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A Scenario for Phase I of the Order 1984--2000

In the years that we have been an Order our care and relationship to the children of Order families has been an important aspect of our corporate life. The structures and style of that care has changed over the years, and the cultural setting we have operated in has changed. When we began we were families coming predominantly from one cultural background (American), a common religious heritage (Christian), sharing a common task. We perceived that the child-centered nuclear family not only kept the mother tied to the domestic scene but that also the children were not being equipped with the skills and perspectives that the changes of this century would require them to have. Therefore, we created corporate structures of child care, with a spiraled version of the curriculum which we were living out of and which we were teaching to others. We created a summer camp programme to care for the children in the long summer holiday in North A merica while the adults were engaged in research programmes and councils.

Since that time we have gone through many changes. We have dispersed across the globe, new Order members from different cultures and religious backgrounds as well as work and educational experience have become part of our body. Our engagement has been diversified. We no longer see North America as the home "base" to which we will return. In some countries of the world the women's revolution has transformed the relationship of the mother and the child, the husband and wife, and has loosed the new reality of the single parent family. The situation of the child in the West has shifted from being the centre of the family to being buffeted about by the family's growth struggles and/or the world's chaos of being re-formed into a new order. The contradiction is no longer the stifling staleness of the nuclear family, but the painful uncertainty and search for meaning in what seems to be a destruction-bent century.

In the last years, because of being assigned to many locations, and because of the "aging" of the Order from North America, there have been fewer children in the houses of North America. In some cases there is only one family with children in the house. In africa and India, on the other hand, there are many children under 12 years of age. The challenges of creating structures to honour and sustain the family's covenant with each other and the Order and of caring for children's education and participation in the Order are part of the new reality in these and other locations. It is no longer easy to determine what the style of corporate parenting needs to be, nor what role the parent uniquely plays in the lives of their children. It is not easy to determine the content of the curriculum especially as it relates to religious and cultural heritage. In houses where only one family has children it is difficult to create children's structures that are "futuric, comprehensive, and intentional."

The Phase I programmes of our Order have the responsibility of being a sign to others of the possibilities of this phase, The programmes provide opportunity for the specific children of our families to recognize their greatness and determine how to live in response to the Mystery and the global family of humans. This involves so many dimensions--language prowess in one's mother tongue, as well as English, and maybe another or two, knowledge of history, sciences, math, skills for employment, physical abilities (sports, arts), as well as the sensitivity to be in touch with one's own spirit deeps and enable others to do so as well. This does not mean trying to create an ideal image of the human of tomorrow which all children of the Order would be encouraged to be. The Phase I programmes from continent to continent may vary in form and content while sharing similar aims within a common vision.

In the next sixteen years Phase I structures will be created for each continent. These structures will include:

* Emerging Generation programmes, and guidelines and support for families and houses
* Rite of Passage to Being a Youth
* Youth structures, and family and house guidelines
* Rite of Passage to Adulthood

In relation to the Emerging Generation (ages birth to 10 or 11 years), wherever possible two or more families with children will be assigned to a house. One house on the continent would serve as a coordination and guide post for E.G. care on the continent. The house would work on curriculum models to share with other houses and on communication and interchange mechanisms between the E.G. of the houses. This house would also create models for E.G. exchange visits, special events such as camps (three to five weeks, depending on the school holiday schedule), and E. G. events during councils, etc. Where possible "delegations" of children from other continents might participate in a camp in order to share the gifts and perspectives of each continent. Houses across the continent will set aside a certain amount of money each month from Self Support in a continental fund to be used for event expenses for the E.G. The continent would schedule workshops for families in order to give them the opportunity to meet together, share insights and struggles, and create plans for themselves within the Order. It might be helpful for one member of the Order Life Commission to be assigned to be available for conversation about matters which relate to Phase I and families.

