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ECUMENISM AND CLC

In General principle 8d related to our charism we can read:

“We desire to act in an ecumenical spirit, ready to collaborate with those initiatives that bring about unity among Christians.”

Euroteam sent me to a meeting in Rome preparing the third European ecumenical Assembly (EEA3) IN SIBIU (ROMANIA) SEPTEMBER 2007; there were representatives of churches, bishops’ conferences, movements and ecumenical organisations from 44 countries under the theme: *The light of Christ shines upon all – hope for renewal and unity in Europe.*

The EEA3 (www.eea3.org) builds on two other assemblies, which took place in Basel (Switzerland) in 1989 and in Graz (Austria) in 1997. It roots in the Charta Oecumenica signed in Strasbourg in 2001 (www.ccee.ch and www.cec-kek.org).

For more details, look to the report on our website www.clc-europe.org

For me, to be present during this meeting was a gift. I never met church on this level and was very impressed by the intelligence and the civility. Every body seemed to be moved by the future of Christianity: we have to work together, overcome our differences to be able to welcome the others: Jews, Muslims, atheists and whatever they may be. And of course, it was very impressive to meet the Holy Father twice, during the vespers ending prayers week for the unity of Christians and in Vatican: a very strong moment by the surrounding magnificence, by the simplicity and the gentleness of the Holy Father who read a brief speech in Italian.

It seems to be important and necessary that CLC is present in those encounters. Whenever it is possible, we work with persons of other religions, especially in England and Wales, in Germany and in the French community they are present and take responsibilities. But this is not the only reason. Movements as Focolari and Sant’Egidio are well known every where by their public social engagements, our community is present in many areas but as individuals and we don’t speak about our engagement. We are present in the whole world and our ignatian spirituality is very important and helpful in this actual world. So we have to take our place and be present during the next encounters, one will take place in Stuttgart (Germany) in 2007 with preparing meetings in Germany and perhaps in Paris in November 2006.

Monika Sander, member of the Euroteam

Austria

In adult CLC we have only Catholics. At our youth CLC center “Alte Burse” in Vienna, however, I hear of a “Confirmation group” including Lutheran, Jewish and Moslem members, one of whom even wants to be baptised. Group members are of school age and being led towards Confirmation over a number of years.

The situation in our country:

14(!) Christian churches are legally recognised in Austria: Anglican, Armenian Apostolic, Bulgarian-, Coptic-, Greek-, Romanian-, Russian-, Serbian-, and Syrian-Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, Old Catholic, Reformed, and of course Roman Catholic. In 2003 they all issued a joint “Social mission statement” which found much attention even beyond Austria.

Jews and Moslems are also recognised, the last ones since 1912. A fortunate heritage of the Austrian Empire. Recognition implies the right of religious instruction at school. The climate among our recognised religious communities is very positive. For example, an “ecumenical morning service” was broadcast on the radio on Sundays for nearly 30 years. It was initiated soon after Vatican II by Leo Wallner SJ, our EA.

Gertrud Zeller

French speaking Belgium

In Belgium, unlike in other countries like Germany, the presence and visibility of other non-catholic Christian churches is very low-key. The question of ecumenism is thus not one to which the CLC is confronted daily. (Three of four members of the CLC are members of a group called SOIF – *session œcuménique interrégionale de formation* - organising each year a training session on a given theme: in 2005 « the Media ». This session is prepared and presented by Catholics and protestants - the orthodox church did not answer the invitation).

A much more acute question is the one of inter-religious dialog. Islam is acquiring an important place in our society, mainly in urban areas.

In 2002, in the turmoil generated by the attack of Twin Towers, the CLC community in Brussels decided to organize a half-day meeting with some Muslim people. The Muslim chaplain of an hospital came to give an introduction to Islam. Then someone member of the El Kalima group (Christian association for the contact with Islam), who lived 10 year in Algeria came to witness how the contact with Islam lead her to rethink and deepen her own faith. After these two testimonies, the participants had the opportunity to gather in small sharing groups. The afternoon finished with a couscous meal, and a common prayer around the 99 Names of God and the first Sourate of Coran.

Charles Bokor

England and Wales

In England and Wales we are perhaps fairly unique in CLC in that we have many groups that are ecumenical and this is something we encourage! Many groups have begun as a result of weeks of guide's prayer which are run throughout the country often by a group of local churches. So the week is very ignatian in content but the participants will come from different Christian denominations. As a result of this experience some decide the wish to continue to explore more deeply the prayer and sharing and this is when CLC is offered as a way forward. We have found that the ecumenical aspect of our groups have indeed proved a very enriching experience and has not proved a barrier in deepening the spiritual life of the participants and most feel very comfortable with ignatian spirituality. We are discovering that CLC as a way of life – a vocation, is drawing people from across the denominations and helping them to discover and celebrate deeply their commonality and their shared vision of building

community. This we feel to be vitally important in a society that so often wants to promote division rather than unity.

Evelyne Maloret

France

Testimony of an “ecumenical couple” taking responsibilities in the community:

Living ecumenism is natural for us. We are married since nearly 30 years, our wedding took place in a protestant church with a protestant and a catholic priest. Our children are baptised by a protestant and a catholic priest. When we lived in Touraine, Marie-Paule got a bible formation by the protestant priest, the catholic one had not time enough and sent her there. And we started on this place an ecumenical group.

