

LITURGY EXPERIMENT
April, 1981

WORKING DRAFT

I

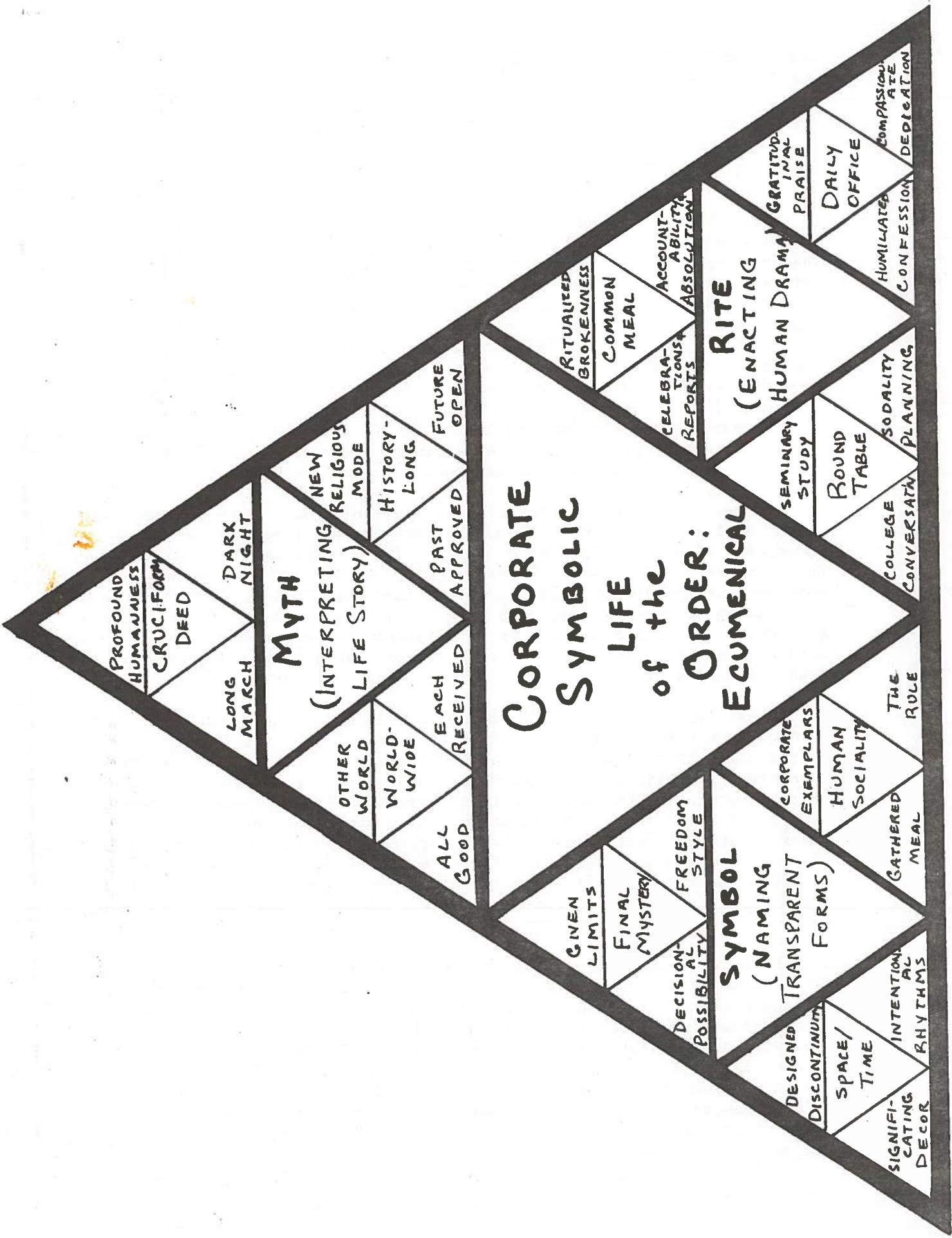
1. Some of our earliest work as a self-conscious community was in the area of the symbolic life, and especially in the creation of a ritual. Thorough research and many different forms finally brought us to the present "Daily Office." From the beginning, our worship has been an experiment, as our life has been an experiment, not simply for ourselves, but also for the church in its broadest sense and for the world. As the scope of our work has changed, our symbolic life has made some changes also and has rightly become a point of attention during the past few years. The July '80 Priors Council produced a contextual statement for further work on the liturgy (see Book I).* This statement lays out the Order context, or history of our liturgy experiment, the present sociological indicative, values and issues, and a word on the nature of the experiment. It stands as a rather thorough and succinct statement for the next stage of our work.

