

**CHARISMS, MOVEMENTS AND COMMUNITIES
IN THE CHURCH****A PASTORAL OVERVIEW**

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I. THE RISE OF CATHOLIC MOVEMENTS: KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS
by
JEAN VANIER

Many people are embarrassed by the new Christian lay communities. Their poverty, enthusiasm, celebrations and radical way of living provoke a certain anxiety. They are out of the ordinary. Let us take the same attitude as Gamaliel in Acts 5:

Keep away from these men. Let them alone; for if this plan or understanding is of human beings, it will fail. But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God.

A few years ago I was invited to visit the Jesus People in a broken-down area of Chicago. When I arrived in the large building, formerly a hotel in which all the members lived, I was somewhat surprised by the rather strange drawings on the walls, the long beards and long dresses, and by the "mother" who seemed to have authority over the group. After supper I was asked to speak to the whole community of about 200 men and women, simply and poorly clothed, including quite a few "punks" with their colored hair.

*Mr. Jean Vanier is the founder of *L'Arche* Community. His article appeared in *The Tablet*, (1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W60QZ), March, 15, 1997, and is reprinted here with permission.

As I spent time with them, I discovered that they gave free meals each day to some 300 people who were down and out. I also realized that many of the members had suffered in their younger days, some through drugs or in prison. I asked one of the leaders what their links were with the mainstream Churches of the city. He told me they were not too good because nobody seemed to want to accept them.

I found this strange group of people, which some might call a sect, quite beautiful. I am not sure there are many Christian communities capable of welcoming men and women whose lives have been so disordered and of helping them to live in a more human and more deeply Christian way.

In Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic, there is a small community of l'Arche where a number of young people, whom we call "assistants," have come to live with people like Luisito, a young beggar with a severe mental handicap whom we welcomed. Some of these young assistants are generous and idealistic but have no interior discipline; their attention span is limited; they are unable to take on a real responsibility; they need continual stimulation and exciting experiences; they are frightened of authority. They join the community for a short time and then leave.

Other young people who come are more structured. Quite often they are former members of a lay movement in the Church which some people might call sectarian and closed, because of its strong formation and the way it is separated off from others. And yet they know why they have come; they can assume responsibility.

My experiences in Chicago and Santo Domingo, then, have taught me to be careful before speaking about "sects" or "sectarian" communities.

Let us examine the differences between a sect and a community.

In recent years, we have heard of the mass deaths (including suicides) of sect members in Texas, Guyana and Switzerland. Other sects, especially in Latin America, bring people into a dream world, cut off from reality. Still others, based on the cult of Satan, appear particularly evil.

Certain characteristics describe or define a sect:

- A sect is frequently dominated by an all-powerful guru seen as the uniquely inspired prophet and savior whose teachings and writings alone are true. No other authority is tolerated. Contacts with other forms of thought or behavior are forbidden.
- The sect has all the truth. It presents itself as having a new message of

salvation for all the world. This gives a total meaning to its members' lives and an intense motivation to proselytize and to recruit.

■ For those in the sect, society is divided into the good and the bad, the saved and the damned. Strong walls of fear are created, making it difficult for members to question anything. They are cut off from family, friends and all other social institutions.

■ Members are obliged to sacrifice their personal conscience, freedom and critical capacity to the power, security and goals of the group. Their intelligences are manipulated. They live off slogans rather than growing in their understanding of reality through their search for truth.

■ Anguished, fragile, lonely people are attracted and seduced into the group. The togetherness, security and powerful goals of the group transmit a good feeling and relieve the anguish and pain of loneliness, worthlessness, meaninglessness and lack of direction. This makes it almost impossible to leave without going through even greater anguish, and the apparent risk of emptiness, loneliness and inner death.

Now, some of these elements can be found in all Christian communities, particularly in the early years of their foundation. But as the community grows and deepens and is recognized by a Church, two very distinctive differences become evident.

■ A Christian community is there for each person, to foster growth into freedom and a deepening of personal consciousness. Though the mission of the community may be greater than any one member, the integrity and vocation of each is more important than numerical increase or institutional survival. There is a long probationary period before anyone can be committed long-term, and whoever discovers that their place is no longer in the group is helped to leave peacefully.

■ A community is not closed upon itself. Community members are encouraged to be in contact with other Christians, movements, spiritual leaders and theologians in the Church as they grow to maturity. They are part of the wider Church which recognizes and accepts the goals of the community and the way it is governed, and which can arbitrate in times of conflict.

There are certain signs that reveal that a community or movement is evolving in the ways of the Spirit. A tree is judged by its fruits. Good fruits, good trees.

First, as the community or movement grows and deepens its own charism and mission, it discovers the beauty and gifts of others in the local Church,

and the whole Church.

This insertion into the local Church can take time because some new movements, with their enthusiasm and poverty, seem to "rock the boat." People set in their ways and their ideas may not like this. New movements founded in one particular diocese may then need support from the Pope and the universal Church, in the initial stages of their foundation, so as to grow universally.

Subsequently, however, the new movements must become integrated and "inculturated" into the local scene, recognizing the authority of the local bishop and co-operating with other movements.

Secondly, it is a sign of the Spirit at work when a movement, conscious of its own limits and weaknesses, and of being closed, realizes it has committed errors.

Every new foundation has its own call, but also its shadow side. Every founder bears some darkness as well as light; none is entirely pure. What is true of the founder may be even more true of the first disciples. They tend frequently to be less open than the founder and to interpret in a rigid way the founder's spirituality, vision and way of life.

Movements and communities will normally need help from outside in order to face their shadow side, to perceive and evaluate how authority has been exercised, how power is used and abused. They will also need to listen and accept criticism, to have the courage to question themselves, the honesty to admit shortcomings and the energy to change. They will have to rid themselves of certain aspects that were necessary at the beginning of the foundation but which have become outmoded, even a sign of death.

Thirdly, a movement is growing in the Holy Spirit if it seeks continually to be faithful to an evolving Church, while remaining clear in its identity. This is not always easy, especially for movements founded to maintain rectitude of faith. But as a movement grows, it is called not only to deepen its charism and identity, but also to progress in openness. It must learn to follow both the Gospel message and the mind of the Church.

Pope John Paul II sets an example of firm identity combined with openness, as shown by the Assisi meeting in 1986 with leaders of other religions, his visits to the synagogue in Rome, and to Morocco and Tunisia, and his insistence that all Catholics work for unity among all Christians.

