

CALLING

ALL GIFTS

TO BUILD THE FUTURE

This talking paper has been written by a group of gay and lesbian colleagues in the Order as the result of a year's dialogue back and forth around the globe.

The intent of the paper is to initiate a process of reconciliation within the Order toward the creation of an environment which receives, affirms, and uses the lives of gay men and lesbian women as part of our pluriform community, on behalf of the globe.

Many aspects of the gay/lesbian issue are just barely touched upon in this paper. Each paragraph could become a paper in itself. We look forward to doing some more writing as our own thinking expands and the dialogue continues.

One note on language. There is considerable discussion over the use of the terms gay, lesbian, and homosexual. For simplicity's sake, we have opted to use the word gay to refer to both men and women whose sexual orientation is towards those of their same sex.

August 1984

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## I. THE INDICATIVE PRESENCE OF THE GAY COMMUNITY

Whatever images society brings to its pictures of the gay person, some truths are apparent: 1) gays are basically invisible and 2) gays are everywhere. Unlike most minorities, there are no physical or behavior traits common to gays--no common skin color, no common shape. The mythical stereotype of the limp-wristed effeminate or the macho bull-dyke do not hold water at all. There are no common cultural traditions and practices to unify gays and create an obvious sense of identity. Until recently, no alternative subculture existed for gays. Gay people's only choices were to blend into society invisibly or to become a part of an underground movement, ever living in the danger of discovery and legal prosecution or imprisonment. Many married in spite of the disjuncture to their sexuality. Today gay people show up in all walks of life--among business people, teachers, entertainers, artists, doctors, judges, political figures, the military, laborers, housewives, sports figures, and clergy, to name a few.

Homosexuality has been a known phenomenon in almost every society. In many non-western cultures, it has often been accepted as a recognized custom, sometimes even ritualized and institutionalized into the lifestyle of the community. The ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians all accepted same-sex behavior. So too did the Celts, Scandinavians, Etruscans, Cretans, Carthaginians, and Sumerians. In India, attitudes toward homosexuality have been more varied but amongst Buddhists and Muslims, homosexuality has been openly practiced. The Pathans of the north-west frontier are quite renowned for their same-sex preference. In the far East, gay sex has been common in both China and Japan. In Japan, during the feudal period, male homosexual love was considered more "manly" than heterosexual love. The examples of open acceptance of gay sex in non-western society are endless. These traditional patterns continue today, although sometimes in more subtle forms.

When seen from this perspective, the homophobia (anti-homosexual attitude) experienced in modern western society is seen as falling at one end of the spectrum of societal attitudes towards gayness. It has only grown rampant since the fourteenth century and has been inseparably linked with the teachings of the Christian Church on homosexuality. Until that time, except for minor fluctuations in mood, homosexuality was an accepted element in most of Western society. With the shift in social milieu in the 14th century, causing great uncertainty in many of the set roles and dynamics of the society of that time, and with the rise of the nation-state, a great demand for conformity arose. This milieu of social intolerance influenced St. Thomas Aquinas, in his massive theological treatise, to set in "theological stone" the attitude of homophobia existent to this day in Western society. Citing certain Biblical references, the church has proclaimed that homosexuality is an immoral choice some human beings make. At best only homosexuals who forsook their sexual

orientation could be included in the church. Though this homophobic morality developed rather late in the twenty-century long journey of the Christian Church, only now is it being challenged.

The climax to this homophobia is surely the Nazi response. Gay people were branded with pink triangles and singled out for the most derogatory treatment. Being a gay person was to be more despised than the wearers of the yellow star, the Jews. Along with six million Jews, 600,000 gay people were also executed. Understandably, this upside-down pink triangle is now a symbol for contemporary gay movements. The presence of this homophobic mentality is still alive in campaigns like the one of Anita Bryant several years ago, the Moral Majority, and in the recent (May, 1984) proclamations of the United Methodist Church against ordaining or appointing any clergy who are gay. Officially sanctioned executions of gay people are going on right now in Iran and other countries.

