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FAITH-FORMATION OF THE LAITY
AND RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

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TO
MY HUSBAND
WHO HAS SHARED MY FAITH JOURNEY
THROUGH MUCH OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
AND TO OUR CHILDREN
WHO HAVE NOT ONLY SHARED OUR JOURNEY
BUT WHO WILL BE CONTINUING THEIR OWN JOURNEYS
WITH THEIR FAMILIES
INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:

MAY GOD GRANT THAT WE AND ALL GOD'S PEOPLE
MAY SEEK TO MAKE CHOICES THAT LEAD TO LIFE
AND TO SERVICE OF THE KINGDOM



I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This integration paper is about God's formation process--his loving patience with slow learners, the largesse of his gifts and his persistent call. It is also about human response, especially the difficulties involved in responding faith-fully while immersed in twentieth century culture which is frequently so unfriendly to human wholeness. This culture is the historical context for the human/spiritual journey of the People of God in the late twentieth century. Reflecting upon my own lived experience during the greater part of this century, I have come to believe that a critical consciousness of this culture has much to do with our ability or inability to respond to God's call in these times. Most serious Christians are acquainted with some sort of a formation process in their individual lives. In this paper, I presume familiarity with individual experience of Christian growth and I focus on the social aspects of this process, starting with my experience of family life.

Several years ago my husband and I celebrated our fortieth wedding anniversary, and with the help of friends I selected the readings for the liturgical celebration. In retrospect, the first reading for that occasion seems to sum up what God's formation process has been for our family. It

is taken from the book of Deuteronomy where Moses is giving his farewell address to the Jewish people:

...I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live...(Deut. 30:19).

I now realize that the formation process within our family has been one of struggling to choose life. In order to illustrate what this has meant, I will begin this paper by sharing my own human/spiritual journey through the twentieth century and my changing perspectives stimulated by a rapidly changing culture and the theological shifts of Vatican II. I will identify cultural influences which helped or hindered human wholeness as my husband and I struggled to integrate our daily lives with our faith and to enable the faith-development of our seven children. A primary discovery was that a counter-cultural stance was necessary at times for human and Christian reasons and that a small community of faith was necessary to sustain us on our journey.

Stimulated during the 1960's and 1970's by the social upheavals of the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam war protests as well as by environmental and feminist concerns, I began to reflect on faith and culture. I sensed an in-breaking of something new and despite my fears of social unrest, I developed a strong sense of hope. I began to realize that God really did concern himself with human history and that human events were under his guidance. The social encyclicals of John XXIII and Paul VI as well as the new insights of Vatican II were a source of real consolation.

At the same time I was surprised and saddened because parish life took little notice. The parishes in which I have participated over the years have seemed to pay scant attention to human culture. Pastoral concern was centered on the Church and on individual needs and problems, and there seemed to be a chasm separating Church from my life experience. Little by little my conscience and life circumstances encouraged my energetic involvement in many causes leading to constructive social change. My support group, besides family, was interparochial and ecumenical. There was no way that I could turn to my parish for enlightenment or guidance.

It was years later before I began to understand and could express what had been happening in my life. Issues of human rights, war and peace and environmental concerns were religious issues and God was insistently calling me to enlarge my horizons and to see his plan in a larger perspective. A year in Brazil gave me an international point-of-view, and I felt embarrassed by United States' manipulation of economics and politics in a developing country. I returned home feeling that the United States needed to change the way it related to other countries and that the American dream of "liberty and justice for all" was being distorted. I was very conscious that my prayer was changing but there was no one with whom I could discuss my spiritual life. At some point I read that Paul VI was recommending that contemporary Christians should pray with the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other. It was then that I began

to feel very much at peace and was able to encourage others to consider this kind of prayer which was so helpful to me.

As my life continued to change, our family began to struggle with questions of life-style. Our counter-cultural stance led us to examine the responsible use of food, money, time and automobiles and we became involved in environmental questions. However, despite our best efforts, we were far from immune to the destructive elements in American culture. Crises seemed to occur regularly in my husband's absence. It was about this time that I discovered the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. My association with the Christian Life Community movement introduced me to Ignatian spirituality and I made a number of individually-guided retreats. I found them very helpful, personally, and supportive of my social awareness and prayer. I began to read my Bible, especially the Old Testament, and anything I could find on developments in the Church in Latin America. I could understand the talk about a "theology of liberation" and I wondered what liberation would be like in the North American context. My experience of the Exercises reinforced my insights.

Wrestling with North American culture and its effects on my family was a devastating experience. There was so much which hindered human wholeness. My husband's flourishing career took precious time from family life and his absences were a distinct handicap to our parenting efforts. There were times when I felt like a single parent with seven

children. For the younger children junior high school was a very negative experience. Their academic motivation disappeared and their lives began to revolve around early-teen peer groups which experimented with drugs, alcohol and God knows what else. I felt as though all my hopes and dreams were dying and there was no recourse. It was then that I began to understand unconditional love and I became very active with other parents in school and ecumenical church groups searching for a way to communicate values in education. One such group worked with the school system's curriculum review committee for social studies. I was shocked to find that there was no over-all philosophy guiding the curriculum--just a designated amount of information and skills to be acquired. Our group proposed a philosophy for social studies which would foster a positive attitude towards life and a sense of connectedness with the human family and with the environment.¹ Without my realizing it, mission was becoming central in my life. It had to do with challenging a deteriorating culture and a silent Church which seemed to be out-of-touch with social problems and pre-occupied with formal "Catholic" education of children and institutional maintenance. I began to feel that the Church itself needed to be evangelized. From these experiences I have culled three questions on which I plan to reflect in this paper:

What is the relationship between Church and Culture?
What is the self-understanding of the Church today?
What is the meaning of the Incarnation today?

After years of reading, reflection and social involvement, I began to search for my late-in-life vocation. In the late winter of 1981, I made the full Spiritual Exercises in a thirty-day enclosed retreat. That retreat is still a source of grace. My vocation has something to do with the renewal of the Church, particularly with the formation of the laity and with the integration of faith and daily life. In addition to further experience of the Exercises in the form of a nine-month retreat in daily life, I have attended workshops for Retreat Directors and Group Guides and have spent six years as a part-time student studying spirituality and theology at the Washington Theological Union. I have dared to dream of centers for lay spirituality and I have dreamed of a renewed American Church in which on-going faith-formation of the laity is a priority as well as the continuing education of clergy--a church which reflects on its self-understanding in the light of the mission of Jesus and which increasingly understands the death and resurrection of Jesus in its own life.

Looking back on my religious life-journey, I am beginning to recognize how unique and special this journey has been. My religious roots are both Protestant and Catholic and I value the heritage of both traditions. Like many women of my generation I have been professionally trained yet my major life-work has been within the home raising a large family. However, my life has been far from cloistered within a domestic circle. At this writing I am

completing professional training for yet another career, one which includes and integrates my previous life-experience-- a social science perspective, experience of family life, a keen awareness of the necessary tension between faith and culture and an energizing sense of mission. My new "career" is challenging me at a time of life when most people have already begun their retirement years. The thread of continuity has been my growing ability to reflect on my life experience in the light of faith. Sometimes I reflect that it took Jesus thirty years to prepare for his brief three-year mission. I cannot complain if it takes me longer!

I have a particular concern for the Church and for all the domestic churches, families as communities of faith, which have so much to share with the larger Church. My experience has taught me that vocations are discovered and nourished within families and small faith-communities. My mission has to do with encouraging lay vocations and providing resources to nourish them. I also have a sense of mission to the American Church which has not yet made listening to lay experience and the discovery and nourishment of lay vocations a priority in pastoral planning, particularly at the parish level. My concern for the Church goes even further. I find that I must continually raise questions about the relationship between Church and culture, about the self understanding of the Church and about mission. Along with the many lay-persons who contributed to the Synod '87 process and who expressed their concerns about a

clericalized church, I am very uncomfortable with pastoral leaders who fail to encourage a discerning, participatory Church and whose sense of mission is circumscribed by clerical and parochial perspectives. I ask what the Spirit of Jesus is saying to the Church and to the churches. Hopefully, this paper will make some contribution to a process of reflection on the faith-formation of the laity, the Church and culture, and the Ignatian Exercises as a school of discernment and as a resource for the renewal of the Church.

Notes

¹See Appendix No. 1. Note the sexist language fifteen years ago in 1973!

II. GOD'S PLAN--CHOOSING LIFE: THE HUMAN PERSON FULLY HUMAN AND ALIVE

For as long as I can remember I have been reflecting on my life experience in the light of my attempts to be a good human being and a person of faith. Being a good human being and a person of faith were first defined for me by my childhood family experiences. My parents were both active in our local Methodist Church as lay religious educators and they were concerned that their children have a sense of accountability to God as well as to themselves as parents. Formation of conscience was important as were right relationships within the family. There was also concern for the good of others in the surrounding community. Sometimes I accompanied my mother when she made home visits to the families of children in the Sunday School. I recall several occasions when my parents sternly warned us against participating in the neighborhood persecution of a Jewish family which had moved nearby. At times, we were counter-cultural, too. I can remember that we were not allowed to go to movies on Sundays when our Catholic playmates did. Besides, each movie that we did see had to be evaluated; there was no assumption that all movies were beneficial.

As I grew up, my childhood formation led me into a search for knowing exactly who Jesus was. Liberal Protes-

tantism had arrived at our Methodist Church in the person of a new pastor. Mother's sturdy faith collapsed, and when we moved to another part of town, we all joined a Congregational Church. Mother wanted to spare us the pain of losing our faith as she had. Externally, our family involvement in church continued but there was a new dimension. From the pulpit we heard "social progress and morality" while the professional choir sang marvelous passages from Handel's Messiah. Reinhold Niebuhr was a visiting preacher. Mother's search led her into Scripture study and church history and eventually into the Catholic Church. My quest had to do with the identity of Jesus and the truth of his claims. Three years after my mother's conversion I became a Catholic.

However, my search for religious truth continued. My studies in philosophy and social studies in a small Catholic college and later, my graduate studies in social work kept raising questions. Because of my friendship for a black fellow student in social work, I had many new experiences. With her I experienced and felt deeply the rejection of black people in American culture. My Master's thesis researched the changing status of voluntary youth groups in Nazi Germany during the 1930's and early 1940's. I had access to primary historical material on the Hitler Youth and I interviewed a number of refugees. My studies made me profoundly aware of the persecution of Jewish people, the evils of totalitarianism and a largely silent Church. My new awareness of sin in its social dimension affected me deeply.

After a brief career in social work which reinforced my sensitivity to individual and social problems, I married and began raising a family. Now I was challenged personally to tend to the nurturing of the human and religious development of our children at the same time that I was being continually decentered by the changing relationships of family life. It was at this point that my husband and I felt a more intense need for community--other parents who were struggling with the human/religious development of their children. We finally found a group called "Sodality" in a neighboring Jesuit parish. Within this group we found nurturing for our own faith-journeys, community with like-minded parents and a sense of mission to a wider community.

As our seven children grew older we found ourselves challenged in many ways by the culture of the church as well as by American culture. We claimed our right as primary religious educators versus our church-centered pastor's approach which separated the children from the family for Sunday Mass and for special celebrations such as First Communion. Our broadening horizons involved us as host-family to foreign visitors from differing cultural and racial backgrounds. One of our fondest memories is of Hildegarde, still a close friend, who lived with us for two and a half years in the late 1950's while she earned a degree in social work. Hildy had spent her childhood taking notes and food to her father who had been jailed by the Nazis for helping Jews escape into Denmark. We learned many things from Hildegarde--

the necessity of taking a stand for reasons of conscience, the importance of using the political process responsibly and the urgency and anguish of reconciliation. Our kitchen table was the scene of a touching reconciliation between Hildy and a young Polish Jew, a colleague of my husband, who had concentration camp numbers tattooed on his arm.

In the 1960's we found ourselves responding to civil rights concerns, and we involved our older children in a project of tutoring inner city black youngsters. Through our diocesan Catholic Interracial Council we encouraged the integration of Catholic High Schools and urged our Bishops to take a public stand on race-relations. When we moved to another city, we sold our home to my husband's successor at the university, a distinguished black scholar with a Ph.D. in mathematics from Notre Dame. Our move integrated the university faculty, our neighborhood and the parish. At this point our countercultural stance became very uncomfortable but our family grew closer and stronger as a result. Confronting the culture of our neighborhood "Catholic ghetto" was particularly difficult. In order to be faithful to the Gospel we were obliged to confront our pastors and most of our Catholic neighbors. Our awareness of social sin was growing and problems lay not only within American culture but within the Church as well.