If a new movement is announcing good news to the poor and allowing them to evangelize it in return, then here again is a sign of the Spirit. To eat

at the same table as the poor, to be committed to them in bonds of friendship, is always demanding and disturbing. The presence of the poor and the weak keeps a movement humble and prevents it from closing in upon itself.

The poor oblige it to evolve and to deepen. When Jesus sends his disciples out to announce good news to the poor, he tells them to go in the style — without money or change of clothes. Is it possible to announce good news to the poor and the broken if we speak from a place of power, comfort and security? God is Emmanuel, God-with-us, looking after us and caring for us in our weakness.

Another important sign is the quality of love for the weaker members of the group: for those who are going through a particular time of psychological or physical difficulty or of doubt, or who feel called to move on. The latter frequently need help in order to leave the group peacefully, without feeling guilty.

All groups tend to hold on to their members. They do not let go easily. Beyond certain limits, this becomes destructive and indeed sectarian. It is as if for a person to leave the group is synonymous with leaving the Church or leaving God. But it does not seem right or of the Spirit when a brother or sister who leaves the group suddenly becomes a stranger.

Another sign of the Spirit is when joy and celebration flow from trust in Jesus. Sectarian groups tend to be very serious. They consider themselves responsible for reforming the Church and that is serious business. But communities growing in the ways of the Spirit know that Jesus is responsible for his Body, the Church, and that they are but instruments of his life, love and light.

As time goes by, some members of new movements, like members of the Church in general, try to hold on drastically to ways of doing things which are not essential to their charism; this prevents them from evolving in the Spirit of God. Others, in an attempt to be totally open, reject elements of faith, of spirituality and of their tradition.

We all need to be pruned and purified in order to be faithful to the Holy Spirit. Only then can we remain grounded in our identity, charism and spirituality, while at the same time being open to evolving in accordance with the needs of the times.

II. NEO-PENTECOSTALISM: A PASTORAL RESPONSE
by
THE CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF INDIA (CCBI-LR)

PREAMBLE

1. We, the 85 archbishops, bishops and diocesan administrators gathered for the Ninth Plenary Assembly of the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI-LR), held in St. Joseph's Seminary, Mangalore, from January 9-12, 1997, discussed, as our main theme, the rise and growth of Neo-Pentecostalism, which poses a challenge to the Catholic Church.

2. All over the world episcopal conferences are confronted with this phenomenon. Various departments of the Vatican studied the matter and issued a document, "Sects or New Religious Movements — A Pastoral Challenge" (1986).

3. In our country a national survey on Neo-Pentecostalism was conducted by the Department of Social Sciences, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune. The findings of the survey were presented to the General Body of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) at Thiruvanthapuram in February 1996. Later an All-India Consultation on the "Challenge of New-Pentecostalism" sponsored jointly by the CBCI Doctrinal Commission and the National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, was held in December 1996 at NBCLC, Bangalore.

4. Against this background, we discussed the challenge of Neo-Pentecostalism and other challenges faced by the Church. After sharing, dialogue, praying and discerning, we have formulated these pastoral guidelines which we believe the Holy Spirit has led us to. It is our hope that these guidelines will be helpful to make our communities vibrant with faith, hope and love and thus realize the vision of Vatican II, which was a new Pentecost in the Church.

PASTORAL GUIDELINES

God Experience

5. Our epoch is characterized by a deep quest for the experience of God. God is experienced in many ways: in creation and the events and circumstances of life, in the Word of God, in the community and in the sacraments.

*The Pastoral Guidelines were issued by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI-LR) at its plenary assembly, held at St. Joseph's Seminary, Mangalore, India, January 9-12, 1997, and reprinted with permission.

For us genuine God-experience is not necessarily related to feelings and emotions; it is deeply rooted in faith and is fundamentally Christ-centred (Phil 3:8). It is the Christ-experience handed over to the Church by apostolic witness (I Jn 1:1-3) which formed the core of authentic Christian God-experience. It is a gift from God through his Holy Spirit and therefore it has to be sought through prayer in an attitude of openness and surrender. Our Church celebrates her God-experience in the liturgy, with the Eucharist as its source and summit. In the Eucharist Christ is experienced as Savior, Redeemer and Healer, Friend and Brother. This Christ-experience is witnessed to through a life of service to others, especially those in need. In the Catholic Church the lives of countless faithful have been transformed by such a profound and personal encounter with Christ.

6. In order to promote God-experience through prayer and liturgy it is important that:

- our people be enabled to find God through a faith perspective in the events of life, especially in difficult circumstances and in times of suffering, through a faith perspective;
- the prayer life of our people be deepened through different forms of prayer, such as prayer of praise, worship, thanksgiving, forgiveness, adoration and night vigils. Indian forms of prayers, such as *namajapa*, *bhajans*, and the practice of interiorization be fostered;
- mutual forgiveness be facilitated between individuals and families within the community, culminating in the sacrament of reconciliation;
- The Eucharist be celebrated on different occasions (First Communion, Confirmation, weddings, jubilees, anniversaries, times of sickness and funerals), in a manner that is more relevant to the life of the people;
- neighborhood masses, children's masses, youth masses, etc., be encouraged;
- the faithful be made aware that the Eucharistic celebration is the greatest healing service, since the Healer himself becomes one with us;
- our traditional and other devotions, such as novenas, popular devotions and para-liturgical services be revitalized through participation, spontaneity, and be made relevant to the needs of the people;
- the celebration of the sacraments be made a true family and community event, leading to a conscious commitment to the Lord;

- the prayers be said and the hymns be sung in the liturgy in such a manner that they become powerful means of personal communion with God;
- The retreats, recollections, live-ins, week-ends leading our faithful to Christ-experience and conversion experience be promoted.

The Word of God

7. The Word of God is of fundamental importance for the building up of the Christian community. The first Christian community received the Word from the preaching of the Apostles (Acts 2:41). It was constantly nourished by the Word, by sharing of the bread, by prayer and by the warmth of their fellowship (Acts 2:42). Any effort at forming the Christian community demands a living and effective presence of God's Word. It is therefore urgent that Christians should nourish their spiritual life through immediate contact with the Word of God. This demands not merely a better knowledge of the Bible, but an experience of the intimate presence of Christ through a deeper listening to the Word. Jesus offers us a pressing invitation when he says: "those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (Jn 14:23). The promise of Jesus is reassuring. He will make his presence felt in our hearts through our listening to and living his Word.