A Rite of Passage into Youthhood would be conducted for children who are 11 or 12 years old. This rite would have a corporate and a solitary dimension. It would be carried out with other children on the continent who have reached this age.The rite of passage would ideally involve a journey in which the child uses the skills he/she has acquired and which gives an opportunity for learning other skills which will allow him/her to take active responsibility for his/her journey in the coming years. Within the journey there would be a solitary time for reflection on one's childhood and deciding on the symbol of turning from childhood to youthhood. The family and the religious house would participate in a ritual of receiving the "new youth". Parents of children taking part in the rite would have a corporate time together to reflect on the new role being required of them, to decide on appropriate changes in family life and the role the youth plays in the religious house.

Youth Structures--Each continent will have structures that respond to the needs of the youth of families assigned there. This may take the form of a student house (as in N. America) or youth clusters (both junior high and high school). Adequate education structures and access to meaningful engagement outside the formal school time would be important considerations. Youth would not shift to doing their education in English. because of the importance of standing in their own cultural and linguistic heritage. Instruction in English will be important, to allow them to be in other cultures and to participate effectively. A greater emphasis will be given to the interchange between youth across a given continent. In each location where youth are assigned a couple will be designated to be their guides. These couples, along with the youth, would arrange Week II or holiday period gatherings with other youth. They would maintain contact with each other in order to commonize the practices, opportunities, and expectations of the youth, the houses, and the families. Youth would be enabled to find part-time work, to learn computer skills, gardening abilities etc. which would allow them to contribute to house self-support, receive a stipend, save money (based on a budget) for special youth activities, and save money individually toward education and/or a year away from the Order.

During the high school years each youth might spend a portion of a year (at least six months) doing what in Europe is called a Practicum, or roughly translated, an Apprenticeship. This might be in an ICA project situation, or in another situation where a youth could be adequately engaged and cared for. The purpose of this experience would be to live with another culture, to participate in a response to one of the major contradictions of our time--as a way of discovering one's own gifts and limits--as a way of "passing over" to another perspective. This would be helpful in getting distance on the educational system one is in, and inform future educational choices. The family and the assigned youth guide would evaluate the youth's school status, possible Practicum locations, and would participate with the youth in preparing for the experience and evaluating it afterwards. This experience might well take place at the close of the high school years as well as a transition to further education.

Rite of Passage to Adulthood (between 18 and 20 years of age)

Youth who have spent a large part of their lives (if not all) within the Order need an opportunity to self-consciously reflect on the Order's purpose and stlyle in order to decide what relationship they want to take to the Order as adults. Also there is a need, not only experienced by youth in the Order, to mark the transition from youthhood to adulthood. This transition would involve reflection over the period of time with the Order--acknowledging the gifts and the struggles and holding these up to the house and family. This might take the form of participating in a period of regular dialogue with an adult, or a weekend course that enables building a story of where one is in one's life (Vocational Journey Lab, or Progoff's Intensive Journal Workshop, etc.) Another aspect of the transition would be designing an experience of living on one's own--being responsible for one's own economic life, relationships, and participation in society. This could be a year of service as a volunteer, or a period of time in a job, or going away to a residential school. Following this experience the young person would return to "debrief" the time and to celebrate the closure of Phase I. This would include a declaration of intention for the next years, a ritual at the Weekly Common Meal, and a celebration to involve the family and colleagues. Depending on the decision of the person, he/she would then return to the order as a member, or begin another life/work style.

In the future we can anticipate that families with children of various ages (emerging generation and youth) will decide to join the group of those in the Order who live in houses. And we can anticipate that member-families who see themselves as part of the Order, but not living in a house full time, may want to give their children the opportunity to participate in Phase I structures of the Order. We will need to design the structures on each continent in such a way as this is possible, clearly thinking out the covenantal basis of each programme as well as the financial implications.

As we become more aware that living involves many rites of passage, many stages, we will reaffirm the need for creative Phase I structures for the sake of the children and youth themselves and for the sake of the sign to the world. We will be enabled to create appropriate forms for other phases based on our experiences with Phase I.