Summer '72, Research Assembly
Ecumenical Institute, Chicago

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THE LOCAL CHURCH EXPERIMENT IN THE LIGHT OF SUMMER '72

1. It was only eighteen months ago that we initiated the Local Church Project in history. There was a wild kind of joy breaking forth, at least in my life, to finally see that there was a body of people who had decided to do a job that no one else had ever tried, that is, to do a systematic, comprehensive radicalizing job on the local church. Many other waves have gone through the historical Church, but in our time there has been no body that has decided to deal with the local church except in a very sporadic, uncomprehensive manner. I stand as one who is touched by the breaking forth of joy in the deeps of my life when the Lord of history called forth what we now know as the Local Church Project. One of its battle cries is simply "the Local Church, the Body of Christ, the Hope of the World." It seems to me that that has not been altered by what has happened this summer. In fact, we have gained some clarity on what we are pointing to by the concretions of that battle cry.

2. I need to read some Scripture to launch this report. It is not exactly a report but more a response to the summer made by one person who has been related to the Local Church Experiment. It is a response to the summer in terms of the implications for the Local Church Experiment. You have heard this passage before. It is a favorite of one of my colleagues in regulation centrum, and it has become one of mine. It is from Ecclesiasticus 2:

> My son, if you aspire to be a servant of the Lord,
> prepare yourself for testing.
> Set a straight course, be resolute,
> and do not lose your head in time of disaster.
> Hold fast to him, never desert him,
> if you would end your days in prosperity.
> Bear every hardship that is sent you;
> be patient under humiliation, whatever the cost.
> For gold is assayed by fire,
> and the Lord proves men in the furnace of humiliation.
> Trust him and he will help you;
> steer a straight course and set your hope on him.
>
> You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy;
> do not stray or you will fall.
> You who fear the Lord, trust in him,
> and you shall not miss your reward.
> You who fear the Lord, expect prosperity,
> lasting happiness and favour.
> Consider the past generations and see:
> was anyone who trusted the Lord ever disappointed?
> was anyone who stood firm in the fear of him ever deserted?
> did he ever neglect anyone who prayed to him?
> For the Lord is compassionate and merciful;
> he forgives sins and comes to the rescue in time of trouble.

Woe to faint hearts and nerveless hands
and to the sinner who leads a double life!
Woe to the feeble-hearted! they have no faith,
and therefore shall go unprotected.
Woe to you who have given up the struggle!
What will you do when the Lord's reckoning comes?

Those who fear the Lord never disobey his words;
and all who love him keep to his ways.
Those who fear the Lord try to do his will;
and all who love him steep themselves in the law.
Those who fear the Lord are always prepared;
they humble themselves before him and say:
'We will fall into the hands of the Lord, not into the hands of men,
for his majesty is equalled by his mercy.'

3. "We" began the Local Church Experiment in 1917. That is, we began doing the job of preparing to transform humanness by getting at the central core of the humanizing process in civilization, namely the local church. We began to become self-conscious about that a little bit later as a body of people and in fact we did not decide to begin to pull together the body of wisdom that had been forged out in the first half of the century until about 1966 when we began to hold what we called Councils and to distill out what was the refined wisdom on the other side of the fire of the wars and depression, the experiences of the ripping back of the mask of terror of the face of God in our time. Beginning in 1966, we spent four years doing the practical research for the reconstruction of the local church. That was articulated in the summer of 1970 in what we call "The Tactical Systems for the Reconstruction of the Local Church." We pulled together the practical wisdom of the historical Church as it was struggling with being renewed into a fantastic tactical system; 9,216 chunks of practical wisdom there orchestrated into the Local Church Project. And that practical wisdom is now being applied in a period of six years of experimentation and demonstration between 1970 and 1976.

4. I have to keep reminding myself, "You just started; we just took our first step out of the front door of consciousness into the historical Church." We have just taken the baby steps toward renewing the church, yet I stand in amazement at what has happened. We started out with twenty galaxies with four local congregations in each of those galaxies, a total of eighty congregations, and then this last January, we increased that by an additional sixty-four. We now have one hundred forty-four congregations directly involved in practical renewal at the local grassroots level. This fall we project that by next January there will be at least one hundred eighty-eight local congregations on this continent in the Local Church Experiment. After 1976 will begin what we call the controlled replication of the experiment across the globe, and at that time there will be approximately one hundred-eight galaxies, which means four hundred thirty-two churches on the North American continent according to the projection in the Inclusive Design document. Then 1976 marks the beginning of an eight-year period of controlled replication ending in 1984, during which time there will be one thousand local congregations, or two hundred fifty galaxies a year beginning to make use of this kind of disciplined, comprehensive practical model for the reconstruction of the local church.

