

ORDER ECUMENICAL: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ASSIGNMENTS PROCESS

The Order: Ecumenical has grown in 30 years from one location to 108, from one nationality to 37, from one continent to eight, from 42 people to well over 900. The symbolization of assignments has evolved in those years from "laying on the hands individual by individual" to the July commissioning and the Assignments Book. The first sign of our deployment in August 1968 was the launching of four religious houses in North America. Yellow Ryder trucks loaded with family goods and materials, departed for Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles and Chicago South.

The global assignments are a primary symbol of each Order member's decision to embody the style of radical engagement and are symbolized finally by the Panchayat.

The annual assignment process and ritual was first initiated with a "reading of the names" ceremony in the Great Hall of the Order in Fifth City at the August Council in the late 60's. The Assignment Task force was first called into being in 1973 and has moved from a few global priors to a larger more representative task force from around the world.

There are 14 guiding principles that serve as a comprehensive context for the making of assignments:

1. Assignments are made in a history-long, worldwide context.
2. Assignment configurations fulfill the missional demands.
3. Every individual is key to the mission.
4. We have all we need to do the necessary task.
5. Every location is equally significant for missional expenditure.
6. Every assignment is a global assignment.
7. Every assignment honors the individual.
8. Every house is a missionally effective unit.
9. Corporate wisdom and individual recommendations are held in creative tension.
10. Every assignment is worth the expenditure of one's life.
11. Everyone is responsible for the whole mission.
12. Anyone can play any role in any location.
13. Assignments are a symbol of obedience.
14. Assignments are consensed by the Order, announced on its behalf and offered up to history.

Various rotational schemes have been typical of the assignment patterns in the past 20 years: by quarter or by year; to offices or locations; in and out of a Nexus; and journeying from third prior to first through the dynamics of a house troika. More recently the trend has been to assign families to a location or task for longer than a year to utilize their particular gifts and establish continuity with local communities. This has resulted in an individual rhythm to assignment patterns that vary widely with some families moving yearly and others remaining in one area (if not one region) for 7 to 9 years.

There has been an increasing number of situations in which families are not globally mobile. The trend toward specialization involves Order members with particular skills or interests who are "locked in" to long term assignment in particular roles, e.g. finances, preschool teachers, strategic permeation and career advancement. Another aspect of restricted assignability is the necessary preparation for global assignment by acquiring global language proficiency and the functional and methodological skills required to serve effectively anywhere. This restriction is intensified by the unpreparedness of many locations to provide the functional and leadership training required. Because of the specialized functions of the Nexus locations, especially in management and development, flexibility of assignment is sometimes restricted.

As our assignment process has changed to accommodate the increasing complexity and diversity of the Order and the mission, the systems into which one feeds the necessary data into the process have become inadequate. In the late 60's and early 70's, Joseph W. Mathews, one of the early founders of the Order, and some Order elders visited house locations around the world between October and May. In each location the assignment shifts necessitated by new missional advantages were talked through and those shifts often took place well before the annual assignments were done in July. In recent years any mid-year changes in assignments that become necessary because of missional or family needs, are worked through by the Assignments Commission. The Commission is comprised of five members from each of the four zones (Bombay, Brussels, Chicago and Hong Kong) and is a global banding dynamic within the polity of the Order.

It was after the move to the Kemper building in 1971 that the gathering of priors was held in conjunction with and immediately after, the Research Assembly. Up to that time, there was a week or more of time after the Assembly before the priors gathered and new assignments made. In 1973 an Assignments Task Force began working through the needed assignment moves with upfront thinking and direction from JWM. The process of "doing assignments" was increasingly participatory but remained a fairly separate activity from the Council. The 8th Floor assignments room became a symbol of the seriousness and care with which the process of deployment is carried out. The area/continent boards are a dramatic presentation of expenditure by a global team of Those Who Care. It was a special place for the Order and a profound address to visitors.

In 1979 there were self-conscious efforts to broaden the base of consensus. In July 1981 the assignments task force moved toward integrating the Council in the assignments process. Corporate lunchtime conversations provided a forum for interchange and input from the total Council. There were scheduled meetings with individuals and continental priors. It also used the Council to deal with questions of configuration, strategic thrusts and difficult assignment decisions.

It has become apparent that what could once be held in the memory of several people now requires hundreds of bytes of computer memory to store and recall. Over time, sticky labels have given way to magnetic cards; simple information personnel sheets to multi-page histories; and notes on napkins to color-coded recommendation forms. For several years individuals have submitted recommendations for colleagues and themselves. Each year the Global Assignments Commission mails contextual collegiums on assignments in Quarter III and recommending collegiums early in Quarter IV. Movemental

colleagues have made recommendations related to their region or area. Phone calls to people not present and conversations with people at the Council have been held about their own and their colleagues' assignments. Necessary information about particular locations is sought directly and indirectly through several showing of the assignments board. This generates further data resulting in a final board that reflects a broad screen of values. Each individual's placement in an assignment releases the creativity and effective missional expenditure that empowers the task of the Order in the ensuing year.

In the Year of the Order Council 1984, the naming of the assignments task force has as its major screen a chosen liaison person from each holon. This represents a broadening of the base for individual input, personal conversations, information flow and reflections on and recommendations for designing an assignment process that is inclusively participatory. It is a manifestation of the paradigmatic shift that marks the 20th century. It will hopefully provide the environment to honor each member of the Order and further the polity experiment the Order has been from its beginnings.