Several years later after moving to another part of the country, our counter-cultural stance found expression in support for young men opposing the Vietnam war (our own in-

cluded). Again, our parish was of little help. Our Methodist, Quaker and Mennonite friends were warmly supportive until finally a marvelous priest, who lived fifty miles away, found a way to be supportive. In yet a third part of the country we felt obliged to confront our pastor by taking a stand with parish lay leaders regarding the necessity of financial disclosure and accountability. Our parish was in crisis yet we were not really heard by parish or diocesan leadership. It seemed that a defensive and protective clerical culture had more power than Gospel values.

Our Brazilian experience, provided by the Fulbright program in the late 1960's, exposed our family to the sharp contrasts of wealth and poverty in a developing country. This disturbing experience led us to form a faith-community with other overseas Americans who were also feeling unsettled. Using Populorum Progressio as a resource, we reflected together on what it meant to be "rich" Americans in Brazil. That year was a turning point for us. God was revealing social sin and challenging us. I returned from Brazil with a deep-seated sense that the mission territory was not so much Brazil but our own country. I felt that consciousness needed to be raised on the American role in underdevelopment and that a changed response involved not only politics but the churches in North America. It seemed to me that the churches needed to become resources for a conversion process that moved beyond private faith. I felt that there needed to be awareness and acknowledgement of and

repentance for social sin as a necessary step in asking God to change us. This mission has shaped my life and my activity for almost twenty years.¹ It was with real joy that I welcomed the American Bishops' Pastoral Letter, Economic Justice for All, as a significant step in raising consciousness on these issues within the Catholic Church as well as outside it. With wide-spread television and newspaper coverage of contemporary social problems, God seems to be underlining the Bishops' efforts--encouraging a national reflection on our American and global experience and our need for change. I sense that even God has difficulty encouraging this sort of reflection within the churches! God was beginning to turn our lives upside down and he is not yet finished!

In my introduction and in this chapter I have sketched my faith-journey and identified the threads of continuity as learning to reflect on life experience in the light of faith, learning to distinguish between and to analyze what contributes to human flourishing and what does not, and learning to choose life. This pattern, which I call "God's formation process," has been a steady factor in my life, however imperfectly at times. Inevitably, on this journey which was shared within our family, there have been questions about life-style. I was always cautious about acquiring new possessions--a very practical concern when there are nine people within one household and sufficient but not extravagant resources. Then there was the burden, as homemaker, of keeping track of many surplus things, not to speak of necessary things

such as small children's shoes! However, I remember a real concern for what possessions might do to individual family members. I will never forget the Christmas when I unthinkingly bought a realistic toy gun for Peter who was an active seven-year old. Hildegarde, who was living with us at the time, was shocked at my choice. As we reflected together on her real-life experiences of war and violence, I became shocked at my own action. Taking away a gift presented further problems, so I eased my oversight of Peter's responsibility for his toys, and the toy gun disappeared somewhere in the neighborhood. Later, at an appropriate time, I discussed my mistake with Peter.

Learning to use television constructively was another life-style problem. I had very mixed feelings about it and I was determined that I would not allow the children to become addicted. Around dinner time when the children would watch a selected television show or two in the family room adjacent to the kitchen, I began to see the television commercials through the children's eyes. I found myself teaching them to talk back to the television commercials and to develop a kind of immunity to the endless promotion of "desirable" or "needed" items. I was apprehensive lest television determine the children's values so we learned to choose a few good programs which did not conflict with their responsibilities. The biggest lesson was to learn to turn the television off.

As the children grew older, we encountered the question of multiple automobile ownership--being forced to own two cars when we lived in a mid-sized town without adequate public transportation. No parent of teenagers needs to be reminded of the hazards and headaches of several cars and teen needs. We reverted to single-car ownership when we moved to a large city and situated ourselves so that all of us had access to public transportation. Life-style questions are endless. I could write a small book of stories about our adventures.

In our new location community relationships became increasingly important. We moved into a racially-mixed neighborhood and joined a mostly black parish. We were still dreaming Martin L. King's dream and were trying to incarnate it in our lives. I developed a profound awareness that no-one had moved away because we had moved into the area. We developed many new friendships in the parish and felt truly welcomed--a unique experience as far as parish life goes. The hospitality which was extended to us we, in turn, extended to family members in need. My own widowed mother lived with us for over ten years and now my handicapped mother-in-law shares our home. I cannot begin to count the number of social justice activists for whom we made space--young people who were testing their vocations to social change some of whom were living heroically on miniscule salaries. We supported their causes and prayed with

them. There were several African refugees, too, in our extended family.

The environment was important, too, as was our health. We learned to grow some of our own food organically and we learned to recycle things as much as possible. Our diet changed in ways better for our health and in the direction of simplicity. I might add that the changes in our life-style were not necessarily easy. Many times my husband and I were at different places in perceiving our need for change. Frequently, we moved two steps forward and one step back as we sought to adapt our changing life-style to our real life situation.

It was not until I began formal theological study that I was able to view my work within the family as ministry. Looking back at my own lived experience, both in my family of origin and in the family I have raised, I have developed an understanding of family as the domestic church with the parents as "co-pastors." The family is an intimate community which shapes faith and life for all its members. It is the place where human and Christian values are taught and encouraged--most of all by example and by reflecting on a shared vision.

A family that is becoming a faith-community begins to develop a good sense of God's loving care and his call to authentic relationships. Individual and shared prayer support the process of listening to God, of trying to discern his call and of responding with fidelity. Sinfulness is

connected with failure to listen to God and with disordered relationships. Family leadership encourages members to name the fault or sin and to ask forgiveness from the one offended and from God. Family meals are a necessary context for good relationships. As the family matures, this concern for listening to God and developing right relationships becomes visible outside the family and is shared in the context of the community and beyond. Anyone who is struggling to develop a family as a community of Christian life soon confronts our culture and finds that it is hostile to such an undertaking. Family as community-in-Christ is an ongoing contradiction to American individualistic life-styles and it continually decenters egotistical tendencies. As our family grew, we found ourselves challenging the American consumer life-style, ecological destructiveness, racial and sexual discrimination and much more. We were becoming "socially maladjusted" for Christian reasons.

The experience of the domestic church has been encouraging despite lapses and wrong turns. Without mapping out our journey we find that our human/Christian growth has been enabled and nourished. However, our domestic church found itself in conflict with parish life, not once but many times. In retrospect I have many questions and few answers. Contemporary American culture was raising disturbing questions regarding race-relations and issues of war and peace, and regarding the environment, life style and economics. The specifically Catholic culture of parish life raised

further questions affecting its own life as a community-- questions of individualism and lack of accountability. I ask: how does the Church relate to culture and to contemporary human experience? How does the Church understand itself today and how does it relate to the mission of Jesus? What does the Incarnation mean to the Church today? Where is the Spirit of Jesus in today's Church and where is discernment of the Spirit leading?

From my contrasting experiences of family as domestic church and the parish as local church, I have come to a deep conviction that Christianity as a way of life is developed through a life-long formation process and that this formation takes place best within families or small faith-communities. An essential component of this formation is reflection on experience in the light of faith which inevitably results in the individual or community taking a stand in some way against the prevailing culture, be it secular or ecclesial, for Christian reasons. This process implies a growing ability to discern the Spirit's leading--challenging and inviting participation in God's work in the world. This activity of the Spirit is social grace and it leads to community. It has to do with choosing life.

In a way my husband's and my efforts to raise our family have been successful. Through all the dying and rising of our years together, we are beginning to recognize what God has been creating in our lives. Our young adults have been discovering their human and lay vocations to be

healers and instruments of constructive change in our American culture. The process of listening to and encouraging these vocations is still part of our family life even though we are scattered from the East to the West coasts of the United States. However, I keep wondering if lay vocations are going to be forced to develop outside the Catholic Church. Only one of our children relates to the Catholic Church in a positive way; he is nourished by parish life. Two participate actively in independent, spirit-led Protestant churches which encourage and nurture their lay vocations. One participates in a Unitarian church which emphasizes social issues and has a sense of mission. The others are searching but have not discovered any ecclesial support for their life work. When we gather as a family, there is always shared prayer and a faith-dimension to our relationship, but my husband and I are their primary connection to the Catholic Church. Most of our young adults remember the Church with mixed feelings and do not feel attracted to return. My husband and I have encouraged their growth in interior freedom and in adult decision-making and have supported their confrontations with worldly values, but they do not look to the Church for support for their worldly vocations. I believe that God does speak to them and calls them through their experiences of marriage and work. Unfortunately, the Church has scarcely begun a process of discernment and pastoral planning which would facilitate listening to lay experience.

I am aware that the American Bishops are pointing to the parish as the focal point for renewal in the Church. Having had much actual and vicarious experience of paternalistic parish leadership, I am apprehensive lest the new wine of renewal burst the old wineskins of outmoded parish structures with nothing to replace the old wineskins. In order to provide new wineskins I believe that there needs to be encouragement of a reflective process in parishes--a reflection asking questions regarding the relationship between Church and culture, regarding the Church's self-understanding and regarding the meaning of the Incarnation today. An obvious fourth question, given my past experience of parish and domestic churches is "How can the local church be heard by the domestic Church and vice-versa?" This will be covered in chapter five.

Notes.

¹See Appendix, Nos. 2, 3, and 4.

III. CHURCH AND CULTURE: SOCIAL SIN AND SOCIAL GRACE

In their introduction to Economic Justice for All the American Bishops state: "Followers of Christ must avoid a tragic separation between faith and daily life. They can neither shirk their earthly duties nor, as the Second Vatican Council declared, 'immerse (them)selves in earthly activities as if these latter were utterly foreign to religion, and religion were nothing more than the fulfillment of acts of worship and the observance of a few moral obligations'" (Gaudium et Spes, 43). For much of my life I have shared this concern. My life-experience and my studies have led me to reflect deeply not only on my life as an individual Christian but on my life as part of a faith community trying to cope with North American culture both outside the Church and within it.

The relatively stable culture in which I grew up--strong family and church ties, neighborhoods and manageable change--has almost disappeared. The rapidly changing culture in which I raised my children presented sharp challenges to family life, Catholic identity and neighborliness. Change seemed unmanageable at times. In our attempts as a family to nourish human wholeness and Catholic identity we found ourselves distancing ourselves from the surrounding culture. We tried to separate celebration of Christmas from the con-

sumer mentality and we created our own family seder service for Holy Thursday in our attempt to bring the meaning home. A lamb cake is still a tradition for Holy Thursday and Easter Sunday dinner. Our family life became more participatory for all its members. However, in reflecting back upon our many growth-producing experiences, I have come to realize that our counter-cultural stance was central to our growth. It had to do with being open to God speaking through our human experience. It had to do with allowing God to change our perspective and to set us free from our spiritual blindness and deafness, our defense-against and fears of change. It had to do with integrating the human and Christian values of our changed perspective into our daily lives. Our God became the God of surprises accompanying, nourishing and challenging us.

In the Catholic Moment R. H. Neuhaus discusses this theme of a counter-cultural stance in his reflections entitled, "The Church and the World in Paradox."¹ He refers to H. Richard Niebuhr's reflections on Christ and Culture which names five ways in which the church finds itself related to the world. Although these five ways are all distinguished one from another, all throw light on this dilemma and all contain elements of truth.

Drawing on these five ways of being church in the world, I would say that the church is against the world because it is really for the world. It sees history as "the story of God's mighty deeds and of man's responses to them"

and is aware "of the power of the Lord to transform all things."² It embraces the eschatological vision of creation longing for fulfillment but knows that "our contribution to the right ordering of the world begins with the right ordering of our lives in that part of the world which is the church." It knows that the greatest need of the world is to know and believe the truth about itself and that the church exposes the world's delusions and directs it to an undreamed-of destiny. In its efforts to transform the world, the church keeps in mind that Jesus' approach to transformation passes through death and resurrection and it reminds the world of its incompleteness in the embrace of any social system. The paradox of church and world cannot be resolved. It can only be surpassed by the Kingdom.

