by the regional groups over the last year, and to come to a consensus around a such a decision. But as we know, God works in mysterious ways... God leads us down crooked paths... God sees a much larger picture of our reality than we could ever imagine.

What I heard within CLC Atlantic Canada here in Summerside, in the voices of its chosen delegates, was the desire to remain attentive and focused upon a more complex reality and need in our world, a reality and need that goes beyond a simple focus upon the issue of 'Poverty' *or* 'CLC Development/Formation.' The need to be attentive towards and address

issues of poverty within the world around us, a need that Pope Francis continually draws our attention towards, cannot be done fully and adequately, in true witness, without ongoing and renewed formation as a CLC community. This felt need of the delegates reminded me of the first disciples in the presence of Jesus. While Jesus continually led the disciples into the presence of people in need of healing and mercy - in need of help - these apostolic missions were always coupled with their growth as a community of prayer and communal awareness... the commitment of their exterior mission to others was always engaged within the context of their ongoing interior mission and formation with one another. The early disciples went out into the needs of others, but always came back to one another for support and understanding.

As a consecrated religious living in community, and as members of families, I think we can all appreciate the relational complexity of our lives, and of our need to be attentive to them in all their dimensions. Our families and our spiritual communities, are the foundations upon which we reach out to others, they are the soil in which we are rooted and grow out of. We must not allow our foundations to crack, we must not allow our soil to dry... they must be attended to and nourished. Only in our attentiveness and focus upon this interior need in our lives can we fruitfully and joyfully reach out to others... and reaching out we must. It is awareness of this complexity that led the CLC Atlantic Region to say *"As the CLC Atlantic Region we are called to place our gifts at the service of the poor, assisted by CLC development for this mission."* Such a statement doesn't sound fearful at all, but rather a statement of sound commitment arising from prayerful flexibility as a spiritual family... we have gifts... we are called to share them with those who are in need of community and acceptance. If to be impoverished is ultimately to be cut off and deprived of what is life giving and nourishing then we as a CLC community have something to share and offer... we have gifts for the poor to share. CLC Atlantic Region was reminded of this in Summerside.