

A

**COMPREHENSIVE EXPERIMENT**

**IN THE**

**RECONSTRUCTION**

**OF THE**

**LOCAL CHURCH**

**The Prologue**

## I. CONTEXT

### TROUBLED TIMES

1. The world is in a state of deepening crisis. The whole globe is in revolution heretofore unknown in the history of man. Nothing remains untouched. Every individual, every people, and every institution is affected: family, state, economic orders, cultural systems, and the Church. The present social cleavage is so broad and so deep that it wrenches the collective psyche. Little wonder that most would flee from it all. But there is no final escape. Man must shoulder the burden, sooner or later, of forging new patterns of social relations and symbols of personal meaning. At such crisis points in history, the Church has a very crucial role to play. Time and again in the journey of man the People of God have both catalyzed new social structures and re-created man's symbol systems. This the Church must and will do again for our time.

### MORALE FAILURE

2. Ironically the Church today is experiencing a painful failure in morale. It is widespread and increasing in intensity. It is the consequence of bearing, over many decades, the burden of intellectual consternation, structural disrepair, and spiritual aridity. These ills, in turn, are occasioned by the present global cultural revolution. This is not to be interpreted negatively as first of all a sign of weakness, degeneration, or irrelevance. The troubles of the Church are rather the fire sent by God, in which she is undergoing the purification that is issuing even now in radical reconstruction. They are the struggle of the Church to prepare herself to fulfill her ancient and ongoing function in this present revolutionary age.

### CHURCH RENEWAL

3. For over fifty years now, the Church has been in this cauldron of self-renewal. It has now become evident that the Church is renewable from within and indeed is even now undergoing transfiguration. The forces of renewal have aroused the Church to grasp afresh her sacred obligation in the world and have forged the vision of reconstruction essential to the fulfilling of that calling. This is phase one of Church renewal, and it is now accomplished. The second phase is the concretizing of that vision of reconstruction. It is bridging the gap between the abstract idea and the manifestation of the idea in the human process. It is the very practical task of transposing or rebuilding the forms through which the Church can effectively exercise her service to mankind. Herein is the task ahead for the next half century.

### CHURCH RECONSTRUCTION

4. The practical phase of any revolution takes place primarily in the local units of society. So the second phase of renewal in the Church must necessarily center on the Church in its local form. Yet because the local congregation is the very essence of the Church, to renew it is to renew the Church at large. What has to be done at the local level is a highly concrete and practical task. It means literally transfiguring every structure of the local congregation for the sake of the Church being what it is: mission in the world. It is the foundational reconstruction of the intellectual, sociological, and spiritual forms that enlighten, equip, and nurture men for sacrificial service in the cause of God and mankind. This is not a matter of building new structures, nor is it an effort to rehabilitate old. It is rather the occasioning of radical metamorphosis in the presently existing structures. If the Church is to be relevant, effective mission in the post-modern world, this serious reconstruction of the Local Church is utterly essential. Herein is the imperative at hand for those who love the established Church.

## 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.

## CHURCH DYNAMICS

8. This project is based on the conviction that the dynamics which make up the Local Church are not temporary phenomena but reside in a fundamental human process which demands restructuring. As social scientists have studied the nature of community it has become apparent that in every local social formation in human history there have been three structural forces at play: 1) some form of human *settlement* through which the family unit could be ordered and cared for, 2) some form of *cultus* which enabled the community to symbolize its reason for being and to make it possible for men to do things together, and 3) some kind of *shaman* group comprised of signal, symbolic, catalytic persons who enlivened the cultus and awakened the spirit depths of the community fabric. The Local Church has stood in history as a living example of a social structure with these self-conscious human dynamics. In forging a project of radical Local Church reconstruction the following terms have symbolized the process which must take place: 1) the "parish" is a missional activity arising out of the response of the Local Church to human need in which structures of re-education and re-formulation realize the demand to love and care for every man in a particular geographical local community, thus being related to the fundamental dynamic of the human settlement; 2) the "congregation" as it is related to the cultic force in human society, is a body of persons who preserve the Word of Jesus Christ out of a particular heritage of Historical Christianity and thrust themselves into the missional task of forging the overlay of love which is the Parish; and 3) the "cadre" concretizes the shaman force in human society by serving as a training ground for developing committed spirit leadership in the congregation while at the same time it acts corporately as a pastorate which intensely embodies the Word in order to sustain the congregation in mission. The intent of this project is the practical reconstruction of the comprehensive Local Church dynamic: parish, congregation, and cadre.

