

Lay Claretian Movement
Study Guide #18

THE GROWTH AND MATURATION OF A LAY CLARETIAN GROUP

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This booklet represents a resume of a conference addressed to the Lay Claretian groups of Spain. Some concrete references to that country may be made. Nevertheless, it hardly deals with local matters. It has been included in the collection of Study Guides for Lay Claretians because it can be useful for groups in other parts of the world.

This second edition was edited in Rome, July 11, 1994, using the revised text of the Sourcebook and entering whole texts instead of just reference for the reader's convenience.

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The Growth and Maturation of a Lay Claretian Group

I. PUTTING THE THEME IN PERSPECTIVE

In this reflection, I am going to be speaking only of the Local Group of Lay Claretians, generally a small group, and not of the overall Movement. I am likewise going to be speaking of their qualitative growth (maturation), and not of their quantitative growth (in numbers), which should follow the former.

We cannot speak adequately about the growth of a Lay Claretian Group without first clearing up two basic points:

- 1) the model of Church in which and for which the group is growing, and
- 2) the group model or kind of community which the group wants to be.

The need for this prior clarification is evident:

- a) The Lay Claretians are an ecclesial movement, born of a charism that is part of the Church's patrimony, of a mission that forms part of the mission of the Church and "is carried out within the mission of the Church" (Sourcebook, no.22)

If we do not know the idea of Church or ecclesial mission in which the Lay Claretians are moving, we cannot know either the directions or dimensions of maturation in which Lay Claretian groups have to grow not only in the Church, but also as Church, that is, in their being Church.

- b) Likewise, if we do not know the model of the group or Christian community that corresponds to the identity of the Lay Claretian Movement, it will be hard for us to know what process they should be following and how they should be following it.

1. The Model of Church in the Lay Claretian Sourcebook

The Church Jesus founded has its own unique elements. But the Church, keeping intact these elements that derive from its Founder, has continued to take on distinct concrete forms in which it realizes these elements throughout history.

Only in this sense can we speak of diverse models of Church or of distinct conceptions of the one Church of Christ.

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Throughout the course of history, there have been many models of Church. We can go so far as to say that today, even among Catholics of the same time and area, different models of Church can and do coexist. We cannot say, for example, that the Opus Dei and Basic Christian Communities (BCC) aim at developing the same model of Church, either within the group or in their outward efforts.

Drastically oversimplifying things, we can speak of two main models of Church: the preconciliar model and the model proposed by the Second Vatican Council. This latter model has continued to develop later, since the Council was not only a point of arrival, but also a point of departure in the process of Church renewal.

Using this overdrawn, but workable contrast, we can describe these two models of Church as follows:

Preconciliar model: the Church is a hierarchy which has a people.

Conciliar model: the Church is a people which has a hierarchy.

The first model is also called a societal model because in it, the Church is conceived of as a society made up of unequal members; it is also called a clientele model, because it considers that in it, the hierarchy have a clientele to whom they offer certain services.

The second model is also called a communitarian model, because in it, the Church is conceived of as a community of persons who offer differentiated services. The faithful are not clients, but co-responsible persons.

In the first model the hierarchy form the essential and dynamic nucleus of the Church, and are charged with almost all responsibilities in the Church. The hierarchy declares what is to be believed and what is to be done; it has the first and last word. The laity are clients, the passive and docile recipients of the cares, services and norms of the hierarchy.

"No one is ignorant of the fact that the Church is a distinct society, in which God has destined some to command and others to obey. The latter are the laity, the former are the clergy" (Vatican I, SP. n.10).

"The faithful have no other duty than to let themselves be led by their pastors and to follow them like a docile flock" (St. Pius X, VN. nn.9-10).

The mere fact that Vatican II chose to call the Church the "People of God" (a heretofore little used expression), and that the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (LG) spoke first of the People of God and then of the hierarchy, indicates that there has been something of a Copernican Revolution in the official notion of the Church.

"By divine institution holy Church is ordered and governed with a wonderful diversity. `For just as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, so we the many, are one Body in Christ, but severally members one of another' (Rom. 12:4-5). **There is, therefore, one chosen People of God:** `one Lord, one faith, one baptism' (Eph. 4:5); there is the common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as sons, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity. In Christ and in the Church there is, then, no inequality arising from race or nationality, social condition or sex, for `there is neither Jew or Greek; there is neither slave nor freeperson; there is neither male nor female. For you are all `one' in Christ Jesus" (Col. 3:11). (LG 32)

Within the People --not outside or above it-- the hierarchy is a service to the Church. and not only the hierarchy, but all the faithful, are co-responsible in an orderly way in the Church.

The Council proposed to us a model of Church that is communitarian, charismatic and participative. I shall return to these three characteristics in a moment.

There are other aspects that reveal sharp contrasts between the former and present models of the Church. I am going to refer to just one here, namely, the relationship between the Church and the world.

In the first model, the Church tended to view the world as an enemy from which it had to defend itself; in fact, it showed itself to be rather distant from a number of great social problems. Faith was more of an intimate, personal matter, and was expressed above all in the acceptance of dogmatic truths and religious and sacramental practices. Active charity--concrete works for the transformation of the world--were not seen as an essential expression of faith.

In the second model, the world is looked upon as the place in which the Church has to carry out its mission of proclaiming and spreading the Kingdom of God. Here, the Church feels challenged by, rather than distanced from, the great problems of society and by situations that contradict the Kingdom. Faith is not reduced to the acceptance of dogmatic truths and certain religious practices, but involves social and political commitment, efforts to transform the world, the struggle to establish justice and solidarity among all people and to eliminate structures of oppression. That we see each other as sisters and brothers.