The gay subculture has existed in great hiding during most of this century. In the United States, fear of discovery, already intense from the homophobic morality of society in general, increased dramatically during the McCarthy era of the House Unamerican Activities Committee trials of the early 1950's. Just being present in a gay bar during a random police raid was cause for arrest. Just looking like one might be gay was cause enough for a favorite past-time--that of "fag-bashing"--gays getting beaten up for no cause and with no avenue of recourse as the police considered it a justifiable reason for getting beaten up. The merest suspicion of being gay was cause for job termination, especially if employed by the government. As recently as March of this year (1984), in West Germany, a top ranking military official was forced to resign his post because it was reported that he was seen in a gay bar. In Great Britain, the Queen's personal bodyguard was relieved of his job as soon as it was revealed that he was homosexual. In both cases, the threat of blackmail was given as the reason for dismissal.

On June 26, 1969, something happened at a bar in Greenwich Village, New York City. During the oft-repeated, familiar moment of another police raid at the Stonewall Bar, suddenly 200 gays decided that police raids with no cause would happen no more. For the first time, the gay community decided that it didn't need to take such unjustified persecution. For the first time, gay people fought back. This was the birth of the new gay movement of these times.

Since that time, gay pride parades (often held in late June to commemorate Stonewall) and other overt gay actions have signalled to a surprised straight society the presence of gays in their very own communities. Gay leaders have emerged on the political scene. The most well-known was Harvey Milk -- the San Francisco gay city supervisor of the late 1970's. Having worked to create a broad local constituent political base, he was elected city supervisor under Mayor Moscone. Milk was noted for his daily trips through local communities, meeting local people, and encouraging them in their struggles to build their own communities. In November of 1978, a disgruntled former city supervisor, Dan White, angry over Milk's presence as a gay city supervisor and over the Mayor's permissiveness in allowing this, assassinated both Milk and Moscone. His punishment was only five years in prison. In January 1984, he was

released. Harvey Milk thus became a symbol of political involvement for the gay community as well as a mentor who urged gay people across the nation to "come out of the closet" and declare their presence so that the nation could see how many gay people there really were. The struggle to do this is still so great that in a Newsweek poll in the summer of 1983, 73% of Americans polled could still say they knew of no one who is gay.

Nevertheless, the 1970's saw the open establishment of the gay community in many major urban centers around the United States and across the world. Gay businesses, entertainment outlets, social centers, political action groups, social organizations, and church groups are now in evidence even beyond major urban centers. So much so, it is almost possible to say that a different concern may need to be voiced soon--how to enable gays who now can live their lives within totally gay institutions and structures to keep relations alive with the straight community.

At the same time, a new perspective is dawning on society as more and more people are discovering that more and more people they know, live, and work with are gay. Gay people are born in the rural at the same rate as in the urban. The urban is often a shelter. Of course, there are gay people in the villages we work in. The very objectivity of the existence of the gay community is calling society to include gays as part of the whole picture of a full, complete, and complex society.

A variety of attempt have been made to explain the causes of homosexuality. In the last thirty to forty years, psychology has led us to believe that homosexuality arises out of gaps and arrests on the road to developing a "normal" heterosexual orientation. Consequently, in this view it is possible to discover where the train got off the track of heterosexuality and allow people to reset it back on the track. While often expounding this viewpoint, very few psychologists have had any large or longlasting successes in actually changing sexual orientation. Their tactics have included electric shock treatments and the administration of various hormones which have wrecked havoc on a person's equilibrium.

Another more sociological orientation to this question considers homosexuality a by-product of the current collapse of traditional social structures. Thus, the increasing presence of the gay community is seen as arising out of the collapse of family values, sexual role clarity, and community institutions. These and numerous other theories of the causes of homosexuality, such as genetic and hormonal explanations, have all proved inconclusive.

