

THE
CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITY

An Introduction

Louise Madsen

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We live in a secular world. Religion, in any form, is foreign to most people. And yet many people sense that there is more to the world than meets the eye, not only on an emotional or psychological level, but especially on a spiritual one. For those looking for a more meaningful and fulfilling life, a modern form of Christian religious life can be a great help in finding a new relationship to the divine world.

The Christian Community is a movement whose aim is to renew religious life. It does not do so by attempting to revive any previous practices. On the contrary, it works out of a heightened awareness of the necessity for a world view with an intrinsic spiritual dimension as basis for any real religious activity. It is this that makes the services, as they are celebrated in the Community, new. The spiritual quality, evident in all the services and sacraments, reveals something of the fullness of the invisible, divine above us.

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Foreword

This booklet offers an introduction to the life and work of The Christian Community. However, it is no substitute for first-hand experience. The sacramental services are open to all. Anyone may come to see whether they experience a spiritual reality in them. If they do, they may embark on a path that eventually leads towards membership of the Community.

The services are the source of the life of the community. All the activities that go on in the community arise out of them and lead towards them, by widening and deepening our understanding of Christianity and caring for and helping human souls in their destinies. This is done through a wide range of activities including talks, study groups, conferences, religious instruction, publishing, children's and youth work and pastoral care.

Through its activities The Christian Community wishes to enable people to discover anew their religious potential and to experience its relevance to their daily life.

It is not the aim of this booklet to give full descriptions of the services, but rather to give an overview. A guide to more information can be found under 'Further Reading,' on page 31.

The Sacraments

Seven sacraments bear the spiritual religious life of The Christian Community. In Latin, *sacrare* means to consecrate, to sanctify or make holy. In the Christian sense 'sacrament' is the name given to a holy act that unites human beings with God.

Sacraments are deeds that create spiritual facts, revealing within the physical world something which has its origin in the divine-spiritual world, which leads from this physical world into the divine world. They are conducted by a priest. Both men and women are ordained into the priesthood in The Christian Community. The sacraments are carried out with the congregation, in the name and the power of the resurrected Christ. Through picture, word and deed, they address the human being as body, soul and spirit. Through them we can approach the divine Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit, and allow the life of the divine community to flow into our community life.

The sacraments are celebrated at decisive times in the life of a human being: at birth, with Baptism; at the threshold between childhood and youth, there is Confirmation; for questions concerning life and destiny, Sacramental Consultation; for marriage, the Sacrament of Marriage; for the priestly vocation, Ordination; and for preparing for death, the Anointing. The sacrament held at the altar, the Eucharist or Communion service, is called the Act of Consecration of Man. Its regular celebration forms the heart of The Christian Community and is the source of its religious life.

The sacraments have a given form and they are made available to the priests at their ordination for their use in the congregations. They are not published in printed form by the Community.

Besides the sacraments, two further services are also celebrated: the Sunday Service for Children and the Funeral Service. Other services such as Evening or Close of Day services are also held from time to time. These have a less fixed form.

Baptism

The child starts its bodily development at conception and at birth enters the physical world. Its soul has come down from the heavenly world and when it is born into the light of day its connection to the invisible world has radically changed. In the words of the Baptism we hear that prior to birth the child's soul lived in the world of spirit. From this other world the child is received in its baptism (or christening as it is often called) into the community of Christ in a way fitting for its age.

The Baptism takes place as soon after birth as is practically possible. It can, however, be conducted up to the age of Confirmation. It is prepared with the parents and the two godparents. The ceremony is conducted with the child, the parents, the godparents and the congregation who have gathered to be part of this event. They are the responsible carriers of the commission given by the resurrected Christ to the Apostles, to go out into the whole world and make disciples of all peoples, 'baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt.28:19). The child receives its name, which is often threefold: the Christian name, a name from the language and culture of the people, and the family name. It is baptized with three consecrated substances: water, salt and ash. It receives a blessing out of the power of the Trinity, with the sign of the cross made over it three times.

