

ChristLife Missionary Community Overview and Way of Life

Introduction

The ChristLife Missionary Community (CMC) is a group of single adults and families centered on love of God and neighbor. Through monthly meetings and small groups we encourage one another to pray daily, pursue life together in community, and share the Gospel with the world.

The CMC started July 2015 after a group of ChristLife Young Adults discerned starting a new community that transcended young adulthood and pursued a deeper, more intentional way of life. This overview includes a number of quotes from members of the discernment team whose prayer, input, and service has shaped the community's vision.



Identity and Mission

The fundamental identity of the CMC is that we are beloved sons and daughters of God called to deepen our community into the love and the heart of the Father. “In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that He first loved us, and sent His Son as expiation for our sins.”¹ This “first love” is core to our identity. We have done nothing to deserve His love. He freely gives it to us.

Our response is to generously love Him back by fulfilling the Great Commandment, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”² We are chosen by God, with all our unique gifts and talents, to fulfill the Great Commission. This is our mission individually and together as members of the body of Christ “to go and make disciples of all nations.”³

Key Characteristics

There are a number of characteristics of “who we are” as a community that are important to explore.

¹ 1 John 4:19

² Luke 10:27

³ Matthew 28:18

ChristLife and Leadership Team

The missionary community has always had a close connection to the apostolate of ChristLife. Being in relationship with ChristLife allows the community to remain connected with the anointing placed over their work of mission and evangelization. Pete Ascosi, who is ChristLife's Assistant Director, serves on the leadership team of the community, which meets periodically throughout the year to pray, discern, and plan community activities and initiatives.

Ecumenical

Throughout our history, our community has served as a welcoming environment where non-Catholics have chosen to journey with us for some time. We don't know how this aspect of our community will grow, but we wish to be open to it in obedience to Christ's last prayer before his passion began: "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."⁴ A good way to live this out is by building friendships with other Christians and learning about Christ's work in their life: "We should intentionally strive to know and enjoy the different fruits produced by different expressions of Christ."⁵



Diversity of Gifts

A common theme that emerged in the written reflections of the discernment team was that of recognizing and growing in our individual gifts. "If Christlife is to truly become a family, the unique gifts of all its members and the unique ways that the Spirit moves each member need to have room for expression in the community itself."⁶ This is an area to be attentive to movements of the Holy Spirit as we open ourselves to ways in which others can live out more fully who they are while enriching the life of the community.

Charismatic

We would like to affirm the importance of the charismatic dimension of the CMC. As a community we are open to the power of the Holy Spirit. This is expressed in our praise and worship, through praying with others, and through our openness to the spiritual gifts.

Commitment

Many members of the discernment team expressed a desire to go deeper in our commitment to one another and the mission placed before us. "At the moment, I think the ideal move forward would be for the missionary community to form some formal collective commitment to the Lord and each other."⁷ Thus the CMC is oriented towards a greater, more unified commitment to God (prayer life), one another (communal life), and the apostolate (missionary life).

⁴ John 17:21

⁵ Liz Terschurr

⁶ Mike Wagaman

⁷ Brian Gray

The CMC is not meant to replace the other sources of community in our life (family, household, small group, parish) rather it forms members in a way that encourages deeper commitment to all sources of community in their lives.

While the CMC is not our only source of community, we all desire to sacrifice aspects of our lives to live with greater intentionality and purpose with one another within this community. As the Way of Life for the community of St. Anselm says:



“There is a deep joy to be found in laying things down, in giving things up, in reducing one’s options in one area in order to gain something more valuable in another... We use our freedom to restrict our choices, in order to gain greater freedom in areas we think are more important.”

Each member of the CMC is responding to a unique call from God. As we discern our response to His call, we must remember:

“If I commit to this community, I am not committing to something ‘for me’; I am committing to something greater than me, I am committing to something messy, something that is going to be difficult sometimes, people that I may not relate to perfectly, who may even sin against me. I am committing to something that may change, develop, something that I can't control. I am committing to something I feel called to, that God is the head of and that I desire for the Holy Spirit to lead.”⁸

Our response to this call is not based on a primary desire to continue friendships or a sense of obligation. Rather, we believe the Lord is *calling* us to this distinct style of prayer, communal, and missionary life.