5. Now I want to give you a frank report on where we are relative to our revolutionary context. There are one hundred twenty-four congregations presently

directly involved in the weekly actualization of tactics in the Local Church Experiment. The rest of the congregations are there; they are in the phase of bringing consciousness into being and enabling the decision to enter the disciplined structure of the Local Church Experiment. They are in the experiment in that they have clergy and laymen who are trained or being trained and who are in the process of enabling their local church to participate in the weekly disciplined structures. The experiment covers thirty-six key metropolitan areas with churches located in over thirty states and provinces. We estimate that some seventy per cent of the population of this continent is within an hour and a half's drive of walking up and knocking on the front door of one of these signal local congregations.

6. The ecumenical diversity of the galaxies is staggering. There are fourteen denominations involved, all the way from Baptist churches that have great gospel spirit to highly liturgical Roman Catholic congregations. In one case, there are in the same galaxy Roman Catholic and black Baptist congregations. We have membership sizes ranging from a congregation of one hundred people in a small ex-urban rice-growing town out on the eastern plains of Texas, to a large university congregation, to a huge Roman Catholic parish of 6,000 members. We have bourgeois, upper-middle-class congregations, one of which already has sixty doctors in a guild, and a forty-member inner city church project sponsored by the denomination. The diversity is phenomenal, and this increases what we are learning about what it means to be grassroots ecumenism on the front lines of change.

7. The average congregational membership of churches in the experiment is 590. That surprised me because I had been thinking that perhaps the only ones that would be interested in this kind of radicalized renewal were those that had collapsed, with only a small membership remaining. Furthermore, there are, according to our calculations, over 1000 colleagues who meet in a disciplined structure every Tuesday night for four hours and every other weekend for twenty-four hours, and who are about the job of catalyzing that local congregation every day. We have over 1000 people in that kind of iron discipline that the local church experiment represents, under covenant to be about a serious job of reformulation at the local level. By my calculations, there are something like 75,000 people who are being jolted every day of their lives by tactical action, by spirit explosions. This fall this brand new kind of care will be extended with the expansion of the project.

8. Now some congregations have dropped out of the experiment, which is the cost of the decisions required to be serious about the local church. At the beginning of this summer, looking back over the entire eighteen months, something like fourteen congregations have dropped out of the experiment out of 144, which is roughly 10 per cent. Now I want to say that only a ten per cent loss in this kind of a radical experiment is for me a sign of the Lord's doing something strange and miraculous in history, for if you have been involved in research and experimentation, and if you know the usual cost of this kind of experimentation, our turnover rate is amazingly low. But it is interesting to note what the reasons were.

9. I want to report about some of the signs of the breakloose that has happened, in the other ninety per cent and then let's work a bit on the dynamics in relation to the summer and the future. There are great human beings emerging. You see them at the Research Assembly. You have experienced it internally yourself, if you have been involved in that kind of disciplined structure finding the incredible internal discipline and the visionary style that is emerging as a result of that chastity. Now I don't mean to say anything simply about the historical Church. But

there is something radically hopeful about the fact that there is indeed a new breed of human beings being forged out on the anvil of the local congregation's renewal.

10. I remember in my experience in the galaxy last year one of the pastors had decided to put his toe into the experiment and try it out for awhile and see what it was like. When we came to see him, he and his wife would always have a table set for us in the dining room, and we would sit down around the dining room table with the nicest of china as though we were guests in the house and have a 30-45 minute little chit-chat over lunch. It was a rather holding-at-arms-length stance. And yet, that was his way of saying there was something important going on here, although it was not exactly a work situation in terms of building the tactics. We went on with this for weeks. We would suggest "Why don't we go down to the church and sit around a table with a blackboard? Or, let's try your basement and get a room set aside there with some charts on the wall, some decor.

11. The only decor in the dining room was this plaster of paris thing over here and little flower bunches over there. I was back there no long ago, and indeed in the basement is a "war room," and on all the walls are grids of the world and his parish and metropolitan complex, as well as strategic objectives, and contradictions. Now you don't even take the time to take off your coat; you just slide on down to the basement and are ready to go--I mean revolutionary strategies have emerged. There is at last a happening in that home church. And this happening is that that pastor, in his home there, with the rest of the auxiliary, is forging out models and doing the job of the tactical system in that congregation. Every two or three hours the pastor drives by the door of the house and there are three new models ready with timelines and assignments, and he drives out and implements those tactics. He swings back again in three hours and picks up another bundle of instructions to keep him on the road, dealing with the contradictions. They have several phones going there--a kind of "war room" image--but that is happening!