## MASTER STRATEGIES

9. Certain master strategies will initiate the refurbishing of the total Local Church dynamic of parish, congregation, and cadre. The corresponding master strategies are contextual re-education, structural re-formulation, and spiritual re-motivation. Contextual re-education points to the need to alter the prevailing narrow, parochial views of life which have impoverished human living. Their preference, even among the most educated, for abstract ideas has caused a major problem in most communities in renewing the social organism. Concrete, human images must replace abstractions as a way to reveal the deepest issues and make significant decisions that will affect personal community and global destiny. Structural re-formulation is the strategy for reshaping the social form which sustains the bi-polar dynamic of missional task and historical nurture of the men of faith. No one dares call forth new wine without building new wineskins to hold it. In order to accomplish such restructuring, two key steps must be taken in the congregation: renewal of its symbolic life and theological re-education. Rites, ceremonies, and visual symbols have been a key to human self-understanding. The Church has used its corporate worship as a way to hold itself self-consciously before the Word and its mission. While maintaining the gifts of the historical traditions of the Church, renewal of symbolic life will come as fresh ways of celebration are tried. The re-educative task in the congregation will develop theological understanding that will enable the churchman to interpret everyday experience in light of the gospel so that he can be an effective person in mission. Spiritual re-motivation is a means to train the spirit leadership of the congregation in the intellectual and religious deeps so that they may stand as a spiritual resource and catalytic agent. Only as modern man touches the mystery and awe of life will he be able to break from apathy and take up the crusade of creating human life across the globe. The spirit man captures anew the profound methodologies of meditation, contemplation, and prayer as ways of forming his religious life. Nothing less than total reconstruction of the Local Church is required.

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 imaginally, 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.

## TACTICAL RENEWAL

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.

## SIX-YEAR EXPERIMENT

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

## ECUMENICAL VISION

across the globe will provide a commonness of human understanding that will bring fresh insights into the Church's mission. The global collegial network of the Church has never had depth and sustained power without dramatic forces surging in the Local Church. The project in reconstruction will birth a new spirit in the Church's universal mission.

### III. PROCEDURES

#### UNIVERSAL APPLICABILITY

13. The Local Church experiment is for any Local Church and every Local Church. This universal applicability must be demonstrated through congregations with widely varying social forms, historical traditions, and socio-economic levels. The Church as mission has particular relevance for our day only as it has universal relevance. The initial experiment must span the whole of the North American continent and must touch denominational streams in order to provide adequate universal testing. Only the kind of refinement of the model for reconstruction that can come from broad, in-depth testing will make it flexible and applicable to each unique local situation. The universal adaptability of the reconstruction model will provide a new sense of direction and motivation for the Historical Church that would never be possible if it were applied only to isolated, highly experimental situations. Hopefully, some eighty selected congregations would begin operation of the tactical model in varying intensity in 1971. These congregations would be selected across the continent out of sixteen regional areas. Building then on the insights and suggestions of the first six-year experiment, additional congregations would be added over the next eight years through 1984 to provide a significant base of testing so that the plan for reconstruction can be reproduced in any and every Local Church.

#### TRAINING RESOURCES

14. Many imaginal models and manuals will provide basic resources for carrying on the experiment in Local Church reconstruction. A four-week research assembly of over five hundred persons working together in the summer of 1970 developed model details for the task of the tactical operations and participated in basic training for activating the model. The following training resources will be available: 1) Basic training in the whole experiment for those pastors and members of local congregations who will be providing the crucial leadership for the experiment. 2) A consultation system which schedules a regular program of further training and objective evaluation throughout the year. 3) The Academy is an intensive program in the theoretical and practical disciplines of cultural and religious life. The program also develops skills in teaching, community reformulation and the new religious exercises. 4) Special schools provide courses and training in specific areas of the tactics as they are implemented in a local situation. Training constructs and a comprehensive curriculum have been developed over the past sixteen years, and a trained body of concerned churchmen is equipped to provide faculty competence and consultation for implementation of the necessary training for the experiment in the Local Church.

#### DATA SHARING

15. The practical working out of the reconstruction model in local congregations will generate many new ideas and tactical procedures. Therefore, the research and evaluation process will play an important role in the reconstruction experiment. Plans will be initiated to collect data from the local situations through common reporting by means of occasional area and continental meetings throughout the year. Frequent contact with auxiliary units and local leadership will enable a continual exchange of information on every facet of the model so that updating can take place in each location as the year progresses. Such research and coordination will be provided by the Regulation Centrum, a Chicago-located team of skilled persons who can be of maximum assistance to the experiment. This kind of cross-reference communication will provide the data for comprehensive evaluation and ensure the universal practicability of the reconstruction model.

## 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 colleagueship 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.