8. Vatican II emphasizes the primacy of the Word in Christian living. "In the Sacred Books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them... Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through liturgy, rich in divine word, or through devotional reading... and other aids,... Prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture so that God and man may talk together..." (Constitution on Divine Revelation, 21, 25). "Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (St Jerome).

9. To emphasize the primacy of the Word in Christian living:

- In the liturgy the Word of God should be proclaimed with faith and unction so that it touches the hearts of people;
- A short homily ought to be preached at every liturgical celebration and made relevant by relating it to the life-experiences of the people;
- Daily reading of the Bible should be encouraged in the family. This is the right place to begin the process of being nourished by the Word of God;

- Bible study groups and prayer groups ought to be promoted;
- Bible conventions should be held with special emphasis on God-experience, with testimonies of people who have experienced the power of the Word of God in their lives;
- Church doctrines ought to be taught in the light of the Word of God;
- In the interpretation of the Bible, respect for the tradition of the Church and communion with the Magisterium should be emphasized. (The claim of the fundamentalists that the Bible by itself is the only source of revelation has no foundation in the Bible); that our people ought to be familiarized with the latest document of the Holy See on "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church."

Fostering Fellowship in the Church

10. The early Church which was essentially a communion, a fellowship of Jesus' disciples gathered together and led by the Spirit of the Risen Lord is the model for our communities. Early Christian communities provided the people with warm fellowship, participation in prayer, encounter with the living Word of God and an experience of the Lord in the breaking of the Bread (Acts 2:43-47). These were truly sharing, caring and praying communities; in them the faithful found fulfillment of their spiritual, interpersonal and affective needs.

11. This communitarian spirit needs to be recaptured and relived in our Church today in order to respond effectively to the sense of isolation and alienation felt by many Catholics.

12. To achieve this it is proposed that:

- the traditional parish structure be revitalized, for example, through the establishment of smaller Christian communities within the parish;
- genuine Catholic renewal stressing the role of the Holy Spirit, as is done in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) and in other renewal movements, be fostered in our parishes under the guidance of Church authorities;
- parish councils be established wherever they do not exist, and be made instruments for building up the parish as a true fellowship, as they share in the pastoral mission of the Church;
- both the pastor and parish council members, along with pastoral teams,

- undertake visiting of the families in the parish, especially in times of distress, sickness, death or any other form of suffering in families;
- the liturgical celebrations, the prayers of the faithful, etc., should reflect the needs of the members of the parish;
- the significant events in the life of individuals and families be made known to the whole parish community through appropriate announcements and prayers;
- wherever possible, Community Day or Parish Day celebrations be held to create a sense of belonging and fellowship.

Pastoral Care

13. Jesus is the Good Shepherd whose pastoral concern was to lead every human person to "life in all its fullness" (Jn 10:10). He showed care and concern for every person whom he met or reached out to. The Church is called to follow in the footsteps of the Master and to demonstrate the same concern in reaching out to the people in all aspects of their human life — material, social, psychological and, above all, spiritual.

14. This pastoral concern is not adequately expressed today in the Church, due to clericalism, over-institutionalization and unwieldy parish structures. A new way of being Church is required in which the burden of pastoring does not fall on the priest alone. It would be shared by many others in the parish community, gifted, called and empowered as they are by the Holy Spirit. The priest then would be the animator and co-ordinator of pastoral teams made up of parish pastoral council members, Basic Christian Community leaders, religious, and parish elders, i.e., representatives from every area of parish life. Women would have a far greater role to play than is currently the case. Each parish community would strive to actualize the Pauline vision of the Church as a body in which each part contributes to the well-being of the whole.

15. To prepare pastors to meet this challenge of "pastoral care with a personal touch," it is proposed:

- to give more attention in our seminaries to pastoral skills, with special reference to the four themes above and the Indian context. Even the study of philosophy and theology should be geared to the realization of this objective. The staff of the seminary should equip themselves to meet these challenges;
- to offer in each of our dioceses an on-going formation and skill training for such pastoral care to all involved in pastoral ministries in the par-

ishes;

- to identify and train lay men and women whose gifts and charisms can be put at the service of the community, even on a full-time basis;
- to revive lay ministries that were so much part of the Early Church;
- to equip both clergy and laity to deal appropriately with those questions and arguments that are used to challenge the Catholic position on biblical and theological issues.

16. Till now, our attention in pastoral care has been mainly on the parish community, parish-related associations and smaller groups, but much less on the family, which is the basic unit of community and society. Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, stresses that every family should be involved in the preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

17. Hence, in view of this Jubilee it would be appropriate if we strengthen our efforts to make the family a true domestic church where the experience of God, the Word of God, fellowship and pastoral care are promoted. In other words, our future pastoral approach should revitalize our families, which in turn will strengthen smaller communities, parish communities and the whole diocese.

CONCLUSION

18. In the face of these challenges our task is to co-operate with the Spirit in renewing our ecclesial life. For this we, the bishops, commit ourselves to be effective instruments in promoting God-experience, the ministry of the Word, fellowship, and effective and personalized pastoral care in our dioceses.

19. We appeal to the clergy and the religious of India to become actively involved in the implementation of the above objectives and guidelines, both at parish and diocesan levels.

20. We earnestly urge the formators in the seminaries that in the formation of future pastors a special focus be given to the primacy of God-experience, the centrality of the Word of God, the vitality of fellowship in the community and the urgency of personalized pastoral care.

21. While appreciating all the efforts being undertaken by the laity in different parts of our country to live true Christian lives, we encourage new and creative initiatives and co-operation in the implementation of the above-mentioned guidelines.

22. "Behold, I make all things new" is God's eternal creative Word. The call of Vatican II is for ongoing renewal, an invitation to live the mystery of the Church in such a way that she becomes a sign of communion between God and his people.

23. Jesus promised to give us his Spirit of life in order that we might be renewed and that the face of the earth might be refashioned. The Spirit of the Promise is alive and active in our Church, creating us anew. To collaborate with the Spirit in leading our people to a deep Abba experience, let us commit ourselves to the task ahead.

24. As the great Jubilee Year 2000 approaches, our Church cannot offer the Lord a greater birthday gift than to fill the Earth with vibrant communities of faith and worship, living and witnessing to the power of the Word and the Spirit of love.

