

THE STATE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH EXPERIMENT

Research Centrum, August, 1974

I. FOCUS ON THE CONGREGATION

1) The first four years of the experimentation phase of the Local Church Project have been completed, bringing to fruition the Actualizing and the Development stages. The first two years saw the Tactical System developed in the Summer of 1970 actualized through strategically selected participating congregations and establishment of the Back-up System as a means of maintaining continental commonality and continued research. During the second two years, the development stage of the project produced refinement and classification of tactical methods and the expansion of congregational participation across North America.

2) Thus far, the project has primarily focused on the Congregation dynamic of the Local Church. Tactics were actualized to expand the congregation's vision and move it toward equipping leadership for assuming responsibility for the Parish. This leadership, or auxiliary, has rediscovered the power of corporate discipline in mission, developed prowess in tactical thinking and method, and released a profound motivity for acting out a renewed vision of the Church's crucial role in history and community.

3) Now, some 172 churches are part of the project in configurations of 54 Galaxies with approximately 1100 clergy and lay members picking up the task of the global and local recovery of the Church. These statistics number substantially more than the six-year projection of the Inclusive Designs set forth in 1970, which anticipated 48 Galaxies and 128 actualizing congregations by 1974. The 44 churches and 6 Galaxies more than projected as well as moving into the third stage, the period of Demonstration (1974-76), call for reflection and evaluation.

II. THE FRUIT OF FOUR YEARS

4) Let us look at the results of the experiment from several vantage points—in relationship to the established Christian denominations, in relationship to the Spirit Movement, and in relationship to the congregations themselves. In 1970, as the project was being initiated, denominations were coming to the end of a period characterized by various forms of experimentation in liturgy, education, service, specialized ministries and other attempts to re-articulate the mission of the church in times of change. By the seventies, the motivity for and authenticity of these limited experiments were severely undercut both by their own interior inadequacy and by the shifts of the times as economic and political forces drove home the point that our age demanded a more adequate response. Consciously or unconsciously, the Church was frightened by these historic changes and its own inability to

cope. The Local Church Project thus sought to be a sign of comprehensive renewal with emphasis on holding the tension of the global and the local, spirit vitality and social responsibility and individual creativity and corporate commonality.

5) With deep doubt that its own life could be renewed, the historic Church in many quarters was at first offended by the birth of the Local Church Project. It expected that the project, like other experiments it had known in the past ten years, would quickly pass away. Further, through working with and within the structures of the denominations and congregations the project evoked a radical vocational question for both the Church and churchmen. However, as the four years have progressed, and as denominations have seen the project to be about the tasks of providing tools, equipping leadership and being a sign of renewal, the historic Church now stands in a different relationship to this experiment and, therefore, to the Spirit Movement as a whole. Particularly in the past two years, hierarchy of the Church increasingly have sought out and requested seminars, consults and methods sharing from participating churches, especially their clerical leadership.

6) The main thrust of the project has focused on the Congregation through tactical methods not intended to create new programs or congregational structures but designed to breathe new spirit, elicit missional vision and provide practical tools. All aspects of the congregation's program were exposed to these intentions in relationship to yearly objectives. The six to eight Auxiliary members from each church saw their role as implementing tactics within what existed rather than planning the program of their congregation. The most overt result has been the development of a core of leadership in each participating church. In a number of congregations, a corporate clergy has emerged including both the ordained and the laity. Another is the corps of highly trained, theologically awakened and spiritually effective local people who see anew the role of the Congregation and are willing to expend themselves for its renewal. In many cases, the ordained clergy family has made a renewed vocational decision. Men and women have become spirit giants who were previously ready to abandon the local congregation because of the state of the Church, the times and their own practical and spiritual unpreparedness but now see it as a viable focus of mission.

7) Across the continent, congregational life itself has been affected, primarily by being re-called to its responsibility for its parish or community. Obviously, though done through many indirect tactics, this is the preparation for the next stage of the experiment, the stage where the congregation turns outside itself toward the world. Furthermore, this has produced the re-engagement of all life phases, or generations, into the missional life of the church. Across the Project, one sees the creative participation of elders and youth. Elders who image themselves as no longer useful and youth who image themselves as vocationally dormant now play vital roles in their congregations and community. Also, forms of spirit life relevant to the post-modern world, coupled with an authentic turn to social responsibility, account for the return of the male dynamic to the life of the congregation. Men have assumed new leadership roles in most of the churches in the experiment and see that congregational life, vocation and occupation are a single thrust. They have seen a means of significant engagement consistent with the world in which they

live their daily lives, This, along with all of these fruits, is an indication of the creation of the spiritual climate necessary for congregations to fulfill social responsibility for the parish.

8) In relationship to the Movement, the Local Church Project has been the major focus of the movemental development in North America during these past four years. The training of auxiliaries in regular weekly meetings has raised up a body of movemental troops who have theological clarity, global awareness and a grasp of radical corporateness. This force of 1100 is the backbone of regional pedagogues and metro leadership. Many have become key leadership in the Symbolic Order. They have embodied increasingly the local-global style as the ones responsible, not merely for their local situation, but for the whole globe. They have become dynamical tactical thinkers and actors. In the fifteen Replication Galaxies, the priorship has come from trained Galaxy leadership rather than the Symbolic Order.

III. METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

9) During this four year period, the Project has been an experiment in the arena of methods development. Undergirded by a universal Tactical System, the participating congregations brought their own experience to move on tactical refinement and methodological sophistication. For example, at the initiation of the project, the participating auxiliaries devised the means by which tactics are actualized indirectly in such a way that releases vision and creativity and shifts the imagination of the congregation. Using their experience from across the continent, they came together in December, 1971, to write the first Tactical Actualization Manual. Throughout, increasing understanding of dynamical thinking, social process, and trend analysis have enabled them to relate tactics more effectively to strategic objectives. In a period dominated by teleological, or goal-centered, thinking, use of the Tactical System avoided this static type of planning by means of a tertiary tactic level timeline design which forced them to act tangentially and indirectly rather than problematically.