When parents have decided that they would like their child to be baptized in The Christian Community they should approach the priest as soon as possible to prepare for this great event and to discuss all further arrangements. This can be done before the child is born. In particular, the role and the tasks of the godparents as guardians accompanying the child on the Christian path need careful consideration. Together with the priest, two people can then be chosen who would be suitable godparents.

What has been inaugurated at the Baptism is carried on by parents and godparents, teachers and ministers, until Confirmation opens the gateway to youth.

Emergency Baptism

If medical opinion deems the newly born child unlikely to survive, an emergency baptism may be held. Anyone can do this but usually it will fall to the midwife, a nurse, doctor or a relation to undertake this.

A cross is made over the child, where possible with water, and the words are spoken: 'I baptize you, [name, if known] in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen, Yea, so be it.' If the child lives, the full sacramental Baptism should be held later.

From Baptism to the Sunday Service for Children

At home the child is surrounded by the family and will be cared for and nurtured by the life of the family. If the family does not yet have a strong religious life, the baby can help bring it about. A song and a prayer feed the soul and give it strength. As the child grows older, prayers suitable for its age can be spoken regularly in the morning and evening. Grace before meals is meaningful when said with understanding and gratitude. Reverence for what we receive and devotion to the animals, flowers and people around us can be awakened and encouraged.

When the child has entered its seventh year, it is ready to take a further step in its religious life. It can now meet the divine world as it comes to expression in the Sunday Service for Children. This is celebrated, together with other children, before the altar. Here, in a short festive act, the children are led to revere God as the primal ground of all nature, who is at work in all things and all people. Their heart is opened to Christ who can be found in all human beings of good will, and their will is strengthened to find, with increasing understanding, the Spirit of the World. Praying together, an intercessory blessing, a reading from the New Testament and the singing of a song belong to a Christian service suitable for children of this age. The natural and regular rhythm of attendance until Confirmation can be a decisive help and strength, and can show its benefits in later years.

At Christmas there is a special service, held only on Christmas Day. The children hear of the first Christmas night when the shepherds beheld the light shining out of the eyes of the Jesus child, and how since then, people can find Christ when they feel this light shining in their hearts. The children take this Christmas message with them into the New Year.

Confirmation

At about fourteen, childhood gives place to youth. The young person reaches the stage of physical maturity and begins to feel the need to become responsible for his or her own life. A whole new inner world starts to assert itself. During the teenage years this will be explored and worked through to discover both its limitations and its potentials.

To confirm is to strengthen. The soul, which is coming into its own, can benefit from receiving an inner orientation and sense of being confirmed in its own right. The child will have been baptized and has been guided by parents and teachers. The regular Sunday services and religious instruction have been leading towards and preparing for the change. Now each young person must begin to be his or her own guide, and for this Christ's blessing is sought. The Confirmation service consists of two parts, the second being the full Communion service, the Act of Consecration of Man. In the first part verses from the prayer of Jesus (John 17) are read, in which Jesus asks that those who come to him may find the Christ and through him the Father God. The centre of the sacrament is the individual blessing of each child. This part closes by sending the young person into the world. It prepares the way for the Act of Consecration of Man in which the confirmand receives his or her first communion. On this occasion communion is reserved for the confirmands. From now on an individual relationship to Christ may be sought from which strength can be drawn throughout adult life.

The Confirmation takes place during Eastertide, between Easter and Ascension.

Sacramental Consultation

In trying to conduct our lives to the best of our ability we must from time to time take stock. That means looking back to what has already taken place and looking forward to see how we can best prepare and plan for what may happen. Our inner strength also depends on exercising our memory in such fashion. To weigh things up and come to conclusions about them binds our experiences to our self, to our 'I,' and to raise these things into the light of the sacrament is one aim of the Sacramental Consultation. All questions and matters of concern can be brought into this light — everything that has to do with the development of the human soul, and its relationship to the human situations and circumstances in which it finds itself.

In coming to terms with experiences and freeing oneself from them, a viewpoint is achieved from which they can be seen more clearly for what they really are. This gives strength and opens out new possibilities for coping with them. Conscience is enhanced and self-knowledge can grow. The priest, out of his relationship to the divine world, can bring an awareness that each personal life and its concerns belong to a greater whole, that a life and destiny are an integral part of the events in which they are placed. To draw the soul into harmony with the greater context of events brings peace and love.