Ever since Vatican II I have had a growing sense of being part of a pilgrim people journeying from an old church into a newly emerging church. The signals are confusing, and I wonder how much individual Christians and their church are aware of their paradoxical existence. Are they comfortable in "Babylon" or are they maladjusted? Do they have a sense of being against the world for the sake of the world, for their own sakes and for their Christian identity? Do they have their eyes and hearts fixed on that Transcendent City? If their focus is not such, the perpetual adaptation of pilgrims becomes perpetual conformation to this changing world.

In the seventh chapter of Romans Paul dramatically portrays his own (and "everyone's") struggle against sin. With deep feeling he describes the tension within himself and his total inability to change his behaviour by his own efforts. Sin is a failure to let God be God for us and it lies much deeper than failure to control bodily appetites. The greatest sin is one of pride and self-centeredness--our deep-seated attitude that the whole world must serve us and our interests. It has to do with our use of created things as ends in themselves and it has to do with the defenses we make against God--refusing his constant invitations to human and spiritual growth. Gerard W. Hughes in God of Surprises has said it well: "He is calling you to share his own life. Sin is our refusal to accept this invitation; we prefer our own security. We are like Lazarus in our tombs. God calls us out to life. We reply, 'Thank you, but I prefer to stay where I am.'"³ The Church has long been familiar with personal sin and has reinforced its concern with the sacrament of reconciliation applied to individual confession of personal sin. However, social sin is less well understood and is seldom mentioned in parish life. I believe that public confession of social sin by the local Christian community is a necessary step in developing consciousness of social sin, which sets the stage for and often sanctions personal sin.

In the years since Vatican II there has been a growing sense that there is such a thing as social sin.

This awareness surfaced in an extraordinary way in Latin America. There was a new sensitivity to widespread poverty and to marginalized people. At the same time there was a new awareness of legitimate human values--the basic equality of persons, the search for freedom, and "solidarity, the visible projection of efficacious love, bringing human beings together around common objectives and prompting them to complement one another in overcoming limitations and dire wants."⁴ Because of this new awareness, pastoral leaders began to realize that their society was organized in such a way as to produce and reproduce this macroscale poverty. They realized that works of mercy alone were an inadequate response. It became clear that there was a vast and growing disrespect for the human person, God's icon, and this disrespect was becoming institutionalized within man-made economic and political systems. Thanks to modern communications, it may be that this consciousness of social sin is beginning to emerge in the United States as well as in other parts of the world. In this country there is certainly a new awareness of homelessness, underemployment and unemployment and there is a growing sensitivity to the ravages of the drug culture and of sexual promiscuity. Our vaunted freedom is turning into unfreedom and deathliness before our very eyes. We see it live and in color on the evening television news. Our culture is becoming increasingly violent and it threatens the quality of life for everyone. I see a process of dehumanization going on, progressively insinuating itself into

the structures of American society and destroying the human/Christian values on which the United States was founded. It is an enemy of the human person and no friend of God. This I call social sin. It is egoism embedded in culture and in social structures.

Gregory Baum goes beyond looking at the consequences of sin and defines it with reference to its subject, thereby clarifying the meaning of "original sin." Sin is inherited through the "unresolved conflicts of parents and families as well as through the discrepancies of institutional life." This unintended heritage confuses human awareness and blinds people to the distortions in their environment. "What is proper to social sin is that its subject is a collectivity. Social sin resides in a group, a community, a people...it is not produced by deliberation and free choice. It produces evil consequences but no guilt in the ordinary sense... social sin is committed out of blindness."⁵ It can be detected in the institutions which shape people's lives and gives rise to dehumanizing trends. It also resides in the cultural and religious symbols which re-inforce these institutions thereby magnifying the harm done to people. An example of the latter is private penance which has no way of dealing with social sin and so defines sin as purely personal. Social sin also refers to the false consciousness which arises from these legitimating institutions and cultural symbols. An example would be our national cultural need to be number one--in sports, in power, and in military might. We fail to

see how our egoism permeates our culture. Baum describes yet another level of social sin which reflects the "collective decisions generated by the distorted consciousness." This level can be illustrated by a look at the distorted collective consciousness which makes unbelievable demands for the military budget and for weapons and encourages other nations to do the same in the name of protecting the world from communism.

What recourse is there for Christians who are beginning to recognize the decadent nature of late twentieth-century American culture--who are trying to find a responsibly human and hopeful way to live? How can parents pass on a meaningful faith to their children? Does the church have anything to do with helping its members to cope with life in this culture? Does affiliation with the people of God offer an alternative? What I see as urgently needed within the Christian community is an ongoing dialogue between the values of faith and the values of culture. Pastoral care needs to nurture within Christians the ability to make choices that lead to life--an ability to discern the Spirit's leading in the midst of everyday life. A Christian who attempts to deal with personal sinful acts and yet ignores the cultural context of his/her activity is failing to deal with problems in their totality. As of this writing, I believe that most pastoral care is still centered on individual needs and fails to address the larger social/cultural environment.

Here it might be helpful to revisit H. Richard Niebuhr's five ways in which the Church (or the individual Christian) relates to culture:

SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS EXAMEN

Is the Church against the world because it is really for the world as Christ was for the world?

Does it embrace the eschatological vision of a new creation starting with life within the church itself?

Does it expose the world's delusions and offer an alternative?

Does it recognize that transformation of the world will lead through the Pascal mystery including its own death and resurrection as it reinterprets the Christian message for the late twentieth century?

Does it recognize that the Church and world must always be kept in tension?...

not the world insinuating its values into the Church

not the Church escaping the world and the historical existence of the people of God.

During his conversation with his disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus recognized the need his followers would have for a defender and an advocate who would assist them in dealing with the world:

If you love me and obey the commands I give you, I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete--to be with you always: the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, since it neither sees him nor recognizes him; because he remains with you and will be within you. I will not leave you orphaned; I will come back to you (John 14: 15-18).

I find the solicitude of Jesus very touching. He recognizes that his disciples cannot withstand the pressures of the world on their own and he promises to send his Spirit to guide and defend them. I must ask--is the church allowing

this Spirit of Jesus to guide it especially when it comes to the sin of the world? Does the collective life of the church reflect the Spirit of Jesus? Is it attractive? How is the church living the Paschal mystery in its own inner life? Does the church see itself in tension with the world, and how is this struggle communicated to individual Christians? Are leaders and laity alike taught to discern the Spirit's leading? My own life experience suggests that discernment is not a well-known resource within the life of the church.

When speaking of sin, it is also necessary to speak of grace. Just as the church has emphasized personal sin to the exclusion of social sin, so there has been a similar emphasis on grace as personal and little said about the social dimensions of grace. Earlier in this paper I identified the importance of choosing life--choosing between authentic and inauthentic existence. This choice goes beyond the life of each individual; it also has to do with social life which is shared within a given cultural context--within families, communities and various forms of organized social life.

A model of church which has helped me to reflect on social grace is the church as sacrament. In reflecting on the Kingdom theology of Rauschenbusch, Diane Yeager points out that sin and salvation are correlatives: "If we experience solidarity in sin, then our conception of salvation must have a similarly social dimension." She quotes

Rauschenbusch: "The establishment of a community of righteousness in mankind is just as much a saving act of God as the salvation of an individual from his natural selfishness and moral inability."⁶ Yeager faults the U. S. Bishops' Pastoral for its individualistic approach to social ministry: "The hope that virtuous lay people will be able through their individual virtuous acts to bring about the improvement of the world has not been much supported by historical experience."⁷ She points out that the moral exhortation of the Pastoral will have little effect unless the problem of American individualism is dealt with. In An Alternative Vision Roger Haight looks at the sacramental nature of the church and asks what the church must be in order to perform effectively its mission in today's world. It must embody a freedom from the world so that it may be free to serve the world. Its lifestyle should proclaim Kingdom values. Internally, it has "a mission to respond to and to heal personal freedom...It is thus a community of reconciliation, one that mediates the love of God" and reflects this love not only in its doctrine but in its way of being church.⁸ Externally, the church is a community which encourages, guides and supports the freedom of its members in their confrontation with worldly values and in their witness to the reign of God in the world.

This church promotes a contemplative attitude which sees the world and history in relation to God. Its spirituality is ecclesial and is related to mission. I believe

that our family experience of "domestic church" has reflected these values to a measurable extent.

If contemporary evidence fairly shouts that life for many in the United States is seriously flawed and destructive of human wholeness--alienating to young people, threatening to family life, devastating to those who fall between the cracks of the economic system and unfriendly to minorities, where is the evidence of social grace? In Romans 5:20, 21 St. Paul comments on sin and grace: "...but despite the increase of sin, grace has far surpassed it, so that, as sin reigned through death, grace may reign by way of justice leading to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

I must ask how is grace manifested and how is it experienced. Does salvation have any historical significance or was Marx correct in his reading of Christian salvation as "pie in the sky when you die?" What about the advocate which Jesus promised to send?

Looking back on my faith-journey, I can detect many instances of God's loving concern and support--not just for our family but for the people he created. As the contemporary crisis of culture has become acute, I have experienced an unexplainable sense of hope and new possibility. This dual awareness of crisis and hope began to enter my consciousness during the 1960's. I was apprehensive during the growing civil rights protests yet filled with hope. Martin Luther King was a very special person and I prayed for the success of his non-violent protests. My husband and I did

what we could to be supportive through our local Catholic Interracial Council. I felt that God was intervening in American history through this charismatic leader and clarifying for Americans the meaning of the freedom which we affirmed in our Constitution. He was also clarifying the meaning of Christian identity in the face of the racism institutionalized in American culture. Above all, he was showing his tender concern and love for an oppressed people who had been brought to this country in slavery and who had not been included in the American dream of "liberty and justice for all." A comparison with Exodus was not inappropriate.

The questioning of the legitimacy and purpose of the Vietnam war created shock-waves in American culture. It challenged the heretofore unquestioned rightness of American military ventures on both civic and moral grounds. I could feel the public consciousness changing, including my own. Again, a changing public awareness raised questions as to American and Christian values. Despite the public turmoil, I felt good about these challenges. It was during the 1970's that a consciousness of ecology arose, calling into question abuse of the environment, and a feminist movement emerged demanding equality for women. Along with many others, I found myself filled with new insights and saying "yes" to them. These questions were important and had to be addressed. It was a very exciting time to be alive. Looking back, I can review my changing social consciousness and

name it as part of God's formation process in the American context. My part was to pay attention and to give an American and Christian response to what was happening. This cultural shift has been dramatic and unsettling, above all--challenging! What I remember most about those years is the sense of surprise and joy I experienced. I found myself applauding and supporting a positive response whenever I could. I was able to reread the story of Exodus with new understanding and I began to sense God's action in the twentieth century in my life-time. I noted the quest for freedom and responsibility which undergirded these shifts. I became part of this quest and communicated it, quite unconsciously, to my family.

In saying "yes" to these new understandings I was saying "yes" to more authentic values and to new possibilities in human relationships: black/white, United States/small third-world country, human/environmental, male/female. These new relationships tended to reject domination and manipulation and had world-transforming potential. I still remember a card from those years: "Suppose there was a war and nobody came!" I had not created these possibilities, but they were newly present in my life-time and were inviting a response. I, along with some of my fellow-Americans, was helping to make choices towards more authentic values in American culture. These were also choices based on my faith perspective. Now I can name these experiences. God's grace was present and operative in the midst of American society

and culture. He was creating a new consciousness that reflected his vision of the Kingdom and was inviting human response. This new awareness was summoning me to collaborate in building new human/social relationships which were more authentic and life-giving. Perhaps my new understanding found best expression in an article I wrote which was published in Progressio, the international publication of the World Federation of Christian Life Communities. I concluded the article with a Credo:

I believe in Christ as Savior and Liberator.
 He came to prepare a place for us in heaven,
 but He also cares about our human existence
 and He urges his followers to share this concern.
 I believe that He is calling us
 to be co-creators of His Kingdom on earth.

He has given us free will
 and He does not interfere with our freedom--
 even our bad and blind choices.
 He lets us take the consequences of our actions
 yet welcomes us with open arms when we turn to Him
 asking Him to replace our hearts of stone
 with truly human hearts.