2. The next phase in experimenting with symbolic life will be important, as the earlier ones have been and can serve us not simply in what is produced, but also in the act of creating. The earlier work was an occasion for profound theologizing. It was a training event in its own right. New work on liturgy can serve as a powerful formation tool as it affords the opportunity to rehearse the structure of liturgy in its three acts and to ground the life reality which it illuminates. In the council last year we said we would take four years for this task. We can take all the time we need, for our task is for the sake of the next 1000 years.

3. We have always ordered our life under the basic understanding that "symbol is the key." It is helpful, therefore to see the liturgy in the context of a larger picture of our symbolic life. The triangle entitled "Corporate Symbolic Life of the Order: Ecumenical" presents a picture of various aspects of the more interior dimensions of the actual operating symbols of the Order. This triangle places symbol on the lower left. The lower right deals with rite. The top triangle spells out myth. The symbols are more the foundational pole; the rites, more relational; and the story or myth, the more significating aspect of our symbolic life. This triangle names pillars of our symbolic commonality, rooted historically, and basic to the fabric of our operating life.

4. The purpose of this writing is not to try to say everything we know about symbolic life nor to reiterate our rather inclusive wisdom about liturgy either in terms of intellectual and theological framework (see J. W. Mathews' "Common Worship in the Life of the Church") or existential knowledge gained from years of daily rehearsal. Nor is there need to repeat the "Preliminary Reflection..." from Book I (July '80). Rather, this is another step in stating the context for the task we have undertaken. This statement describes the situation to which we are responding, both in terms of the world and the Order. Then it addresses possible reductionisms and pitfalls that we need to stand present to in taking the next step in

* See Appendix



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liturgy creation. Finally, it rehearses some foundational concerns and pillars of the experiment.

II

5. With only nineteen years left in the 20th century, people are aware (sometimes painfully) of the fact of perpetual change and of global relatedness and interdependency. Common denominators of our lives across the planet are household words such as "global village," "OPEC," and "telstar." We are clear how water pollution by one industry can endanger the health of towns and cities all along the shore, or on the other hand, how a technological victory in one arena can contribute to breakthroughs in many others. Another hallmark of our times is the fact that we are conscious of the consciousness that this is our common knowledge. Still, there is no inevitability that any of this understanding will result in progress, unity or humanness.

6. In this time of transition we may well undergo some of the most dramatic upheavals in history as old forms crumble in order to make way for the new. As the foundational tremors occur, there is a simultaneous effort to find a relevant ethical base upon which to stand. Some of these attempts seem to be yielding genuinely futuristic voices, while others simply reveal a grasping for value systems which served a former age. In other cases people are giving themselves with a religious fervor to popular pseudo religious modes and causes which in themselves are no more than acts of self improvement that tend to insultate devotees from the pains of the world. Nattily attired joggers religiously make their way along the streets of Bombay as well as the parks of Chicago; health food proponents zealously witness to the effectiveness of their diet; young people in every land seek atonement in the universal strains of music that flow from their ever present electronic equipment.

7. It is in this time, not another, that the Order: Ecumenical is called to serve the world and to live its life, as a universal body belonging to the whole inhabited earth. Our task has taken us to remote villages, and urban ghettos, to small town leadership meetings and sophisticated nationwide gatherings, to work with major corporations, government agencies, religious conferences and adhoc assemblies of Those Who Care. In our own body, we are constituted of many nationalities, cultures, backgrounds, classes and religions, not only in general, but also in most particular situations, and have made an effort to maintain that kind of face in our individual Houses. We are not situated so that only Indians live in sub-Asian Houses and serve that continent, or Muslims are bound to Muslim countries, Japanese are restricted to Japan or Christians to Christian contexts. Anyone may be assigned anywhere. We have embodied many shifts over a period of 30 years; however,

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T.M.'s, LENS, RS-1 or Academy, appropriating the actual life situation and living on behalf of, out of a history-long and world-wide context, is the understanding." (Book I, Summer '80)

8. This diverse constituency in no way blurs our vision of renewed human life. We continue to engage in the single task of witnessing and justice-ing love through a mode of historical repentance. Likewise, we understand ourselves to be one people bound together in one style which embodies the simple life under images of detachment, willing one thing and engagement (poverty, chastity and obedience.).