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The model of Church that is expressed in the Sourcebook is that of the Church as the People of God, a communitarian, charismatic and participative model.

a) Communitarian

SOURCEBOOK:

- 17. The gift we have received and the experience of it which we share, are bonds of a communion. This charismatic communion, which is above all a grace, we express and develop in friendship, mutual help, teamwork, assemblies, days of reflection, review and prayer, in other encounters planned by the community, and above all in the Eucharist.**

Within the pluralism that is proper of a charismatic communion, Lay Claretian groups are generally small ecclesial communities, which may even have all things in common, like Christian communities.

- 21. We Lay Claretian carry out our evangelizing mission in these two ways:**
- **through Christian animation and action to transform temporal realities;**
 - **through cooperating as laypersons, to build up the Church to a community of faith hope and charity.**

The Church as communion is brought about by its being a community of communities. The small Christian community is the most nuclear expression of the Church's being. "They spring from the need to live the Church's life more intensely" (EN 58).

"In some regions the Ecclesial Base Communities appeal and develop, almost without exception, within the Church, having solidarity with her life, being nourished by her teaching and united with her pastors. In these cases, they spring from a need to live the Church's life more intensely, or from the desire and quest for a more human dimension such as larger ecclesial communities can only offer with difficulty, especially in the big modern cities which lend themselves both to life in the mass and to anonymity. Such communities can quite simply be in their own way an extension on the spiritual and religious level - worship, deepening of faith, fraternal charity, prayer, contact with pastors - of a small sociological community such as a village, etc. Or again their aim may be to bring together, for the purpose to listening to and meditation on the Word, for the Sacraments and the bond of agape, groups of people who are linked by age, culture, civil state or social situation: married couples, young people, professional people, etc., people who already happen

to be united in the struggle for justice, aid for the poor, human advancement."
(EN 58)

"These Ecclesial Base Communities are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a "civilization of love." (RM 51)

"Because the Church is communion, the new 'basic communities', if they truly live in unity with the Church, are a true expression of communion and a means of construction of a more profound communion. They are thus cause for great hope for the life of the Church." (1985 Synod of Bishops, Final Report, II,C,6)

They are an expression of the Church itself; that is to say, a community called together by the word of God, nourished by the Eucharist and united to its pastors, in order to fulfill its mission of proclaiming the Gospel and of serving humanity.

b) Charismatic

The People of God are guided and animated by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit keeps them united and empowers its members with special gifts so that they can better serve the community and their mission in the Church. "The Holy Spirit empowers and destines us for special service in the Church" (S. n.5).

SOURCEBOOK:

- 5. Through the Claretian charism, which qualifies our whole being, the Holy Spirit empowers and destines us for a special service in the Church.**

Identified through this gift with Christ the Missionary, we continue, as laypersons, the mission for which the Holy Spirit raised up St. Anthony Mary Claret in the Church.

The Lord has called us to be evangelizers, to proclaim and spread the Kingdom of God among people by means of the word in all its forms, especially by our witness and transforming action in the world, thus bringing the Good News to all human environments and transforming humanity from within.

17. **The gift we have received and the experience of it which we share, are bonds of a communion. This charismatic communion, which is above all a grace, we express and develop in friendship, mutual help, teamwork, assemblies, days of reflection, review and prayer, in other encounters planned by the community, and above all in the Eucharist.**

Within the pluralism that is proper of a charismatic communion, Lay Claretian groups are generally small ecclesial communities, which may even have all things in common, like the early Christian communities.

Every charism is for a service to the community. Some of these services come to form part of the official organization of the Church and then become ministries. In this sense the very structure of the Church is charismatic, because it is determined and shaped by the different charisms.

"Baptism makes us God's people and living members of the Church. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, we share in all the wealth of Grace that the Risen One bestows on us.

"It is the same spirit that enables us to recognize Jesus as Lord and leads us to build up the unity of the Church from the various charisms that he entrusts to us for 'the common good' (1Cor. 12:3-11).

"Thus, Christ's salvific ministry (cf. Mt. 20:28; Jn 10:10) is made present through the presence of each one of us. We exist and we serve in a Church with a wealth of ministries." (Santo Domingo Conclusions, CELAM, 1992, nn. 65,66)

In this charismatic People of God there is one charism of exceptional importance, the charism which gives unity to all charisms and coordinates them for the common good of the people: **the charism of the hierarchy.**

c) Participative

When we say that the Church is the People of God, we are stressing not only the essential equality of all its members, but also the co-responsibility that belongs to every citizen in a well organized people.

In the Church, no one can be merely passive, no one can be without responsibilities, because no one is without charisms. Charism is the source of

responsibility, since it is given for a service. The diversity of charisms gives rise to what Yves Congar has called "differentiated co-responsibility."

The Church is a group of believers entrusted collectively with the responsibility to live and proclaim the Gospel.

Laypersons find, in small Christian communities, their place of communion and the most adequate channel for the development of their co-responsibility and their participation in the life and mission of the People of God.

"Today's Church, like that of yesterday and always, will either be a community of communities, prepared by a catechumenate and later maintained in a climate of constant self-catechesis, or else it will continue being a Church that is bureaucratic rather than charismatic, yawning, rather than confessing, an atomized and spineless Church, passive and massive, instead of being a People of God that are alive, happy and decided on their way, which can give witness to the world of the hope that gives meaning to their walk through history" (A. Iniesta, in España a país de misión, de J. López, PPC 1979, p.4).

Lay Claretians feel that they are part of this charism-endowed people and they strive to live lives committed to the what is enumerated in n. 27 of the Sourcebook and specifically:

SOURCEBOOK:

27. The options in principle that inspire our ecclesial commitment and, as permanent attitudes, orient all our actions, are:

.....