Could it be that the cause of being gay has now become a passe issue? Or even more radical, could it be that gays just are--whether born that way or developed that way quite early in life? Statistically, about 10% of any population is exclusively homosexual. Even more to the point, therefore, could the power behind all of life and all of history be making a 10% error in the creation of human beings? Absurd. The only question that can now be asked is not how do people get to be gay but what does it mean to claim the significance of a life that shows up gay? How does a gay person act out the life which has been given in both responsibility and service? How does a community and a society make use of the perspective, gifts, and insights of its members who are gay?

Gay people have shown up in all societies at many different points in history, but, because of their invisibility, they have not always been known to be gay. Historically, many famous figures have been gay people. They encompass all professions and backgrounds ranging from politics to the arts, business to sports. It is interesting, however, that a large percentage of gay public figures fall into the cultural arena of life. No doubt this underscores the role that art plays in allowing people to express their interior being, and the way art gives people permission to reflect on their own responses to life. The names are endless and include such celebrities as D. H. Lawrence, James Baldwin, E. M. Forster, George Gershwin, W. H. Auden, Tennessee Williams, Christopher Isherwood, Noel Coward, Oscar Wilde, Willa Cather, and Gertrude Stein.

Naturally, in the realms of politics, business, and sports, the risk of losing one's fame, friends, position, or reputation has been so high that fewer gays have emerged. However, even here, there are names such as Dag Hammarskjold, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Billie Jean King who are known to have been gay. In more recent times, a number of prominent figures, especially in the United States, have revealed their sexual preferences in public. They include former New York City Health Chief Howard Brown, U.S. Congressman Gerry Studds, former Representative Bauman, and former San Francisco City Supervisor Harvey Milk.

## II. GAYS IN THE ORDER

Within our own body, we have slowly come to recognize the presence of gays among us. Applying the statistical 10%, there would be 70-80 people in the Order who are gay or lesbian. In fact, it is estimated that amongst artist, theatre, religious and vocational service groups, the percentage is higher, 15-25%. In actuality, the figure for the Order is probably less than 10% because within the Order's corporate culture are many homophobic sentiments, mores, writings, and structures. While many gays and lesbians experience a calling to service, those who cross paths with the Order have often tended to stay for only a short time or never join at all because of these homophobic sentiments. Of those who remain, many have resorted to heterosexual relationships as a matter of survival. Others remain single, choosing to 1) keep up the facade of looking for a mate of the opposite sex 2) maintain a surreptitious gay life outside of the Order or 3) become "asexual." Today there are a dozen men and women in our order who are self-consciously and openly gay, at least another dozen we know of who have left because of their gayness, and probably another two to three dozen who are either bisexual or closeted gays. Both men and women are equally distributed throughout these categories.

The Order very early perceived that sexuality is a profound gift to humanness. Sexuality in covenant has been seen as a powerful vehicle through which one's passion for the globe can be expressed. The Order, has deeply understood D. H. Lawrence's words, "sexless people transmit nothing". But until recently, gays in the Order have found it necessary either to leave the Order or to bracket their own sexuality entirely in order to remain in the Order. At best, they may have decided to express their sexuality in very limited situations outside the Order. Until a year

or so ago, gays in the Order never even communicated with one another, wrestling with this issue and its implications on a totally solitary basis. For the gay male in the Order especially, any relationship with another male in the Order can be so misconstrued that some gay males despair of making any social contact whatsoever. This radical isolation has pushed the development of creative tools, such as journals, readings, reflective screens, and artistic expressions to transform the gnawing loneliness into depth solitude.

Many times a week, the gay person has run into the overt and unabashed prejudice of this community toward gay people. Often this is in the form of anti-gay jokes or slashing comments. Other times, it is in passing references or stated fears about gays. Occasionally key talks and lectures have stated openly the unsuitability of being a gay person. Every hour of every day, the gay person has watched every motion, every phrase, every spontaneous response, lest the secret be revealed--especially revealed to someone unable to relate to a gay. Against this hostile environment, it is only a profound sense of election, a deep consciousness of the significance of the missional task, that enables a daily decision to remain in a hostile atmosphere.