25. We cannot but feel pain and anguish at the separation of our brothers and sisters who have chosen to leave the Church. We pray and hope that they realize the Lord's will for them to belong to the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church.

26. As we seek to bring about an all-round renewal in the Church we turn to Mary, the perfect disciple of Jesus, who filled with the Holy Spirit, was obedient always to the will of the heavenly Father. Jesus gave her to us to be our Mother. Many Christians who do not acknowledge, or even reject, Mary as their Mother, are in fact her children, for the very Bible they quote describes who the children of Mary are: "those who obey God's commandments and give witness to the world of Jesus" (Rev 12:17). May she intercede for us her children to grow in authentic discipleship and to be responsive to the needs and problems of our people in the modern world! May she gather together under her mantle the scattered sheep of the Good Shepherd!

III. THE RENEWAL OF CHRISTIAN LIFE AS CHARISM OF THE SPIRIT
GUIDELINES FOR THE RENEWAL
OF THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT IN INDONESIA
by
THE INDONESIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
INTRODUCTION

THE HOLY SPIRIT — ANIMATOR OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

1. It is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church towards all truth, unites it in communion and service, provides and directs it with certain hierarchical and charismatic gifts.¹ Recently, the Church has been shepherded by the hierarchy in the person of Pope John Paul II towards a New Evangelization, because world situations are being transformed rapidly. All members of the Church, especially those who have joined renewal movements in it, are also expected to revitalize themselves in that direction.

2. Hence, we, the entire Catholic faithful, are always in need of self-reflection in order to reevaluate all we have been doing traditionally. It is good to reconsider to what extent there is a need for change and reformation in all that we have been carrying out by habit. It is even necessary, perhaps, to look for new ways and to take new steps, since much has been changed in our life situations. Together with the whole Church, the Catholic charismatic movements also continually need to renew themselves. For that purpose we, the bishops of Indonesia, also feel urged to issue new Pastoral Directives on Renewal of the Christian Life, by deepening our understanding of the charisms of the Spirit, as we presently focus upon "renewing our involvement in New Evangelization together with all the faithful."

CHAPTER ONE

LIVING CHRISTIAN FAITH IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING HUMAN SOCIETY

A. Situations in Society at Large

3. Our nation, together with many other nations, feels the urge to promote *human prosperity* still more. This quest can be easily understood as the carrying out of the mission entrusted to the whole of humanity to cultivate the earth.² From experience we learn how economic growth can enhance improvement of the quality of life. On the contrary, it can turn out to be harm-

*These guidelines were issued by the Indonesian Bishops' Conference. This translation is reprinted with permission.

ful as well. Quite often economics are understood only as the pursuit and accumulation of material wealth. Although the danger of *materialism* in atheist countries has receded because of the breakup of the Communist regimes, more often than not *capitalism* pays excessive homage to material wealth, overemphasizes financial resources and tramples upon human dignity. Within such a development model, the spiritual life, human conscience, and religious morality are easily disregarded. We all feel distressed by such situations.

4. When human dignity is degraded, when faith and spiritual life are depreciated, human society will lose respect for community life. Individualism and a proneness to hedonism and self-satisfaction will prevail in every human endeavor, in politics, economics, social and cultural life, even in religion. There is, indeed, *a close and profound connection between the lack of stability in politics, economics, societal and cultural life*, on the one hand, and the decadence of faith, morality, and spiritual life, on the other.

5. That is why in the last few years, among many nations and in some religions, several movements have come to the fore in order to renew the *spiritual life, to respect the human person, to appreciate more highly fellowship, in being together and in mutual solidarity, to the extent of being committed to preserving the environment and the universe*. However, so many options are being presented by religions, that not a few of our faithful become bewildered. Hence, there is a profound gratitude when a worldview is being proposed that is integral, secure and fascinating. We acknowledge that for many of the faithful the Catholic Charismatic Renewal plays a prominent role on behalf of renewal.

B. The Current Situation of the Church

6. Together with all the Indonesian people, we share their "*joys and hopes, their sufferings and anxieties*."³ We are grateful for the increasing prosperity; but we all feel distressed and threatened by the imminent dangers of materialism, individualism, consumerism, hedonism, pan-sexualism, as manifested by numerous deviations in society.

7. In their struggle against these threats, all parts of the Church are *being touched by the Holy Spirit*, in its whole and in each of its parts, according to its particular charisms. In the course of the outpourings of the Spirit, the disciples were witnesses to how Jesus was sent by the Father, starting with his being baptized by John.⁴ And eventually they experienced that the liberating power of Christ the Lord was manifested through them after his Resurrection, when at Pentecost they received the Spirit. Thus, the early Christians lived out their mission.⁵

8. Within that same process, we in turn feel united with the renewal movement in the Church experienced through the ages. The Church itself came into existence at the time of Jesus in the midst of other emerging religious movements which felt disillusioned with the practices of contemporary Judaism. The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 15, and many New Testament writings disclose how the disciples of Jesus Christ did not want to be hampered by obsolete customs. With St. Anthony of Egypt and his followers withdrawing into the desert, with St. Benedict building his monasteries, until the time of St. Bernard, the action of the Spirit continually renewing the Church was widely evidenced. St. Dominic, St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, and other founders and foundresses of religious institutes in the 19th century, were all persons who strove to be faithful to the Church's vocation to heed continuously the guidance of the Spirit. During the 20th century many among the laity joined lay movements and developed a lay spirituality, because they felt impelled by the Spirit to renew their faith and reform their lives. In fact, the *Catholic Charismatic Renewal* itself has emerged from and has developed within the stream of renewal at work throughout the centuries.

C. Challenges to the Faithful

9. Where great numbers of people are gathered together, in faith communities or groups, with a large number of members, quite often there is need for a witness that *faith touches the very hearts of humans*.⁶ Faith has a social dimension.⁷ Yet, it needs to be accepted by everyone very personally. Faith also can be perceived by others and communicated to them in a visible way.⁸ This way of life can become a reality only when inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in imitation of Jesus Christ, the Son, who teaches us the way to express our faith vividly amid the current trends and events of this world.

