

Purpose of the Order Ecumenical (O:E) 1970

PRELUDE

The Order: Ecumenical is a product of the twentieth century theological revolution. It is rooted in the dreams of men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Teilhard de Chardin and inspired by pioneer communities like Taizé, Iona and the Kirchentag. The founding leadership of the Order: Ecumenical arose in the early 1950's at the Christian Faith and Life Community at the University of Texas. In 1962 this leadership was invited to staff the Chicago Ecumenical Institute, born out of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches.

Ecumenical Family Order: Comprised of 1400 adults and 600 children, of 23 nationalities, the Order operates from 101 religious houses on six continents as a disciplined servant force to the historical Church in its task of ministry to the world at this moment of history.

A unique feature of the Order: Ecumenical is its combination of traditional first order characteristics with a family composition. The presupposition is that renewal of the social order in the light of the present family crisis depends upon its demonstration within a highly covenanted community. It suggests that the primary religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are as relevant to the contemporary family as they were for the medieval monk.

The other unique feature of the Order is the scope of its ecumenism, which includes geographical and sociological characteristics. In this residential order, young and old, lay and clergy, Catholic and Protestant, executive and laborer, Oriental and Occidental work in common mission to realize their dream of a new church, a new world and a new human.

1. EXTERNAL MISSION

SERVING THE CHURCH

Intensive Catechetical Retraining: In every age, the Church refreshes her memory of the Word of Jesus Christ. Where she has forgotten the goodness of Creation and become cynical, paralyzed or weary, she gives birth to a sensitive core who reawaken her vision of the Resurrection. Early the Order: Ecumenical

fashioned a pedagogical implement that could cut through the accretions of pietism to provide a fundamental understanding of the Word of God as experienced in concrete living. Taught to clergy and to laity, this compact seminar enables a transformation in self-image through secular decoding of the Trinitarian categories. Supplemental to the catechetical work of parishes, this instrument has released many people across the world to better grasp their own theological traditions.

This basic curriculum has been expanded, among other Forms, to an eight week Academy of religious and cultural studies for local churchmen and to a three week international Institute which brings together Church leaders on several continents for more formal experience.

Local Church Renewal: The Order: Ecumenical understands the local church as the operating base for converting new awareness into concrete love for the world. As administrative burdens consume her leadership, dominate her congregational life and consequently cripple her social mission, the need of radical renewal has become evident. Instead of abstractly debating about the locus of renewal, the Order: Ecumenical assumed from the beginning it would work within the existing structures. It proceeded with concerned local laity and clergy to design a tactical system for use by an ecumenical configuration of churches to initiate a renewal dynamic that is self-regenerative. Work with over one hundred Protestant and Catholic congregations in North America in the past four years has provided a replicable model adaptable to any local situation.

SERVING SOCIETY

Church-World Dialogue: Concerned as well for the witness to the world, the Order: Ecumenical has experimented more recently with a practical seminar tool to bridge the gap from the Church to the world. This seminar discusses the malaise of the economic, political and cultural arenas of society and focuses upon the practical prospects of recapturing authentic meaning and effective vocation for individuals who live in our complex day. This purely secular approach is also enabling participants to

persons, this corporate coverage of the total demand releases everyone's time and energy by eliminating frenetic activity. Through such structures, relevant corporate wisdom is available for every task and acts as a check on excessive individualism and elitism.

COMMON GOOD

Economic Self Support: Another of the covenantal features of the Order: Ecumenical is the disposition of its material resources. Operating under the principle of total self-support, the Order assigns half its body out to work in diverse occupational roles, including those of lawyers, doctors, businessmen and teachers. This income is pooled, with part used for equivalent stipends and part for corporate funds that care for health, travel, special celebrations, children's education and annuity. This plan frees the external mission from the Order's dependence upon it for economic sustenance and enables the Order to arrange its common life so all goods are available for the mission

Symbolic Family Stipend: The family stipend also functions as a symbol of the Order's relation to its goods. Not only is the amount below the actual poverty level in most countries where religious houses are located, but it also illuminates the vow of poverty as the detachment from all goods for the sake of mission. In this way the economic aspect is placed in the service of the symbolic, and the power of a corporate life style is demonstrated again.

COMMON POLITY

Corporate Consensus Creation: The Order's polity is both an acting out of the vow of obedience and an experiment in new political forms. The consensus method is the means by which the whole body builds a corporate mind and arrives at a common decision, thereby avoiding both the group polarization from voting and the imposition of arbitrary decision from above. Then a corporate priorship articulates the consensus as it becomes apparent. Finally, various task groups interpret the consensus in the light of tactical demands. These three aspects inform each other in an ongoing dynamic relationship.