Sacramental Consultation is conducted on a one-to-one basis between an individual and the priest. In the opening conversation the priest listens to what is being said and lets it come to full expression. Then, together with the priest, avenues of insight and understanding will open up, leading to acceptance, peace and inner strength. Learning to offer and learning to receive is the theme summed up in the sacramental words.

At the end of the meeting or after a series of conversations the priest will wear vestments, as he or she reads words which can

guide us into harmony with the divine world. The Sacramental Consultation can be held in response to a particular situation in life, for example, before a major decision; it can also take place at regular intervals throughout our lives.

A further aim of the Sacramental Consultation is to prepare for taking communion. The latter is done as part of the community gathered before the altar. It is a challenge for every communicant to receive the body and the blood of Christ in a worthy fashion. Those gathered together unite with each other through being united with Christ. In a Consultation which one receives as an individual, one can prepare to receive communion as a member of the community. It serves to renew, enliven and deepen one's experience of the taking of communion.

What is spoken about in a Sacramental Consultation is kept confidential by the priest.

The Act of Consecration of Man

The Act of Consecration of Man is the central service of The Christian Community. It is celebrated on Sundays — the day of the Resurrection, ‘the first day of the week’ — and also on week-days. It is a communion service containing four main parts: Gospel reading, Offertory, Transubstantiation and Communion. It is celebrated at an altar with seven candles above which both the crucified Christ and the resurrected Christ are portrayed.

Four archetypal steps are manifested in the four main parts through which an inner dynamic moves.

In the Gospel reading a creative mood of listening allows the word of Christ, as expressed in the New Testament, to be heard with the heart, purifying and preparing it to bring the Offering.

The Offering of bread and wine is brought by turning to God the will, feeling and thinking of all those participating in the Act of Consecration. They draw nearer in soul to Christ, with whom and through whom the offering can be made.

In the Transubstantiation the decisive ‘event’ of the service takes place. At the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday Christ Jesus united himself with the bread and the wine and gave them to the disciples as his body and his blood. With his death and Resurrection the Last Supper was transformed into the Christian Eucharist.

In the Communion, in uniting with the divine, the service comes to its culmination. Firstly, the priest, as representative of the congregation, takes communion and all who are present partake in it through him or her. After this, when there is general communion, members of the congregation can receive it individually.

With Christ’s Resurrection a new creation began. In the first creation the visible world was brought forth. In the second creation, what is visible (and temporal) is being transformed into what is eternal and invisible. In the Act of Consecration, in which the spirit penetrates the physical world, human beings partici-

pate in the working of the divine. Human beings, and through them nature, are thus united again with the eternal.

The Act of Consecration of Man changes through the Christian year, which begins at Advent. Like nature, which is the physical expression of the divine creativity of the world, the sacrament, unfolding during the year, is a continuous revelation of the divine world. Each of the festivals has its special prayers and Epistle (words addressed at the beginning and end of the service to the soul concerning its relationship to the particular festival). The colours of the altar cloths and of the vestments also change, reflecting something of the mood of each festival. The Act of Consecration of Man requires a full twelve months to show itself in its completeness and in so doing makes the natural year into a 'holy year.' The festivals of the year and the colours of the vestments are:

Advent	deep blue
Christmas	white and pale violet
Epiphany	magenta
Passiontide	black
Easter	red and green
Ascension	red and gold
Whitsun	white and yellow
St John's Tide	white and yellow
Michaelmas	rose and light green

The festivals cover periods ranging from three days (Whitsun) to forty days (Easter). In the times when no particular festival period stands to the fore, the Epistle is directed specially to the Trinity and the vestment colours are lilac and orange. A listing of the festivals with all the gospel readings for the coming year is published in the first issue of *Perspectives* every year.

After the Act of Consecration of Man has been held, communion can be taken to those who have been prevented from attending the service through illness or disability. If deemed appropriate, certain elements of the service may be included to allow a fuller participation in receiving the communion.