While survival is obviously possible in the environment described and while survival has obviously been demonstrated by the gay people in the Order who have chosen not to leave, a large segment of existence has been stifled. One senses a mysterious blocking of a dynamism in life. Inflexibility begins to set in as one's mode of existence. Worse yet, perhaps one doesn't even know what is missing until some event forces one to rediscover how stagnated one has become. Only raw faith enables one to remain alive in this situation. Depth spirit tools alone are what must be created to survive without giving up, without losing one's faith in the goodness of life, and without becoming a rigid, sexless automaton.

Why July 1982? Only the Mystery knows. Yet the unexpected did occur. It was a reporting session for those gathered at the July Planning Council. The leader decided to pull everyone together with some humor. For his humor, he decided to tell some anti-gay jokes--just like all gays have long since grown accustomed to hearing. But at that moment, at least one person in that room was outraged. His heart was aflame. No more could that kind of insensitivity be permitted in our Order, in his Order. Outwardly no one knew what was going on inside. What had been dormant for years was now irreversibly emerging with new conviction.

Brooding on this event for several weeks, at last this person shared his experience with an Order colleague familiar with his journey. The suggestion was made to talk to another colleague who was said to be gay. This was a radical suggestion. The years of isolation revealed that such a move would change everything. Finally, weeks later, he dared to open up by sharing his gayness with this colleague. He asked if this colleague were also gay. Thanking him for asking, the colleague affirmed that he was indeed gay. At that moment, a corporate, caring gay consciousness in the Order was born.

More critical decisions were made during those weeks of sorting out the implications of acknowledging a gay presence in the Order. A

conversation with another trusted colleague in the Order helped this person to affirm these hesitant steps as steps still within his deep covenant with the Order. It was suggested we seek out a church community as an entry point into the gay community. The church chosen has since become one several order colleagues have joined. The Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), founded in 1970, with 200 parishes throughout the United States and more across the world, has now been received into the Church Federation of Greater Chicago.

In early December of 1982, another conversation included a third person into the circle. It was now clear that a serious concerned network of care was born. Early events included visits to gay night spots, birthday celebrations, and attendance at Good Shepherd Parish of the MCC. All three joined Good Shepherd Parish in May of 1983. This cemented together a group that has continued to meet to discuss in serious fashion our role in the Order and to celebrate in many ways our uniqueness as gay people alive in the 1980's.

In March, we received a letter from a colleague in India who had recently been having conversations with a western gay Order member there. Uncertain of how to proceed or relate to this person, the colleague asked for advice. Letters followed which finally brought a fourth member into an extended relationship to the network. This dialogue across continents has been crucial. We were able to share information and our journeys together. Soon after, a colleague in Africa was included in our ranks. Others followed, and, at the time of writing, the network numbers twelve self-acknowledged members.

We have been engaged in an ongoing process of holding conversations with people in the Order to acquaint them with our journees. In this way, we have tried to foster informal brooding in the Order on the presence of its gay members. Some of the people we've talked to have joined us for a Sunday evening Church service at Good Shepherd Parish. These "coming out" conversations have enabled our own articulation of who and where we are. In addition, our colleagues have had an opportunity to ask questions of us and offer us advice. This internal network of care has become more and more crucial to moving beyond mere "survival".

Needless to say, the congregation of Good Shepherd Parish has been a signal element in our network of care. The profundity of weekly dramas of reconciliation and reunion is slowly dissolving the wall of fear and alienation which surrounds gay people as soon as they perceive that something is different about them. In participating with this parish, we are also participating with hundreds of other MCC parishes as well as other gay-lesbian church groups out of the mainstream denominations.