Prayer Life

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”⁹

Prayer is the source of the Christian vocation, and what fuels its mission. Without an ever deepening personal and communal prayer life, we risk removing ourselves from the vine and no longer bearing the fruit of God’s work in us. One member writes: “I also worry that with too

⁸ Ally Ascosi

⁹ John 15:5

much emphasis on direct evangelization (or action of any kind) we run the risk of missing out on the necessary time of prayer and contemplation that allows us to understand our lives and our relationship with God better - renewing us and giving us that deep well of faith out of which our evangelization can spring."¹⁰

As part of our prayer
life we are to come
under the Word of God,
and allow it to shape
and mold us. "If a man
loves me, he will keep
my word, and my
Father will love him,
and we will come to
him and make our
home with him."¹¹

As Pope Francis writes,
prayer and meditation
upon the Word of God
is the source of the
Church's missionary
impulse:

"All evangelization is based on that word, listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. The sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization. Consequently, we need to be constantly trained in hearing the word. The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized. It is indispensable that the word of God "be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity."¹²

And as Pope Benedict XVI teaches, "The word of God is at the basis of all authentic Christian spirituality."¹³

Fasting

The 1st commandment states, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."¹⁴ God wills that we prefer Him over His gifts, and that requires not just stating that intention but taking concrete action that demonstrates that we do in fact prefer Him over His gifts. The practice of fasting as a spiritual discipline, brings us face to face with our willingness to obey the first commandment, to love God wholeheartedly. It exposes our answer to the question "Is God enough?" Choosing to fast is a way of saying that having more of the Giver surpasses more of the gift. Food is good, but God is better. More than any other spiritual discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us, and areas in our lives that are unconverted. It exposes our pain, our pride and our anger. It helps put our passions in order, and achieve greater freedom for self-giving love. It gives glory to God because it

¹⁰ Elisabeth Reed

¹¹ John 14:23

¹² *The Joy of the Gospel*, 174

¹³ *The Word of the Lord*, 86

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 6:5

expresses the cry of the heart that nothing can satisfy the deeper hunger of our souls besides God.

Early in the life of the community we felt called, in union with the universal Church, to fast on Fridays in some way. Some members give up meat or abstain from desserts or alcohol and others skip a meal or fast from media in some form. As one member reflects:

“When I fast on Fridays my appetite reminds me that something is different. For example, I may want to have a delicious dessert after dinner on Friday, but remembering our community fast, I abstain. And though my appetite ‘fights back’ I am reminded of the purpose of my fast: to grow closer to the Lord in union with my brothers and sisters in community. This also reminds me to pray for them.”¹⁵

How We Live This Out

- We set aside 15-30 minutes every day for a personal prayer time centered on personal encounter with God, especially through Scripture.
- We fast every Friday and make time to intercede for the community.

Communal Life

Growing more into a family is the outcome of a Gospel-centered Christian community. It is a process that we are currently undergoing, as we also try to understand its implications. Having experienced a variety of Christian communities before coming to ChristLife a member writes: “What stands out is a more mature love in Christ and a deeper manifestation of brotherly/sisterly love. It's the heartfelt interest and commitment to each other that I think is present and unusual.”¹⁶



An important distinction in this process is to understand what it means to treat and love those who are part of the community as brothers and sisters. Pope Benedict XVI said regarding new emerging communities in the Church: “Territorial unity is the expression of the fact that Christianity is not a group of friends who separate themselves from others or become a self-enclosed circle; Christians, rather, are men and women found by the Lord who accept the brethren that the Lord gives them. As we know, the difference between a friend and a brother is precisely this: a friend is someone I have sought; a brother is given to me. It follows that I am supposed to accept the brothers who may not be that agreeable to me but who are my brothers because we are united in the same faith.” Echoing a similar sentiment one member writes:

¹⁵ Pete Ascosi

¹⁶ Liz Terschurr

“While we may not be best friends with every member of the community, we are to be brothers and sisters, always available for each other.”¹⁷

It is also about taking the path of vulnerability with one another, “Pursuing opportunities for sharing some of our weakness with one another in order to take it to prayer and grow from it. A very important part of this for me, is getting past the walls that are so easy to put up to keep people thinking we're perfect.”¹⁸ The CMC meetings are designed to encourage a depth of relationship among individuals; though, a certain level of depth will only be reached in small group settings, “I think it would be good to have a large community with common purpose and vision, composed of small groups where the vulnerability and support can happen on a deeper level.”¹⁹

A community that seeks to embody evangelism, that is centered in the gospel of Jesus Christ, must ultimately seek to be perfected in the greatest theological virtue: Love. “There is no greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”²⁰ In the imitation of Jesus Christ we go ever deeper into sacrificial love.