9. The fact is that in the tension between this tremendous diversity and profound unity, our symbolic life has tended to move both directions. Amazing threads of commonness prevail in our singing, daily time designs, collegium room decor etc. Perhaps understandably, the greatest diversity exists in the content of ritual--from wake-up to send-outs--and in liturgies, both daily and weekly. These variations grew out of a decision to honor the pluriformity of our body and the larger settings in which we labor. This year we have self-consciously expanded this trend so that every House may participate in the various lituriges already being used around the world, as well as in the creation of new ones.

III

10. It is timely, therefore to call ourselves to attention before the possible, perhaps likely, pitfalls and perversions of this task as well as to remind ourselves of foundational understandings.

11. One such pitfall would be to deal with the liturgy simply from a practical standpoint rather than a spirit one. This approach could lead to perpetuating a tradition, but doing so in the quickest, easiest way possible, by creating a short liturgy which demands little in the way of preparation (as in a witness) or decisional participation (as in prayers or offering) or simply becomes a device by which to get people out of bed (as another Order indicated in a recent conversation, is their pattern.) We need to have short forms available and use them as appropriate, but here we are concerned about our standard office. Another temptation is to try to make the liturgy more "palatable" to the world, the established religious or ourselves, which tends to yield a diluted poetry or eclectic mode in its effort to avoid offence. Or again, there is always the temptation to view "my" situation as more unique than any other and therefore to decide that the symbolic life requires special tailoring on the one hand, or clinging to familiar forms, on the other. Any of these approaches contains elements of authenticity, but the point here is to indicate the perversions which erode the power of a common symbolic life.

12. Another major reductionism for a body such as ours is to capitulate to acculturation--we have called it "going native." In its insight it is an effort to honor the "other," or to "pass over" into another way of life in order to absorb the most another culture has to offer. In its practical perversions, it has often led to syncretism or eclecticism. For

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example, the Church in Latin America used Indian gods to freight its new doctrine and Bahai incorporated something from several religions in an attempt to be inclusive. Or, in other situations, a group may rely totally on the local idiom or familiar style to emphasize the indigenous nature of its work. In other cases, the tendency may be to celebrate one aspect of its mission, whereby it stands accountable only to its task or to one programmatic theme or to one face of its understanding.

13. Though "going native" is most easily visible when we move into new countries or foreign cultures, it can also be a pitfall for mid-Americans when they show up in Texas, New England or California, or for middle class anybodies who find themselves in backwater villages or urban slums, or for developing-world citizens who are overcome by the beguiling style of glamorous new candy-coated cultures in the developed world. This happening can capture any of us, but our liturgy is designed to root us beyond any particular culture, class, nation or ideology.

14. Then there is another arena of perversion. After years of direct unrelenting doing, another beguiling trap is to think that turning our attention to the liturgy will improve our religious life--perhaps add "being" to our "doing." There might be a tendency to believe that either hanging on to the familiar, tried-and-true or getting on with the task of lining up our symbols with new contexts is a pious exercise which makes us more acceptable. On the other hand, dwelling on liturgy could signal a retreat from responsible action in the world under the guise of entering a new phase of our "real" calling.

15. It would be an easy thing (perhaps natural) to build any of these reductionisms into the fabric of our life by weaving them into our symbolic life and in this case, particularly the liturgy. It is especially at major transition points that we can be guided by historical learnings and foundational wisdom.

IV

16. Throughout our history we have understood worship to be a rehearsal of a drama performed not simply for ourselves, but on behalf of the larger enterprise of humanness. Yet, at the same time, we have used ourselves as "guinea pigs" in one pioneering venture after another. And therefore we are experimenting for the sake of a liturgy which addresses our life together. The next phase is but a radicalizing of a continuing experiment.