Symbolic Priorship Assignment: The symbolic dimension of order polity is represented in

priorship roles. A yearly assignment, the prior represents a worldwide network of people with a particular mission at stake. Where he is present, corporateness is symbolized. Priors exercise care for the Order by maintaining structural integrity and by making assignments on the basis of comprehensive missional rationales.

COMMON STUDY

Common Memory Cultivation: The mission of the Order governs its study life. Operating against the popular tendencies of intellectual dilettantism and abstraction, the Order seeks to ground its members in common operating images to maintain a corporate thrust under diverse conditions. Common artforms, lectures, missional constructs and collegium issues are shared, while constant exposure to significant films and novels is promoted. The global research network makes new wisdom available to every religious house.

To deepen its reflective base the Order assigns itself to corporate study and practical grounding of devotional classics and theological and sociological works. Representative examples include John of The Cross, Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, Servan Schreiber and Kenneth Boulding.

Methodological Prowess Formation: Practical methods are germane to every aspect of the Order's life and mission. Intellectual methods enable persons to grasp and retain complicated texts in a short time and to construct lectures or sermons from corporate sharing. Social methods include gridding and analysis of geographical areas so that social problems can be indicated and corrective models built. Religious methods draw upon the rich store of scriptural and devotional themes and apply directed conversations that transpose traditional religious concepts into meaningful categories in the light of contemporary life experience. The weekly Ecclesiola meeting is instrumental in reflective training and in building commonness. Twenty-five adults experiment with spirit conversations, scripture discussions, family celebrations and solitary office in a "college" dynamic, followed by a "seminary" aimed at depth lucidity, and ending with a "sodality" visioning session.

COMMON MISSION

recover their spiritual roots and to renew their religious quest.

Local Community Reformulation: Aware that basic community today is the locus of dehumanizing problems, the practical response of the Order: Ecumenical is a community reformulation project begun in a Chicago ghetto in 1963. As a grassroots approach, its presuppositions are that all human problems within the delimited area be acted upon simultaneously and in depth, with particular emphasis on image reconstruction through extensive use of symbols. This sixteen block experiment for comprehensive structural change has produced a reduplicable plan now being demonstrated in over fifty cities, from a middle class project in Rochester, New York to an Aboriginal community at Oombulgurri, Australia.

SERVING HUMANNES

Contemporary Public Awakening: The witnessing mission of the Order Ecumenical culminates in experimentation with new ways to address contemporary man en masse with themes of human resurgence. New forms of planning have been used on college campuses and at congregational gatherings in different parts of the world to indicate humanizing trends to highly diverse audiences. Another form of mass witnessing is through community convocations. Combining celebrational aspects of medieval pageantry with the political orientation of the New England Town Meeting, the convocation builds a context that gives courage to local citizens to participate in their communities with responsibility and hope.

Strategic Social Demonstration: Beyond the local community the Order: Ecumenical recognizes vast fields of institutional association which invite restructuring if; remotivated human beings are to create viable channels for vocational expression. Because business and educational structures bear the brunt of much of the collapse of sustaining images in society, carefully delineated signal projects demonstrate how social sectors can be renewed from within. A pilot social project underway in the Marshall Islands has turned a near bankrupt merchandizing company into a creative service force in Micronesia. Experimental projects such as a Hong Kong

preschool and a student house in Chicago offer new educational and stylistic directions for the future.

II. INTERNAL LIFE

COMMON WORSHIP

Daily Office Celebration: The internal life of the Order: Ecumenical is tailored to meet its external mission. It is focused primarily upon the creation of a corporate body. Because symbols play a definitive role in any human enterprise, the Order places highest priority on its common symbolic life. The Daily Office is the central liturgy common to all the religious houses. Combining dramaturgy with the language and structure of classical Christian worship, the Office celebrates contingency, promise and decision before God. A weekly House Church celebration is the focal event for symbolic reports and accountability of order members.

Common Life Symbolization: Common secondary rites are carried on at corporate meals, meetings and at morning wakeup. Intentional decor of every environment with common themes unites the Order across the globe. Singing is a major factor in corporateness as everyone from the musically adept to the unskilled symbolize with common repertoire the multiple states of being alive.

COMMON DISCIPLINE

Common Vision Generation: The corporate discipline of a family order is found to be sustained by continuous visioning. Global and historical perspectives on missional priorities, operating images for the meanest task, and constant reports on the state of the enterprise insure a common operating context and release individual gifts to play creative roles within a corporate emphasis. Experience has proven that missional vision rather than personal counseling accounts for the Order's perseverance.