- **the promotion of a more community-oriented and participative model of Church, in which all the faithful can fully develop the responsibilities and demands of their own ecclesial mission.....**

The maturation or growth of an Lay Claretian group as Church implies:

a) Growth in communion among themselves as a small ecclesial community, and growth in communion with the local Church and with the other small communities that make it up.

b) Growth in participation and co-responsibility in the local Church.

2. Group Model Or the Lay Claretian Movement

There is a very broad range of group types, depending on the different points of view and criteria that are taken into account. We will refer to only two of these types that seem to be especially interesting for the understanding of an Lay Claretian group. We will be looking at groups that differ:

- ! in the first place, from the point of view of their aims (what they are for) and,
- ! in the second place, from the point of view of their origins (how they come into being).

2.1. From the point of view of their aims

Special interest groups are those in which the members meet in order to satisfy some interest or interests. According to the kinds of interests involved, we can distinguish two types of groups:

a) Groups with internal interests

The aims of these groups is to satisfy needs of an emotional, intellectual, spiritual, economic, professional or other type. The group is for itself; it exists to satisfy the needs or interests of the members of the group. Everything remains within the group.

b) Groups with transcendent interests or values

The aim of these groups is not to satisfy their own personal needs or interests, but to live and put into effect certain values that are above the group. The group is not for itself, but for the values that it strives to put into effect. Its members are joined by something that is of more worth and that stands above their own interests and needs.

Obviously, an Lay Claretian group is a group with **transcendent values**. It does not exists for the satisfaction of its personal needs or interests, however good those might be, but rather, to interiorize, personally live and carry out in the world, the values of the Kingdom of God.

Among the values of the Kingdom of Cod, the following stand out:

- a) In relation to God: filiation (sonship and daughtership), that is, love and filial commitment to the Father and His will; the following of Jesus; docility to the Spirit; a life lived in love, faith and active hope.

- b) In relation to the world: fraternity (brotherhood and sisterhood), that is, our own living as brothers and sisters and our struggle to enable all men and women to live as brothers and sisters; the promotion of justice, peace, equality, solidarity, etc.

An Lay Claretian group does not exist for the purpose of becoming an oasis of fraternity that is closed in on itself, but rather, for the sake of mission, that is, in order to proclaim and spread the Kingdom of God.

2.2. From the point of view of their origin

From the point of view of their origin, and in a theological perspective, we can likewise distinguish two types of groups:

a) Groups formed by a mere human will to associate

These are groups with religious and apostolic aims which are created by the free decision of their members in order better to realize the general vocation to holiness and to the apostolate that every Christian has. If several persons with common cultural or apostolic interests in common freely decide to join together in order to help one another in the service they offer, they can begin a group that is not born of the dynamism of a charism.

b) Groups formed in response to a charism

These groups do not arise from a merely human will to form an association, but also and above all, from an action of the Spirit, who, through His gifts or charisms, calls and empowers certain people for a special mission. The charism they share is the dynamism that creates the group and is also the special bond that keeps them together. Of course, in order to become a working social reality, they also need a free personal decision to form a group and to commit themselves to the fulfillment of their aims.

The Lay Claretians are a group born of a charism, understood in the sense just indicated. At the origin of such a group there is a call from God and a calling together by means of the gifts of the Spirit. The Sourcebook makes this very clear:

SOURCEBOOK:

- 17. The gift we have received and the experience of it which we share, are bonds of a communion. This charismatic communion, which is above all a grace, we**

express and develop in friendship, mutual help, teamwork, assemblies, days of reflection, review and prayer, in other encounters planned by the community, and above all in the Eucharist.

2.3. A Work Group or a Small Christian Community?

Although I will be speaking only in brief and sketchy terms, we will try to point out the most important difference between a work group, as usually understood, and a small Christian community.

a) Work groups tend to develop some particular dimension or aspect of Christian life, while a community tends to develop all of them. This partialness, which is proper of a work group, and this wholeness, which is proper of a small Christian community, is the characteristic that most clearly distinguishes them from one another.

The work group is made up of persons who join together to achieve some partial objective or objectives. Thus, there are groups that meet for Bible study, for theological reflection, for formation in liturgy, for pastoral or spiritual growth, for apostolate, for social or cultural studies, for aid to the needy, etc.

Although communications and personal relationships within a work group may be excellent, they are still not of the kind that prevail in a small Christian community, where all aspects of Christian life are shared in depth.

b) Small Christian Communities are groups made up of Christians "who are seeking to live and celebrate their faith in community, who seek to enliven their commitment to the world, so as to become in their own environment a sign of the saving presence of the risen Christ in history, thus imitating and following what was done in the first Christian communities" (Bishops' Pastoral Commission, Ecclesia 1982, p.467).

There is a great variety of small communities. I am going to mention only some that have spread most widely in our times:

- **The Basic Church Communities** (comunidades eclesiales de base) that arose in Latin America after Vatican II, and which rapidly spread, with different characteristics, to other continents.
- **The communities for neocatechumens** that arose in Spain in the 60s.

- **The communities of "Charismatic Renewal"** that arose in Pittsburgh (USA) in 1967.
- **The Focolare groups**, founded in Italy in the 40s, which spread to other countries after their approval in the 60s.
- **The Movement for a Better World**, in its work of the "New Image of the Parish."
- **Third Orders and the like**, small communities of groups and associations that are connected with the charism of the founder of some Institute.

