

REFLECTIONS OF A CLC PRESIDENT

Dearest Friends in Christ,

I was asked by the National Implementation Working Group and then by Lois Zacariah to share some highlights from the past few years as National President. This took the form of a history line mingled with an Examen. I really don't want to bore you with details but if you can glean something from my story that gives you insight and energy, I will be grateful.

It began in Spring 2017 when I kept feeling a strong nudge (actually, more like a PUSH!) to let my name stand as President Elect. The idea actually terrified me yet the 'hound of heaven' persisted in my mind and spirit. I could relate to people in scripture like Moses and Jeremiah who also felt called at the same time as feeling quite inadequate. I thought of Solomon's plea…. 'I am only a little child; I do not know how to go in or come out.' Like Solomon, I prayed for wisdom and felt the promise of the Spirit that I 'would never be left alone'. This gave me the confidence and courage to discern a 'Yes'. Right off the bat, I knew that I had my local community's prayerful support which is still ongoing…I was not alone.

My first task was to take a pilgrim's journey to a face-to-face General Council Meeting on a tiny island North of Montreal. It was Fall and the Autumn colours were spectacular. We spent 3 days in a rustic lodge owned by the Jesuits in L'Achigan. Aside from intense meetings, we shopped for groceries, boated them over to the island, cooked and cleaned and even entertained some CVX members at a Saturday night social evening. On our last night we lost power and cleaned the dishes by candlelight. There was part of me that resisted and felt anxious in unfamiliar surroundings where I could not leave if I wanted, but I soon realized what a wonderful gift it was to bond as a 'Working GC', a new community. It was the beginning of a wonderful and challenging journey together rooted in our passion for CLC….and I was not alone.

The next step was to go to the World Assembly in Buenos Aires… another journey I was dreading…. unfamiliar surroundings and people. I argued that I was not President yet and did not feel called to go. Leah Michaud knew better and challenged me. I also confided in my Spiritual director (I would never suggest anyone take on a leadership role like this without a Spiritual Guide or Director) Once I said 'yes', things began to fall into place and I was invited to attend a North American Regional Meeting on line where I would meet other people who were going. To my great surprise, I reconnected with a dear friend from years ago when I was Atlantic Rep. She was now living in Quebec and going to the World Assembly as a delegate from CVX in Canada. We arranged our flights, dates and times together. We arrived early to the World Assembly and stayed afterward to explore Buenos Aires. I know that the Spirit placed us together for a life changing experience…. and I was not alone.

I returned to take my place as National President at the next face to face meeting for General Council, this time at Our Lady of Hope Retreat Centre in PEI. Although challenged by some leadership issues and uneasy in my new role, I felt held by the Spirit in taking the lead and facilitating a decision to continue

with a plan to hold the National Assembly in 2019. I was able to move away from the agenda and call for silence and prayer as we struggled with this issue. I knew that if we weren't all 'on board', we would never be able to follow through. The Holy Spirit blessed us with consolation in our communal decision to hold the National Assembly. Though there were many struggles and disagreements over the months, the movement of the Spirit was palpable as it all came together. Although it was being held in Winnipeg each Region collaborated and worked hard to bring it together. In my own struggle to hold onto what I thought was the 'right way', I received the grace of Spiritual freedom. I let go and prayed for God's will and work to prevail. This happened, and taught me a very valuable lesson.

I also realized the great need to have a deeper understanding and practice of the 3 rounds of spiritual conversation. We were able to have several on-line meetings for those who agreed to facilitate the small groups. The National Evaluation W/G worked long and hard to prepare the document to discern, using data from the National Evaluation project that was begun 5 years earlier! They were free open to Julia Donahoe MacDougald facilitating. As most of you are aware, we were able to experience communal discernment and unanimous consensus for CLC in Canada. It was a wonderful moment in CLC Canada history…. We were not alone

On return from the National Assembly there was much to be done but as GC and National Assembly Co-ordinating Committee, we were worn out and needed and to 'rest a while'. We also needed to take time to evaluate and regroup. In Jan 2020, we began anew. One of the priorities was to find someone to begin as President Elect in the Fall. There was also a need for a new Rep in Prairie Region and several roles in the building of a Rocky BC Regional. The lack of Leaders coming forward was discouraging and could have moved us into desolation. Again, there was another surprise that shook not only those of us in CLC but our World as the pandemic took hold. Almost immediately our focus shifted to collaborating and supporting beyond our borders. Our use and appreciation of technology grew exponentially. Covid-19 led to something much more important that finding leaders to fill specific roles. It challenged us to draw Regions together as we expanded the Communications W/G, the National Implementation W/G and called forth the National Formation and Financial W/G's to share information and work together as one National rather than 4 separate "countries". This had to happen before we could move forward with new leadership as CLC in Canada. The Holy Spirit is always one step ahead! … not alone 😊!

In the meantime, we have been reminded of the injustices that a pandemic can bring to the fore and yet the resilience of humankind and nature itself. We are working together much more globally to address some of these issues. We are also collaborating more with Jesuit Organizations like Canadian Jesuits International (unjust distribution of Vaccines and needs in Haiti), the Jesuit Forum of Social Faith and Justice to increase knowledge and change unjust structures concerning Indigenous peoples and Ecology. Many of us subscribe to Eco-Jesuits. As you know, we have also made many connections with CLC in USA. Right now, many are participating in the US Group Guide Training.

I feel inspired by the leaders I have come to know, past and present on the Circle of Elders, Prairie Transitional Leadership Team, the National Communications Working Group, National Implementation W/G, CLC Spiritual Guide Peer support groups, the Rockies young adults' energy and generosity. As Ruth Chipman says, we have no shortage of Leaders. We just need to support people in their desire to serve and find their niche.

If you have read to this point, I congratulate you and CHALLENGE you to “Be Not Afraid” if you are feeling a ‘nudge’ or a ‘PUSH’ to be involved in CLC Leadership. CLC has something to offer the Church and the World at this time in our history. With the Holy Spirit’s lead and Amazing Companions for the journey……YOU WILL NEVER BE ALONE!

Thank you! Miigwech! Wela’lin, Merci! and Gracias…to you and to our loving and faithful Creator… from the very bottom of my heart!

Michelle