Exploring the gay community which is very much alive in Chicago has been important, too. The weekly newspapers, Howard Brown Memorial Clinic (for gay men), Gay Horizons (a social center), the Illinois Gay Lesbian Task Force (concerned with legal issues and rights in the gay community as well as legislation), the gay Theater, gay music events, gay business establishments, --all of these have been structural signs that we are part of a very real and authentic movement.

## II. THE GAY GIFT TO HUMANNESS

For the gay person, the journey through childhood to adulthood usually creates an intense awareness of set-apart-ness. Many gay people are utterly clear of this set-apartness even at such early ages as four, five, or six. This often occasions in gays an intense sensitivity to the journey of the more visible minorities whether they are minorities of race, i.e., blacks, Spanish speaking peoples, Asians, or peoples treated as minorities through long tradition, i.e. women, or whether they are minorities of displacement, i.e. internationals residing or sojourning in one's country. Gay people are keenly aware of the variety of subtle ways both society and individuals use to denigrate its minorities as second class citizens.

Because of this journey of set-apart-ness which has been occasioned in the gay person's life, there is a tremendous temptation to take advantage of the emergence of a gay subculture and remain within the walls of the gay ghetto. Or there is a temptation wherever you are to create a comfortable in-group or clique, having been excluded for so long. The challenge for the gay community is to utilize this heightened minority consciousness on behalf of creating a future society which will be able to honor and benefit from the diverse gifts of all peoples. In the United States, Democratic Party Presidential contender, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, has called gays and lesbians to join forces with other minorities as part of the "Rainbow Coalition" needed to forge a pluriform society.

Gay people bring many other gifts to the human experience. They are often deeply in touch with the emotions inside. They have not absorbed society's injunctions, especially those for males against crying and for impassivity. They are often free to touch - a feared form of expression for most Western males, although quite common in many cultures. They have learned to survive by developing skills of non-verbal communication. They have learned to use their eyes. For years, gay people have survived in straight society by depending on many body language signals. Finally, they are in touch with compassion. The experience of oppression has heightened the consciousness of how oppression occurs toward others and is experienced by others.

In the midst of this experience, the temptation for the gay person is unadulterated sentimentality--or being run purely by feelings or emotions. This creates incredibly productive highs in the gay person's life along with disastrous, debilitating lows. This leads to a life style of great inconsistency. The challenge is to utilize the gay's willingness to express care and concern in ways that enable whole groups of society to be more humanly expressive among themselves and in their outward displays of authentic and lasting care.

Many gay people, otherwise unidentifiable, have lived their entire lives never having self-consciously or openly encountered another gay. These gay people have masked their sexual orientation for the sake of participating in the rigid structures of mainstream straight society, the only structures that were available. However, some gay people have been able to discern the presence of other gays. They cautiously reached out. Consequently, an invisible minority created a rather invisible sub-culture.

In order to operate in homophobic society, gay people have been forced to become strategists. Those who have come out partially, but are not totally submerged into the gay sub-culture and maintain some position in straight society, have had to create a variety of indirect approaches just to stay in being.

The coming-out decision and process of declaring one's homosexuality also necessitates incredible tactical thinking. When do I come out? Where do I come out? To whom do I come out? To whom do I dare not come out? Why come out at all? How do I come out? Do I dare tell my family? Things go unexpectedly, and new strategies must be created. There is no going back once you have revealed yourself to someone. Inevitably, this aspect of the gay person's journey creates a unique perspective. Not only the skill of strategy but the sixth sense of who is open and who can be trusted results in a heightened sensitivity to other people, their capacity to change, and a deep appreciation of what it takes to journey them.

In the midst of this hostile milieu, the temptation is thus to give up entirely on straight society in one of two ways: either outrageous displays of flaunting one's gayness which occasion total societal rejection or direct escape into the gay sub-culture never more standing in the tension of relating to straight society. The challenge is to create strategic bridges between the two societies so that one day society's homophobia can somehow be transformed, and gay people will be able to put back into society all they have withheld for so long.

