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# THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY

**T**he roots of Christian Life Community go back to the early days of the Society of Jesus. Ignatius of Loyola was severely wounded in 1522 in a battle at Pamplona against the French. While convalescing, he went through a complete conversion of life. During ten months in a cave in Manresa, Spain, he journaled the experience of his conversion, calling it "Spiritual Exercises." He began giving these Exercises to small groups of laymen who eventually joined together as the Society of Jesus in 1540.

When the first Jesuits would leave a city, they would leave behind small groups of men who were formed in the Exercises to carry on their work. These were the roots of CLC. These groups had different names: Company of the Apostles, Company of the Holy Spirit, one was even called the Society of Jesus. Within a decade of their founding, they were established in Peru in 1571, in Mexico in 1574, and in New York among the Huron Indians by 1653. These groups became very effective, as testified to by the resistance they encountered. In 1584, Pope Gregory XIII affiliated all these groups into one the called "Sodality of our Lady" which had been begun in 1563 by a Jesuit scholastic, John Leunis, in Rome.

For 200 years these groups, mostly adult male (women first became part of the Sodality in 1751), were extremely effective in forming deeply committed Christians, so much so that when the Jesuit Order was suppressed by the pope in 1773, he decreed that Sodalities should continue under the jurisdiction of local bishops and priests. Cut off from the source of their spirituality, the Spiritual Exercises, they became mass devotional movements unrelated to Catholic action, composed mostly of pious women and children. By 1920 there were 80,000 Sodalities in the world, where there had been 2,000 in 1773.

In 1814, the Jesuit order was restored under a new pope. This was a period of vast expansion in numbers of Sodalities, but many were still isolated from their Ignatian roots. In 1925, Fr. Dan Lord, SJ, was named Sodality director in the United States. He and the "Queen's Work" publication in St. Louis accomplished great things with American youth, initiating many to mental prayer and an apostolic sense. However, there was little spiritual formation, no real Ignatian grounding, and small adult impact. In 1948, Pope Pius XII, who had himself been a Sodality member, issued an important document urging the groups to stop trying to be mass organizations and to go back to their source, the Spiritual Exercises,

### Papal Approbations of Christian Life Community

Christian Life Community has received the following approbations from the Church since the time of its origins in the sixteenth century:

- December 5, 1584 Gregory XIII in his bull "**Omnipotentis Dei**" gave his approbation and the name to the Marian Congregations of "The Sodality of Our Lady."
- November 27, 1948 Pius XII in his Apostolic Constitution, "**Bis Saeculari**," approved again the Sodality of Our Lady and called for its renewal.
- 1968 on the Feast of the Annunciation, Pope Paul VI confirms the General Principles of the World Federation of the Christian Life Communities.
- December 3, 1990 The Pontifical Council for the Laity approved Christian Life Community as "A Public International Association of the Faithful."
- February 21, 2000 Address to World CLC leaders by John Paul II

to be lay apostles. This Apostolic Constitution, "**Bis Saeculari**," was a high point in calling for the renewal of the Sodality. It stressed a return to its original spirit in the Spiritual Exercises while striving to become a truly contemporary vehicle for lay Christian life. Because of this Constitution, a great renewal began. In the United States, high priority was placed on the Spiritual Exercises as the true source of the Sodality spirit. Throughout the world, the initiative of Pius XII had a profound effect in spurring on the modern adaptation of the movement. The midfifties saw the formation of a World Federation of Sodalities and the encouragement of National Federations. This changed the practice of Sodalities being autonomous and isolated, with little or no influence from the outside.

Now with the World Federation, International Congresses were held in Rome in 1950, in United States in

1959, and in Bombay in 1964. The latter Congresses under the guidance of one of movement's greatest leaders, Fr. Louis Paulussen, SJ, became the steps in the Sodality's final evolution. He has been called the "second founder of the Sodalities/Christian life Communities". Immediately after the 1959 Congress, Fr. Paulussen set up a renewal process through international commissions in over 40 nations where Sodalities existed. They had one purpose: to totally update the Sodality's historic movement as a modern flowering of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and all that was substantial in its past.

In 1954 in New York, a mixed gender Sodality of professional men and women was established by Fr. Frank Drolet, SJ. It was called the New York Professional Sodality. The goal of the group was to grow in love for Christ and their faith and to build a more just, Christian social order. In the early sixties, just as the world's Sodality was making the steps towards renewal, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council. In 1967, delegates from 38 nations convened in Rome for the final phase of renewal of the Sodality. It became a fully independent lay movement, received the new name of Christian Life Communities, and adopted "**The General Principles**," replacing the old Sodality rule.

There were different reactions to this change world-wide. Some Sodalists resisted the change and refused to join CLC. Others totally threw out the founding heritage of the Sodality as they embraced CLC. Still others strived to build CLC on its Sodality roots. The results were initially mixed, but in time, Christian Life Community was accepted as the full flowering of the original Sodality of Our Lady.

(*"Christian Life Communities, from the Sodalities of Our Lady"* by Fr. Frank Drolet, SJ.  
*"The Ignatian History of CLC,"* by Fr. Nick Rieman, SJ.  
*"International Christian life Community"* by Dr. Ray Zambito)