12. That is the fundamental phenomenon that is happening. People are being trained to be disciplined. And in the midst of the local church tactical thinking is going on.People are learning to think as revolutionaries. I mean simply by that that we discern how it is that you and I can gaze squarely in the face of the reality of our congregation, the reality of our community, the reality of our leaders, the reality of our own lives, standing there with eyes wide open and with the passion of the gospel, and build the model by which to change the face, to create a new face of life on the despair of that congregation, of its leadership or whatever it might be, and to begin to forge out practical, tactical methodology by which to offer the gospel of Jesus Christ to every soul in that congregation, to offer it, and enable that person to redecide now about his life in the midst of history.

13. There is popular preaching going on day by day in those local churches. It is going on because of people's capacity to discern the primary spirit contradiction in the midst of a human beings life or in the life of a body of people, and speak to that with power. They are recontexting,reimaging, dramatizing the significance of life, the gift of history and the Word in Jesus Christ. They are enabling the capacity to stand in the fire.

14. Another breakthrough has been the leadership exchange. We have been taking lay and clergy couples from one galaxy and assigning them to other galaxies to be a part of a leadership exchange, doing continental consults these last three

quarters. At one consult we had an open house on Friday night, to which members of the congregations were invited to come and hear the report on the Local Church Experiment. Several came that night with their weapons loaded with cynical questions. But we had there, one lay couple from one of the galaxies with a stance of nonchalance who kind of wiped the blood away, and stood there as ones that could not be killed. And there was no way ever to fall back into the cynicism and despair at that moment in history. They stood there as the ones who had decided to LOVE those local congregation people in the midst of their despair, their anger toward history, and whatever happened in that local church over the last 25 or 50 years of their life. By the time that was over, those people were just dancing. They began to sing and break loose a phenomenal transformation of a local congregation of blue collar workers who were angry at life as well as at the local pastor and whatever else was involved in stirring up the waters of their own attempt to build the facade of peace over the chaos of their lives. That phenomenal break loose came from standing in the nonchalance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

15. There is a new polity in the local church. You run into the consensus methodology being used in official bodies and in other structures of the local congregation. This is happening by the recontexting and re-imaging, and by the discipline of the pastor or the leaders of the congregation in the auxiliary to decide not to move until a decision has been reached at the consensus level by the congregation. This polity cuts over against the stance of, "I want to say yes and let you say no so we can't do anything, so we will be paralyzed by our own disagreement." The leadership is emerging with the willingness to stand the vision, and to pass that vision across that congregation and enable it to decide that it can move on a situation, that it could care enough to decide to move beyond its paralyzing methodology and forge out new ones. And new decisions are being made. That is tactical engagement.

16. Now let's talk about the new pastor and tactical engagement. For those who live under the Episcopal appointment system, this is a strange phenomenon. I happen to be one of those raised in that context, and it's amazing how moving tactically is possible even in those hierarchical structures. In one case the local pastor was in the experiment and had been there from the beginning. He had been with his local church seven years, and he got rumors by the grapevine that he was up for a move, in fact it was a move that the bishop and local cabinet understood as a matter of honoring the pastor for his work.

17. He worked out a variety of maneuvers creating images of the significance of a pastor staying on with his congregation and working with it, of the raising of the sign of grassroots renewal, of laymen being retrained and he began to feed these images into the cabinet of his historical church. Several people walked by the Bishops' office and mentioned a number of names, among which was this one pastor's, letting him know that these guys were really doing great things out there in the front lines in the local church. Finally that did not work, did not help at all. When it came to the interview, and the district superintendent had already said his say, the pastor said, "Well, I think it would be tragic. I'm ready to be reassigned, no question about my loyalty to the polity of this denomination, but I think it would be tragic. What I think this conference needs is a sign, and I think we are in the process of building it right now." And the district superintendent said, "You will have to talk to the Bishop. With all this network, and changes, we need to have you over there."

18. So he went to see the Bishop. You have to get to know the story of this particular human being's life to know the revolutionary deed that this was. He just kind of sat across the desk of the Bishop and told the Bishop, "Bishop, I deeply honor your freedom to assign me anywhere that is necessary. But I think you would be making a tragic mistake, and let me tell you why." Then he spent about ten minutes spinning about what had happened in that local church in the last ten, twelve, fifteen months. By the time that little conversation was over, the Bishop said, "Oh, I think you are right. It would be tragic. We'll reassign you." That pastor is now back at the helm of that local church.