The fundamental differences between these various Christian communities involves these two points: **(1) their projection of the Church** and **(2) their way of understanding and living their relationship with the world.**

a) The projection, as Church, which they propose to be and to carry out

All of these communities have adopted the model of Church-as-People-of-God, which is realized by being a community of communities. They try to imitate the first Christian communities described in Acts. But not all of them have the same understanding of the small Christian community. While some of them mainly conceive of it as an oasis of fraternity in which the group shares prayer and spiritual experiences, others put much more stress on commitment and on action to transform the world.

In almost all of these groups, the Word of God occupies a privileged place; but while some groups listen to the Word and interpret it in relation to historic realities, other groups listen to it and live it only as a call to personal, inner conversion.

There are also notable differences in the way they understand lay participation in the life of the Church. Some groups grant the laity greater responsibilities and scope than other groups do.

As regards their relationship with the institutional Church and the hierarchy, there is a broad spectrum of attitudes, ranging from the highly critical attitudes of some Basic Christian Communities, to the blind docility of others.

Small communities also have different conceptions of the mission of the Church and, hence, of the mission of the laity within the Church. Although all of them hold that the mission of the Church is evangelization and the proclamation and spread of the Kingdom, each of them understands evangelization in greater or

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lesser breadth. While some restrict evangelization almost entirely to the proclamation of the Word, others also include in the mission of the Church and of the small Christian community the promotion of justice and action aimed at transforming the world.

b) The way of understanding and living our relationship with the world

Some groups, practicing a modern version of the early monks' "fuga mundi" (flight from the world), take refuge in a very dis-incarnate spiritualism and live their faith on the margin of social conflicts. They are rather anemic in their critical attitude toward social injustices, and some are even opposed to their members taking any socio-political stands. They live a charity of rather limited relationships, on a person to person basis.

Other groups, in contrast, strive to undertake a responsibly active role and presence in the world. They have a much broader vision of charity which they wish to put into practice by way of action to transform the world.

"Christian faith awakens us to charity on a broad scale, to social justice, and to the authentic meaning of global liberation in Jesus Christ, which demands a transformation not only of the person, but also of structures" (L. Boff, op.cit., p.214).

To counteract those options for the dominating classes which the official Church has sometimes, either consciously or unconsciously, taken, some communities have taken a decided stand for the popular classes and for the marginated sectors of society from which, in their opinion, there is bound to arise a model of Church "which comes to birth, in virtue of the Spirit of God, from the believing and oppressed people" (L. Boff, op. cit., p.198).

"When preaching liberation and associating herself with those who are working and suffering for it, the Church is certainly not willing to restrict her mission only to the religious field and dissociate herself from man's temporal problems. Nevertheless she reaffirms the primacy of her spiritual vocation and refuses to replace the proclamation of the Kingdom by the proclamation of forms of human liberation; she even states that her contribution to liberation is incomplete if she neglects to proclaim the salvation of Jesus. The Church links human liberation and salvation in Jesus Christ, but she never identifies them." (EN 34,35)

c) The Thinking of the Sourcebook

The Sourcebook unambiguously defends pluralism within the Lay Claretian Movement, both as to the makeup and characteristics of each Lay Claretian group. The Sourcebook states in rather general terms, that there can be many different kinds of Lay Claretian groups:

SOURCEBOOK:

- 17. Within the pluralism that is proper of a charismatic communion, Lay Claretian groups are generally small ecclesial communities, which may even have all things in common, like the early Christian communities.**

One suspects that the basic criterion underlying this division is the degree of depth in communion, ranging from the small ecclesial community to the highest degree, which would be holding all things in common. It is a classification in rather general terms, since a basic ecclesial community might very well have all things in common.

From the context, one could understand the Sourcebook's use of "basic ecclesial community" in a generic sense as meaning a small Christian community, since it is only one type of small Christian community.

There is no doubt either, that within the pluralism proposed in the Sourcebook, the Lay Claretians can be a group with partial objectives, for example, in order to develop an apostolic work in keeping with the distinctive charism and spirituality of the Lay Claretian Movement. In this case, each one of the members of the group could also belong to another small community.

Nevertheless, the normal case would be for the local Lay Claretian group to tend towards forming a small Christian community in connection with the local Church, either by way of a parish or directly with the diocese.

In effect, the Lay Claretian group has its origin and support in a community charism which, of its own nature, tends to unite closely those who share the same gift for the same mission.

How far to carry this communion and just how to structure it, is something that the group itself will have to decide, in keeping with its situation and the realistic possibilities of its members.

2.4. Characteristics of the Lay Claretian group

Above, I have presented a list of characteristics of different types of communities. Comparing this list with the LC Sourcebook, certain points are clear:

- ! The model of Church that the Lay Claretians want to be and carry out is the Church as a community of communities.
- ! The model of group that the Lay Claretians want to be is not that of an oasis-community, narrowly centered on prayer and interpersonal relationships of fraternity, but rather, that of a community open to the world, to society and its problems, and really committed to its transformation.
- ! For the Lay Claretians, as for the whole Claretian Family, the Word of God occupies a privileged place. They listen to it not only as a call to personal, interior conversion, but also as a call to transform society. Even if this aspect does not stand out in the letter of the Sourcebook, it does in its spirit. (Sourcebook: nn. 23,40).

SOURCEBOOK

4. **Claret responded to the gift he received and made it the key whereby he lived the whole gospel, placing himself without reserve in the service of God's plan of salvation. In this way, he converted the gift he had received into his own style of life.**
 - His only concern is how he can best follow Jesus Christ and imitate Him
 - He felt called to evangelization he committed himself to missionary evangelization through the ministry of the Word..
16. **Like Jesus, we unceasingly seek the will of the Father; we discover it in his Word....**
20. **The mission of St. Anthony Mary Claret was evangelization and, within the scope of evangelization, "the missionary service of the Word".**

By means of Claret, and for the same service of evangelization, the Holy Spirit raised up an entire family of laypersons, priests and religious, which Claret conceived of as a great army of evangelizers, under the banner of the Heart of Mary.