What is important for us and what is passing differences, is love and the differences are our richness. I don't know if this is ecumenism, we don't situate ourselves by our different religions, but we situate in face each other and in face of all the other in the love of God.

I always said that I feel very well in CLC as protestant. I appreciate the simples and concretes exchanges in the presence of God who is the centre of the exchanges as well as the welcome and the fraternity we are living in the community.

When I was elected as responsible of our region, I think that I was accepted as I was with my richness and my poverty. I never felt as stranger. With the time, I am convinced that Ignatius, as well as Calvin and Luther were reformers reacting against what happened in their time ; they wanted to give God and the Word the first place in their life – exactly what we are living in the community.

And what about the others, how do they look to me? I heart questions which allowed me to understand better the differences and helped me to understand that differences are richness making me able to be more open to all the other and to welcome them as they are. I don't consider very much dogmas, this is not really my interest. I feel myself loved by God and I share this with the others – this is my simple way of life. Is this ecumenism? I don't know but I am living it as this.

Jean-Louis Girard, former responsible of the CLC region Alpes du Nord

Germany

CLC Germany is very present by spiritual exercises: Hildegard Joeres is guiding ten days spiritual exercises for protestant priests with Father Andreas Falkner sj. This is happening since many years and is very fruitful. CLC is present in a protestant working group called spiritual guidance. The protestant church is very interested by spiritual guidance, supports this and offers formation. In 1999, Gerhard Munderlein published by Claudius Edition a book: *Attentive ways, experiences of protestant Christians with the spiritual exercises of Ignatius*. CLC is mentioned in this book.

Lithuania

In Lithuania Christians are mostly Catholics, including the Greek Catholics. An important protestant community exists since a long time in the western part of Lithuania with the centres Birzai and Klaipeda (Memel) but we have also some small young communities outcoming of Protestantism and the Orthodox Church is present. Recently took place in Vilnius an ecumenical prayer evening with persons of all Christian churches. A great moment.

Jurga Sidiskyte

Luxembourg

General situation: Luxembourg is historically Roman Catholic, and Catholicism remains the predominant faith. Over 90 percent of the population is estimated to be baptised Catholic. The Lutheran and Calvinist Churches are the largest Protestant denominations. The Jewish community numbers approximately 1000 adherents (0, 22%). Muslims are estimated to number approximately 6,000 persons (1, 3%) and, owing to the recent immigration from Ex-

Yugoslavia, their numbers are rising. The Baha'i Faith, the Mormons, the Universal Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses are represented in smaller numbers. As for all Western European countries, the number of professed atheists or agnostics is growing.¹

Up to now, other faiths have not had any major social, economical or political influence on our country. Differences among religious faiths are not a significant source of tension in society.

On an **official level**, CLC Luxembourg has had little contact with other faiths. Of our 70 members, one is Protestant. She is of Czech origin, came into contact with Ignatian spirituality in Munich and, on coming to Luxembourg, became a member of CLC in Luxembourg. As far as I know, she perceives no incompatibilities or inconvenience in being the only non-Catholic in CLC. Our workgroup "Forced Migration" organised a discussion evening on the theme of the high percentage of foreigners residing and working in Luxembourg. To this debate they had invited one Muslim to testify to his experience. I would say that CLC Luxembourg is very open-minded and open-hearted as far as other faiths are concerned. Taking our own faith very seriously, we sympathise with anybody who perceives his or her religion as important.

On the **personal level**, however, I would say that many of our members have warm and good contacts with representatives of other faiths. CLC members working for the Church have always been at the forefront of fostering ecumenical contacts, especially with protestant denominations. Those of our members who are involved in the work with refugees, among whom are many Muslims, also have very good relationships.

Tessy Geimer-Biver

Malta

Malta is predominantly a Catholic country. As a result, CLC in Malta is made up entirely of people who are Catholic. In addition, CLC in Malta does not work with organisations of other religions. All other religions in Malta have very few members who are usually foreigners residing in Malta rather than Maltese nationals. CLC Malta strives to collaborate and work with different movements and organisations all within the Catholic Church itself.

Roberta Pace-Balzan

Switzerland

In Switzerland ecumenical contacts are part of daily life. In the Swiss population there are about the same number of Catholics and Protestants (and free churches). This is also important for CLC. In a lot of families the parents practice in a different confession. Children know from the beginning two different churches. But this is also an obstacle, because families sometimes feel not really "at home" in one church and also suffer from the separation. A lot of people don't know really the difference between Catholic and Protestant Churches.

In our country there are regions where the majority of Christians are Protestants. Therefore it is in those regions not so easy to establish CLC groups. In our local communities there are also protestant members who live very seriously CLC spirituality. In some parishes Catholics and Protestants share together the experience of Spiritual Exercises in daily life, and there are about three Protestant pastors who guide Spiritual Exercises. Since some months there is an Anglican pastor a new member in one of the groups in Zurich.

We also have good contacts with other spiritual movements/communities. Once a year representatives of the different communities meet for an exchange to get to know more deeply the others. So we can appreciate the diversity of ways to live as Christians.

For the "year of vocation" that the Swiss Church pronounced this year CLC contributed in an article for a journal how our spirituality helps us to live our vocation in daily life.

Dorothee Fischer