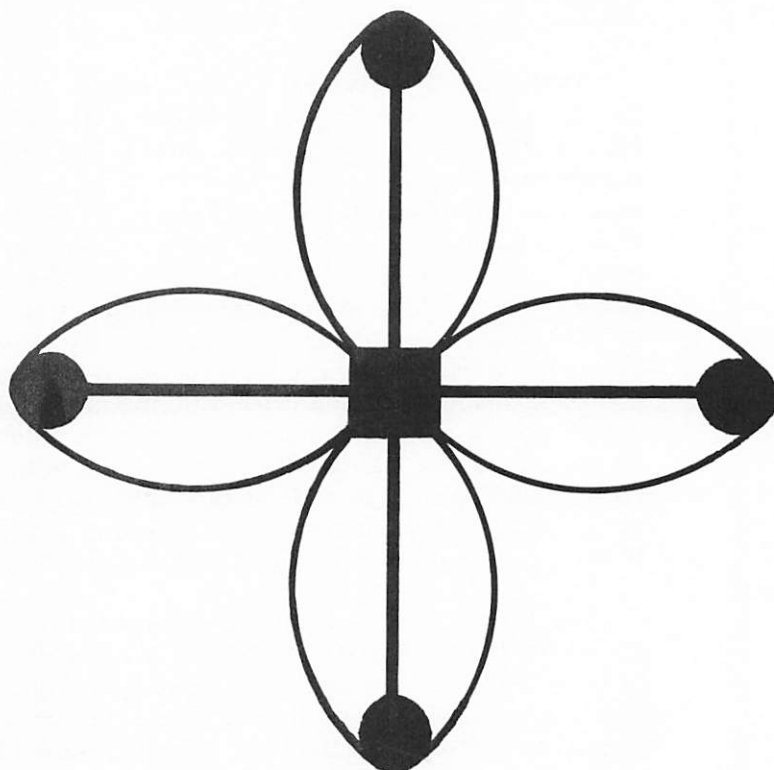


THE LOCAL CHURCH EXPERIMENT



One hundred and forty-four local churches are implementing a comprehensive tactical system for church renewal through an ecumenical dynamic that releases the unique gifts of each congregation to serve all mankind.

ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE: CHICAGO

THE LOCAL CHURCH EXPERIMENT

CALL TO THE CHURCH

No individual, no institution, and no culture escapes the radical upheavals and global crises which are the twentieth century. Nevertheless, time and again in the journey of man, there has arisen a body of God's people which has seen itself called to forge and pioneer the necessary new patterns of social relationships. The church in particular hears and struggles to be obedient to that call. Today, however, like every other human institution facing the convulsions and ambiguities of our historical moment, the church is experiencing a painful failure in morale. At the same time, it is precisely here, in the midst of her despair over spiritual aridity, structural disrepair and intellectual stagnation, that the church is undergoing a purification in preparation for fulfilling her ancient and ongoing function of creating the future.

LOCAL DYNAMICS

As the forces of renewal have aroused the church to grasp afresh her destinal responsibility for the world, it has become apparent that the church is renewed from within and already undergoing transformation. Practically, however, there is no renewed church except as it is manifest on the local level. We have come to recognize three sociological dynamics which together constitute the reformulated local church. The *parish* is the missional activity which is the response of the local church to human need, concretizing itself in structures of comprehensive care for every person within a given geographical settlement. The *congregation* is the activity of a body of people in maintaining and celebrating the one Word of Jesus Christ within a particular denominational heritage in order to expend its life on behalf of the parish. The *cadre* is the activity of intensified training and spirit leadership within the congregation in sustaining the congregation's decision to be mission. The task today is the reconstruction of these dynamics within every local church.

TACTICAL SYSTEM

The program of local church reconstruction is now underway. Called the Local Church Experiment, it is the product of fifty years of world-wide research and experimentation in church renewal and is now in the second of its three phases. 1966 to 1970 was Phase I: Research consisting of compiling, ordering, evaluating and testing the methodologies and insights from literally thousands of renewal ventures. This phase culminated with Summer '70, a research assembly held in Chicago, at which 500 local churchmen designed on the basis of this accumulated wisdom the theoretical and practical format of the Experiment and a tactical system for its actualization. The six years from 1970 to 1976 make up Phase II: Experimentation which is designed to test and refine every aspect of the project with 552 local churches in 108 metropolitan centers of North America, as well as on other continents. Finally, Phase III: Controlled Replication will occur during the eight years from 1976 to 1984, during which time a thousand churches will begin the project throughout the world each year.

A fundamental ordering dynamic within the Experiment is the *galaxy*, a group of four participating congregations from the same

GALAXY PARTICIPATION

geographical area. Within each galaxy, the leadership principle is embodied in a group called the *auxiliary*—the clergy family and one or two families of committed laymen—from each congregation. The galaxy auxiliary also includes one staff couple from the Ecumenical Institute. Meeting as the galaxy one night each week and six weekends during each quarter, participating churchmen plan out the disciplined application of the common tactical system within their unique local situations.

GLOBAL EXPERIMENT

During the first year of the Experimentation Phase, eighty local churches in North America including fourteen denominations participated in the project as called for by the timeline. Practical wisdom was shared and refinements introduced through weekend consultations in each galaxy and through a series of basic and advanced training schools which the Institute offered for galaxy members. The second year of the Experimentation Phase adds 64 new churches to the project for a total of 144 congregations in 36 galaxies. The sociological make-up of these 144 churches ranges from black inner-city to wealthy suburbanite, from small rural congregations to 6,000-member Roman Catholic parishes. And already the Experiment has become global. In Mowanjum, near Derby, Australia, every member of the aboriginal community now participates in the methodologies of the Experiment, whether it be through corporate worship, planning or cattle-raising.

AWAKENED CHURCHMEN

The result of the Local Church Experiment has been the reawakening and equipping for mission of thousands of responsible churchmen in these representative congregations throughout North America and across the globe. A battery of methodologies such as workshopping, model-building, timeline design, depth problem analysis and goal-setting has allowed both clergy and laymen to see themselves as responsible for the future of their planet and capable of developing and implementing the models needed for the task. Groups of seasoned renewal forces in each local congregation become thoroughly grounded in the historical tradition of the church, sensitive to human needs, and competent in tactical methods. The most significant result, however, has been the renewed spirit of these churchmen. They have recovered the sense of being powerful shapers of history, they have a new vision of possibility for the whole of society, and they have a new basis for confidence in the local church as the vehicle through which they will give their lives on behalf of all men.

CONGREGATIONAL DECISION

The Local Church Experiment is available to a congregation on the basis of its decision to expend itself in the tactical renewal of its local church while maintaining its unique denominational heritage. A practical introduction to the basic presuppositions of the Experiment, as well as to the fruits of twenty years of work in theological and cultural curricula, is obtainable in the basic courses offered regularly by the Ecumenical Institute.

HOPE OF THE WORLD

Through the Local Church Experiment, grassroots people expend their lives to design comprehensive structures that will care for all men. As they do so, the local church becomes visibly manifest in our times as the redemptive activity it was commissioned to be: the body of Christ, the hope of the world.

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