Communicating the whole mystery of Christ to others through the service of the Word, holds a key place in the charism of the Claretian family.

The Word plays a leading role in our family spirit. Listened to and received, it evangelizes us; proclaimed to others - by all means possible, in all forms, an bolstered by guarantee of our own life witness - it leads them to an encounter with the Word made flesh.

25. As Claretians, we attach special attention to everything relating to the service of the Word in all its forms, ranging from familiar conversations to the most advanced forms of communications media.

36. Our spiritual life is nourished, expressed and developed by the Word of God, liturgical praise, prayer and the sacraments, above all by the Eucharist and the sacrament of brotherhood and sisterhood.

37.

The Word of God is the primary source of our spirituality. It discloses God's saving plan to us, and fortifies and encourages us in building up the Kingdom. Accepted with docility, it demands that we constantly change our lives in order to fulfill the Father's will and follow Jesus Christ.

Lay Claretians desire the maximum of participation and co-responsibility by laypersons in the life of the Church, and are committed to undertake all the responsibilities that belong to them (Sourcebook: nn. 24,28,30,31,32).

The Lay Claretians relationships with the hierarchy are characterized in the following way:

SOURCEBOOK:

24. As members of Church and of the ecclesial communities that make it up, we cooperate co-responsibly toward its growth and dynamism...

Our relationships with bishops and priests are characterized by a spirit of communion, collaboration and initiative.

Lay Claretians understand the mission of the Church and their own mission in a very broad sense, as being carried out by means of the word, life-witness, Christian animation of the temporal order and action to transform the world.

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They do not view the world as an enemy, but as the place in which they have to work toward restoring the Kingdom of God. Their spirituality is neither monastic nor evasive. They try to live a faith that is incarnated in society, as a renewing leaven. They live not only short-range kind of charity, but also a charity that is expressed in concrete commitments to change structures of injustice (Sourcebook: nn. 10,25,27,40).

SOURCEBOOK:

- 10. Our participation in Christ's Kingship leads us to make a radical option for His cause: the reign of God. It puts us in His service and in the service of all people, in order to renew humanity from within and change the inhuman structures of the world, so that all may be governed by justice, peace and charity.**
- 25. As Claretians, we attach special attention to everything relating to the service of the Word in all its forms, ranging from familiar conversations to the most advanced forms of communications media.**

We feel urgently called to collaborate in pastoral programs for youth, marriage and the family, in the manifold forms of catechesis and the catechumenate, in the mass medial in the promotion of the laity, in the formation of new evangelizers and in the development of all the possibilities afforded us by lay ministries.

- 27. The options in principle that inspire our ecclesial commitment and, as permanent attitudes, orient all our actions, are:**
 - **full involvement in the world;**
 - **professional competency, which qualifies our service to others;**
 - **commitment to the cause of the poor and action on behalf of justice;**
 - **incarnation in the local Church and collaboration to see that it begins and grows in inculturation;**
 - **the promotion of a more community-oriented and participative model of Church, in which all the faithful can fully develop the responsibilities and demands of their own ecclesial mission;**
 - **an endeavor to multiply agents of evangelization;**

- **missionary evangelization that keeps us ever alert and available for whatever seems most urgent and necessary in our service for the sake of the reign of God.**

- 40. Because the Father has always shown himself to be the God of the poor, and because the Son who identified himself with them continues to be present in the poor, they are a sacrament of the presence of God and an unequivocal place for encounter with Him.**

The Spirit, who is the deep force acting behind the historical processes of all oppressed peoples, impels us toward communion with them and with their struggle for liberation.

The Lay Claretians, as St. Claret, have a preferential option for the poor, popular classes and for the marginalized sectors of society (Sourcebook: nn. 3,27,32,40).

II. GROWTH

1. What we Mean by Growth

We are all for growth, but in what sense and toward which goals? The maturation of the group must develop in line with the nature and distinctive characteristics of the Lay Claretian Movement.

Bearing in mind that we are dealing with a group with a charism, with lofty interests, whose mission is evangelization, We can single out five important aspects or dimensions in which the members of the group must strive for maturity.

1.1. The Internalization of Values

The group will grow in the measure that its members continue internalizing the values of the Kingdom, and in the measure that the group continues centering on the realization of these values.

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The group will not grow in the line of values, unless its members grow in line with them. The process of internalizing values is carried out within each one of the members. What produces growth is the inner ability to internalize values, that is, the free and personal decision to model one's own life according to the values of the Kingdom.

And this depends, above all, on the individual, on his or her conversion to Christ, who is the supreme incarnation of the Kingdom of God and its values. The group can help in this, but the "yes" to a life according to the Kingdom is always something personal: the finding of a grace perseveringly sought ("Thy Kingdom come!") and a personal decision to correspond with this grace.

The growth of a Lay Claretian group is always measured in relation to the Reign of God, that is, bearing in mind:

- how each of its members lives the values of the Kingdom,
- how these values are carried out within the group,
- and how the group carries them out in the world.

We grow by making the Kingdom the constant objective of our concern, of our reflection, of our prayer and of our practice of Christian life.

Persons who have not come to the group in search of these values, but have become associated with it only for reasons of friendship and the need to belong to some human group where they will be listened to and loved, are not apt members for an LC group.

