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Profound Vocation as Mission

Have any of you been asked as you have made rounds talking about Town Meetings, "Who is that group?" I was not asked the question, but the other day I was given the answer. Someone said, "Aren't you part of that group that about a year ago bought out the Ecumenical Institute?" And I said, "Yes."

These last six months, since we last met here as a group of Guardians, have been an exciting time for me. I would guess that each of you could stand here just as well as I and talk about the journey that all of us have been on - doing all kinds of things that we did not think we knew how to do before.

All kinds of things have been happening in Town Meeting. Some of us have gotten into some interesting situations. The other night I made a call in Tatum, Texas at the invitation of the Kiwanis Club. Tatum is a town in east Texas, a very thriving community of 700 souls. When I showed up at the Kiwanis Club there were eight people there counting myself. I talked about Town Meeting '76, what a fine project it is, and how it would benefit the city of Tatum. Then I asked if there were any questions. They sat there for a minute and finally an old man in bib overalls, who had been sitting on one side in the back, stood up and gave my speech over again. He said that he had lived in Tatum, Texas all of his life and as long as he could remember the people in that community had been fussing with one another about what their grandfathers did to each other fifty years ago. The Town Meeting was the first opportunity that he had soon in fifty years that could bring that town together. It turned out that the old guy with the bib overalls owns about half of the county. They are going to have a Town Meeting, and they have a steering committee now.

I had a different experience just the night before last. I had been in another east Texas town, Henderson. It is a little bit bigger; it has about 15,000 people. Several weeks ago I spoke to one of their Kiwanis Clubs about Town Meeting. Some of the leaders in that club got interested and thought it was a good idea, but they really did not know how to use it. I suggested that what they ought to do in their community would be to call a meeting of a group of people in Henderson who know how to get things done, to gather those people who were decision-makers and who could accomplish a task if they really put their minds to it. So I went home. About three days later the phone rang. They said, "Charles, we have your meeting set up for you." Then I asked, "Okay, who do you have coming?" They replied, "Oh well, on the night of April the 8th you are on the agenda to appear before the City Council of Henderson, Texas. You will make your pitch about Town Meeting. They will vote on whether to have one or not." So I showed up on Thursday night. When I got there I discovered that my arrival was front-page news. The headline story in the town newspaper that day was that the City Council will discuss the possibility of holding a Town Meeting in Henderson. The media was there with the TV cameras and recorders. Thus it was with some nervousness that I made my presentation to the Council. After asking if there were any questions I sat down. Before I really knew what had happened, one of the Councilmen, actually a Councilwoman, had made a

motion and they had voted unanimously to hold a Town Meeting. That was exciting. I still do not know what the outcome will be, but they did instruct the Mayor to appoint a steering committee.

There have been other things happening. Some of us have been leading workshops. All I want to say about leading workshops is that if you have not led one you need to do it before the month of April is over. Many of us here have done the nitty-gritty work of serving on steering committees, or heading them. But, as I look back over the last six months of Town Meetings, what I am most aware of is that it has been a lot of fun. These months have been very exciting.

Then there is Social Demonstration. My goodness, the stories that are coming back from those Social Demonstration projects! A few of us have been lucky enough to have had a chance to participate. A year ago when I took part in the Guardian's consult, one of the things that we were told to do was to go home and get passports. Being an obedient sort of fellow, I went home and applied for a passport. Now what I want to tell you is this: if you do not have a passport you need to go home now and apply for one. There is, in some cases of old reprobates like me, some checking the government wants to do to see if you really are who you claim to be and if you have committed any felonies lately. It takes a little while. It took about six months for me to get mine. There are Guardians who have done other things related to Social Demonstration. Some of you have put up the money, the hard cold cash, that it takes to pull off the miracles that have been taking place in the projects.

