

A
COMPREHENSIVE EXPERIMENT
IN THE
RECONSTRUCTION
OF THE
LOCAL CHURCH

The Prologue

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

5. The need today is therefore twofold: to forge the framework for a new vision of reformulation for the social structures and to provide new meaning to the spirit dimension of every human being. Man's journey in the twentieth century has raised consciousness to unparalleled heights, yet the aridity of the spirit deeps has broadened in our time. Behind the revolution in the human community of the globe lies the cry for a renewal of the spiritual depths. The Church's role is to recast her spiritual forms and social constructs which embody her new awareness and to bring spiritual reality into the life of the community of the People of God, and thus to the society of mankind.

EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT

6. The Ecumenical Institute in Chicago, a research, training, and demonstration center within the Historical Church, is convinced that the time is kairotic for a radical, extensive, experimental project in this phase of Church renewal. More important, there are thousands of awakened churchmen across the world who are similarly persuaded. The fifty years of renewal in the more theoretical aspect of the effort has produced an abundance of insights, images, models, methodologies, curricula, operational plans, organizational designs, and practical manuals which are relevant to the reconstruction of the Local Church. For the past sixteen years the Ecumenical Institute, along with clergymen and laymen across the globe, has been collecting, testing, and refining these instruments for the re-education, re-formulation, and re-spiritualization of the Local Church. From this research a comprehensive tactical model has been created with accompanying "how to" manuals to enable this experimentation. It has been tested during the past eighteen months on a limited scale in the Chicago region. This proposal intends to describe briefly the nature and means for such an inclusive demonstration. We are persuaded that local congregations are now ready, either through a hope that fades or a hope that is dawning, for precisely this. Furthermore, we believe that the symbolic and administrative leadership in the established Church is ready. Finally, we are convinced that the renewal forces are prepared for just this course of action.

II. PROJECT

MISSIONAL CHURCH

7. The Church is mission. This is a basic assumption underlying this project in the reconstruction of the Local Church. In the fifty years of self-renewal and awakening the Church has become clear that mission is not one aspect of its life, but that mission is the very being of the people who are the Church. Only as the Church is structured in a way that will always thrust its attention upon the world of humanity will the creation of internal Church structures be meaningful. Internal congregational structures and programs must always be seen in the context of the world which is the arena of the Church's mission, so that the congregational program becomes not an end in itself but a means to mission. At the same time the mission of the Local Church must be utterly global in its scope. In order for the Local Church to minister missionally to its community, it must see the entire globe as the sphere of its mission and the context out of which it renews social structures in the local setting. Anything short of this universal understanding will only maintain autonomous, uncoordinated, and parochial communities. Specifically, the mission which is the Historical Church is three-fold: 1) to bear witness to the Word that heals the human spirit, the Word in Jesus Christ that sets men free to live creative lives; 2) to be an insistent, catalytic power within the structures of society to see that justice is imparted to all men; and 3) to stand as a sign of hope in the midst of world despair by living a style of life which speaks of the possibility of the future as we live in the present moment. This project in reconstruction will put flesh and blood on the basic assumption that the Church is mission in specific local communities.

TACTICAL RENEWAL

10. Strategies for renewal become obvious to the awakened person today, but the key to reconstruction lies in what concrete steps are taken to accomplish the strategies and goals. The basic attention of this project, therefore, focuses on specific, practical tactics. The research and model-building that has comprised the work of the past four years is called Phase I. A comprehensive system of tactical steps will center the energies of concerned persons towards moving from present contradictions to unrealized human possibilities. Broad vision and practical action have been used in creating a system of thirty-six overall tactical units, each with 256 supplementary tactics. Twelve of these units will effect programmatic change in the congregation bent on releasing adults for missional study and action. In the first year this will be accomplished through a major emphasis in the congregation on broadening and deepening the children's programming to include weekday, weeknight, and weekend programs. Of critical importance will be recapturing the youth through relevant and vocation-demanding structures. The work with adults will center upon creating a new context, both structurally and imaginatively, for their relations to both the Church and the world. A strong second beat in the first year will be placed on twelve training units for the cadre, the spirit leadership of the congregation. There will be extensive training in theology and culture, as well as in the leadership skills of model-building and teaching. The twelve units of first-year activity in the parish will be mere signals of the overlay of love that the congregation will eventually bring into being. Work will begin on parish analysis and laying the groundwork for community reformulation, while initial moves are made in changing the mindset of the community through re-education. The sheer practicality of the tactical system is demonstrated in that each unit is comprised of sixty-four specific sub-tactics each with four supplementary steps resulting in a total of 9,216 very practical channels of action. Completion of the full tactical system will involve four years of progression through congregation, cadre, and parish. Accompanying manuals will enable a well-trained person to move with flexibility and practical power in the particular local situation.