1.2. Identification with the Community Charism of the Group

The Lay Claretian Movement is charismatic in origin: it has arisen because the Spirit has distributed to a number of people one and the same gift for one and the same mission.

Growing, for a group of Lay Claretians, implies knowing and assuming more deeply and responsibly every day, the Lay Claretian charism and mission, as described in the Sourcebook, which they must convert into their own rule of life. And here, too, internalization is above all a decision and a personal process in which the group can and should be of help.

1.3. The Commitment to Evangelization

The Lay Claretians are, above all, evangelizers, and the group grows in the measure that it undertakes and carries out commitments of evangelization in keeping with its charism (Sourcebook: 1,3,5,22,23,25,26,27) and makes its own the principle options or permanent attitudes that every Claretian evangelizer should have. The most important of these options in principle are those for "our full involvement in the world" and for "...missionary evangelization that keeps us ever alert and available for whatever seems most urgent and necessary in our service for the sake of the reign of God." (Sourcebook: n.4,27).

The Lay Claretian evangelizes "by means of the Word in all its forms, especially by our witness and transforming action in the world" (Sourcebook: n.5).

The Lay Claretian does all he or she can to multiply and form new evangelizers (Sourcebook: 25,27).

1.4. Involvement in the Local Church

The Lay Claretian group is itself an embodiment of the Church as a community of communities, and its mission is part of the Church's mission (S. n.18,27). Hence, its growth implies growing as Church and growing in communion with the Church and, concretely, with the Local Church in which the group lives.

For this reason, the Lay Claretian group's communion with the local Church and involvement in the projects and commitments the latter has undertaken for the spread of the Kingdom is not something that is carried out in just any manner, but precisely as Lay Claretians. This means putting at the service of the local Church the gift they have received from the Spirit, pushing for a community-oriented and participative model of Church, and cooperating in the development of small Christian communities which, besides being the nuclear expression of the Church as a place of communion and participation, are also the principal agents of evangelization (Sourcebook: nn.21,27,32).

1.5. Integration of the Group

At first sight one might think that the growth of an Lay Claretian group is produced mainly by increasing in cohesiveness, that is, friendship and fraternity within the group. But this cannot be the group's first objective, because the group does not exist for itself, but for its mission, in order to implement the values that transcend it. The direction of growth for the group is not centripetal or ingoing, but centrifugal or outgoing.

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The group has to be within itself, what it would like to bring into being outside itself. Communion within the group is also an objective of the distinctive mission of the group. Its members must strive to embody within the group the values which they would like: spread outside the group, namely, love, solidarity, trust and faith in our brothers and sisters, etc. The group must be a witness to and an anticipation of the Kingdom. The group must realize in itself the model of Church-as-communion for which it struggles.

The union of the group is also a demand of the gift they have received, since, as a community-oriented charism, it tends to unite those who have received it.

If the group has decided to live as a small Christian community, the demands of communion are all the greater, since that is where believers most intensely live the community dimension of their faith, of their being Christian and of their being Church.

Belonging to an Lay Claretian group is not something that can be taken lightly; not "just anyone" can enter it or persevere in it. The group itself has to be very demanding as regards vocation, a consistent Christian life, and commitment to evangelization, not only with those who are seeking admission, but also with those who already belong to the group.

2. Dynamics of Growth

Growth in assimilating and carrying out values within and without the group requires, over and above a greater theoretical awareness, a putting into practice of the dynamisms that lead to maturation. Here are some of the dynamisms that are important.

2.1. Group Meetings

The regular group meeting is one of the means that can dynamize the process of growth in the group. This meeting is a moment of stimulus and mutual help in the commitment, communion and integration of the group.

Each group determines the frequency of these meetings in keeping with their projects and their realistic possibilities, but it is not a good idea to leave too large of a space between meetings. It is necessary to be very careful about the content and flow of the meeting, if we want to prevent it from being frustrating.

a) The group will set the criteria for the content it wants its meetings to cover.

By way of a suggestion, the following points on the possible content of these meetings:

- Set aside a moment for listening to the Word of God; let it sink in and comment on it, not in an abstract way, but relating it to its personal, social, ecclesial and group implications.
- Enter more deeply into the knowledge and assimilation of the values of the Kingdom for which the group exists.
- Review your knowledge of the vocation, mission and spirituality of the Lay Claretians (study and reflection on the Sourcebook).
- Sharpen your critical awareness by making an analysis of the reality you are involved in. Refer to social and ecclesial events, happenings and situations.
- Share activities and life-experience in common.
- Make a discernment over decisions to be taken, works and services to be carried out, etc.
- It is also important for personal and group growth, for the group to set aside, at least on some occasions, a place for the distinctive practice of Christian charity that is called fraternal correction.

All of these themes cannot be dealt with at every regular meeting of the group. It is better to treat them in turn, or to put greater stress on some of them on certain occasions.

It is important to take time and care in preparing topics that require prior study. Do not trust in improvising.

b) Development of the Meeting:

- It is important to create a climate of freedom, spontaneity, trust and seriousness.
- The coordinator or moderator plays an important role. To a great extent, the success of the group meeting depends on him or her.

The most frequent frustrations for members of the group at these meetings comes mainly from two factors: lack of participation by all present, and a failure to undertake an in-depth treatment of problems. The coordinator, without imposing

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himself on the meeting, can foster the participation of everyone present, encouraging the inhibited and moderating those who tend to talk too much. He can thus lead the group to enter more deeply into the topics for discussion.

c) Evaluation

It is very important that during the year the group make a serious evaluation of its meetings, in order to correct its deficiencies and raise the quality-level of these periodic encounters.