It has been long understood that humanness was intensified in the complementary tension between the male and the female. This has been symbolized in the Oriental image of the yin-yang. Thinkers today are pushing that understanding another level deeper by declaring that finally the entire yin-yang rests in each person. In other words, each human being is a complex mixture of the male and the female dynamics, whether they are born with a female body or a male one. We are being called to a consciousness of androgyny—an awareness that all embody a continuum of male/female sexuality. Some of us show up with more of the yin and others more of the yang. That's just the way it is. Gay people have unconsciously understood this. Gay couple relationships which have lasted have done so because the people in the relationship were willing to stand in the alternating tensions between the male and female dynamics each shared.

To take this point one step further, sexuality can be pictured as a three dimensional entity. Imagine three axes. Along the horizontal one, you have qualities of maleness at the one end (the yang) and qualities of femaleness (the yin) at the other. Along the vertical axis, you have erotic preference which ranges from totally heterosexual to totally homosexual, with bisexual at the mid-point. The third axis is the physical body that we all get born into, either a masculine gender form or a feminine gender form or, in rare cases, a bisexual form. To talk about a person's sexuality means taking these three dimensions into account and plotting oneself on the "sexual sphere" accordingly. Sexuality is not quite as simple as we are often want to make out.

Gay people have created alternative styles of working relationships.

A new context for working relationships between men and women can be created when sexual intimidation or sexual victimization are not the underlying forces at work. A new style of relationship can be created when neither sexual competition nor sexual courting are the dominating forces. Sensing this, many women articulate that they find gay men easier to work with than straight men. The opportunity is present for new models of working relationships among human beings who honor each other's contributions and creativity.

The temptation for gays and lesbians is to hold on to romantic expectations of what it takes to create any kind of successful relationship, be they between two individuals or among many in a group. Any relationship between any two human beings is of course complex, requiring creative effort to extend and deepen. The gay community no longer has the excuse of an impossible social milieu which will not allow long-lasting relationships. The challenge is now the painful building of solid relationships which can last. One-night stands are no longer the only option in the gay social situation -- and are in fact being questioned from a number of directions. In addition, the challenge is for people to covenant together in commitment to long-range tasks.

#### IV. THE INTENTIONAL LIFE STYLE

The world is experiencing an intrusion of globality only distantly imagined by the astronauts as they stepped onto the moon in 1969 and beamed an image of the earthrise back to earth. A new planetary consciousness has taken root. Movements have sprung up to remind us of this fact. The ecology and the peace movements are examples of this. If the world has become a village, it is equally true that a village has become the globe. The image of the global brain encapsules this reality. This new planetary consciousness calls for an inclusivity in our responses never before required.

Previously, it was believed that diverse people merged together gradually into one mainstream society over the generations becoming one in a melting pot. That image is no longer adequate to peoples' authentic desire to maintain their own unique identities and create a pluriform society. Perhaps the images most faithful to this new paradigm are the mosaic, the kaleidoscope, or the patchwork quilt. While perceiving that this indeed has happened, most of the world remains blocked if not paralyzed as to how practically to give form to the new global human being that is emerging everywhere. How does the global village become more than ghettos intricately woven together? How do diverse peoples actually live, work, and celebrate together each honoring the gifts the others bring to the creative process?

Within the gay community at large, many far-reaching changes are occurring. One of these has been occasioned by the intrusion of the life-threatening disease of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) for which there is no known cure. The AIDS crisis has raised the question of the possibility of imminent death to the consciousness of every gay man. The gay preoccupation with youthfulness has now been forever altered by AIDS' undeniable reminder of the end of all of our lives. The question

that AIDS has raised is not the morality of homosexuality but rather the quality of life led whether one is gay or straight.