17. This experiment has always been cast in a history-long and world-wide context. It is for the sake of the next millennium and for the last human being. Beyond our own immediate body, there are cores of people in villages and urban communities, teams in metros, and ad hoc groups bound together in service to the world whose continuing care requires a self-conscious rehearsal of the way life is. This rehearsal, in concert with an inclusive symbolic life is key to catalyzing and sustaining the human factor in society. Then beyond this engaged group, there is a host of people across the earth who are awakened, but have no community or symbol system to sustain that awakenment in authentic vocation. And then, there are those caught in the insulating, mesmerizing symbols which society provides. Daily Office reminds

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us that our life is lived on behalf of all these people.

18. Though we have worked and lived in widely varied settings around this earth, our concern has not been for acculturation, but rather for transparency and profundity. The need is for a liturgy which speaks to an order, movement and world which is mobile, pluriform and changing. It will require rich poetry that is transcultural yet reveals the deeps of life in its totality. And it will dramatize our creaturely relation to the final Mystery of life as well as responsibility to God for society. This means that we must look carefully at our posture or standing point in this drama and That-before-which we stand in final accountability.

19. As this is a profound drama, it might also be termed a "secular" rehearsal. J.A.T. Robinson, in his book Liturgy Coming To Life, says,

"Liturgy is essentially and primarily a secular activity.... It is concerned with matter, with society, with action--ordinary matter, society and action--at the level of the holy.... It is not concerned with a special world of its own, but with the making sacred of the secular."

20. This drama has three acts of confession, praise and thanksgiving which hold us before the totality of life. The rehearsal of these acts informs our whole life, both in terms of identity and of vocation and thus sets us in a historic community of Those Who Care. The "life of service" is not simply a natural happening, as a parent cares for a child or one friend serves another, but is always a decision in the midst of conflicting claims on a particular life. It flows out of gratitude born of forgiveness, and requires a decision to care which is nourished in a self-conscious community through a disciplined rehearsal of such a decision.

V

21. We have described our destinal task as that of witnessing and justicing love. This task is one of delivering people to their own freedom and of creating the structures which provide participation in the wholeness of society. This task requires study, worship and corporate discipline. This paper has dealt only with worship, for the sake of being the People of God in history.

22. For now, participation in the creating is important; participation in the rehearsal is "that without which...." In Act I of this drama, we wake up in any given moment as broken, separated, uncaring people, willfully participating in that state of being. And standing precisely in that state, we are reminded that nevertheless we are a forgiven people. Then, in that word of forgiveness, in Act II, we are freed in thanksgiving to live in whole new relationships, united with the roots of life itself, with those about us, and with our own being. Thereby, in Act III, we decide to live out that wholeness in dedication to the suffering of this world. And the secret which is no secret, is that "tomorrow" once again the drama of life

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goes on stage. We wake up in brokenness and separation, not caring about our neighbors.... Once again the liturgy is self consciously enacted, and once again we are reminded that forgiveness cuts us loose from past deeds and the accompanying guilt or pride. And yet once again we have permission to enter into life anew. In performing this drama we take our place among Those Who Care in all ages and all places. We stand before the gaze of our neighbor and the God of all neighbors and rehearse the totality of life, which in and through that very rehearsal is pronounced meaningfilled.

23. There will be much more to be said and done. There are many facets of this experiment that will need to be thoughtthrough, including the space, the architecture, the time, the mode of prayers and witness, the bodily movements, the rhythm and others. There can also be more work on the triangles which depict our corporate symbolic life. Taking these to another level or two will force clarity. Then, there is practical work to be done in the other dimensions of the symbolic--the nature of change makes this indicative. But we will ever need to rehearse the wisdom that brought us to our present situation.

24. We need not rush or drag our feet in this endeavor.

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(This is for consideration as a context for the 1980-81 ritual experiment)

ORDER CONTEXT: This group of people has always experimented with a daily ritual. The present daily office experiment has served us for the past 16 years. The daily office is an experiment in ecumenical worship. The experiment grew out of a study in 1954-55 of the structure of Christian worship, including traditions as varied as Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and various forms of Protestant worship, including the "free worship" traditions. This study resulted in the three acts and three moods of worship: Confession, Praise, Dedication; Humility, Gratitude, Compassion. These three acts in the Daily Office of the Ecumenical Institute and the House Church Common Meal point to the way life is and are a dramatization of our common self-understanding. This common self-understanding has remained the touchstone of all future experiments. In the time of knowing we emphasized understanding the words and symbols. We wrote numerous liturgies in our own words as well as contemporary poetry--e.e. Cummings, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and Kazantzakis. We also emphasized the dramaturgy of the daily office: the space, the use of the body, the public voice and rhythm. Clapping was added to the end of daily office in the summer of 1965 when the students at worship spontaneously began it. A use of poetic sounds were used to emphasize the dramatic nature of worship: Ya-Ki-Nu, from the monkey dance of Bali. The drums and gong were added in 1968. Worship through all this was seen as an expression of the understanding of a people.