10. These circumstances in society and Church *challenge us all to develop a firm faith conviction and a resolute Christian attitude*. We are called to give a courageous witness that the spiritual life, animated by the Spirit of divine love, is a genuine part of our lives today. The world needs witnesses to faith, who in word and in deed give evidence of the *Spirit involving them actively in our world nowadays*.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

11. The Church is a communion of people who powerfully bear witness to the resurrection of the Lord and to life in overflowing grace.⁹ This faith community perseveres in prayer, and commits itself also to promoting the common welfare.¹⁰ It is thus that, very concretely, the mission entrusted to

the Church by Jesus Christ when he ascended into heaven to take his seat at the Father's right hand is realized.¹¹ The Church is sent to make present God's love amid a humanity fully engaged in building a prosperous society.

12. In order to *give concrete shape to our service* in such a society many means are called for. There ought to be technical means, e.g., in efforts for traffic regulation, and for the promotion of economics and trade. Other means are needed to cultivate the sense of belonging to a nation, and to elaborate a right ideology for development. There should also be the ministry of defending fundamental human rights and of improving the environment, of ministries in the fields of education, social-economics, and health services, and of the care for orphans. The Church is sent to carry forth the spirit of Christian love everywhere, so that the earth itself proclaims God's love¹² and fraternity among humans. And our many simple day-to-day activities give proof of the fact that God, now as always, still loves humanity and bestows his love upon his people.¹³ The Church is being sent to share a *renewal of life-attitudes overflowing from the tender love of God's Spirit*.

A. There are Many Ways to Implement the Church's Mission

13. Together with the whole Church, from apostolic times onwards until now, even to the charitable activities launched by Mother Theresa of Calcutta, for example, we have found that *the powerful love of God's Spirit needs to take on a concrete shape*: in mutual service in the earning of a livelihood, so that there be a real growth in prosperity for all the people; in our ministry amid people afflicted by sorrow and disease, so deprived of their homes and bereft of political freedom; in efforts for creating unity among ourselves, as well as with all people of good will; in all enterprises to unveil further the secrets of nature as a mystery of God's salvific design; in all sorts of ritual ceremonies and prayer communities, with the intention of giving expression to our worship of the God of love.

Actually, all of us are called to give shape personally to all those ways of worship. Our limitations, however, cause us to select ways that are closely linked to our concrete lives so that they may be put into practice easily, without thinking less in any way of other ways of implementing one's mission. *"To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."*¹⁴

B. Some Ways of Carrying out the Church's Mission

14. The Apostle Paul clearly shows the purpose of God's Spirit: *that everyone of us should implement in his/her own way the mission* received from God.¹⁵ Hence, according to one's own abilities. There are those who preach, or share his/her knowledge; others work miracles, i.e., words or actions caus-

ing astonishment so that people become aware that God is manifesting his love here. In all this, the congregation is enriched by the Spirit, with some members receiving charisms which have been imparted in order to lead his people,¹⁶ as well as some who are prophets to interpret the signs of the times.

15. *Prophets and messengers of God remind people of the presence and action of the Spirit in the world.* They sense that God wishes to breathe the Spirit of his life into the world, no matter how covered with darkness it may be, and how ensnared it is in numerous difficulties. Prophets are called to discern where God's Spirit blows. They are gifted with the ability to disclose the meaning of God's word, often so difficult to grasp. Not that the words are difficult, but because they convey messages difficult to understand, by those whose minds are too concentrated on the world and are reluctant to open their hearts to God.¹⁷

Obstacles to the grasping of the message of prophets arise from the stubbornness of their hearers. This obstinacy causes people to misunderstand the deepest meaning of what prophets have to say; or even shuts out any understanding altogether. Dominic was called to grasp the urgency of preaching the truths of faith reliably and clearly. Francis of Assisi was needed for us to understand that earthly wealth would not provide humanity with any basis for obtaining eternal salvation. We welcome Mother Theresa of Calcutta to help us understand that we need to bring about a human solidarity with our brothers and sisters afflicted with physical suffering.

16. The world today is confronted with an immense problem: on the one hand, there is a real hunger for union; on the other hand, wars and hatred flare up everywhere. A movement for the renewal of the world becomes really indispensable in order to arrive at a genuine, truly felt, truly human solidarity. This sense of togetherness should be anchored in the very hearts of people, and not merely founded on biological, economic and political interests. Faith and religion ought to be at the base of such undertakings. *Humanity is in bare need of convincing evidence which will impress upon flesh and blood that faith and religion are truly capable of bringing about a genuine solidarity.* Therefore, everyone — individuals, officials, groups — are challenged to put into practice the charism of a true solidarity bestowed by the one Spirit. No charism whatsoever will have any meaning apart from the one and only Spirit of love.

17. In this contemporary atmosphere we bishops are delighted to welcome so many who feel "*reborn in the Spirit,*" because you have experienced an extraordinary loving touch of the Spirit. This we consider an important source for your feeling united, as participants in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Your group has experienced the gentle touch of the love of Christ as your personal Savior. At the same time you have been impressed by Christ's deepest

concern for the salvation of all peoples.¹⁸ We are pleased to know that so many among you — captured by God's love — have spread out into the populated areas, university circles, industrial areas and commercial enterprises, which up to now have been thought devoid of any influence of spiritual life. There are even some among you who feel compelled often to courageously preach the Good News: usually prudently and considerately, but at other times also insisting too strongly, without due consideration of others or without tolerance. As you go your way, let us be mindful that the *Spirit breathes where it wills*.¹⁹ It is the Lord who decides when and how he wishes to touch his people. It may happen that he is speaking and acting precisely through those whom we do not expect to be his instrument. Hence, we are to announce the Good News humbly.

C. The Mission to Promote the Catholic Charismatic Renewal

18. It is in a situation of a pluriformity of ways and a variety of spirits in carrying out the mission of disciples of our Lord that we see how many of the faithful feel themselves called to join particularly the movement for Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Hence, we bishops see the *Catholic Charismatic Renewal as one among so many ways and means in the Church*, manifesting how the human heart is being touched by the power of God's Spirit.