I believe that as Christians we are called
 to be co-laborators and co-liberators with Christ.
 I believe that the Christian presence in the United States
 calls us to be a sign of contradiction
 to our materialistic, manipulative society.
 Our mission is to create a Christian counter-culture
 with alternative personal attitudes,
 alternative life-styles,
 and alternative institutional models
 which reflect more clearly
 our secular and religious ideals of human freedom.⁹

Perhaps it is appropriate now to rename grace and sin
 as authentic or inauthentic existence. Choosing authentic
 existence is what God asks of all his people and it involves
 making decisions in the light of faith. In our inauthenticity
 we do not have the freedom to choose; the false social value-

system overwhelms us. We are in a state of "death" and our freedom cannot function. In Becoming Human Together Jerome Murphy-O'Connor gives a very helpful Christological reflection on authentic and inauthentic existence: "God's part in the transition from 'death' to 'life' consists in restoring authenticity to the status of a real option... God's first step in this process consists in the sending of his Son...Despite his real integration into the historical situation Christ did not merely reflect what the rest of humanity was. He manifested what humankind could become.... His presence gave humanity a new standard by which to judge itself, thus creating the opportunity to see inauthenticity for what it really was. It also forced humanity to recognize that the bonds of Sin were not unbreakable, that the tyranny of contemporary attitudes and values could be shaken off."¹⁰ Jesus is our model of authentic existence, and the people of God, his followers, are called to authentic existence with the help of the Spirit (grace) which is available to all of us.

This necessity of choice is a requisite not only for the individual Christian; it is a necessity for Christians collectively, gathered as Church intending to be a sign of the Kingdom. The believers recognize their call to a new life together which is essentially relational and centered on Jesus. In this new life they are invited to be responsible for each other and for the healing and transformation of the world. The new life is to be an experience of and a witness

to Kingdom values. Such an experience of Christian community is rare, if not non-existent, within parishes. What seems to be missing is a compelling vision of what the Church is called to become. It is almost as though Vatican II with its tremendous development in self-understanding of Church had not taken place.

My own parish is an example of Church with a very limited vision. In my parish there is much talk from the pulpit of Church as "family" and "community" but very little experience of this in the life of the parish. If the pastor decides not to share responsibility with the laity, and if the communication is one-way or ignored, there is little sense of community and a great potential for alienation. I hear little or no talk of mission--just encouragement for private virtue and avoidance of personal sin. A deacon takes care of ministry to the needy. In exhortations to call forth priestly and religious vocations the pastor never mentions lay vocations. However, lay men and women are encouraged to assist the priest during liturgy. Except for a few old-time parish organizations such as a men's club, youth club and Sodality the laity are largely passive and uninvolved. Although it has not always been this difficult, this has been my experience for the past eleven years in a predominantly black, middle-class parish under two successive white pastors. When the parish council (now defunct) resisted the undiscerning, authoritative ways of the first pastor, the diocesan referee called for a cooling-off period which gave

carte blanche to the pastor to act unilaterally. In order to help the parish council cope, I wrote a theological reflection on this experience.¹¹ After seven years this pastor was finally reassigned and his successor, a much more kindly man, came with Bishop's orders not to reinstate a parish council. Because the present pastor is clearly a man who loves God and is gentle in his ways, parishoners have welcomed him, and the parish has grown in numbers and in financial stability. The school seems to be doing well. There is one area in which the parish is a contrast-society: race-relations are excellent and because of past struggles, a number of people know each other. The kiss of peace sometimes seems to be the most significant part of Mass. However, there is no compelling vision or way of participation which encourages adult faith-awareness, community formation and mission. I know that my adult children could not be prevailed upon to join such a parish, and I wonder if this is true of other families. We stay because we have a commitment to the people, and because my very lame, elderly mother-in-law who lives with us probably could not re-adjust to another parish. This pastor is very kind to her and very good with the sick and dying.

My present parish experience is only the latest in a series of encounters with a clerical culture which clings to pre-Vatican II ways. For laity who are searching for co-responsibility in the Church, nourishment for family life and enablement of their lay vocation, such parish leadership

is clearly inadequate. What is needed is more than well-intentioned, old-style parish leadership. There is an urgent need for a renewed vision of Church which is claimed by the whole American Church in a collaborative process of pastoral planning on the local, diocesan and national levels. Such a process would not intend to produce a new ecclesiastical power structure but local churches which are able to read the signs of the times and which respond to the needs of the gathered community and to mission. Just as Jesus did not conform in many ways to Jewish religious culture but called the people back to a more authentic reading of God's plan for them, so the Church today fortified with the renewed vision of Vatican II has a mandate to summon God's Catholic people reminding them that

a privatized faith reflects an individualistic, self-centered approach to God, and that

uninvolvement in the world is a denial of God's love for the world (God who so loved that he sent his only son), but that they are called to a new way of being and doing.

One of the most significant achievements of Vatican II was the conciliar document, Lumen Gentium, which reflected the Church's changing self-understanding from a juridical, ecclesiocentric notion to one which is more biblically and pastorally oriented. The Church is seen paradoxically as both human and divine and in constant need of purification. Authority in the Church is seen in terms of service rather than domination. The second conciliar document on the Church, Gaudium et Spes, enlarged this renewed self-understanding by

reflecting on the Church in relationship to a changing world and at the service of the human family. It devoted considerable attention to the Christian vision of the human person, to the Church as Communio and Missio, and to the role of the laity. I keep wondering how Church leadership is bringing this vision to local pastors and to laity in the pews. A significant number of laity have already caught this vision and find themselves between a rock and a hard place in parish life.

Before concluding this chapter I want to take a brief look at the vision of Church as community and mission and the relevance of an understanding of the incarnation. In Jesus and Community New Testament scholar Gerhard Lohfink has written about the Church as a contrast-society and comments that this understanding is not a very familiar one to contemporary Christians. This concept as such does not emerge from experience of Church nor from a reading of scripture. However, Lohfink convincingly points out that the understanding of the people of God as God's contrast-society preoccupies the Bible from beginning to end. In the Old Testament they are movingly described in Deut. 7:6-8; Israel has been chosen "out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth"¹² and is called to be a holy people by God's special love. Israel's holiness depends not only on being chosen and called by God's love but on its own responsive love--living in accordance with the social order given to it by God, a society which is in contrast to that of the sur-

rounding nations. This contrasting characteristic is expressed in the "holiness-code" (Lev. 17-26). Lohfink identifies this understanding as the background for all of Jesus' actions. A reading of the New Testament identifies a similar orientation except that Jesus' perspective is eschatological. Lohfink interprets the words of the Our Father, "Hallowed by thy name," as a prayer for gathering God's people: "Gather and renew your people; let it again become the true people of God."¹³ Jesus is intending that this renewed people should be holy so that the reign of God might become visible like a city set on a hill. Lohfink asks if the early church grasped this intention of Jesus and continued it. Did the New Testament communities see themselves in contrast to the surrounding pagan society? To illustrate his point Lohfink cites numerous texts, especially from Paul's epistles. In Ephesians Paul says, "For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). The world from which Christ rescues the repentant new believers is called an "evil age." The Church is the community of those who are rescued--God's "new creation." This contrast between the former lives of the converts and their present life in the Church is referred to so often that it is called the "Once and now pattern." Often this contrast is illustrated by lists of vices. The now refers to life within the Christian community and includes not only interior dispositions but radical social

consequences. This "new creation" implies changed social structures which are not like those in the rest of society.

Of particular significance to Lohfink is the self-designation of early Christians as saints and brothers and sisters. Lohfink suspects that this self-understanding has slowly become narrowed through the ages as the Church accommodated itself to the world. He believes that "saints" expressed much of the meaning of "contrast-society." I share with Lohfink a concern for the contemporary privatization of faith which narrows the concept of holiness to the individual Christian. He contrasts this individualistic notion with the ringing words in I Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

After making his case for the Church as a contrast-society, Lohfink turns to the question of mission. He asks how a community which is called to be a contrast-society can at the same time be an evangelizing community, and he focuses on the dilemma of the church which is in but not of the world. How can the Church keep from becoming an elitist spiritual ghetto or totally other-worldly and separated from the world and the people to be evangelized?

Again Lohfink turns to the Bible pointing out the social dimension of the call to holiness: "Not only the human heart must be holy but also living conditions, social structures and forms of the environment in which people live

and which they continually construct."¹⁴ The message of the Old Testament prophets is also Jesus' Good News. The social environment either supports growth into human wholeness and holiness or it impedes it. The question is--how does this concern for holiness translate into mission? At the end of Matthew's Gospel when Jesus is giving his final instructions to his disciples, he commissions them: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations...Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20). The mission appears to be making disciples and teaching them a way of life. Lohfink's conclusion is that this way of life makes the communities so attractive that they stand out in contrast to the surrounding society and become places in which love of neighbor is the way of life. This understanding is very helpful for me and clarifies my understanding of the chosenness and calling of the new people of God. Jesus had been attempting to gather Israel in view of the Kingdom of God which was at hand. Those who responded and formed Jewish-Christian communities were to be a symbolic presence of the new Israel with a mission to the nations. However, the missionary effort will be effective in so far as the new Israel is a transformed society.

Lohfink builds his case with many references and is convincing. His insights validate many of my own inner feelings. For me, the most important task is the renewal of the Church. How can the Church give what it does not demonstrate? In what way is the Church attractive in these times?

Is it focused on mission or maintenance? Does it see itself as God's contrast-society for the healing of the nations? What is the self-understanding of the Church today? These are crucial questions which need to be asked within the Church and the churches. If I had the opportunity, I would encourage a process of listening within each local church-- a prayerful and discerning dialogue with the experience of faithful Christians. I believe that God still has a plan for his chosen people and that it is slowly emerging amid all the dying and rising going on in the Church today. Lohfink concludes his discussion of the New Testament communities with some very helpful reflections warning against the Pelagian temptation to create an "ethical-moral performance society." He contrasts human effort at acquired holiness with the "saving deed of God, who justifies the godless, accepts failures and reconciles himself with the guilty. Only in this gift of reconciliation, in the miracle of life newly won against all expectation, does what is here termed contrast-society flourish."

Through these reflections on the self-understanding of the Church I have come very close to answering my final question: What does the incarnation mean today? There is a very close connection between the Church as the symbol of the reality of God's salvation and the life of the Church. Like Jesus, the Church is to make visible God's message, not only in word but in deed. Like Jesus, the Church does not exist for itself but for God's mission which is also that of

the community. Like Jesus, the Church is called to be so committed to this mission of salvation and liberation that it incarnates the death and resurrection of the Pascal mystery. In other words the Church is called to be a visible, witnessing, Kingdom-oriented sacrament of salvation following Jesus even to death...and to resurrection.

In the past fifteen years I have spent considerable time attempting to raise consciousness within the Christian Life Community movement as to the deeper meaning of mission and service. One workshop, which was very well received, finished with a paraliturgical service in which we summed up our new understanding. Let me conclude with a quotation from this service in which we consecrated the people of God in words paraphrased from the words of consecration of the Mass:

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER OF HUMAN UNITY

Leader:

We thank you, Almighty Father of all, for sharing with us the love that makes you God. We praise you and thank you for calling us thru faith to share your gift of love with the world and so to hasten the fulfillment of your promise of liberation for all people. Joining in the chorus of creation, we celebrate your presence with this hymn of praise:

All:

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts...

Leader:

Blessed are you, dear Father, for from the beginning you made us all sisters and brothers to one another, born in your likeness and sharing a common destiny.

It was our pride, though, that made us deaf to your voice and blinded us to the beauty of your plan. You created us to live in harmony with our sisters and brothers but we preferred alienation, racism and violence.

Assistant to Leader:

Nevertheless, in your loving kindness, you did not allow our house to remain divided against itself. Rather, you prepared us for the coming of One who would gather together again the broken fragments of Adam and Eve throughout the world and forge them into a new and far greater unity than we had ever known. Thus, in the fullness of time, you sent your only Son into the world to call by name into one fold the scattered children of your flock, to mold the diverse gifts of your people into the members of one Body, which is his Church.