2.2. Sharing Life Together

All Christian movements and groups attach great importance to spending a day or days together, because they know how great an influence this can be on their growth and vitality.

"Live-ins" such as this are an extraordinary moment of communion, reflection, celebration of faith and of incentive for our commitment to spread the Kingdom. Each LC group also needs to organize a number of these "live-ins" throughout the year. If they are well planned and directed, they can contribute a great deal toward their maturation. The climate at such gatherings favors the possibility of making an occasional in-depth revision of life by the group.

In these, as well as in other encounters, the Eucharist should occupy a privileged place; but it should be a Eucharist rooted in life. The Sourcebook, speaking of communion among the members of the group, says: "We express and develop (this charismatic union)...above all, in the Eucharist" (S. n.20). This also underscores the apostolic dimension that Claretian spirituality must show, and, using a phrase from Claret, the Sourcebook tells us that the Eucharist "makes all Claretians people who are afire with love and spread its flames wherever they go" (Sourcebook: n.17).

The special celebration of some Claretian feast, such as October 24th, can also be an important moment for dynamizing the group.

2.3. The Plan for Continuing Formation

Speaking of the maturation of the group, we cannot forget the plan for continuing formation. Although formation is above all a personal effort to know one's own lay identity, to identify with it and to enable oneself to carry out one's mission, the group can do a great deal to foster this by drawing up a plan of help.

All groups have to have their own formation plan which should be simple, concrete, workable and adjusted to the realistic possibilities of the group.

2.4. The Group Project

The group's project, drafted with the participation of all its members, is also an important means to foster maturation. In the group's overall project one might also include the programming of other dynamics of growth: meetings, get-togethers, formation plan, etc.

In the booklet *THE RELIGIOUS ASSESSOR IN THE Lay Claretian MOVEMENT* (Rome, 1984), the importance of the group project is underscored and some suggestions are offered for drawing it up.

2.5. The Service of Animation or Leadership

This is another important dynamic element for the maturation of the group. For its cohesiveness, coordination and encouragement, every group needs and has a service of leadership. The aim of this service is to help each member to form his or her identity as an Lay Claretian, and to keep the group united, open to the outside world and committed to its transformation.

In the case of the Lay Claretians, the official leader is the coordinator. For this service, it is important to elect the person who is most qualified to unite, coordinate and stimulate the group. But the service of leadership does not belong exclusively to the coordinator. All members of the group exercise this role of encouragement or animation, whenever they spur on the rest by their life witness and by their words.

Those members who are most centered in their values and most committed to their mission have a very positive influence on the rest of the members. Meetings and get-togethers are an excellent occasion for the spontaneous and natural exercise of this kind of non-official leadership.

Where possible, it would be helpful for the coordinator and other members of the group to perfect themselves in group dynamics.

The religious assessor, too, plays a specific and important role in animating the group. But it would be a mistake for the assessor, because of the convenience of his doing so or because of the inhibitions of the group, to become the real leader of the group. If he did so, he would hinder, rather than help the group. Whenever this happens, it always means a crisis for the group -- a crisis that cannot always be overcome.

On the role of the assessor, there are a number of guidelines in THE RELIGIOUS ASSESSOR IN THE Lay Claretian MOVEMENT.

3. Difficulties and Obstacles for Growth

The obstacles that can brake or hinder the growth of the group are many and varies. Here are a few of them. Some are internal and others are external. None of these are magic recipes. They are simply some suggestions in order to awaken reflection and discernment.

3.1. Difficulties of an Internal Nature

A) Of a Personal Sort

a) *Members of the group who are not identified with the mission of the Lay Claretians.*

The gravest obstacles are those which militate directly against the essential characteristics of the group, such as its charism, the model of Church it wishes to be and promote, and the assimilation of the values that give meaning to the group.

From this point of view, a very grave obstacle to growth lies in the fact that there are in the group any persons:

- ! who want to live in a model of clientele-Church, without room for the participation of laypersons;
- ! who lack a lay Claretian vocation and are without enthusiasm for the mission of the Lay Claretians;
- ! who not feel attracted, let alone identified with, the values for which the group is struggling.

Persons like this should be openly asked to leave the group.

When the time comes for the group to admit new members, the group must be very demanding as to the motives that lead these persons to want to join the group.

- b) *Other individuals who impede the growth of the group are immature persons, whose emotional, behavioral or volitional reactions and comportment is childish.*

On this point, too, the group must also be very demanding when it comes time to admit new members. It would be a disaster to overlook the suitability of candidates in an effort to increase the numbers of the group.

- c) *Another obstacle to the growth of the group would be the acceptance of psychologically unbalanced persons: rigid and inflexible characters, rugged individualists, suspicious people, types who like to create tensions and conflicts.*

There must be tensions, but not so many or such great ones as to jeopardize the survival of the group.

Very often, often without realizing it, these types of people hinder and lock the group and its meetings. They may be lay evangelizers, but of the "lone wolf" type, who cannot adapt either to life in a group or to teamwork.

B) Of a Functional Sort

- a) *An important difficulty may stem from the fact that the group has too any members.*

It is hard to say what the ideal number might be, because it depends on the character which the group has or would like to have.

If the group wants to be a small Christian community in which there are deep relationships of friendship, trust, freedom, spontaneity, etc., it would seem that when the group gets to be of about 20 members, this often begins to be an obstacle.

In these cases, it seems better to split into two or more groups, or else to maintain the large group but have it meet as a whole only on certain special occasions, for example, for some get-together or celebration, while smaller groups would have their own project and their own regular meetings. In the latter case, the small group would be the place in which communion was lived more intensely and mission was shared.