19. From recent *history* we learn that in the 1970s several ecumenical groups emerged and soon captured a following of a good number of Catholics. To provide them proper pastoral care, Msgr. Leo Soekoto, S.J., the archbishop of Jakarta, invited well-known personalities of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. In May 1976 Father O'Brien, S.J. and Father Herbert Schneider, S.J., were invited by the Archbishop to organize a "New Life Seminar" in Jakarta. Since then, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Indonesia has developed steadily. As with every other group in the Church, the *Catholic Charismatic Renewal has its own characteristics and its specific ways of proceeding. It also has to meet the need to integrate itself wholeheartedly within the communion of the entire People of God.*

CHAPTER THREE

BASIC NOTIONS CONCERNING CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

A. Faith in the Blessed Trinity

20. The Charismatic Renewal, first of all, is to be considered an element in the life of the Church, which acknowledges that our lives on earth are to be lived in faith, itself a charism or gift of the Spirit. *Our faith is founded on the Blessed Trinity.* We believe that God the Father, our Creator, gives us life, that God the Son, our Savior, has redeemed us, and that we have been anointed

by God the Holy Spirit, our Paraclete. Church life is a communion, accepted by faith to be the human manifestation of the action of *the Spirit moving all of humankind in love according to the teaching of Christ, towards eternal union with God.*

21. As we know by faith, the Church came into being when the Apostles were gathered in fraternal love around Jesus Christ in response to their Master's call. The Church still remains the communion of Christ's disciples. Hence, *the dynamics of becoming Christ's disciples* are also truly fundamental to their being Church. We are pleased to note that one aspect of faith very often stressed and deepened by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is precisely the consciousness of their being Christ's disciples. Taught by Jesus our Master, we believe in God our Creator, who lives without any one ever having seen him²⁰ except the Son.²¹ After his ascension to his Father and our Father, Christ bequeathed to us the Holy Spirit.²² Therefore, as we know the Father only through the Son, so we also have access to the Son only through the Holy Spirit.²³ In other words, *faith in the Holy Spirit can only be lived in unity with belief in the Father and the Son.* Our belief in the Holy Spirit we obtain also through faith in Jesus Christ,²⁴ by becoming his disciples. Hopefully, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal will become a leaven in the Church, so that our faithful will become ever more aware of the consequences of being Christ's disciples, i.e., by continually trying to grasp ever better Christ's teaching and by implementing it as fully as possible.

B. The Holy Spirit: Divine Gift

22. Because of the Paschal Mystery the Apostles believed in the unity of life between Christ and the Father. The Father and the Son are one through the Holy Spirit, who is the Gift, so that Jesus lives in the Father. The evangelist reveals the guiding role of the Spirit, the Gift, at the beginning of and throughout the entire life of Jesus Christ, and in his mission as the Messiah.²⁵ This was expressed by John the Baptist: "When you see the Spirit descend and rest on someone, it is he who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit."²⁶ This verse shows that *the entire mission of Jesus as the Messiah is embedded in the stream of action of the Holy Spirit, the Gift of the Father.* Baptism in the Spirit, therefore, points to the entire way of life and ministry of Jesus Christ as the one sent by the Father, as shown by Lk 4:18-19. Jesus stayed in relationship with the Holy Spirit and God the Father, while he proclaimed the Good News in words and in deeds, even while he suffered on the Cross and died, even until he arose from the dead.

23. It is because we have received the Holy Spirit that we have been enabled to believe and be united in the Body of Christ.²⁷ It is the Spirit as well who unites all of us.²⁸ Through the Spirit Christ is present among us, because he is the Spirit of Christ himself.²⁹

*Since the Church is vivified by the Holy Spirit, the whole Church, and every Christian, is truly "charismatic."*³⁰ This means that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal stimulates the Church to experience as fully as possible how our entire human nature is really permeated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, first of all, witnesses to our faith, the fact that the living presence of the Spirit has become flesh and blood in all the faithful. In their faith the Catholic Charismatic Renewal emphasizes a very important aspect of Catholic faith, which at times is less felt in other sections of the Church. It may be said, therefore, that the *Catholic Charismatic Renewal is and ought to be ecclesial.*³¹

24. The faith-experience in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, intimately related to the Holy Spirit, finds *its model and heavenly guidance in the Blessed Virgin Mary*,³² At Pentecost, the Mother of the Church³³ was present among the Apostles, while they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. This presence has strengthened our Christian belief that from the outset Mary was, in fact, united with the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Church believes that Mary was conceived immaculate, thanks precisely to the sanctifying power of the Lord's Spirit.³⁴ The power of the Spirit reached out to her from the moment Mary came to be conceived. That is the very reason why, very particularly, Mary is called "Daughter of God the Father." We believe that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not restricted by the particular limitations of time, space and external human conditions. We also believe that Mary became the Mother of God because the Spirit, the power of the Most High, overshadowed her.³⁵ Mary, therefore, is also called "the Bride of God the Holy Spirit." We rejoice that devotion to Blessed Mother Mary in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal always brings with it the strengthening of faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that the power of the Spirit is not restrained by any human will. We too have been called to entrust our heart, our mind, our will and all our activities to the Lord. Only because of her perfect union with the Holy Spirit has Mary become "the Mother of God the Son."³⁶ This spiritual bond was reaffirmed in the course of Jesus' preaching, when he praised Mary because she "hears the word of God and keeps it."³⁷ Mary was united with her Son on the Cross, and when he was glorified. Thus again, it becomes evident that Mary's role in the work of salvation is closely united with the role of her Son, because the Holy Spirit overshadowed her.

It is clear that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, with its intense devotion to the Holy Spirit and its desire for union with the Lord, knows no more touching model than Mary our Mother. We recommend, therefore, that devotion to the Blessed Virgin be always fostered by an intense genuine love, which expresses itself rightly.

C. Various Charisms

25. We notice that the rich variety of ways the Church has of expressing itself is manifested by the many ways that charismatic faith is now being realized in the Church. E.g., our charismatic families are convinced that baptism since ancient times always has been a sacrament; and that people are thereby cleansed from sin that alienates them from God. *Fundamentally understood, Baptism contains an external element, i.e., cleansing with water, and a spiritual element, i.e., cleansing by the Spirit.* It is this spiritual element — together with the entire deeply spiritual experience that goes with it — that is re-expressed, when in charismatic circles the term "Baptism in the Spirit" is used. On the one hand, the charismatic community reminds other faithful of the unity in Baptism between the external and internal aspects, while stressing that this spiritual dimension is to be truly lived out. The profound experience of being saved truly renews the human spirit to live in a new way. On the other hand, the charismatic community ought to be conscious of its being integrated within the entire endeavor of the congregation in order to make their Baptism truly meaningful, and so to live accordingly, in a genuine spirit and in appropriate ways. John the Baptist clearly associates Baptism with the Spirit, in order to explain the entire mission, life and death of Jesus as the Messiah, and not simply with the purpose of pointing to just some kind of ceremony.³⁸