There is now in the gay community an aching sense that there is something beyond the bars and the baths, that a response is demanded more than sheer rebellion at a homophobic society. Not only must there be something beyond the narrow pious religious morality many gay people have endured firsthand, but also there must be something beyond individual activism. Many gay people are experiencing for the first time that they can declare their sexual preference and still occupy a variety of responsible positions in society. The gay community is also coming face-to-face with its own diversity. The gay business executive can feel just as uncomfortable with the leather subculture as any straight executive would feel! In the midst of all of these challenges, the real questions are now emerging. What is a life style of quality? What does it mean to live a life beyond oneself? What does it mean to live a life on-behalf-of? These are the questions of an intentional life style that are now being raised on very serious levels within the gay community.

As an Order, we have talked a great deal lately about the impact of "pluriformity" on our lives. Heretofore, we have meant by that the obvious diversity of cultures, races, religious heritages, and traditions our Order now embodies. But these are just some of the many dimensions of pluriformity we are encountering. Others are more hidden or more subtle. One such is that of sexual preference. The gay community in society and in our Order is raising this to our consciousness now. As an Order, we have the chance to embody pluriformity with a new self-conscious completeness by embracing gay people within our Order. We have the chance to demonstrate that our unity is not founded on uniformity or any reduced understanding of pluriformity but on the unique gifts of all our diversities.

The life of service can fulfill the deep yearning to care that is in the self-conscious gay person. The covenanted life is the life style of quality which now challenges the life style of the gay community. The gay community needs to see demonstrations of the power of covenants and the power of corporateness. The Order needs to see and believe that covenants between gay and lesbian people are not only possible but necessary. It is time to declare how the on-behalf-of life can heighten the gifts for humanness which gays and lesbians are. The time has come for the Order to demonstrate the power of covenant and on-behalf-of living in a mode that will challenge authentic responses from self-conscious gay people.

#### V. THE FUTURE FOR OUR PLURIFORM ORDER

1984 has now become a truly kairotic moment for our life as the Order. This Year of Order Council has initiated incredible amounts of reflecting and writing on what our future needs to be. We are building on the numerous gifts of our journey so far. As a sign of repentance for the parochialism and alienation around the globe, we have moved toward establishing centers of pluriform human communities around the globe. We have dared see ourselves as one of the sensitive and responsive elements of society moving all of society toward a more human future.

Among our responses to the initial impact of pluriformity in our body has been a frantic search for what our unity might possibly be. Many times in this franticness, we have come up with what we could call "top-down-unity." We rehearse over and over those things which we believe all of us or at least most of us have committed ourselves to as a way to create an experience of unity among us. This approach attempts to superimpose a unity in a body that for whatever reason has become more passionate about its uniquenesses and its heritages.

For us to continue our journey of repentance, an entirely different approach to our unity is called for. Our unity can only be re-fashioned through the honoring and overt utilization of the uniquenesses we are. This calls for a radical honoring of the givenness that is the people who have covenanted their lives and their deaths to the Order. This means our unity must be rebuilt step by step, piece by piece, in a way that includes everyone's gifts and continues to do so. Daring to forge our unity in this way is pioneering in how human settlements around the globe can create a foundation of unity in the midst of mobile and shifting social milieus.

Consequently, it is essential for us even indirectly to acknowledge the gifts and contributions our gay and lesbian colleagues are making for the future of our Order. If we are a representational microcosm on behalf of the future, the self-conscious inclusion of gay people into our creative process is going to become more and more of a concern not less. What would it mean concretely for our Order to do this in its thinking, organization, and action? What would it mean for the Order to turn its back on, to abolish within, and to lead in the social act of repentance for centuries of irrational homophobia? At the very least this would mean embarking upon a journey from acknowledgment through understanding to symbolization of the presence of gay people in the Order.