- b) *Another possible obstacle might be the excessive heterogeneity of the members of the group. Great differences in age, formation, mentality and ideology can generate tensions and confrontations that go beyond the normal and block the functioning of the group.*

These are aspects that have to be borne in mind when it comes time to form groups, so that an effort may be made, if it seems fitting, to give them a certain homogeneity. In some areas there are youth groups and adult groups. There can also be, and in fact are, groups in the same place that have different ideological tendencies. All of this fits perfectly well within the pluralism of the Lay Claretian Movement.

c) The inability to face conflicts.

Every group is necessarily conflictual, because the two-way drive of unity-diversity which it bears within it is itself conflictual. In the group we strive to attain unity without destroying diversity.

Within this dialectic, we can have two opposite tendencies, each of which is equally dangerous: individualism and groupism. The former looks upon the individual as the center and aim of everything: the group exists for the individual. Groupism, in contrast, looks upon the individual as existing only for the group, so that the person and his or her distinctive traits are swallowed up in the absolute equality of the group.

In the case of the Lay Claretians, neither the group is for the individual nor the individual for the group. This is a false statement of the question. The person in the group is for its values and for its mission. It is in communion with these values that unity in diversity is achieved, when the person puts his or her person and distinctive gifts in the service of mission.

The problem does not lie in having conflicts. If conflicts are not out of proportion, they favor, rather than hinder, the maturation of the group. The problem lies in not being able to bring up and face conflicts.

It would be a mistake to face conflicts:

- by singling out victors and vanquished, who is right and who is wrong; because, generally, no one is completely right, and this would lead to the creation of defensive coalitions within the group;
- by making someone a scapegoat on whose back all the ills of the group's malfunctioning are laid.

It would be equally erroneous not to confront conflicts at all, hoping that they would solve themselves in time. It is necessary to face conflicts serenely and optimistically, representing problematic situations without beating around the bush,

but with absolute clarity. Only thus can they be resolved by way of dialogue, so that no one is humiliated.

3.2. Difficulties of an External Nature

A) From the Local Church

Communion with the local Church and involvement in its organized pastoral plan is an important dimension of the Lay Claretian group, and growth in this dimension plays an important part in the maturation of the group. The gravest obstacles in this respect would be the following:

a) Rejection by the hierarchy

It would not be so strange to encounter priests and even bishops who did not understand the meaning of a movement linked to a religious family, considering it as sectarian or overly pious, and showing preference for lay movements that were more universal and more directly linked to and controlled by the hierarchy.

The only way to overcome a difficulty like this, is serene and persevering dialogue, together with a decided and disinterested collaboration with the representatives of the local Church. Hypercritical and confrontational attitudes are generally counterproductive and are always foreign to the spirit of the Lay Claretian Movement: "Our relationships with bishops, pastors and priests are characterized by a spirit of communion, collaboration and initiative" (Sourcebook, n.24).

b) The lack of a pastoral plan in the local Church.

When such a plan does not exist, there is no possibility for articulation with the organized pastoral approach of the local Church. In this case, it is up to the Lay Claretians to cooperate in seeing to it that such a plan comes into existence.

B) From the Congregation of Missionaries

The Congregation of Missionaries has played a decisive role in the reorganization of the Lay Claretian Movement since 1938. Even today, Lay Claretian groups are generally connected with works or persons of the Congregation of Missionaries, or with other branches of the Claretian Family.

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Although the Congregation, overall, has taken a stance of unconditional support for the Lay Claretian Movements (General Chapters of 1967, 1973, 1979, 1985, 1991), as have most of its members, nevertheless, the attitudes of some religious, especially those responsible for works in which the Lay Claretians are involved, may have constituted a grave obstacle to the growth of the group.

It is not rare to find among CMFs, attitudes of ignorance of the Lay Claretian Movement, and even, at times, of rejection of it, because of a false notion that they are a particularist movement, because of doubts about their origin or Claretian character, or because of other reasons.

In this case, too, as in problems with the hierarchy, the best way to a solution is patient dialogue and disinterested collaboration.

Even the religious assessor, when he is unaware of the specific service he is called to perform, can hinder the growth of the group, either by inhibiting the group from functioning as it ought, or by acting as if he were the lord and master of the group, or by trying to channel it along paths that are foreign to the nature of the Lay Claretian Movement. In these cases, the group may propose the appointment of another religious assessor to the group.

C) Difficulties arising from the family

Sometimes the family circle can give rise to difficulties, either directly for the member or indirectly for the group. The hardest case would be when one spouse is blindly opposed to the other's involvement.

Here, the point at issue is a conflict between the demands of the Lay Claretian vocation and the duties of the married state. Each case and each situation demands individual attention and treatment. Consultation with trustworthy advisers is the best help in discerning the most adequate approach that should be taken in these situations.

D) Difficulties that come from belonging to other groups

The degree of incompatibility between belonging to the Movement and other groups or movements depends fundamentally on two factors:

- on what the particular Lay Claretian group wants to be (e.g., a simple group or a small Christian community) and
- on the characteristics and demands of the other movement or group to which the particular Lay Claretian member may belong.

As is pointed out in THE RELIGIOUS ASSESSOR AND THE Lay Claretian MOVEMENT there are movements that are parallel to the Lay Claretians (third orders and the like) which are not compatible with belonging to another group or movement.

In contrast, in the case of a group (not a movement) aimed at formation, belonging to two groups can be both positive and complementary. But when the second group is not just an aid to one's formation, but is in effect the small community in which the person lives his or her Christian life most intensely, then double membership is generally incompatible. This is the case, for example, with many groups of the charismatic renewal movement and of other recently established movements.

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