Marriage

To be a human being is to be neither only a man nor only a woman. To become more fully human, we need to appreciate and even develop something of the qualities belonging to the other sex. Each man has female qualities and in each woman there is something of the male. In joining together in a way which enhances each other's nature and qualities, each partner will find that their own soul life becomes fuller, more all-round and balanced.

Sharing one's life with another means the interweaving of two destinies, two paths of life. With this the basic element of human community is created. Whereas the decision to marry is a private matter for the two people concerned, the fact of their marriage is of import for society.

Marriage has three aspects to it which are distinct from one another: the intention to lead a shared life and order a household; the legal contract conducted at the registry office; and the sacramental blessing on 'holy wedlock.' Living together is very common today and many people, at least initially, do not see why they should take the matter further. When the next step of having a civil wedding is taken, the partners should be very clear about what it involves. The legal contract fulfils social requirements and, especially if there are children, provides the underlying security that they need.

The sacrament brings both partners — body, soul and spirit — and their union into relationship with the divine. In the light of the Risen Christ — who himself continually lifts earthly things and events into the eternal — personal and temporal characteristics are placed into the greater encompassing bond now being formed. The power of union is embodied in the sacramental signs of the exchanging of rings and the binding together of two sticks in the shape of a diagonal (St Andrew's) cross. The union being

formed on earth, which can bring goodness and joy into human existence, itself lights up as a sacramental promise of the future, when the divisions between man and woman, between the world and God, will be overcome.

The time between deciding to marry and the marriage itself can and should be a special time of preparing and learning about what lies ahead. Conversations with the priest over several months cover the ground needed for a fuller awareness of and clarity about the task to be undertaken. Two witnesses are required to partake in the ceremony and inwardly to accompany the marriage in the years to come. The choice of witnesses and their task is clarified with the priest well in advance of the marriage. Their role is an indication of the social importance of the undertaking.

After twenty-five years a **silver wedding** can be conducted. The ritual is the same and gives the opportunity to receive the sacramental blessing, even where this was not possible on the first occasion. By this time children will be growing up and leaving home, and the parents, now more free from the immediate concerns of bringing them up, have to re-establish their relationship to each other.

At the time of the **golden wedding**, after fifty years, the Sacrament of Marriage can once again be received. Taking place towards the end of life, the words spoken at the beginning of the ceremony in which Christ is described as the one who transforms what is earthly into that which is of heaven, take on new meaning. The relationship itself will have moved in this direction and the union, the community of life, of these two destinies will once again receive strength and blessing as the couple draw nearer to the world above.

Ordination

Ordination is consecration into the priesthood. Through their consecration the ordinands become servants of the divine world and receive the authority to celebrate the sacraments. The ceremony is connected to and interwoven with the Act of Consecration of Man; through it the ordinands receive their task and strength to celebrate the sacraments, to proclaim and teach the Gospels, and to help human souls. They are anointed with consecrated oil and received into the circle of the priesthood. As sign of their office they wear the black cassock, the white alb and the stole. As the sign of their authority to celebrate the Act of Consecration of Man, they wear the chasuble and are recognized as shepherds of souls by the congregation.

From the beginning of The Christian Community, women have been fully accepted into the priesthood. Thereby a crucial step has been taken towards making the priesthood of the whole human being a reality.

After ordination the priests are sent out into the congregation to carry out their tasks as ministers in The Christian Community, to found and care for free communities as members of the body of the resurrected Christ.

The preparation for priesthood is carried out in the Community's international seminaries in Stuttgart and Hamburg in Germany and Chicago in the USA. There are preliminary courses in other countries.

Candidates come from various walks of life. Younger or older, each brings some life experience with him. They may have known The Christian Community for a longer time or may have only recently met it when a question arises in them regarding their own relationship to the priesthood. If they feel that this vocation might lie in their own destiny, they should approach a priest about it.

The Anointing

In the later years of our life or in illness there is often a great need to find a source of inner strength to meet our own situation and life's questions in general. The soul is much in need of comfort, reassurance and confirmation of its existence and importance and wants to 'put its house in order.' The meaning and purpose of our life and old age itself can become central issues.