The third part of that circle around the Pentagon on the wall is Intra-Global Movement. As I look back over the last six months of my participation in this Global Movement I feel like I am a part of something that is on the verge of turning the world on its ear. If you do not have that same kind of feeling I think it is because you have not been paying attention. It is exciting! The Guardians are playing an important part. We are doing all kinds of things. Guardians are working with Metro Cadres and the Primal Community Experiment, playing various roles in Development efforts, working with the Religious Houses in their planning and helping them carry out those plans. We have been taking part in every phase of the work of the Movement. That has been exciting for me. I suppose that the basic question that all of us face this weekend as we meet, is perhaps this: "What would it mean for this body of Guardians gathered here and the hundreds of others at home whom we represent, to really decide to intensify our own personal engagement in this Global Spirit Movement?" I think that is the question that we are going to be talking about this weekend.

As I have tried to think about that question, my problem has been my own personal tendency to think too small. I think in terms of the categories that are familiar to me and those I am accustomed to.

The first, and I think the most important, is that intensification of our engagement in this mission depends on and is based on a decision. Now, in a sense, there is nothing new about that. Decisions are not a new thing for this group of people. You decided that you would be here this morning.

You decided that you would do whatever it is that you have done in this Movement over the last six months or the last year. What I am trying to point to is a new depth of decision. A decision to get more deeply involved as Guardians than ever before, to go a little farther than ever before, perhaps to risk more than we have ever decided we could risk before in order to see that the job that needs to happen, happens.

Secondly, Town Meeting. What would it mean for Town Meeting if the Guardians decided to intensify our efforts? Another way to phrase that is, "What new decision is history requiring of us as Guardians about Town Meeting?" Maybe for some it is the decision that I can lead a Town Meeting workshop. I had to make that decision. I led one and I have been having a ball doing it ever since. I got comfortable doing that, then I was down in Houston and Don Clark eased up to me and said, "By the way, Charlie, you need to be ready before the month of April is out to be the orchestrator of a Town Meeting and make the talk." Now that required a new decision, one that I am still working on. Maybe another new decision that some of us need to make is to decide to get out and hit the road to work with Kiwanis Clubs and Jaycee Chapters, to decide that we can, in fact, take off one or two days a week from whatever job or profession we work at to see that these Town Meetings get set up. That would require a decision on our part. Maybe another role the Guardians need to play in connection with Town Meeting is to ask some impertinent questions like, "What comes next after Town Meeting?" or "What do we do when this Bicentennial horse that we have been riding gets tired?" I have the feeling from some of the contacts that I have been making that those questions may not be too far off. I have gone charging into some towns lately and said, "I have a new Bicentennial program that I would like to talk to you about." They either yawn or start backpeddling just as fast as they can. So I think that as Guardians we have the responsibility to raise questions like, "What are the new images?" "What are the new forms?" "What is the new story?" These are questions required to keep Global Community Forum rolling in the United States of America throughout the next year. I think that not only do we have the responsibility to raise those questions, but we have the responsibility to work with our colleagues in the Order to find the answers to them.

Now let me say a word or two about Social Demonstration. What are the new decisions that we as Guardians face regarding Social Demonstration? Well, one obvious one is to go on a consult. If I had been given more than twenty-four hours to decide to go to Kawangware, I am certain that I would not have gone. But I am glad I went because that was really an exciting trip. But that is not what this talk is about. There is another decision that some of us need to make about Social Demonstration. That will be to go to one of the Social Demonstration sites for six months or two years. As mentioned last night, Roger Guissinger from Baton Rouge is not here this weekend. He went back to Maliwada to build dams and whatever else is necessary, on our behalf. There may be other Guardians who need to make that kind of a decision. I would submit that is a decision that you could point to and say, "That is what I mean by the intensification of missional engagement for Guardians." Maybe we need to ask some questions in Social Demonstration. "What is next?" "How many?" "What are the criteria for selecting the Social Demonstration sites?" Another thing that we need to do

is to get ourselves organized. Maybe the Medical Professionals that met before the rest of us got here have taken a step in that direction. But we Guardians need to get organized. We need to know who has what skills, who can pull which string, and who can get a particular job done. We need to have that information in a form in which it is readily and instantly available. It needs to be accurate. We need the kind of information that we could go to instantly and find out what Guardian we need where.