SIX-YEAR EXPERIMENT

11. The six-year experiment, called Phase II, is designed as three operations of two years each. The first operation is two years of activating the model (1970-1972) in which the tactical system is put in full motion in selected congregations across the North American continent. The second operation of the experiment (1972-1974) is the stage when the first congregations complete the four-year development of the tactical model. At the same time the original eighty congregations in preparation or development will be activating the tactical model, with additional churches beginning the process. The third operation (1974-1976) will see full operation of the experiment in which there will be 552 congregations involved in some stage or level of participation.

ECUMENICAL VISION

12. The four years of reconstruction in the Local Church will have deep implications and by-products in the Historical Church at large. The great Councils of the Church have established a vision of ecumenism that has summoned the whole Church to attend to the one mission and has demonstrated the universality of the Word in Jesus Christ. The futuristic gaze of the Councils will find a practical focus in this project of Local Church reconstruction. Only as the Church renews its diverse expression and traditions at the local level will the whole Church be able to coordinate its common mission to the world. A program of Local Church reconstruction must hold the memory and multiple historical forms that have honored life's diversity. Denominational programs of care for the Church will breathe new relevance as they work in concert with renewed local congregations. This project assumes the need to use the great resources that the Church has had in the persons of laymen who are immersed weekly in the secular structures of society. These laymen are key to the Church's impact upon the decaying and unjust structures of civilization. Laymen

PROJECT
PERMISSION

16. The Local Church has provided the basic motivation and resources for work of the Ecumenical Institute since its inception. The development of the model for the reconstruction of the Local Church through the resources of the Ecumenical Institute has been in intimate collegiality with the Historical Church. Renewal forces within the church can now assume that the Historical Church is awake to the great call of the Local Church; that the Historical Church is ready to forge into the unknown future. The Ecumenical Institute seeks to work within this general consent and with the specific stated support of the congregations where the experiment is to be carried out. A further prerequisite to engagement in a particular local congregation is the permission and support of national and regional denominational offices and boards. Such approval of both the local and national levels of the Historical Church is needed to provide a solid foundation for the future of the Church. Success in the reconstruction of the Local Church promises a new birth for the whole Church and thus demands broad participation.

PROJECT
PREREQUISITES

17. The process of selecting local congregations for the initial phase of the reconstruction project is informed by certain criteria. 1) There must be an awakened clergyman and his wife who are committed to the local congregation and see the necessity of being engaged in a comprehensive plan of renewal. The clergyman's wife is important in completing the family involvement and standing as a sign of future missional family participation in the congregation. 2) An enabling body of leadership that is also committed to the renewal of the local congregation and sees itself as a signal, catalytic force needs to be present in the congregation. 3) The congregation must demonstrate that it sees its mission in the world by indicating its readiness to participate in the reconstruction process. In addition to these criteria the selection process will also focus on suburban and exurban situations. While it is important that inner-city congregations engage in the reconstructive process, the focus is on the outer rings of the urban area because it is here that the greatest contradictions lie in trying to establish structures of justice and humanity in our society. Finally, the basic plan for reconstruction creates a clustering of four congregations in reasonable proximity to allow the enabling forces (auxiliary unit) to function as a team with a minimum of travel.

FINANCIAL
SUPPORT

18. The probable cost of the initial demonstration project in Local Church reconstruction for one year will be \$6,000 per congregation. This amount will be budgeted as follows: the stipend of the local coordinators (auxiliary couple)—30%; a centrally-based research and national coordination team—15%; materials and consultant teams sent to the project areas on a regular and special basis—20%; and the evaluation process crucial to continuing effectiveness—15%. In order that no congregation be faced with an inordinate program budget increase, it is suggested that a broad base of support be provided through the resources of the Historical Church. Responsive individual churchmen throughout the nation may well be prepared to establish a fund that would defray up to 10% of the total national project cost as an investment to enable the Historical Church to recover its catalytic role in the reformulation of social structures. In addition, 30% of the support can come from national Church boards or participating agencies, 20% from regional Church funds, 20% from the resources of the local congregation, and another 20% from the spirit leadership of the congregations, including 5% from the pastor's family itself. Such a spread of financial participation also insures the kind of spirit support on the part of the entire Historical Church that is necessary to the success of this project in Local Church reconstruction. It is intended that within five years each congregation in its renewed life would support its own parish without the necessity of national or regional aid.