Moving forward with greater intentionality as a community on mission will require sacrifice. All of us will have to give something up if we are to maintain unity as we go deeper and grow together as a community. As St. Paul wrote: “make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”²¹

Community House

As an outgrowth of the community-wide process of discussing and discerning what community means for us, and inspired by the original vision of Christian community in Acts, a smaller group within the CMC felt called to pursue the possibility of sharing life in an intentional live-in community. Living with others in an intentional way requires many sacrifices, but it also accelerates the deepening of community through support, companionship, accountability, as



well as inevitable conflict. Even the conflict can be a blessing when it is approached with openness, humility, love, and a desire to grow in mutual understanding. Beginning in June 2017, the Reed and Sosebee families and Jenny Jean-Louis moved into a large house together to form the Our Lady of Corpus Christi (OLCC) Community. OLCC currently strives to live out our call to

¹⁷ Mike Wagaman

¹⁸ Brian Reed

¹⁹ Elisabeth Reed

²⁰ John 15:13

²¹ Philippians 2:2-5

community through shared resources, shared meals, praying with and for one another, a commitment to peaceful conflict resolution, and a ministry of hospitality for the CMC.

Monthly Meetings

We gather once a month on a Sunday at the OLCC house. Our gathering starts with a time of prayer and worship, which is followed by community announcements, and then there is usually a testimonial sharing from one of the members. Then there is a formation topic which could be a teaching given by a member, a guest speaker, a reading, or a video. We end with a potluck dinner and time for fellowship.

How We Live This Out

- We serve and care for one another's needs at our monthly community meetings through helping out with childcare, preparing meals, setup, clean-up, etc.
- Many community members participate in a small group. Small groups pray together and support one another as missionary disciples by meeting twice a month as brothers or sisters in the Lord.

Missionary Life

The community's missionary life is how we are called to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world, through humble service and evangelization. We are sent to carry the peace of the Father that makes us whole out into the world, and form authentic sons and daughters of God. It is the tangible fruit that is born out of the deep well of faith nourished by our prayer life, and our love for one another through fraternal community life. The Gospel, when lived out, is attractive and bears fruit in mission. "And then evangelization would be a natural fruit because others would be attracted to our lifestyle."²²

More than being the fruit of an evangelical life, a shared missionary life builds up both our prayer life and our fraternal community life. It builds our prayer life through the added fervor of intercession for God's action both in our missionary hearts of service, and in the hearts of those whom we serve and witness to. It builds our community life since "carrying out service as a group forms bonds which can't be formed simply by coming to a social event or a small group consistently."²³

Addressing emerging movements and new communities in the Church, Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko stresses the danger of neglecting the missionary life: "All Christian formation ought to have a missionary element because the Christian vocation is, by its nature, a call to apostolate. Missionary outreach helps baptized persons discover the fullness of their own vocation; it helps them overcome the temptation of egoistic selfishness and the subtle danger of seeing the movement or community as a refuge or a way to flee the problems of the world in an environment of warm friendship."

²² Brian Gray

²³ Mohit Dave

How We Live This Out

- We live out the call to be “missionary disciples” by helping others come to know Jesus Christ in our own personal lives, and through involvement in a ministry or activity of evangelization and service.

Joining the CMC and Membership

The ChristLife Missionary Community presents a “way of life” that is focused above all on loving God with everything we are, and our neighbor as ourselves. Together we want to live a lifestyle of being disciples of Jesus Christ together.

From the beginning we wanted to come together for more than meetings or get-togethers among friends that are like-minded, but to *intentionally* grow together as a community on mission. To invite people into this intentionality, into our way of life, we have a simple membership process.

1. We invite someone who is interested in the CMC to attend a monthly meeting
2. After attending the meeting, if they want to join, they are asked to write a personal faith reflection expressing their understanding of the community, their sincere desire to live out the CMC commitments, and their own testimony of conversion.



Members are asked to prioritize attendance at monthly meetings and earnestly desire to live out the commitments. All members make an annual commitment to the CMC “way of life.”