When a person is confined indoors, the visiting priest can bring three services: Sacramental Consultation, Communion for the Sick, and the Anointing. Sacramental Consultation and Communion can be held at regular intervals, either separately or together.

The Anointing is given when life is drawing to a close. The priest, if possible, will already be paying visits at home or in hospital. If not, the nursing staff should be clearly informed that it is the wish of the person concerned to receive the Anointing when the time comes. If circumstances allow, Sacramental Consultation, Communion, and the Anointing can be conducted together, so enabling a person to order and recollect his or her life before he or she departs. The Anointing begins with the prayer Jesus spoke before going into the world of the Father (John 17). It is followed by the anointing on the forehead with oil. Body and soul are prepared for an eventual separation from each other and for crossing the threshold of death.

The Anointing can be given to an unconscious person, but not to one who has died. Should he or she recover, the sacrament will have helped to strengthen his or her forces. It can be repeated when death again draws near.

The Funeral Service

The manner in which a human being dies is of the greatest importance. The Anointing, the Funeral Service and the Memorial Act of Consecration together aid the soul worthily to make the transition into the world of spirit. At the moment of death, the Lord's Prayer can be spoken by those present.

If possible before death occurs, but certainly as soon as it has taken place, the priest who is going to conduct the Funeral Service should be contacted, preferably before anyone else, particularly the undertakers. It is good if this event has previously been spoken about with the person who has died and with the relatives. Failing that, his or her wishes should be ascertained as soon as possible. It is better if they have already been written down and made easily accessible.

The service is in two parts; the first is held at home, or if that cannot be, where the coffin has lain, preferably for three days. This allows for the withdrawal of the life forces from the body. Although death has occurred, these forces are still present and only gradually withdraw. This is the time when relatives and friends can take their leave: say farewell in thankfulness for a long and full life, grieve for a dearly loved one, or begin to come to terms with the shock of a sudden departure. For the first part of the funeral service, only close relatives and friends are present. According to the wishes of the deceased or the relatives, there follows either a burial or a cremation. The second part of the service is held, wherever possible, at the place of burial or at the crematorium and is open to all who wish to be present.

In the case of someone having taken his own life, he or she should be buried. The soul of a person who has committed this untimely act may need the body as a point of orientation for a longer period before it can continue its way into the world of spirit.

Both parts of the Funeral Service are intended through the words of the ritual to bring together the thoughts and prayers of relatives and friends to help and accompany the soul of the departed one.

The Funeral Service for a Child

Since the founding of The Christian Community there is, for the first time in the history of Christianity, a Baptism specifically given for children. For the age before they are confirmed, they have their special Sunday service.

So also they have their particular Funeral Service if they die before reaching the age of Confirmation. The threefold nature of the service addresses the three members of the Trinity in relation to the departed soul, and to the sorrowing parents it gives much comfort and encouragement.

The Memorial Act of Consecration

The Memorial Act of Consecration, also called the Act of Consecration for the Dead, may be celebrated on the Saturday following the funeral or on the next suitable Saturday. As on the Saturday after the Crucifixion, when all was quiet as the body of Christ Jesus lay in the grave, so the mood of the day of rest is spiritually suited to offering our thoughts and prayers for one who has died.

The colour of the vestments for the service is black. The Gospel reading is from the last chapter of Mark about Christ who, through his death and resurrection, overcame the power of death in the world. A special prayer is spoken at the end of the service. This asks that the departed soul who is named may be received into the light realms of the Father by the hand of Christ.

The event of this communion service can be the beginning of a conscious living together in spirit with the one who has died. The priest can give further information about how this can be done.

The Gospel

Every time the Act of Consecration of Man is celebrated, we hear a short reading, a *pericope* (from the Greek, segment), from the New Testament. Through the year we thus learn of the main events in the life of Christ Jesus in their relationship to the Christian festivals.