10) Contradiction analysis is key to the system. Such analysis has allowed building tactics that augment or re-direct the trends which are shaping the future by resolving the inherent contradictions, the result of which is of a different quality than merely solving a problem. Particularly in the last year, the movement and the Galaxies have gained deeper methodological insight in this arena. While the tactical actualization has used a rather direct one-to-one relationship between contradiction, objective and tactic, refinement of contradiction analysis indicates an intuitive, transrational gap between the paramount contradictions and the tactical means of resolution. As the Project moves into the next stage, effective recognition and implementation of this gap, will undergird its methods and move it forward.

11) One signal aspect of this methodological development involves the means to move tactic building to the local level. The proven effectiveness of the Tactical System built for the Congregation and the additional wisdom garnered from practical experience being

built into additional Parish Tactics provides the basis for local auxiliaries to design local implementation. In the earlier stages of the Project, when building corporateness and methods skills were the demand, such a move would have been a disaster for the global renewal of the church. It would be dangerous even now, save for the common universal vision of the renewed Church held in these systems which form the basis of the Practical Vision of every galaxy in the Project. This wisdom stands irreplaceable in forming the common memory of awakened churchmen.

IV. CONTEXT OF CHURCH-WORLD TODAY

12) The Demonstration stage of the Experimentation Phase of the Local Church Project must take account of the state of church renewal across the globe and the state of the globe in which the experiment is called to be a sign. Both have made significant shifts since 1970. Briefly stated, the Church is in a crisis period and even in the midst of an increased awareness of responsibility for the world, the Church knows her sociological forms to be incapable of freighting her vision. The flaw is not moral or psychological, but a facet of the times which call for radically altered structures both imaginally and practically to carry the mission. While various forms of denominational and ecumenical restructuring have taken place, the fundamental questions raised still remain to be dealt with. The increasing drive toward significant missional engagement on the one hand, and new quests for spiritual rootage on the other usually appear as two separate thrusts. The former, yearning for comprehensive, realistic expenditure for the whole world, proceeds without thinking through all the issues and, consequently, burns out its adherents or lapses into immediacy or reductionism. The latter, yearning for depth, authentic selfhood before the Mystery without considering the totality of human existence falls victim to images and mythologies that result in spiritual drowning. Only as these two dominant concerns are realized as one in the post-modern, radically secular context will the new sociological form of the Church become a reality.

13) The world has also made significant shifts in the past four years. The collapse of political forms globally has pushed to a new sense of the responsibility of local man. A sense of common global destiny is now abroad, bringing with it the desire for practical engagement in the recreation of community. The commonality of crisis has, at the same time, revealed the commonality of possibility. Today, individuals and groups are interested in training and education related to the question of human vocation, rather than abstract data gathering or simply ensuring physical survival. This yearning calls the Church to raise a demonstration sign showing how local man can, in fact, reformulate his community in a way that is significant not merely for his local situation but for the re-creation of the globe. The Local Church Project now turns to this global re-creation of the local community.

V. TURN TO THE PARISH

14) From the project's inception, the parish has been its intended thrust. The focus on the Congregation emphasized preparation to care for its parish. Although requiring more time

than originally expected, the imaginal shift necessary for the Congregation has brought the experiment to the parish stage.

15) In fact, work in the parish dynamic has already been going on. The 5th City Project in Chicago, a parish-oriented experiment, pioneered in the initial research and experimentation with the means of reformulation and the primary methods for the Tactical Systems of the Local Church Project. The pilot work in Guild formation in Uptown, Chicago, performed the research and experimentation for the Guild Launching Experiment around 51 religious Houses in North America during 1973. By working on the parish through the Religious Houses with an adequately trained backup group, it was possible to research the necessary tactics while keeping the congregational aspect of the experiment going through the Local Church Project. The Guild Launching experiment developed tactics for initiating the Guild (25 week time-line) and tactics for expanding and sustaining the Guild (52-week Time-line). Through the Global Research assembly of 1974, both sets of tactics have been refined and will form the basis of the Parish Tactical System of the Primal Community Experiment (originally the Local Church Project).

16) The sensitive and responsive body of auxiliaries who have been actualizing tactics to bring renewal to congregational life for the sake of the parish will now also actualize tactics toward the creation and sustaining of the Guild within the Parish. In the coming year, one parish within each configuration of the Galaxies will be selected for this actualization, with all of the congregational auxiliaries becoming the trained back-up forces working corporately in that parish area. In so doing, they will also be refining the tactics and gaining the necessary training for replication in their own parishes at a later time.

17) The past four years have brought us not only to the point of turning to the parish but also to where the Experiment can now be employed by the movement in each penetrated area and region across the globe. The experiment is now adequately tested and refined and the movement across the globe is ready for its use. The global Church and the World require it.

18) Such global expansion is a forceful move toward the articulation of the new sociological form of the Church. This requires careful work in the theological and theoretical dynamics of the Church, its function and role. It will require further work in the theology of Love and Transparentized Christianity, especially since we can no longer assume that the experiment will be demonstrated in situations where the historical Christian Church is the dominant articulation of the People of God. It requires that we do the necessary homework in defining the applicability in all settings and in experiencing the reality of the Church in every culture which is in and through, and yet beyond, any given present social manifestation.

19) The times are right for this step forward. We enter it with both fear and fascination - fascination with the known, yet unknown possibility based on what we have already seen

and fear, and with the unknown, yet known future form which the Church will be called to take for her global task of responsibility for the world before the Mystery.