Then, let me go to Intra-Global Movement. What new decisions face us as Guardians relative to the whole global enterprise that we have decided to be a part of? The thing that occurs to me about the Movement is that we simply need to get involved with the Order, with the Religious Houses, in depth, if we are to serve as real Guardians. We need to work with those people so closely that we know what is going on and what is needed. We need to work in Metro Cadres and in Development. We can help in those areas if we are knowledgeable about what is going on because we have been involved. I think that we could help by raising the kind of questions and helping to formulate the answers that will serve the Movement down into the 1980's. That is a role that Guardians can play. An example, right now is that the Dallas Religious House is facing the expiration of its lease in six weeks. The building was sold and this has created the necessity of a move by the House. That necessity has in turn raised some other questions.

There are questions like, "What does a Religious House need to look like in 1976, or on into the 80's?" "What image should a Religious House present to the world?" "What facilities are needed as part of a functional Religious House?" I don't know all of the answers to any of those questions. I suspect that a Religious House does not need to look too different from a moderately sound business. The furnishings, at least in the public areas of the House, need to be somewhat more sophisticated than the "Early Garage Sale" style that some of us are accustomed to. It may already be the time when the seediest old house on the block is not an adequate office for a group that has decided to work with the political and economic leaders of our cities on a day-by-day basis. A functional Religious House in the cities in North America ought to include a very fine small conference center. I believe that on the other side of Town Meetings, we will be holding a lot of weekend seminars. I don't know if those are going to be LENS courses, or RS-I or both, or something we have never heard of before, but they are coming and we need to be ready for them.

Now, that raises another question. "How in the world do you pay for all of that?" I think that here again is a place where Guardians can and ought to get involved - in Religious House finances. How many people in this room own a Religious House? Right now, there is another Guardian who is not here because she is down in Dallas working on a plan to put together a group of Guardians who would buy a particular building that we spotted and then lease it to the Order at a loss and take the tax write-off for twenty years. I suggest that that is another way we could intensify our engagement in this mission.

Then I want to raise one other question about money. I think that the time has come that we need to at least step back and look at the story that

the Order has been telling itself and all of us for all of these years about self-support. The story that each Religious House, each Area, is self-supporting financially. It seems to me that we have reached a point in history that we need to rethink that because we have come to the time that we need more, rather than fewer, of the Order people released to work, not at some secular job that keeps the light bill paid, but out on the road getting the job done working on the mission. I think that it is feasible to raise those kinds of questions if we Guardians are ready to pick up our part of the task of financing the mission that we are on.

There is also Development. Haven't we Guardians reached the point yet where we would never again have to be the object of the development call? Haven't we gotten mature enough that we could take the initiative to do what is necessary ourselves without even being asked? Even beyond that, couldn't we function as part of Development by providing the names and setting up appointments when a Development team comes to town, even going with them if that is appropriate? I know that some of you are doing that already, or even going beyond that. Couldn't we ourselves get trained to do that kind of development job so that it would not even be necessary for the team to travel to Texas or to wherever to do development? Now I was checking on Development last night and I learned this statistic. It is the responsibility of Development Centrum each month to raise \$164,000 minimum just to keep the bills paid. My first reaction was that I was amazed that the figure was that low. Then the thought occurred to me that the group of Guardians in this room, if we decided, could get out and raise \$164,000 in two days and then, if we decided to, we could go back and do it again next week. Now that would take a decision. But we could do it if we decided to intensify our commitment to this Movement in that particular way. It may just be that some kind of decision like that is what history is requiring of us right now.

Those are some thoughts on intensifying involvement. You will recognize that I have been guilty of exactly that lack of nerve or lack of creativity that I told you about at the outset because I have talked only in terms of old familiar categories. I guess what I need for you to do is to push at me to think harder and maybe we need to prod each other to jostle our brains around a little to think and then move out into this unexplored territory that lies out in the future for all of us as Guardians.

Now, finally let me say a personal word about the experience of missional intensification as I have experienced it over the last year. I set foot in this building for the first time exactly a year ago. The only way that I can think of to talk about the experience that I have had and the journey that I have personally been on over the last year in this group of Guardians would be to talk about them in terms of the categories of Hope and Love and Faith.