Leader and Assistant:

We now recall that on the night before he died, he called together his friends for a final meal, and made with them a new and everlasting covenant of love, by sharing with them his own body and blood. Giving thanks to You, almighty Father, He took bread into his hands, blessed it, broke it and gave it to us with the command to become His body, broken and passed around for the liberation of the world. (Pause)

Then he took a cup of wine, and offering thanks to you again, gave it to us with the command to become his blood, poured out for the life of those in need. (Pause)

Leader and Assistant:

Merciful Father, we beg you to send the Holy Spirit among us in a new Pentecost of understanding and harmony, so that whoever speaks the truth in love will be heard by each person in his or her own tongue. For in sharing one bread and drinking from the same cup, we profess our faith in the power of the Spirit to bend our pride into love and our selfishness into unity.

Leader:

Grant us concern for our fellow men and women, even for those we have never seen or called by name. May we suffer with the victims of hatred and oppression, of

starvation, war and racism. Grant us a selfless love for each other, so that our unity may be the genuine sign that it claims to be, heralding that final and blessed union of all people in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All:

For through Him, and with Him and in Him, all honor and glory is given to you, Almighty Father, in union with the Holy Spirit today and everyday until eternity.

Amen.

Notes

- ¹Richard Neuhaus, The Catholic Moment, p. 16f.
- ²H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, p. 195.
- ³Gerard W. Hughes, S.J., God of Surprises, p. 71.
- ⁴Marcello deC. Azevedo, S.J., Basic Ecclesial Communities, p. 181.
- ⁵Gregory Baum, Religion and Alienation, pp. 200-202.
- ⁶Diane Yeager, "Bishops and the Kingdom," in The Deeper Meaning of Economic Life: Critical Essays on the U.S. Catholic Bishop's Pastoral Letter on the Economy, ed. by R. Bruce Douglas, p. 193.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 198.
- ⁸Roger Haight, An Alternative Vision, p. 181.
- ⁹Elizabeth Leone, "Rich Countries Need Liberation, Too," Progressio (May 1974).
- ¹⁰Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, OP., p. 143.
- ¹¹See Appendix 5, "What is the Spirit Saying?"
- ¹²Gerhard Lohfink, Jesus and Community, p. 124.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 135.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 147.

IV. THE IGNATIAN EXERCISES--A RESOURCE FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH OF LAITY

So far I have attempted to trace the process of Christian formation in my own life and in that of my family with special attention to the social dimension. The process has been a relatively simple one of learning to reflect on life experience in the light of faith and learning to choose life--authentic existence in preference to inauthentic existence. The historical context has been the latter half of the twentieth century which has been a time of unprecedented change. One of the resources which has helped me to recognize my own faith-journey and to articulate it has been the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

In beginning my reflections on the Exercises I first want to call attention to Ignatius himself and his historical context which has many parallels to our own time. Ignatius was born in 1491 when a new age was dawning in the history of the West. During Ignatius' lifetime the voyages of explorers and discoveries of astronomers radically altered the human perception of the universe. The Middle Ages were ending and a new era was at hand. The Reformation was breaking over Northern Europe and Southern Europe came under the surveillance of the Inquisition. Spain was becoming a new European power. During this time of tumultuous change,

Ignatius was born into a noble Basque family--the youngest of thirteen children. He spent his teen-age years and young adulthood at the court of Charles V and was known for his self-indulgent and impetuous lifestyle. During the battle of Pamplona in 1521, Ignatius was seriously wounded. Because of crippling injuries to both legs, he was carried back to his ancestral home where he spent a long and painful convalescence. During this period Ignatius was given some books to read--not his usual fare of tales of chivalry but the Life of Christ and a collection of saints' lives. This reading material set up in Ignatius a tension between his former life with its dreams of chivalry and worldly heroism and the heroic lives of Francis, Dominic and other saints. As he day-dreamed about his future, he began to recognize contrasting feelings associated with his varying imaginings. In his autobiography (written in the third person) Ignatius described this experience of alternating feelings:

Yet there was this difference. When he was thinking about the things of the world, he took much delight in them, but afterwards, when he was tired and put them aside, he found that he was dry and discontented. But when he thought of going to Jerusalem barefoot and eating nothing but herbs and undergoing all the other rigors that he saw the saints had endured, not only was he consoled when he had these thoughts, but even after putting them aside, he remained content and happy. He did not wonder, however, at this; nor did he stop to ponder the difference until one time his eyes were opened a little, and he began to marvel at the difference and to reflect upon it, realizing from experience that some thoughts left him sad and others happy. Little by little he came to recognize the difference between the spirits that agitated him....¹

These insights were crucial in Ignatius' spiritual development and are central to the pedagogy of the Exercises. Reflection on these experiences led to further insights, and Ignatius began to regret his past life and wanted to do penance. Gradually his past life lost its attraction for him, and Ignatius began to desire to do great deeds for God. The difference in his attitudes and behavior was noticeable to those around him. Ignatius' initial conversion was deepened and confirmed at Manresa where he gradually discovered his vocation to become a worker with and for Christ, seeking to find God's will in all things.

Throughout his life, Ignatius continued to insist on the centrality of personal religious experience. Because of his own profound experience at Manresa, he was convinced that personal conversion of the heart was necessary for authentic Christian living--that all the commandments and ecclesiastical imperatives, traditions, customs and religious practices were of use only if they encountered God's grace from within that person. He felt that people needed help in this conversion of the heart and feared for the Church lest institutionally-defined objective faith fail to meet a living, personal faith.

Ignatius' remedy was to share through his little book of the Exercises his own experience of falling in love with God. He had discovered the patterns of his own Christian growth and found that they had a validity far beyond his own experience. These patterns of growth are the dynamic

of the Exercises which moves towards self-conquest and regulation of life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any unreasonable attachment. This process of conversion is symbolized through a series of progressively fuller calls addressed to the retreatant during the Exercises.

However, the full Exercises are not for everyone. Ignatius left directions for adapting the Exercises to the needs of individuals. In his article in Soundings, "The Eighteenth Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises and Social Sinfulness," Bernard Bush points out that there are people "who have a poor self-image, who are adrift in their prayer-life, oppressed by church and community structures, and who have little social consciousness and yet feel helpless and guilty in the face of the world's evils." For these and others who may be emotionally immature "Ignatius prescribes a variety of consciousness-raising spiritual exercises... designed to guide a person to become more deeply aware of herself and the various influences she responds to, the good and the evil, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."² Bush concludes that becoming aware of unconscious and disordered determinisms which have formed conscience and life-style is the work of social grace and is a potential preparation for a fuller experience of the Exercises. The Eighteenth Annotation consists of the "Principle and Foundation" and the exercises of the First Week. The "Principle and Foundation" begins with a consideration and awareness of creaturehood--

a sense that the individual is loved for herself, unconditionally, regardless of failings--and not for what she does. As the retreatant experiences God's mercy and unconditional acceptance and recognizes her own failures to choose life and authentic existence, s(he) is led to profound sorrow and prayer for healing. The second, third, and fourth weeks of the Exercises lead the retreatant to enlist under the standard of Jesus and to accompany him in his life, passion, death and resurrection--always seeking to find God in all things.

The process of the Spiritual Exercises is not an end in itself but a means leading to transformation of the self. Ignatius is seeking to clarify for his retreatant the question of freedom: "...freedom is a question about yourself. It is not a question which a person has; it is a question which I am and with which I constitute what I am to become."³ It is the potential for self-determination. Ignatius' radical religious question is: what are you going to do with your freedom? He is preparing his retreatant for serious Christian choices which involve a search for the will of God in one's life.

Underlying the process of Ignatius' Exercises is a dynamic view of God's love working actively in the world. Events, places, persons, circumstances--all contain within themselves God's invitations which call for a choice and a response. Ignatius encouraged reflection on this existential word of God--a kind of conversation between events and God,

a listening to the world and to the Spirit. He had learned to read the meaning of life situations in the light of his deepened faith. Such a contemplative attitude enables the individual to sift out possible choices with a view to developing authentic Christian responses in daily life. This process of making choices informed by faith is called discernment and it is central to the Ignatian Exercises. It is the great contribution of Ignatius to Christian spirituality. Like Ignatius, I discovered this process going on in my life and the Exercises have confirmed my understanding. I call it God's formation process.

This process was reflected in our family life as we found ourselves developing a profound interest in and concern for human persons and choosing to respond, especially to those who were different from ourselves by reason of race or nationality or because of a variety of conditions unfavorable to human growth and development. The choice of occupation among our young adults reveals this orientation: law directed towards service of the local community; communications with skills directed towards helping refugees and socially handicapped minorities; special education; creative restructuring of elementary education; physical therapy; wholistic community-based medicine; and integration of work and family life within a Christian perspective. These occupations draw on professional competence and a deep concern for others. Some are integrated with a sense of Christian vocation; all have that potential. The Kingdom orientation

is very clear and that gives me great joy. The consequence for all has been a growing freedom from self-preoccupation and a corresponding freedom for the concerns and needs of others in our society and culture. Somehow, we have opened our hearts and our homes to the needs of others and God has reciprocated by leading us in good directions that we did not anticipate.

In some ways Ignatian spirituality sounds very inward--fostering a relationship between God and the individual person, encouraging growth in personal freedom and discernment and inviting a personal following of Christ. However, Ignatian spirituality today is being re-examined in the light of the newly emergent social consciousness of Vatican II and in light of recent General Congregations of the Jesuits. In 1974 the Jesuit-sponsored Center of Concern in Washington, D. C. published Soundings, the product of an American and Canadian task force on social consciousness and Ignatian spirituality. Responsive to the growing interest in religious experience and prayer and the renewal of the Exercises focused on individually-guided Ignatian retreats, the task force presented a number of working papers and writings clarifying and integrating social theology and the Exercises. This work has been a valuable contribution and stimulus to further exploration of the integration of religious experience and social awareness.

In my experience of the Exercises the social dimension has been particularly clear in the meditations on sin and the "Kingdom." Sin becomes a cosmic event, including a personal perspective but extending far beyond it. In the "Two Standards" the hostile forces with which the Christian does battle are not only within the individual but are also identifiable in social customs and institutions--social and environmental co-conspirators in evil. Such new insights fit well with the developing theology of grace and revelation and broaden the scope of discernment. A broader sense of mission flows from these new understandings. It envisions a collaboration with Christ in his healing, reconciling and liberating work in this world. The focus is clearly incarnational and leads to a deepening sense of what it means to be "church"--the body of Christ in the world and a sign of his presence.

From these insights it is possible to derive implications for the development of faith communities--those small groups which have so much potential for ongoing nourishment of Christian adults, for engaging the laity in collaboration and co-liberation with Christ and for becoming signs of the Kingdom. These groups struggle to hold together the tension between the journey inward into the self and the journey outward into the world, living and modeling the caring, compassionate relationships to which Jesus calls his people. Ignatian spirituality has much to offer such groups. I am particularly interested in group experiences of the

Retreat in Daily Life, an adaptation of Ignatius' Nineteenth Annotation. It has the potential for sharing within a faith community not only individual experiences of conversion but conversion on the social level which has been so little understood, and which is so necessary. Within the coming year I intend to make a Nineteenth Annotation group retreat with my faith community and experience the process first hand. I anticipate an experience of spiritual direction within a group.

Although much could be said about the varieties of Ignatian prayer--meditation, affective prayer, petitionary prayer for a specific grace, examen of consciousness, praying with the imagination, bodily posture and prayer, simply being open and present to the Lord, etc., I will here mention just one aspect which is very characteristic--the habit of evaluation. During retreat Ignatius recommends a fifteen-minute period for evaluation on how the prayer went--after each prayer period. This is a review of affective consciousness during prayer. Outside of retreat this examen is a reflective review of life experience and is concerned, not with the morality of good and bad actions, but with how the Lord is affecting and moving the individual. Examination of consciousness leads to a discerning mind and heart and becomes a daily self-confrontation and renewal of Christian identity. Its quality and effectiveness depend on ongoing prayerfulness and a stance of "listening" to God's daily revelation. It develops a growing sensitivity to the way

the Spirit is calling a person and is a resource for ongoing renewal and growth. My growing habit of examining my social consciousness has led me into praying with the news--asking God's help for victims of violence, help for the perpetrators of violence and guidance for public decision-makers. It has led me into political action with others on behalf of justice issues and writing articles sharing my insights and experiences in order to raise consciousness among my friends in Christian Life Communities. Another although minor aspect of Ignatian spirituality is a deep reverence for Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the model of human response to God's call. Her "yes" to God completely changed her plans and turned her life upside-down. Ignatian prayer encourages such responsiveness.