Our Order was founded on the white Ur gift of rationality. We are engaged in a great journey now to create openness to new patterns. How do we constantly structure in encounters with other Ur gifts--rhythm?, sociality?, time?, etc. Our current experiment with meditation is a bold demonstration that we have the willingness and capacity for openness. Only constant encounters will open us up to the journey of embracing and utilizing the gifts of all in our whole life and mission. Learning to appreciate and utilize the gifts of other urs will open us to affirm the gifts of other alternative orientations. Becoming self-conscious about our own prejudices and fears is another step. One of the most consistent and widespread of these fears is the prejudice toward gay people.

Deciding to get the facts is a crucial beginning step. Getting the facts about another culture and tradition has been foundational to our methodology. The objective data is just as helpful even in dealing with such an emotion-charged issue as the gay/lesbian one. There is a huge education job to be done to allow the Order to begin to grasp the depth of the gay issue. Just as we have given thought now to the gifts of the gay person to the white Western culture, we also need to grapple with what gifts gay people bring to other cultures around the globe. We need to discover how other cultures have embraced homosexuality in a natural and affirmative way. This educative task could be done in a variety of ways,

including individual and corporate study, movie viewings, discussions, and direct exposure to the gay community.

Our Order was founded on the family life style. Nevertheless, many single men and women are remaining single. Many families have broken so that single parent families are increasing. Currently, 40% of our Order are single adults. In addition, the Order is now becoming more aware that there have been many gays and lesbians in the Order. How do we re-image our perceptions of all these? How do we begin to see the gifts in these diverse perspectives alongside of the gifts of traditional family life? To do so would be to pioneer far beyond where society is at the moment--which is at the stance of nominal toleration at best. The emergence of a singles interest group at this Council is a step in the direction of honoring alternatives to traditional family life. Although most of the single people in the Order are not gay or lesbian, there are many points of common concern.

At this point, one of the Order's most fundamental fears relative to acknowledging and proclaiming our life style diversity is our fear of negative publicity. We can imagine the press labelling the Order as being a "haven for homosexuals" or as being "friendly to faggots" should we overtly acknowledge the presence of gays and lesbians in the Order. However, our friends and supporters are very much aware of our daring inroads into inclusivity. One reason we are uncomfortable is our own inability to articulate to ourselves why gay people need to be an integral part of our covenanted body. Our self-conscious story of inclusivity can also help close the gaps in the understanding of homosexuality among the various cultures and nationalities of the people who make up our Order.

We have been struggling for a long time over the issue of formalizing covenants with the Order. We have begun to think of appropriate ways during this council of formalizing the various relationships people have to the Order. Perhaps more difficult is the issue of how to honor one-to-one covenantal relationships that are not traditional marriage relationships. It may not be easy to acknowledge officially a gay or lesbian couple relationship within the Order. Nevertheless, many self-conscious gays and lesbians in the Order long for a lasting covenantal relationship. The Order now needs to struggle with how to honor such relationships.

More and more, our polity needs to reflect directly the pluriformity we are. We need to continue to involve our non-Western colleagues in the serious decision-making roles within our Order. Our training efforts need to intensify and increase. The shift to the creation of troikas and quinterns made up of diverse individuals is a significant step in this direction. In addition, it is now possible for the Order gay care network to be recognized not only as a support group but also as a reference point for dialogue with the rest of the Order.

It is time for a new CSIIIA (Individual and Family Course). Maybe its name could be just the Family Course or the Covenant Course, for we have long understood covenants as the central and often missing key within relationships. It is time to acknowledge in such a course forms of intentional covenants other than marriage. It is time to recognize the authenticity of showing up as a responsible gay person. Society is

desperately in need of our wisdom here.

Finally, we need to expand the documentation of our life together as the Order. We need to find other ways of offering our gift as an Order to the globe. The world is asking how intentional human beings can create human communities. 1984 is our year of opportunity as an Order. We are at a crossroads. Our temptation is to extend or duplicate those structures that have so cared for us until now. The challenge, however, is to invent the appropriate structures which will manifest in our very thinking, organization, and action the new paradigm that we already embody.

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