26. In several charismatic activities the "*effusion of the Spirit*" becomes an important element. This is founded in a deeply Christian faith, and needs to be understood properly in the context of our understanding of Christian life. From the whole Gospel we learn that the salvation brought about by God takes place in God's act of sending his Spirit. This happened at the creation of the universe, as well as at the incarnation of the Son of God, and in the proclamation of his Church.³⁹ Rightly, therefore, the effusion of the Spirit is considered the moment God's saving action is being experienced in a new way. The process of the development of the Church in its institutional and administrative aspects is often underlined more strongly than is its spiritual dimension, so that people may feel that they are being "enrolled" as Church members by human officials, more than being received by God through the gift of his Spirit. In this other context the effusion of the Spirit, on the one hand, highlights in charismatic circles the theological meaning of "receiving the love of the Spirit"; and on the other, our conviction about the primary role of the Spirit in salvation is reaffirmed. This conviction always provides our faith with a reliable foundation. Not seldom, however, this spiritual dimension has become blurred in the course of history and of people's life experiences.⁴⁰

27. Many participants in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal undergo the ex-

perience of the effusion of the Spirit during the "*Life in the Spirit Seminar*." It is here that "communication of faith and in faith" — often in the form of "witness" — is seen to be a lively process. As a matter of fact, we do receive faith through its announcement by fellow Christians. Since ultimately it is Jesus Christ himself who is being proclaimed, we believe that the content as well as the method of the Life in the Spirit Seminar, which already has taken a particular form, can be ever further refined.

In particular, faith in the Holy Spirit, in the fervor of the experience of love for the Son, tending toward genuine self-surrender to the Father, needs to be ever more deeply interiorized in a spiritual serenity. Charisms are to be truly received in faith conviction as manifestations of the love of the Holy Spirit, the Principal Gift. One ought to feel genuinely impelled to grow freely and continuously towards perfection in Jesus Christ. Hence, the Life in the Spirit Seminar is just one point of departure for a life long pilgrimage. All this can be continually fostered when participants in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are truly ready to reserve *moments of serenity every day*, in order to listen to God's call. Ardor in Spiritual Revival, or enthusiasm in Great Seminars, ought to be complemented by the tranquility of intimate encounter with Jesus Christ. Participants in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are advised to continue this praiseworthy tradition by regularly taking part in a formation through sound prayer groups. There the fervor for a new life can be tested by fidelity to prayer, to meditation in community on Holy Scripture, and to reflection on the teachings and Tradition of the Church.

We are grateful that more people feel called to develop basic faith communities, which can become core groups within the Church: either by living a common life, or by holding regular intensive meetings. We also wish to encourage and support those kinds of *ongoing formation programs* which have already begun to develop in many places. Hopefully, their contents will be steadily improved and the ways they are conducted increasingly better co-ordinated.

28. The *prophetic aspect* appears often in charismatic circles, an aspect which throughout its history has always been significant in the entire life of the Church. In ancient times the role of prophets discerning the will of God took place now and then with an uttering of words which were not easily grasped by others. Yet our experience is that this obscurity is not essential to prophetism itself. The prophetic character, therefore, should not be limited to the uttering of words which are difficult to understand. In such happenings of prophetic utterance we may also be strengthened in our faith; or encouraged to place our hopes in the hands of the Lord; or admonished to repent our sins. Some time back the Church was drawn to engage more intensively in social movements. These are some of the meanings that can be given to the "several tongues" used by God's Spirit in manifesting his will.

That is why the unity of the Charismatic Renewal with the entire People of God is experienced, when participants in prayer groups exercise the gift of prophecy. These groups will feel ever more strengthened, when the gift of prophesying is understood within the background of a prophethood which from Old Testament times has been well-known among the People of God. This charism is always closely linked to mission. Genuine prophecy is given in order to manifest God's will at a certain moment in a certain place, and always needs to be examined by the faithful through responsible people. In some cases a prophecy may even need to be examined by the official leader of the local Church, i.e., by the bishop.

29. We likewise see the gift of "*tongues of the Spirit*" from an ecclesial point of view. There are in the Church traditions of prayer and singing in tongues of the Spirit, as, for example, in 1 Corinthians, and in Romans 8:26-27. One is not speaking to his/her neighbor, but is addressing God. There the one praying grows. Hence, the tongues of the Spirit are ways of praying. No one understands them; and so, people speak of this as the "language of love." This type of praying is indeed found in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Indonesia. Tongues are spoken unconsciously. But its fruits bring about something new to those so gifted. This newness is felt to bring salvation also to the faithful. We wish to invite all of you to be united in our genuine Christian faith and in our worship of the Spirit, who is given to renew the entire face of the earth. We also express here the hope that the "*tongues of the Spirit*" will be used in our charismatic communities with prudence.

30. *The charism of healing* is often quite conspicuous in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Many of the faithful feel reinforced in faith by instances of healing, external as well as internal. We view all cases of healing as coming within the context of faith in the presence of God's Reign, and as an action of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ We are convinced that the most important aspect of every instance of genuine healing in the New Testament is that he/she who has been cured, and others around, grow in faith. There the whole person experiences God's *shalom*, which is bestowed upon him/her through the Son by the power of his Spirit. This salvation builds up the person again, makes him/her whole, purifies him/her from every stain of sin, and restores his/her relationship with God and with fellow humans. This renovation may happen, though not always, with a recovery of external health.

Let us, therefore, keep in mind that in the Catholic Church a complete healing of our relationship with God is *manifested in whole in the sacraments themselves*. It is there — from the viewpoint of the Church — that we are touched wholly by God. Indeed, some sacraments officially celebrate God the Healer, who effects external as well as internal health. These are the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. There healing is

found within the context of faith and is entrusted to God's wisdom.⁴² We recommend that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal include these sacraments in their celebrations, especially the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick.

In this context we strongly recommend that the *celebration of the Holy Eucharist be not held together with ceremonies of healing*. For there we celebrate the self-gift of Jesus on the Cross for our redemption and our union with God. This is the unique event of sublime healing for all humankind. Hence, the Eucharist itself is our most important celebration of healing. If lived with an intense and sincere devotion, the Eucharistic celebration can bring a tranquility of heart, a spiritual healing, and a restoration of social relationships. The Lord himself is experienced as present, working an outer and inner salvation. Furthermore, we are led to believe more firmly in the meaning of the Cross, of suffering, of Christian death, that is, that the Cross truly is the path leading us to the glory of the Lord. It is evident that the Father reveals his utmost love in the very suffering on the Cross. For the self-gift of Jesus Christ by his death is the only way to "total healing," i.e., to the restoration of God's relationship with humanity. Moreover, while there is human suffering caused by one's own fault, there is also suffering, as in Job's case, permitted by God with a sublime intention, i.e., for one's own salvation and for that of others.