The word 'Gospel' derives from the Anglo-Saxon 'godspell' which means God's word of power. Many other languages preserve a version of the Greek *euangelion*, 'good tidings.' In the Bible there are four versions according to the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the bringers of good news. What they wrote is in part what they witnessed, but also in part what was shown to them in their inner vision and hearing. In the Revelation to John, he tells us how the angel, the messenger of God, made him write down what he had witnessed of the Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Read in the light of spiritual understanding and heard with an open heart, the Bible will again become a relevant and essential part of the lives of people looking for deeper meaning and a firm foundation for their existence. As described in the parable (Matt.13), the seed, the Word of God, planted in the human heart, will bring forth fruit in abundance when it is heard and received with understanding.

Learning to know and understand the Bible, in particular the New Testament, is an important part of religious instruction for children and of study groups for adults. The retranslating of the New Testament is an ongoing process in which new forms of expression are looked for to suit the consciousness of modern humanity.

The Creed

During the Act of Consecration of Man the Creed of The Christian Community is read after the Gospel. The basic premises of Christianity are brought together here in twelve statements. Through their formulation they call upon the enquiring heart and mind to ponder them. In this way, these statements concerning the divine are not only there to be felt, but to be raised into the life of thought. This new step is expressed as well in the fact that the Creed does not begin with the words 'I believe,' as the ancient creeds do (it is from the Latin *credo* or 'I believe' that the word 'creed' is derived). The priest, who recites the Creed, embodies in the commitment to his or her vocation an acceptance of the realities expressed through the Creed. Each member of the congregation is free to make their own relationship to these truths.

A personal copy of this Creed is entrusted to all who become members of The Christian Community. It is given to them to work and live with ever more closely on the path to Christ in whose steps they wish to follow.

Membership

When one who has come to know and to recognize The Christian Community and its services as one's spiritual and religious home one can take the step of preparing for membership. This is done by arranging a series of talks with the priest who will then receive the new member into the Community.

By sharing in the life of the Community through taking part in the Act of Consecration, getting married or having children baptized in it, one is no longer a mere guest or friend. For 'now I take part in what *we* do; I am no longer an onlooker.' In conversation with the priest a clear understanding can be reached of one's relationship to the Community. In peace and clarity the step is made of becoming a member, in the knowledge that out of this free decision the relationship can grow and deepen.

If felt appropriate the words of the Sacramental Consultation may be heard on becoming a member. A copy of the Creed is received for personal use. The Creed and the Lord's Prayer give the inner foundation and strength needed to become a carrier and a fulfiller of the sacraments together with others. Recognition of the healing effect of these sacraments in one's life and relationships is the social aspect of membership.

Being a member implies an inner connection to the life of the Community; the aim of membership is to participate in creating communities in and through which Christ can work. Christ used the image 'the salt of the earth' for his followers. This makes clear that membership is not primarily about the satisfaction of my own religious needs. On the contrary members will want to support the Community in all its aspects: spiritual, social and economic.

One becomes, in fact, a member of several bodies, each being the vessel for another. Belonging to a body of Christians makes one aware that receiving Christ's body and blood in bread and

wine is not only for one's own sake, but for the nourishment and unity of the whole community, indeed of the whole earth. In the 'social body' of the congregation the healing power of Christ can work between human beings. As part of the economic sphere each will contribute financially to ensure the continued existence and growth of The Christian Community.

By identifying and uniting with the aims and intentions of the Community an awareness can grow of what the Community can offer into the lives of people and the fabric of society. The Christian ideals, virtues, qualities of soul and moral life can be realized anew in a modern context.

Understanding Christianity and Religious Education

In a 'post-Christian' world there is a need to find a worldview in which Christianity is not just a private matter of the heart, but is part of a spiritual worldview. Such a worldview will include the nature of the human being, of God and the world. The central task of the Community is the cultivation of religious practice. It is a hallmark of The Christian Community that it lays down no dogma and makes no demands of a commitment to any creed. Nevertheless, as modern human beings we need to understand what we are doing, and one of the tasks of the Community is teaching in its widest sense.

Religious education begins when a child has reached school age. Before this the child still lives close to the world from which it has come. The Baptism and the regular marking of sleeping and waking times through prayer and perhaps song, and the parents' acceptance of spiritual realities all nourish the religious needs of a child. Having reached school age, children learn about mankind, the earthly world and the heavenly world, through fairy tales, myths and legends, human biography, the Old and the New Testament. Religion lessons accompany the children during the time they attend the Children's Service. Confirmation is prepared towards the end of this time.