SOCIOLOGICAL INDICATIVE: The explosion of global awareness has happened and includes all cultures, religions and modes of expression. Our Order membership profoundly reflects this pluriform reality. In the beginning, the forging of our symbolic life was couched in the Christian context in Texas. Today, we stand representing major religious heritages from across the world. In part, this leap into actual pluriform membership was caused by our shift in emphasis from knowing or beliefs to the doing of our care that has us shoulder to shoulder with local man across the globe in a common servant force. The daily enactment of a ritual is one of a number of ways in which profound humanness is articulated. To articulate the depth of life is seen as foundational for all other social structures. Our current historical context has required new expressions of our self-understanding due to the many external and internal contexts we now have. The self-understanding of the Order has not fundamentally changed. Whether people have come to the houses through RDP's, IM's, LENS, ES-I or Academy, appropriating the actual life situation and living on behalf of out of a history-long, world-wide context, is the one understanding. The poetry and the drama that enact this self-understanding is the single issue to having common daily rituals.

VALUES AND ISSUES: Underlying values held in creating the ritual of the pluriform religious order are: one, that it be created through the use of screens that include RS-I, New Religious Mode, Profound Humanness, and further screens that are part of a particular cultural and/or religious heritage such as the eight-fold path or the Tao, and that it be grounded in the three acts of Confession, Praise and Dedication; two, that the poetry be classical and related to various specific communities, e.g. Kaz, Tabor, Kaunda; three, that the dramatization be in corporate public voice, approximately ten minutes in length and include a witness (possibly prayers), in a space that is created carefully and intentionally, where possible, and four, that it honor people's traditions in the using

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VALUES AND ISSUES, cont.:

or not using of any historical religious terminology or symbols and shall hold the tension between the Word, Deed, and Mystery; and five that it include the archaic, whether this be through particular modes such as kneeling, through songs, poetry or symbols. We find many questions and issues being raised, such as the use of the word pluriform and order, the song or readings to use, whether the witness should be voluntary or assigned, how we hold the archaic over against having no traditional symbols of any religion. There is a danger of collecting different ideas of what is assumed the best of all religions into a conglomeration just for the sake of oneness, thereby losing the depth significance and power of symbolic life of that particular religion, e.g. B'hai. We stand at a point now of reempowering the unified global community who are held before the mystery of life, as well as before the human suffering of our time.

RIUAL EXPERIMENTATION: The common daily ritual is one mark of being a religious order in history. No other group engages in such rehearsal and this is one difference between merely being the staff of the ICA and being the pluriform religious order that we are. We are at a new standpoint as a global religious order. For the past three years we have decided to experiment with the creation of new internal life rituals which allow everyone to participate in a profound rehearsal as a people in radical service to the world. The experiments of the last three years, as well as the Daily Office of the Ecumenical Institute, are all marked by the three acts of: 1. coming to terms with the real situation as it exists; 2. living in self-conscious gratitude for life as it is given; and 3. the committing of yourself to live on behalf of all. When profoundly grounded out of any culture or religious context, one discovers the contemporary and universal understanding of humanness--the common water table of our own life experience that finally all can relate to. The order in its pluriformity, has yet always had only one self-understanding in the midst of divergent heritages, cultures, backgrounds and religions. Our experiment in the use of new rituals present again the opportunity to dramatize that self-understanding in images that are closer to our life experience and that unify and sustain us commonly. As we are now at a point of creating new experimental modes and forms in our common external mission, it is not inappropriate that we take a new step in creating a religious-secular ritual for our common rehearsal of who we are as a body of people. The 1980-81 year will mark the beginning of a four year experiment with universal daily rituals. It will be a year where we will have the opportunity to corporately participate in, and reflect upon, this dimension of our research. Our experiment is symbolic on behalf of a more human future for all people, as well as representing our struggle to dramatize anew the profound role of the order in history.