There have been some interesting developments in the current re-examination of Ignatian spirituality. In March, 1981, there was a symposium held at Regis College, Toronto, on "Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age." This is also the title under which the presentations were published. Among the papers presented was a very helpful one by Thomas Clarke, S.J. on "Jesus at Table: The Ignatian Rules and Human Hunger Today." Clarke sees the Spiritual Exercises as more than a manual for retreat directors. He sees the Exercises "as a text which has transcended itself..." and which, "together with the more basic Christian scriptures and the (Jesuit) Constitutions, is the source of that community's (Society of Jesus') understanding of its contemporary

mission: the service of faith and the promotion of justice."⁴ He adds a footnote which acknowledges "the reality of a larger Jesuit family, including Christian Life Communities..." and others whose charisms reflect Ignatian influence.⁵

Clarke's imaginative reflections on the "Rules as to Eating" call attention to hunger in the life of Jesus: Jesus, hungry and thirsty during his forty day fast; Jesus feeding the hungry crowds and sharing meals with his disciples. Clarke raises the question of how his followers reflect these concerns today and stresses "the importance of contemplative exercises for 'agents of change.'" He sees the Exercises as "a series of exposures of the Christian heart to Christ present in the Gospel mysteries" and a resource for developing a passion for right order based on a Christocentric perspective.⁶

I found this reflection to be helpful and a stimulus to further reflection on contemporary adaptation of the Exercises. My thoughts led me to examine another set of rules, the ones on "Distributing Alms," which, like the "Rules as to Eating," seems to be frequently ignored in the giving of retreats. I see them as a practical extension of the reflections on "Three Pairs of Men" in the Second Week of the Exercises. These guidelines may have been written for lay persons according to Fleming's commentary. They are placed in the manual of the Exercises after the "Fourth Week" which implies that they are to be used in daily life

and are not just an imaginative exercise. "Distributing Alms" refers to the sharing of wealth and possessions with those in need, particularly those to whom the retreatant is related. Ignatius is concerned that this sharing, like all things in life, be guided by a proper motivation. This activity is to reflect the over-arching theme of the Exercises to serve God in all things; such sharing should not take place apart from a relationship with God. Ignatius is well aware that his Exercises will involve the person in a struggle to make the desires of Jesus the norm for choices, not disordered human affections. In today's world this issue of sharing wealth and possessions is a very real and urgent issue. It is possible that the experience of committed lay persons may make a future contribution to Ignatian spirituality in this area.

Through the years in our own family life we have changed our priorities and pattern of giving money--less to the Church-as-it-has-been-and-is and more to church in process-of-becoming such as justice groups and lobbies with Kingdom values. We also share money within the family. One practice which has evolved is a family banking system which makes loans available for occasional urgent needs. These loans are then repaid and the funds are held in readiness for future use. A new commitment has called us to participate in a process of collaborative funding for a national council of Catholic lay organizations which is still largely in the future. We see our altered use of financial resources

as very much connected with a changing life-style as well as with a changing perspective of church. I know that our angle of vision has been influenced by the Exercises.

During this past summer I was co-director of a workshop on Christian life-style at the biennial meeting of the National Federation of Christian Life Communities. The theme of the conference was "Ignatian Spirituality for a Mission People." Our workshop process among twenty people consisted in getting acquainted, a few focusing remarks by the co-directors, three small discussion groups with prepared questions, individual prayer on the subject matter and a plenary session in which the whole group reassembled to share their reflections. We concluded that a simple life-style is part of the mission of our faith-communities--witnessing to the Kingdom in our way of living. We agreed that a simple life-style is not an end in itself but a means towards loving God who so loves us. By acquiring a certain indifference to material things we become more free to discern how we can reciprocate that love. One of our Vietnamese participants wrote a powerful statement on the blackboard for all to see:

"I cannot change the world, can I?
I cannot change the world, but I can change me
with God grace. Then I will see the world change!
That's the more! changing self!"

As we summed up our experience we concluded that our non-simple life-style is alienating and killing us. Our life-style is dangerous to our physical as well as to our spiritual health. Some participants' comments follow:

God's call keeps inviting us to change.
 We need to trust the Spirit who speaks in our hearts
 suggesting how we are to live our lives.
 I see life-style in terms of relationships.
 Does my life-style help me to follow Jesus more closely?
 This is the first time I have heard of a simple lifestyle
 in connection with the Exercises.
 Life-style responses are different for different people.
 Life-style includes making time for people in our lives.

In our conclusion we noted that our reflection on
 and critique of our social, economic and political systems
 leads us to an awareness of the spiritual crisis at the
 heart of our problems. Our problem is idolatry though we
 call it by many other names, and its destructiveness of the
 human person is both personal and systemic. Our reflections
 on the person of Jesus can reveal not only the personal im-
 plications of believing in him but the social, economic and
 political implications of our belief. The way of Jesus is
 a special way of being in the world and it touches us
 totally.

All of these insights point to a very important con-
 tribution of the Exercises to a contemporary spirituality.
 God's formation process is available to all. Ignatius dis-
 covered the process within his own conversion experiences
 and devised the Exercises to help others
 to learn to reflect on life-experience in the light of their
 Christian insights;
 to learn to discern God's leading in the alternating feel-
 ings they experience when faced with different choices;
 and
 to seek the freedom to make choices that lead to life.

Such a process has a Church-transforming and world-transforming potential with the Church truly becoming God's contrast society--enfleshed in a world that ignores him.

I want to repeat and emphasize what Thomas Clarke stated at the symposium on "Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age,": "For the most part the Spiritual Exercises are a series of exposures of the Christian heart to Christ present in the Gospel mysteries. Their power is primarily in the enlightenment and energizing that take place from this beholding of the Lord as he engages in human life and ministry, together with rational reflection on the same..." Ignatius is identifying "the importance of contemplative exercises for 'agents of change'"⁷ and is offering a spirituality which shapes theological reflection and social analysis and leads to change. I believe that the laity are looking for just such a spirituality which integrates faith and their growing social consciousness and motivates change.

Imaginative contemplation of the life of Jesus has great potential for freeing the human imagination which seems defeated in its inability to envision alternatives to present social problems. Let me conclude this chapter with a marvelous quotation from Walter Brueggmann's Prophetic Imagination:

Jesus' concern was for the joy of the Kingdom but he was clear that the future rejoicing required a grieving about the present order. "Blessed are you who weep for you shall laugh" (Luke 6:21)...Jesus does not view the present world as the only one, nor does he yearn for the future without a concern for the

present. There is grief and mourning to be done for those who do not know the deathliness of their situation and for those who lack the power to bring it to speech...Only an anguished disengagement permits fruitful yearning. Only the embrace of deathliness permits newness. This we know personally but not yet socially.⁸

I agree with Thomas Clarke that the Ignatian Exercises is a "classic text" with a surplus of meaning. It is my belief and hope that continuing contemporary interpretations of the Spiritual Exercises will yield new resources for formation of the laity.

Notes

¹Joseph F. O'Callaghan, The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola, p. 24.

²Bernard Bush, "The Eighteenth Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises and Social Sinfulness," Soundings, p. 20.

³Michael Buckley, S.J., "Freedom, Election, and Self-Transcendence: Some Reflections upon the Ignatian Development of a Life of Ministry," Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age, p. 71.

⁴Thomas Clarke, S.J., "Jesus at Table: The Ignatian Rules and Human Hunger Today," Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age, p. 91.

⁵Ibid., p. 107.

⁶Ibid., p. 101.

⁷Ibid., p. 101.

⁸Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, pp. 112, 113.

V. CONCLUSION: CONCERN FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

As I read and reflect upon the Scriptures, I find certain recurring themes which have real significance for the faith-formation, not only of the laity, but of all the people of God in these times. Chuck Lathrop stated well this sense of inclusiveness: "For God has called a People, not 'them and us.' 'Them and us' are unable to gather round ...and ALL are invited to wholeness and to food..."¹ The Scriptures tell the story of how God formed a people for himself. There is the theme of being called not only as individuals but as individuals-in-community. There is the theme of historical journey in time and space with this family-community-people into an unknown, hopeful future trusting this loving Creator-God. There is a clear awareness of a special agreement of fidelity, a covenant between God and this chosen people who agree to honor this God only-- and this in the midst of cultures which worship many gods. This people are called to respond to God's love and to be different from the people who worship many gods. The thread which is to connect this people from one generation to the next is more than land and cultic worship. Scripture portrays God as continually calling his people to remember. They are to remember their call and their sense of being God's family on a journey through history. They are to

remember God's saving deeds and their special agreement to worship no other gods, no matter what their neighbors do. They are to remember and listen to God's persistent invitation to respond to his call in the way they lead their lives.

In the New Testament these themes are reinforced in the teaching and example of Jesus who was a Jewish layman calling his co-religionists to purify and renew their covenantal relationship with God. The Gospels tell the story of Jesus' mission, his symbolic choosing of twelve disciples and his sending them out "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6). Although Jesus' efforts ended in rejection and apparent failure, after his death his disciples and followers were newly-animated by his Spirit and carried his message of the present and future Kingdom to the Jewish and Gentile worlds. The Church which emerged from their evangelizing activity was understood as the people of God of the new covenant continuing Israel's special relationship to God and call to be a people set apart.

A primary achievement of Vatican II is the renewed understanding of the Church as people of God. Its documents reveal a major shift in the Church's self-understanding with less attention given to the Church as institution and much more focus on the Church as God's people in the context of the second half of the twentieth century. However, I believe that this understanding is not very clear or meaningful for many, if not most Catholics in the United States. I believe that leadership in most parishes is in the hands of men who

completed their theological studies prior to Vatican II. Even if these leaders have kept up with theological developments, their leadership style is likely to reflect their life-long experience of a non-participatory Church focused on maintaining traditional structures. Isolated in rectories which are often over-busy but lonely places, these pastoral leaders lack the basic experiences of Christian community. Sharing diverse tasks without sharing meals, friendship and faith does not lead to or exemplify Christian community. These pastors are so involved in maintaining the Church-as-it-has-been-and-is that they have no time or space to share dreams of God's new plans for the Church-in-process-of-becoming.

Unless such pastoral leaders find a way to participate in a discerning faith community of associates in ministry within the parish, they may be exposed to overwork, burnout and deep discouragement. My point is that pastors and their parishes need all the help they can get to begin to live out the vision of Church as people of God, to discover the gifts and call of the community and to discern God's leading for each local Church. After all, the Spirit guides not only ordained parish leaders but committed laypersons who have a deep concern for renewal of the Church and for passing on the faith to the next generation. To restrict the guidance of the Spirit to one or two pastors seems almost an attempt to tie the hands of God whose Spirit blows where it will and who wishes to renew the face of the

earth. To limit the guidance of the Spirit to individuals and to turn away from the Spirit's leading in the life of the community is to ignore the social dimension of human life where human sinfulness is so clearly obvious and troubling to the church and unchurched alike. Social sin needs to be confronted by social grace which is manifest in the collective life-style of a gathered people who together or through their representatives discern God's leading. Encouraging the Spirit to guide the local Church calls for the pastors and lay and religious associates in ministry to participate in a discerning faith community. It calls for a parish to become a community of communities which provide mutual support, which discover and enable gifts and which facilitate the whole congregation in becoming involved in the mission of Jesus. I have serious questions about parishes which have a passive congregation nourished only by an individualistic piety and with token staff carrying out mission on behalf of the whole parish. Such a parish will eventually have great difficulty surviving much less passing on the faith to the next generation.

I have an insight from my own family life which may make a contribution to pastors who knowingly or unknowingly cling to their pre-Vatican II vision and style of leadership. For some time after the mid-sixties I remained a pre-Vatican II co-pastor of the Leone domestic church. I was uncomfortable with my occasionally authoritarian ways of dealing with my children, especially the teenagers. However,

I did not know how to adapt to my children who were growing up before my eyes and surprising me constantly and keeping me off balance. My traditional role had become very dysfunctional and yet I was unable to transform my leadership style. My children finally informed me that I did not listen to them. Of course I do, I thought, but I was unable to change and there were serious tensions. It took time, struggle and much pain for me to learn to listen, not only to the words of my changing children, but to their feelings and to be able to respond in a more empathetic and compassionate way. It occurs to me that many pastors are faced with a similar situation--not being able to change themselves and faced with laity growing into responsible adult faith. I believe that a process of mutual and respectful listening accompanied by dialogue is key to necessary change in the Church. I believe that the spirit can be heard in such a process and that laity have a real contribution to make to the Church. In retrospect I have come to understand that mutual listening leads to change and that it is a participation in the dying and rising of Jesus. Change can be painful, especially when it is resisted, but it is necessary for the growth of individuals and of the Church. Such respectful listening invites the Spirit and contains the seed of new life in the Church.