Later on, attenders are encouraged to participate actively in the religious life with their thinking as well as with their feelings through talks, conferences and study groups. By increasing one's understanding of what underlies religious practice, that practice itself can gain in certainty and strength.

The written word can often reach further afield than the spoken one. Floris Books, The Christian Community publisher, produces books on a variety of subjects related to the Community's

work. *Perspectives*, a quarterly journal, carries news and articles which are not only topical but also accord with the particular time of year.

What is spoken or written in The Christian Community is done on personal authority. The Community has no 'teaching office,' which defines what is to be taught or believed. Priests undertake only that what they teach will accord with the content of the sacraments.

Structure and Form of the Community

The priesthood, while sharing a common ordination, is hierarchically structured into priest, lenker (regional coordinator), oberlenker and erzoberlenker.* A lenker is responsible for the congregations in one region or one country, conducts confirmations and consecrates new churches. Responsible for the whole Community are oberlenkers and the erzoberlenker, who, together with four of the lenkers constitute the Circle of Seven. The erzoberlenker officiates at Ordinations, although this task can be delegated to any ordained priest. In practice it would generally be one of the oberlenkers. The Circle of Seven has the task of deciding who should be ordained, and where the priests should be sent to work.

Local centres

Each centre or congregation pursues its own life, creates its own activities and produces its own programme of events. It sets up its own administrative organs composed of priest(s) and members. Financially, each centre aims to be self-supporting through the contributions of its members and friends. Local centres contribute to central funds which supports the lenker, retired priests, priests in training and other non-local requirements. Properties may be owned nationally, regionally or locally (this varies in different countries). The day-to-day administration is done locally.

* *Lenker* is a German word meaning one who guides, directs, steers, leads. There being no appropriate English equivalent for *Lenker*, this term has been retained.

The region

The region for which a lenker is responsible has its own administration and central fund. The region contributes to an international central fund which supports the overall leadership and the international administration.

Foundation and History

The first Act of Consecration of Man was conducted by the first erzoberlenker of The Christian Community, Friedrich Rittelmeyer, on September 16, 1922. With this, the movement for religious renewal was born. The event had been prepared for by a group of mainly young people, both men and women, who for some time had received much advice and help from Rudolf Steiner through courses of lectures and discussions.

His spiritual research which led him to see the Incarnation of Christ as the central event in human evolution, served to develop not only a spiritual theology and Christology, but a widened understanding of the Gospel and a basis for a new practice of pastoral care.

The work began in Germany, Switzerland and Austria, and then rapidly spread to Holland, Scandinavia and Czechoslovakia. In 1929 it became established in Britain. The first centre was opened in the United States in 1948 and in Canada in 1952. Work in South Africa began in 1965, in Ireland in the 1960s and in New Zealand and Australia in 1988 and 1989.

There are also communities in many other European countries, South America and Japan.

Further reading

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Capel, Evelyn, *The Christian Year*, Floris Books 1991.
— and Tom Ravetz, *Seven Sacraments in The Christian Community*, Floris Books 1999.
Frieling, Rudolf, *New Testament Studies*, Floris Books 1994.
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—, *The Cosmic Christ*, Floris Books 1997.
—, *Necessary Evil*, Floris Books 2005.
—, *The Trinity*, Floris Books 2007.
—, *The Healing Power of Prayer*, Floris Books 2008.

Current availability and prices from www.florisbooks.co.uk

Perspectives, Quarterly Journal of The Christian Community. A free sample copy can be requested from Subscriptions Manager, 22 Baylie Street, Stourbridge DY8 1AZ

Addresses of The Christian Community

For more information and current addresses of centres of The Christian Community, check following websites:

Britain and Ireland *www.thechristiancommunity.co.uk*

North America *www.thechristiancommunity.org*

Australia and New Zealand *www.thechristiancommunity.net*

Germany (in German) *www.christengemeinschaft.de*