19. That is Tactical operation, and others of you can think of much more. Some stories are emerging that will help the established church see, in fact, that what is going on within the local congregation with this experiment is that without which the historical church does not have the foggiest chance of making it in our time. And there is nothing moral about that; it is simply the way it is.

20. Then, a disciplined levitational joy is emerging. There is a kind of wild breaking forth of celebration in the local church as a result of getting a realistic grasp of the situation. You do not have levitational joy save that encounter with reality happens in the life of the local congregation. Indeed, the "grand ball" is extraordinarily appropriate as a symbol of what happens at the local church level as bodies of people are beginning to grasp anew their missional destiny and what it means to celebrate that now.

21. Now, let us turn to look at what Summer '72 has done, and what the implications are. Obviously we created a new set of secular metaphors that will be phenomenally powerful at the point of speaking to secular man as part of the evangelism of the local church in the world. The Other World metaphors, while they are full of spirit for you and me, at the same time are utterly secular. I also think we have useful tools, methdologies, and images. Some of us were saying last night, as we reflected on the visit conversations that here is a secular methodology by which you could take <u>any</u> human being and spin him into the state of being at the center, enabling him to experience his own life at that moment in the Word of Jesus Christ. In any situation you can spin that situation and enable that individual to come to terms with the Word, with his life, and it is utterly secular in context.

22. Secondly, from Summer '72 we have the nine converging designs of the movement. Only one of those is about the Local Church Experiment <u>per se</u>, but to be able to talk about that kind of pincer movement on history, on secular society, on the historical Church, is phenomenal. But do not think for a moment that we have anything happening within those 9 designs besides the Church of Jesus Christ being renewed. I am sure there are those in the Movement, and I count myself among them, that sometimes would like to think that there is an option to the local church. We visualize some other movement out there in the field. No, No, No. That is not an option. That is not what those designs are about. What we have discovered is that a movemental colleague who is not in a grassroots historical Church or is not in the Local Church Experiment or does not have that on his time line for the next couple of years is not a colleague in the renewal of the Church and the changing of civilization. Do you understand what I am saying? The moment you let your liberal cynicism loose and try to think, "Let's go out there and do something in society now," without seeing that whatever it is we are doing in society is only in the midst of, and on the back of, and in the context of the Historical Church,

then there is no chance.

23. Now you take a look at any other outfit that started in this century. There are social action projects that are now only dead corpses here and there. A colleague has reported on those who came to this great thing called the Academy. Many great troops went to do "their thing" at the local level. Now you go there and you cannot find them. Save they are sustained and maintained in the local church by the symbol structure and the gospel of Jesus Christ, they are not there. I mean they just seem to drop off the edge of the universe. They turn in on themselves or they drop into a pit of despair. A body of people has to have the story and memory of Jesus and the Word of Jesus Christ to keep feeding that spirit and sustain them. So, whatever is going to happen in the New Social Vehicle depends on the designs coming from the radical renewal of the local congregation.

24. Also, as a result of the tactics work, we have found the New Social Vehicle whistle points. I see that we have nine ways to forge the local parish. It is as if you strike those nine blows and you have a brand new piece of reality called a renewed civilizational unit, the local parish. I mean you have a brand new sense of life. Without those you have some reduced parochialism. We have built on that anvil of the NSV vision and put into history the practical methodology by which you can create at the local level the New Social Vehicle.

25. This has implications for the parish tactical system. We have a brand new context in which to do tactics day by day. I mean it grounds the global in the local in a very practical way. You and I can see now how local man can do the global deed, and how doing the local deed is, in fact, doing the global deed in the midst of the spirit movement, with that kind of imagery in the collegial network that we have.

26. Then there will be brand new supplementaries appearing at the tactical level. And there will be new tools and methodologies for the tactical system. We are not sure what all the implications are in taking Summer '72 and connecting it to Summer '70's work, by interpreting the New Social Vehicle as the Local Church Experiment at the practical local level, because most of what will come out will simply be what we mean by the contentlessness of the tactical system, such as a new set of contexts, visions, images, practical designs and tactical wisdom. But I think first it is a matter of working with something like a "pilot guild," which appeared as Tactic 36, so that it becomes something like a guild system or guild complex or something of that kind. Parish tactics will be transformed from being tactics primarily geared to awakening a congregation, to being tactics directed toward the actual battle in the local community. But again, I do not think there is that much difference; it is a matter of context.

27. Finally, let us think a bit about the future in a much broader way, as a result of this summer, relative to the local church. What is it going to take to sustain you and me in the long struggle ahead?