Comprehensive Strategic Enablement: The corporate discipline depends equally on comprehensive operating structures common to the Order in every location. The enablement of internal life is handled in teams and units on a chore rotation schedule, while the external mission is accomplished through station and post assignments. Rather than restricting

Corporate Missional Planning: Missional planning is a product of corporate model-building. Daily collegia, weekend problem-solving sessions, quarterly councils and annual assemblies are instruments of the corporate life which provide the substance for missional models and relate all tasks to the future needs of mankind. Planning thus issues from a groundswell of common concern in which each member affects the final plan

Task Time Assignment: Following a variety of experimental time designs, the Order: Ecumenical embraces the vow of chastity as single-mindedness with the principle that "all time is assigned time." Assignments are based on the missional imperatives rather than on individual talents Accountability to one's task and to the timeline for accomplishing it gauges the individual contribution in relation to missional participation rather than according to personal abilities or character This brings objectivity to the covenantal requirements and tests ways of sustaining common mission in the family and local church.

III. HISTORICAL FUNCTION

MEDIATE TRANSPARENCY

Final Reality Reflection: The Order: Ecumenical seeks to stand present to God. As an instrument of mediation, its discontinuous corporate discipline fascinates and motivates men. The Order's pedagogical style transmits the healing Word of Jesus Christ in the mundane. Through its rites of acknowledgment of its own humiliation, helplessness and forgiveness it is freed to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit and to be used by it to help shape the future and liberate mankind.

New Religious Representation: Through its network of religious houses the Order: Ecumenical symbolizes the journey of the religious. In its spiritual Odysseys, the exercises of meditation, contemplation and prayer are encountered in the context of a postmodern worldview. In its weekly Ecclesiola, the possibility for revitalization of congregational life is demonstrated. When men see how the Order resolves personal, family and intercommunion differences through missional engagement, they see possibilities for their own denomination's renewal. When they see the Order assign Indian priors to British houses and

Canadian priors to African houses, they are reminded of the universal collegiality of the People of God which links all races, creeds and nationalities.

SIGNAL SOCIALITY

Social Vision Discernment: The Order: Ecumenical seeks to stand present to the world. It elects to function within the Historic Church to embody a social vision and attempts to prefigure the new society. The Order seeks to discern the signs of the times through daily news conversations and analysis of trends and contradictions, using the same methods on itself as it recommends to the world. Its study life keeps it on the edge of social consciousness in order to enable constructive change to occur through the established structures. At the same time it maintains a critical view which ascertains where existing institutions fail to alleviate human suffering. This ordering dynamic envisions and demonstrates the possibility of an earth that belongs to all and beckons society at large to actualize it.

New Society Exemplification: The Order's internal form is intended as a prototype for future society. The architecture of the daily office is self-consciously maintained as the design and elements that symbolize authentic social existence. The liturgy is interpreted as a dramatization of the full meaning of human community as lived before the Final Mystery. The Order symbol of the Congolese Cross represents the sacrificial service which marks the place where human sociality is given final meaning. In its corporate life the Order: Ecumenical aims to signify political economic and cultural care in the family neighborhood and polls. Its hope is that an order which today embodies a social vehicle of global ecumenism may be the herald of a genuine pluralistic society in the future.

ILLUMINE CONSCIOUSNESS

Repentant Awareness Embodiment: The Order: Ecumenical seeks to stand present to human consciousness. It is convinced that at every critical juncture in history those people emerge who perceive the hidden depths of reality, who order the new self-consciousness and who articulate the human question with new insight. Out of their struggles come the methods to disclose the transcendent dimension in human experience and to provide the reference

frames by which to judge the common sense of this world. Then rather than retire into mystical solitude, these people move out to provide humanity with the reflective tools with which to care for the world.

Basic Humanness Disclosure: With the conviction that civilization is borne on the back of religious orders it would appear that in a time of radical upheaval and transition such as today a new kind of ordering task is required. To invent the imagery that makes possible an evolutionary shift the Order: Ecumenical seeks to be sensitive to the ways in which the personal values dreams and fears of a people are the resources which can give a creative burst to all of culture. Today technology is guiding human consciousness toward an imaginative future. In the midst of this, a religious community stands with its symbols and self-story as a sign that it is possible to live as a full human being in the new age.

POSTLUDE

The Order: Ecumenical stands ready to serve the Church and the world as a global servant force. Its religious house network is available to support the local church on six continents; its mobile units are prepared to move on notice to any point on the globe and to demonstrate its methods at the social pressure points of our time.

Global Servant Force: The past twenty years have seen the Order's growth from the initiative of a few men of vision to a highly complex research, training and demonstration corps with tested models in local church renewal, community reformulation and religious revaluation. The next twenty years will see the Order participating in the creation of a global network of parish and corporation guilds in which the People of God will meet from the Church and the world as task forces in a new missional synthesis that will reengage the Church in the world and reunite the world to the Church in a new human family. To this end, the Order: Ecumenical pledges its resources to the Church Universal and offers its vision of a new tomorrow.