My concern for the Church and its renewed self-understanding is much more than a narrowly focused concern for maintenance and renewal within present structures. The

changed self-understanding of the Church reveals that the Church does not exist for itself but for mission, the mission of Jesus who so clearly reflects God's love for the world. Structures of the Church are to serve this mission. In the process of listening to my own experience and that of many other American lay persons during preparations for the recent 1987 Synod on the Laity, I have concluded that present structures are counter-productive and that there needs to be a nation-wide shared reflection within the Church on the vocation of the laity and on what kind of Church structures will best serve this crucial but neglected agenda. Since laity comprise approximately ninety-eight percent of the Church, it is not unreasonable to expect that the Spirit is speaking to committed lay persons regarding their mission and the future structuring of the Church which is to enable that mission. In the Church's renewed self-understanding the laity are called in a special way, by reason of their immersion in the world, "to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can she become the salt of the earth" (Lumen Gentium, no. 33). Sharing the priestly function of Jesus, they are called to consecrate the world itself to God transforming it by the way they lead their lives and the choices they make in family life and in the world of work. They are also called to share Jesus' prophetic role in confronting unjust social structures.

In my reflection on church and culture, social sin and social grace, I have pointed to the crisis of Western civilization particularly as it is experienced within the United States. Thoughtful reflection on the many facets of this crisis reveals the spiritual void at its center. Self-centered individualism has infected our culture and even the Church in such a way that faith has become a private matter and that being a person for others as Jesus was is understood narrowly. I am not alone in believing that this culture seduces Christians into an idolatry of money, things and power with little conscious resistance to such temptations for Christian reasons. A Church that has not dealt with the social aspects of conversion is in no position to challenge or to change that culture. It has not communicated effectively its understanding that the message of Jesus is both personal and social. With a few marvelous exceptions, such as the Campaign for Human Development, I feel that the Church has become domesticated within American culture without maintaining a critical distance and self-awareness. In Religion and Alienation Gregory Baum has stated the situation clearly: "To reduce the Christian message to a truth about personal salvation is to suppress a basic dimension of this message and to transform it into an ideology sanctioning individualism."² I believe that a critical self-awareness is absolutely necessary for the Church to evangelize and to fulfill its mission within American society and culture.

If the laity are to be the agents of this evangelization, there is an urgent need for a consultative process of national pastoral planning to move forward the lay agenda. At this point in time this agenda seems to have a very low priority and is at the mercy of the individualistic insights and initiatives of local pastors who do not share the vision nor the urgency of fostering lay vocations. However, there are signs of life from committed laity, but they are so scattered and unconnected with each other that progress is very uncertain. Under the umbrella of an organization called "The American Catholic Lay Network," two hundred and fifty American laity held a parallel conference in Rome during the third week of the Bishops' Synod on the Laity. There are hopes that a Leadership Conference of Catholic Laity will emerge from this gathering and from the communication among the laity which took place in preparation for the Synod.

In the process of gathering input from the American laity in preparation for the Synod in Rome, the four American Bishop delegates were already able to determine to a great extent the sensus fidelium. There was concern for lay/clergy relationships, the role of women in the Church, the expressed need of the laity for resources for spiritual growth, and a search for affirmation and enablement of laity in mission and ministry. It seems to me that these concerns, in addition to others which would be surfaced locally, would provide sufficient matter for a national consultation process which, most practically, might take place within each

diocese or regional cluster of dioceses. It seems to me that all of these concerns have to do with the development of lay vocations. Such a process also has the possibility of putting laity and clergy in dialogue with each other outside of parish structures where tensions are sometimes felt so keenly. Perhaps the American Church could learn something from the experience of the English Church which held a two year, nationwide process of consultation reappraising the effectiveness of the Church. In Michael Winter's book Mission Resumed?, it was proposed that this consultation develop a data base for pastoral planning. This process would include:

1. identification of the objectives of the Church,
2. measurement of the attainment of these objectives,
3. an evaluation of methods in light of data acquired, and
4. a devising of new methods wherever present methods are shown to be ineffective.³

Evaluation would be an essential part of any pastoral planning. Particularly neglected resources are the movements for renewal such as Cusillo, Marriage Encounter, and Christian Life Communities which need to be called together within a diocese to explore their complementarity and to determine what they can offer to the pastoral planning process. The Spirit has been active in these groups but they are out of touch with each other and seem to be almost totally ignored as resources for lay formation. I am particularly concerned for the local churches--the parishes where the Bishops have placed all their hopes for renewal of the Church. I believe that parishes have a vigorous sense of

mission depending on whether the pastor sees himself primarily as a coordinator of tasks--dispensing sacraments and services and managing finances and a physical plant, or whether he sees himself as the animator of the whole Christian community. The latter would be an enabler of ongoing adult faith-formation which leads to lay discernment of call and gifts, faith-sharing communities and discernment of vocations to serve the life of the church and the life of the world.

The present thrust towards evangelization of American culture is praiseworthy but I keep on wondering how well the evangelizers are evangelized. How do they understand social sin and social grace? Are they wrestling with the tension between Christ and culture or are they domesticated within a Church which seems firmly entrenched in this culture? I have seen many instances of this harmful relationship: a CIA Director as speaker at two Catholic high school commencements (while the CIA was being publicly censured in Congress and the press); the Klan attempting to recruit in my son's Catholic high school; white-gloved military men acting as ushers and marching in the procession for the consecration of two Bishops, and much more. I have noted with great discomfort the news photographs of the President with the Bishops and the President with the Pope. Whether the Bishops are aware of it or not, such publicity makes a powerful public statement for the policies of that President and symbolizes an unhealthy Church/State relationship. What

do liberation themes such as freedom from manipulation and from cultural addictions have to say in such circumstances?

In An Alternative Vision, Roger Haight shares some very helpful reflections on the role of the Spirit/grace in human existence. He sees grace as "God's power at work in the world for salvation" and Jesus as Savior in whom was revealed "God's intention for human life and the direction in which history should move." The evidence for the operation of God's grace is in the fruit of Christian religious experience--the liberation of the human spirit from itself, overcoming selfishness and egoism. "Grace is the disclosure that the human situation does not have to be the way it is."⁴ The location for exercise of this growing freedom and love is the arena of everyday life in human occupations, decisions and actions. A way must be found for graced lay experience to be heard in the Church.

We must never forget that our faith is incarnational. This insight has enormous implications for individual Christians and for Christians gathered as Church. It has to do with making choices that lead to life and has everything to do with the way we lead our lives. If Christians are called to a faithful following of Jesus, then the Church must begin to reflect that discipleship in its collective life-style. Within its own life as a Christian community of communities it must live Kingdom values--caring, communicating, sharing, treasuring and enabling the gifts of all, reading the signs of the times, discerning, resisting evil and struggling for

justice. Ministry in such a Church makes a choice from the point of view of the victims of society. It will respond to social and cultural crises from a Christian point of view. Such a Church will become a sign of Jesus' healing and liberating presence within its own social context. The process of reflection on personal, interpersonal and social experience in the light of faith will develop a prayerful people guided by the Spirit--contemplatives in action. The Spirit of Jesus will be visible in their worship, their ministry and their daily lives. Jesus' concerns for the Kingdom will be the concerns of their lives, individually and collectively. Jesus signified his continuing presence in the Church under the eucharistic species of bread and wine. Can his followers do less than allow themselves to become bread and wine for an alienated and hungry world?

In this paper I have proposed the Ignatian Exercises as a resource to facilitate the faith-formation of the people of God. Like Ignatius, God's people can reflect on their personal, interpersonal and social experience in the light of faith, and they can discern God's guidance in their lives. Experience of the Exercises offers the advantages of spiritual disciplines, a personal encounter with the person of Jesus, adaptation of prayer to personal needs, challenges to life-style, thinking with the Church and a deeper appreciation of discernment. I have experienced the Exercises as a marvelous resource for the integration of the personal and social dimensions of my life and as nourishment

for my individual faith-journey as well as for that of my faith-community. My concern for the Church takes seriously the active role of the layperson functioning with responsibility and freedom. I see the Exercises as a significant resource for developing this responsibility and freedom.

For the people of God in the Old Testament, God's will was written on tablets of stone and in the books of the law, but God promised at a future time to write this law in human hearts: "The Lord, your God, will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, that you may love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and all your soul, and so may live" (Deut. 30:6). This command to love God is "not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, 'Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out" (Deut. 30:11-14). God is pleading through the farewell address of Moses for his people to learn to listen. It is crucial that they make choices that lead to life. God's anger is directed against those who worship false gods--a choice which leads to death. This idolatry is largely unconscious because his people have not learned to listen to his law of love written on their hearts.

Today, the people of God are again having difficulty with idolatry because we have not kept enough distance from our self-centered culture which worships money and power. We have not named our sin and grieved publicly because we have forgotten our accountability to God for our life together in this culture and in our nation. I believe that we need to confess our social sins corporately and to ask for true sorrow for our idolatry and its consequences-- everything that we have done to deface God's image: in ourselves and others and our failure to be responsible stewards of this planet.

I believe that God cares deeply about the conversion of his people in every age. There seems to be a process of conversion going on in the Church in Latin America, especially in Brazil, where the national process of pastoral planning has been so fruitful. In his book, Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil, Marcello Azevedo outlines the changes which have accompanied this conversion:

(1) a shift from clerical hegemony to the active presence and importance of lay people and religious women in the evangelical and apostolic work of the Church;

(2) a shift from an overly spiritualistic approach to a broad, comprehensive view of the human person as the addressee of the evangelization process; all the material and spiritual dimensions of humanity and the human being were to be evangelized--body and soul, individual and community, society and culture;

(3) a shift from the believing Christian as the final object of the evangelization process to the believing Christian as the initial and increasingly active subject of his or her own evangelization and its subsequent spread to the world at large;

(4) a shift from a hierarchical, institutional Church playing a protective, watchdog role to the model of a Church accepting and often promoting change even while remaining faithful to itself; open to self-transformation on the personal and structural levels, this Church would endorse the legitimacy of vital, small communities within its bosom because it saw their promise and their possible fruitfulness for church life;

(5) a shift from seeing transformation as something always effected from the top down, or merely on the juridical and organizational planes, to positive valuation and endorsement of creativity operating from the bottom up; new patterns of social relations, founded on participation and communion, would surface both within communities and Church, serving as vehicles for both the process of evangelization and the inner life of the ecclesial institution;

(6) a shift from giving primacy to theoretical elaboration as the prerequisite in the evangelization process to paying attention to reality and experience as the starting point and perduring reference point for all reflection.⁵

It seems to me that the Church in the United States could learn much from the Church in Brazil. For me the most fundamental issue seems to be the need for openness to reflection on the experience of the Church in the United States--what has been hospitable to the life of the Spirit and what has hindered it, which structures serve the mission of Jesus and which ones do not. How does the Church as a community embody Kingdom values? The poem of Chuck Lathrop entitled "In Search of a Roundtable" suggests the choices that lie ahead. They have to do with a renewed understanding of Church as people of God, discerning the Spirit and incarnating the Kingdom values of Jesus.

IN SEARCH OF A ROUNDTABLE

Concerning the why and how and what and who
of ministry,
one image keeps surfacing:

A table that is round.

It will take some sawing
to be roundtabled,
some redefining
and redesigning

Such redoing and rebirthing
of narrowlong Churching
can painful be
for people and tables

But so was the cross
a painful too table
of giving and yes

And from such death comes life,
from such dying comes rising
in search of roundtabling

And what would roundtable Churching mean?