28. First of all, it seems to me that you and I have to appropriate honoring. We have learned a lot in the last year-and-a-half about honoring, standing before the given with a loud "YES" said to the situation. That means honoring the historical Church as she is, with no myopia, no naiveté, no

cynicism, just as the way it is. We have to appropriate that, take that into our life and embrace it. You and I know that what may appear to be an enemy is our friend; she is the only friend we have in the long struggle--and that is the local church. We used to say in days gone by that "the church is a whore, but she's my mother." I have had to add on another couple of lines, "She's a whore, but she's my mother; she's a whore, but she's got the secret; and therby she's my mother, without which I am not in being." But it is also necessary to get said that she is beginning to come out of that form of sitting about ready to die of malnutrition and anger over there in the corner of the dance floor. In fact you and I are called to go over there and enable our mother to get on her feet and help her to do the waltz, to dance again. I tell you, she is beginning to get onto the dance floor; she is on her feet and she is beginning to do the dance. And it is only because some people, and I do not mean to point only to us, but it had better be some of us too, have decided to honor, to pay the appropriate, depth honor to that without which you and I are not and would not be in history, indeed to that vehicle through which civilization will be transformed, and none other, the historical Church, the local congregation, the Body of Christ, the Hope of the World.

29. Secondly is the dimension of resiliance. It is as though you and I have to know what it means to have the tar beat out of us every day and still stand there with the passion that will not let us turn our eyes for one moment away from that which is beating the tar out of us, and to re-engage with that phenomenal institution, that phenomenal dynamic in history called the local church. It is almost as if we ought to deal with our auxiliary training by taking those who have decided to be about the radical reformulation of the local church into some little room and send in some mean, big colleague who will just take a two-by-four and go bam, whack, crunch on that auxiliary, kicking the living daylights out of that auxiliary for maybe four or five or six weeks. What you are after there is that they have to decide to live in a world where they are going to have somebody come and beat the tar out of them every day. What is necessary is to decide to embrace that as the given, not as the exception. I mean to embrace that kind of battle as the given of your life, and therby begin to have that incredible nonchalance and tranquillity and peace that passes understanding that can take that and walk back into it the next day as one who has decided to love that local congregation. He pours his life into it, not for one moment falling back into the illusion that there is an option, that history will ever make it with any other structure in civilization than the local congregation.

30. So it is first, honoring the Land of Mystery by embracing that reality; then plunging into the cold waters of the River of Consciousness.

31. Third is the vision, and it is in the area of the Mountain of Care. You and I are called to cast that vision of the future across the next 20 years, the next 40 years, every moment that we are alive and breathing. There is no "Pollyanna-ism" here, it is simply saying that my context is now and always will be 20 years, 1000 years down the road. That is the context out of which I do my revolutionary deed in the moment that is mine. Vision, then, is context. And contextual re-education is a primary strategy of the renewal of the Church. We are about the process of mutation. We are at the apex of the age of transition, and we are the ones who have the secret of the Word of Jesus Christ that will release this mutation to emerge. We also have the structures by which those human beings that are created in the process of mutation will be sustained and intensified. These exist only because somebody decided to reformulate grassroots human community in the Word of Jesus Christ and translated it secularly into the

Other World, the metaphors of consciousness.

32. Finally, corporateness is just built into the next 20 years. It is interesting that that appears in the Sea of Tranquillity. It is going to take an iron discipline. No one can play around with this kind of model. No, it is going to take discipline, not for the sake of discipline, but in order to get it done, to get the job done. Think of getting just one little thing done like popular preaching. One of the designs has in it popular preaching, the minute curriculum, mass evangelism, rallies, etc. Imagine what it would be like in five years when the Local Church Experiment would be in perhaps most major metropolitan areas, on the globe. On August 18, in every fire chief's office, in walked some spirit revolutionary with a new short course, of about 3 minutes to spin that man's imagination. Every fire chief on the planet would be transformed; you would have a new reality. Or he might try the garment workers, or see that every alderman got a visit. Then a little image or two pops into his imagination about the responsibility of the new citizen, about the possibilities, about how the destiny of this planet is contingent upon his decisions. I do not know what the mini-curriculum would be, but I submit to you that without that this planet will not be transformed. It explodes your mind to think of five pastors preaching the same sermon on a Sunday in five different churches. But it is that kind of discipline that is required for corporateness, to get the job done of catalyzing the vision, of catalyzing freedom, enabling people to make new decisions in the midst of their everyday lives.

33. The Local Church is the Body of Christ and the Hope of the World. And you and I are here to see that the Local Church is renewed and catapaulted into the future as the vehicle by which every man is given the authentic alternative of a role in history that will be the center of whatever New Social Vehicle will emerge in the 21st century.

- D. Cramer