More than once, as I have taken part in Town Meetings, I have caught a glimpse of Hope being born for the first time in people. People see that ~~it is possible for them to pick up their lives and move out into a new kind of future.~~ I think that I have seen Hope begin to stir around in communities where Town Meetings have occurred. It is like a gentle little breeze that

has not quite decided which way it is going to blow yet, but it is there. I don't know if I really see it yet. Maybe it is something that I can barely hear, off beyond the horizon. But I think it is there and I would call that the extension of Hope, as it becomes a really strong wind that sweeps across this country and around the globe. The Hope that I am talking about is not a hope in something that you can grab hold of. It is just Hope. It is Hopefulness. It is hope in life itself. It is the Mystery in the center of those triangles that I do not really ever look at head on. It is something you get a glimpse of out of the corner of your eye once in a while.

And then Love. I saw genuine love on the faces of the old men and women and young people in Kawangware. As tears streamed down their faces and mine, we got ready to leave that village. There were two young men who took part in that consult, brothers. One of them is named Rufus Kamau. Rufus called my aside one day, the day before we were going to leave. We sat off to one side and talked for a while. I let him do most of the talking. He talked about the new vision of possibility that he had seen that week for that community and told me a little bit about himself and his background. Rufus is a college graduate, as are many of the young men in Kawangware. He works there in the village with his brother and his mother. They own and operate one of the little retail stores in the village.

Rufus' mother is from the Kikuyu tribe which is the predominant tribe in Kawangware. Rufus' father is a Masai, a tribe that lives a distance out from Nairobi and is somewhat less settled in their life style than most of the other tribes. Rufus told me one of the legends of the Masai in which the Masai own all of the cattle in the world. (Now that is disconcerting to a Texan!) He told me that from time to time there is little bit of friction about that, especially if the Masai discover a Kikuyu farmer down the road who has acquired a milk cow or two. The Masai, because they understand that they own all of the cattle, will go down the road to liberate that Kikuyu cow and take it back where it really belongs, with the Masai. When I heard that story, the only thing that I could think of was that the Development Centrum needs to know about these people and do a little bit of in-kind work with those Masai.

Then Rufus stunned me when he asked, "Charles, could you possibly arrange to stay in Kenya a couple of weeks, because if you could I would like to take you with me to visit with my father who lives out there with the Masai tribe?" He explained to me that we would drive as far as the road would take us. Then we would get out and hike for about fifteen miles back farther into the country. There we would be met by a delegation from the tribe. At that point they would strip us down and give us a good thorough ceremonial scrubbing to get all of the bad spirits under control. Then we would be led into the settlement where the Masai live and would be welcomed in a second ceremony which included drinking some concoction of cow's milk and blood. (I am not sure how I would have handled that.) Rufus make it very clear to me that I would not be treated any differently than he would be, because they had not yet learned about racial discrimination. It was a hard thing for me to say, "No, Rufus, I cannot stay any longer." Then I tried, and I had a lump in my throat as I did so, to thank him for the tremendous honor that the invitation had been.

I have pondered this a number of times since; the mysterious bond of human understanding, trust and love that can transcend barriers of culture and language and race, as I shared on that morning in Novemeber with that young African man. That particular experience, I would submit, is simply a hint at what I want to talk about when I talk about Love. I do not have the words to say any more about it. I think that I would say, though, that experiences like the one I described are possible only because of the mysterious power of Love that is loose today.

The final category is Faith. I do not know how to talk about Faith coherently. I do know that it does not have anything to do with believing this or that or the other idea, although it may be important for some of us to believe various things. The Faith that I would try to point to has more to do with decision than it has to do with belief. It has to do with doing the deed that history requires of us. It means being the faithful one with our own lives at every moment. During the past year I have caught only a glimpse of that kind of faith. The occasions in which I have begun to sense myself as being that kind of faithful one have been rare, occasional, fragmentary and incomplete. But they have wetted my appetite. I guess that I would just say that I am going to try for a better batting average this next year because I really do wonder what richness of experience of Hope and Love and Faith lie out there in the future, out there to be lived in this next year. And I am eager to find out, aren't you?

- Charles Bush-