It would mean no daising
and throning,
for but one King is there
and He was a footwisher
at table no less

A healer of hearts, he
and bestower of disturbing peace,
whose footsteps we lost track of

We looked for signs
but with uncircumcised hearts,
trying to discern a message indiscernable
to pumped and circumstanced,

Yet well-intentioned ones,
who while proclaiming the finding,
were all the time losing

For at the narrowlong tables,
servant and mirror
became picture framed
and centers of attention

And crosses became but gilded ornaments
 on bare stone walls
 in buildings used but once a week only

But the times and the tables
 are changing and rearranging

And what of narrowlong table ministers
 when they confront
 a roundtable people,
 after years of working up the table
 (as in up the ladder)
 to finally sit at its head
 only to discover
 that the table has turned round???

Continued rarified air
 will only isolate
 for there are no people there
 only roles

They must be loved into roundness,
 where apart is spelled a part
 and the call
 is to the gathering

For God has called a People
 not 'them and us'

'Them and us'
 are unable
 to gather round
 for at a roundtable
 there are no sides

And ALL are invited
 to wholeness and to food

"When more than was lost
 has been found has been found"
 (e.e. cummings)

But wishing and hoping
 will not get us there -
 daily dying and rising will
 (and some sawing)

At one time

our narrowlong churches
 were built so to resemble the cross,
 but it does no good
 for buildings to do so
 if lives do not

Roundtabling means
 no preferred seating,
 no first and last,
 no better, and no corners
 for the 'least of these'

Roundtabling means
 being with
 a part of,
 together, and one

It means
 room for the Spirit
 and gifts
 and disturbing profound peace for all

It is not magic bread
 that we are baking,
 for the dough we are dealing with
 must and will
 take its dying-in-order-to-rise-again-time

And it is we in the present
 who are mixing and kneading
 the dough for the future.

We can no longer prepare for the past.

We will and must and are called
 to be Church,

And if He calls for other than roundtables
 we are bound to follow

Leaving behind the sawdust
 and chips, designs and redesigns
 behind

All the while
 being harmless as doves
 and wily as serpents
 in search of and in the presence of
 the Kingdom
 that is His and not ours

Amen.⁶

Notes.

¹Chuck Lathrop, "In Search of a Roundtable," in A Gentle Presence.

²Gregory Baum, Religion and Alienation, p. 197.

³Michael Winter, Mission Resumed?, ix.

⁴Roger Haight, An Alternative Vision, pp. 140, 141, 147.

⁵Marcello Azevedo, Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil, pp. 245, 246.

⁶Chuck Lathrop, "In Search of a Roundtable," in A Gentle Presence.

APPENDICES

The following items represent some of my efforts at consciousness-raising on issues relating to faith and culture.

1. "Project Green Proposal." "Project Green" was a community-based group in Iowa City focused on environmental concerns. It was seeking to incorporate its point of view into the curriculum-planning process of the school system. The curriculum-review committee for which I was responsible submitted this proposal which included both human and environmental concerns--a Christian anthropological perspective in secular terms.
2. "'Our Father' in the Context of the USA." This paraphrased "Our Father" was written for and used for worship in an ecumenical association in which I participated in the early seventies in Iowa City when Vietnam war protests were at their high point. The original has been slightly revised for this paper.
3. "American Delegation Replies to Chilean Challenge." I wrote this statement in collaboration with one other person at the meeting of the World Federation of Christian Life Communities in 1973, at which more than forty countries were represented. The timing was one month before the Allende regime was brought down in Chile. When this statement was read before a plenary session, it had a remarkable reconciling effect.
4. "Confession of Social Sin for American Christians." This confession was never used. It was written during an eight-day, individually-guided Ignatian retreat which I made in the Philippines in connection with a meeting of the World Federation of Christian Life Communities in 1976. I have revised it slightly for this paper.
5. "What is the Spirit Saying?". This is a theological reflection which I wrote and distributed to our troubled parish council in 1980. As of this writing there is still no parish council and the parish is largely passive and uninvolved in mission. It is also getting restless!

APPENDIX 1

Project Green Proposal

for discussion of

Underlying Philosophy for Social Studies
Curriculum

"Everything begins--or ends--with a view of life." As individuals, as members of the human family, and as inhabitants of this planet, we are inextricably related to and dependent upon others and our environment. Individual fulfillment can be realized only if man sees himself as a part of the entire community of man and of nature--with which he must live in harmony and for which he is responsible.

A philosophy of education based on this commitment to life requires a new approach to the educational process which would open to this sense of community on the human and environmental levels. This educational process must provide opportunities for responsible participation in and utilization of all sources of educational experience with special emphasis on those found outside the traditional methods and materials.

May 1973

APPENDIX 2

"OUR FATHER" IN THE CONTEXT OF THE USAOur Father -

You are Father-Creator to all peoples--Arabs and Israelis, black Africans and white Africans, Vietnamese, Chinese and Russians. We consider ourselves your children, too, and members of the human family.

Who art in heaven -

You know us all and see our serious inability to get along with each other. We ask forgiveness and healing of our self-righteousness.

Hallowed be your name -

We say these words but in our actions we really reverence money, power and pleasure because we have enshrined them in our American way of life. Do you listen to our liturgies while we fail to acknowledge and reject these idols?

Your kingdom come -

What are we doing, as your people, to further your kingdom? If we love you, our lives and the institutions we create will reflect kingdom-values.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven -

Help us to understand that our will is not necessarily your will. What do you think about our wars against our sisters and brothers and our failure to find alternatives? Teach us discernment, Lord!

Give us this day our daily bread -

Thank you for our abundance--but do we squander it in our consumer society and in the arms race? What about the needs of the homeless and the unemployed? Is Lazarus at our gates? What is God asking of us, his people?

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors -

Your forgiveness of us depends on our mutual and fraternal forgiveness. Forgiveness is not easy, Lord. Help us to become aware of your unconditional acceptance and love for us and help us to extend this acceptance and love to others.

And lead us not into temptation -

Lord, we make choices daily. Some lead to death, others to life. Help us to make choices that lead to life and to human wholeness--for ourselves and others.

But deliver us from evil -

Lord, free us from our self-centered ways and give us clean hearts. Help us, your people, to discover your will for us in these times.

FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY FOREVER,

AMEN

APPENDIX 3

American Delegation Replies to Chilean Challenge

Augsburg, August 8, 1973

The United States Delegation has the following message for the delegates to the World Assembly of Christian Life Communities meeting in Augsburg, Germany.

We identify ourselves as belonging to a rich "First World" country which often is blind and insensitive to its involvement in the oppressive exploitation of developing countries around the world. Our economic system represented by multinational corporations appears to us more and more as a form of economic colonialism in which we consume enormous quantities of the world's resources. Before the world we see ourselves as a "liberator," but we do not yet truly understand the meaning of the word.

We think of ourselves as a Christian country and as a democracy--yet our involvement with other nations takes advantage of them at every opportunity. We say we believe in "liberty and justice for all," yet we deny this belief in our relations with other countries. We have much to discern as a country.

And so we say to you--that as a delegation, we truly have begun to hear the message on liberation, and that it has new meaning for us. It means taking a new look at our materialistic, consumer society, and our life-style as American Christians. It means a new and distinctively American approach to liberation in the context of our own society and culture. Our own liberation from this situation of sin must develop along with our increased awareness and involvement with the liberation of others.

We hope in a small way we can be a sign of hope to you. But you truly are a sign of hope to us, and we pray that our efforts in the process of liberation may become a more abundant sign of hope to you as we struggle toward constructive, radical (root) change. We, as individuals, take back with us to our national convention in one week this expression, and a deep desire to make the United States aware of your struggle and our own need for change. We are searching for ways in which we, as members of CLC, can help each other in this enormous task of liberation for all men and women.

The United States Delegation

APPENDIX 4

CONFESSION OF SOCIAL SIN FOR AMERICAN CHRISTIANS

We wish to acknowledge and ask forgiveness for our participation in the seriously unjust structures of American society and culture. We also desire, personally, to beg forgiveness for and to ask for healing of our inner attitudes which are projected so clearly in our social institutions:

For being too busy and distracted to sustain loving human relationships with those nearest and dearest to us

We ask forgiveness, Lord

For our uncritical support of an educational process which domesticates us in an unjust society

We ask forgiveness, Lord

For our sins of insensitivity to the suffering of the poor, the elderly, the homeless, the unemployed, abused children, the imprisoned

We beg forgiveness, Lord

For our way of life which emphasizes getting rather than giving

We ask forgiveness, Lord

For our personal and social sins of racism and sexism-- external expressions of our seriously flawed love of neighbor

We ask forgiveness, Lord

For our destructive over-use of world-resources and abuse of our environment

We ask forgiveness, Lord

For our uncritical acceptance of an economic system which puts profits first and people second

We ask forgiveness, Lord

For our passive acquiescence in the arms race which diverts human and financial resources for destructive purposes

We ask forgiveness, Lord

For our failure to listen to you, Lord and to trust your leading. We have scarcely begun to translate your law of love into our personal, economic and social relationships.

We ask your forgiveness, Lord

Like Adam and Eve in the garden we hide from your presence in our use of drugs and in other compulsive behaviour. Forgive our failure to read the signs of the times and give us clean hearts.

Lord, we your people beg forgiveness and healing

APPENDIX 5

WHAT IS THE SPIRIT SAYING?

We, the People of God in NW Washington now known as the "Amen Community," have a growing sense of alienation from the church as we have experienced it in parish life. In our efforts to take seriously the call of Christ in our own lives and in the life of the church, we have found ourselves excluded from ministries, denied participation in parish life and silenced. Most painful of all has been the refusal of our pastor to enter into dialogue with us and to discuss honest differences. Our efforts to function as responsible adults and to foster mutual accountability in parish life have met with varied responses from our pastor: hostility, evasiveness, manipulation, silence and shunning at the kiss of peace during Mass. This negative relationship has even been experienced by our children in the parish school and we have been obliged to send them elsewhere.

In our search for honest dialogue we have desired neither to dominate nor to be dominated. We are learning, to our sorrow, that the clerical state can be a controlling, specialized culture which frequently renders its members incapable of listening to the "cry of the people." We are searching for our ministry as lay people and we feel that it goes beyond being a lector and assisting the priest at Mass. We sense that lay ministry is not understood by our pastoral leaders and is threatening to them. We feel like exiles but are consoled when we recall that Jesus, also not of the priestly caste, was rejected by the religious leaders of His time.

We are beginning to sense that being is more important than doing. St. Paul put it well when he said, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels"...and have great knowledge and do great works and don't have love, I am nothing...I gain nothing. We believe that a community which rejects dialogue (and the caring for the "other" that is implied in listening) cannot be an authentic sign or sacrament of God's Love. The quality of relationships makes or destroys community.

In our struggle we have been learning much about love and prayer. We have shared meals together, we listen carefully to each other, we pray for each other and for our pastors and are searching for God's guidance and leading in our experience of exile. We feel as though we have been excommunicated (driven out of the community) by our pastor yet we still consider ourselves members of our parish. We were here before he came and we will be here after he leaves.

However, we disclaim responsibility for any parish indebtedness which he has incurred as a result of his unilateral decision-making and undiscerned priorities.

Our struggle has brought us closer to each other and to our God who has promised to be with His people even in the desert. During this third summer of our struggle, the daily Mass readings have portrayed the slavery of the Jewish people in Egypt and God's liberating action. We can identify with that story just as we can with the gradual liberation of black people in this country. Most of us are black. We know that we must remember God's saving action in human history and that He continues to save His people today. Such reflection strengthens us in our exile and wandering and gives us hope that He will lead us Home in His good time. "We have come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord..."

Our desert experience is deepening our identity as God's people. We know that we are called to be a community with a mission and that it has to do with justice in the Church and in the world. We are concerned for our children. We doubt that the experience of exile which they have shared with us will lead them to choose church vocations. However, they may very well discover that they share with us a concern to build a more just and caring world. We wonder if they will see the Church as preaching justice but denying that justice in its inner life. Will they follow the exodus of so many young people from the Church or will they choose an authentic Christian community regardless of the denominational label and so preserve their faith?

Our sense of being exiled is deepening. We want to worship together but we have no-one to say Mass for us. We do share meals together, pray together and keep in touch. We want to grow and develop an adult understanding and practice of our faith. We feel a call to ministry but feel rejected and misunderstood. We feel that we have been given stones instead of bread. Our greatest sorrow is that we have not been able to develop a listening process within our parish or diocese. We believe that such an experience is urgently needed so that together as Church we may read the signs of the times and allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit. What is the Spirit saying to the Church and to the churches?

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