31. There exists in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal a practice similar to a tradition of the early Christians, namely the *laying-on of hands*. We have inherited this tradition of laying our hands on those we pray for. This sign of confidence we also find in sacramental ordination. In prayer groups the laying-on of hands, of course, has no sacramental function. There in a visible way we join others in expressing our faith in the God of love, and we invoke his blessing. Once again, it is clear that we can express our innermost conviction by a symbol and an action which touch the heart. Hopefully, the person will be also truly touched by the Spirit and receive God's blessing.

32. When we renew our faith in this way, we become very much aware that ultimately *the entire life of the believer is a gift or charism of the Lord*. Some God-given charisms may seem to be extraordinary, for example, the charism of prophecy and of speaking in tongues of the Spirit. But there are also other important fruits of the Spirit, e.g., self-control, discipline, perseverance, and day-to-day wisdom. We should broaden our understanding of the action of the Spirit which goes beyond one or other of the more astonishing charisms. For the Lord speaks to his people in the way he chooses to address them. We believe in his omnipotence; he bestows his gifts according to his will. Hence, we need not urge the Lord to work miracles the way we would want them. May this confidence in the Lord strengthen us, so that we persevere in seeking our welfare, yet at the same time submit ourselves

to his holy will.

Hopefully, it should be clear that *to receive charisms* — as, for instance, those mentioned by Paul — does not mean only "to be endowed with very singular gifts and equipped with particular techniques in praying and in ministering to the people," but "to have a certain way of living and making Christian faith real." A charism of the Spirit implies the giving of ministry to the building up of the community of Christ. There the Spirit is at work bringing about salvation of his people. With this attitude we shall be able to resist the temptation to exaggerate the significance of any one or other charism.⁴³ For no gift has any real meaning whatsoever without faith, hope and charity.⁴⁴ Hence, no gift of body or mind has any meaning unless it is found framed in a humble heart and with love for Christ, and unless it is also of benefit to people.⁴⁵ Those who have received gifts from the Spirit should also bring forth the fruits of the Spirit in their daily lives.⁴⁶

33. We appreciate that in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal efforts are being made to integrate the contemplative dimension of Christian life with its active dimension, so that both become inseparable. This could help Christians avoid living in two worlds: one way in prayer, and differently at work. One, therefore, carries out in a practical way the renewal of Christian faith in the Spirit, when he/she directs his/her prayer and contemplation toward concrete acts of service, the unity of all faithful and that of human society, and so makes his/her day-to-day activities a genuine service to God. It is this *very integration of the contemplative and active dimensions* that indeed will help the Church to grasp more readily the signs of the times: to understand, to feel, to follow, as well as to implement, the movements of the Spirit, unto the glory of God's Name in the midst of our daily activities.

CHAPTER FOUR

DYNAMICS AND GUIDELINES FOR CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

A. The Spirit and Verbal Expression

34. Among the faithful in general, and in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in particular, our tradition of *proclaiming the Gospel* has become widespread. This is a reflection of the Christian tradition from our beginning until now, that from the moment of Baptism onwards all Christians are commissioned to spread the Good News. The Gospel is in its quintessence the Person of Jesus Christ himself, whom we have come to know through the New Testament. Hence, evangelizers carry out the important mission of making known God's very own message.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal joins together in promoting the read-

ing of Holy Scripture. With this growing interest in reading Holy Scripture and in proclaiming the Gospel, certain groups have taken the praiseworthy initiative of organizing serious refresher courses, in order that the faithful may understand the true meaning of the biblical text, as well as the spiritual content of the Scriptural passages. We all know that God's intention is not realized properly when verses are cited merely to meet the needs of the moment, without paying due attention to their wider literary context. We are aware that when a group or a person is not able to interpret Holy Scripture correctly, or a particular text directly involved in the teaching of the Church, they need the help of someone who is knowledgeable, be he a priest or someone who is competently trained to interpret Scripture.

35. In this way we are kept from the danger of that kind of literal understanding of Holy Scripture which is very often found among *fundamentalists*, who look for an approval of their lives and behavior in the Scripture texts taken too literally and simply. In our understanding of the role of the Scripture, our faith moves us behind the "words," and places us in a relationship with the Spirit, who conveys the Father's word to us and introduces us into the Spirit of new life in Jesus, which is based on the entire content of Holy Scripture. The ability to interpret Scripture properly, and the readiness to participate in refresher courses on Scripture and the Church's teaching can help all of us to render a true service to prayer groups, to conduct Sunday Schools, to give a homily, and to offer reflections, devoutly and in a responsible way. Continual study may also move us to engage in dialogue with others on the Scriptures and the truths of Christian faith.

B. The Spirit and Organization

36. We have noted that the most important source of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is the all-encompassing love of the Holy Spirit towards humanity, and in turn the response of humans he has touched. The "first commandment," therefore, is God's love. Yet, since we are human, *God utilizes human means*, such as organizations and regulations.

When a group is still small, many concerns can be dealt with in a simple and fraternal way. But when a group has to co-operate with many other people, and where it involves the proclamation of the Good News, which is of spiritual nature yet implies human elements (e.g., verbal expression, literature and funds), there needs to be some framework for collaboration. This framework is conveniently called an organization or institution. We understand that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal — while stressing its "dynamism in listening to the prompting of the Spirit" — needs the particular means of some kind of organization. On the one hand, some organization is needed; on the other hand, this should not obstruct the movements of the Spirit.

37. As regards such organizations, the Catholic Church has had positive, as well as negative, experiences. There have been periods when the Church organization itself was so rigorous that almost everything was regulated from the center. But there were also times when people did not bother about regulations or agreements governing activities, so that aberrations in doctrine, as well as in the practice of Christian life occurred, as for instance happened during the Church's first centuries, when many heresies emerged.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal at the same time means a renewal of life in faith; i.e., it *implies spiritual elements, but also has many external aspects, like any organization*. This last element may touch doctrine or the practice of life in the community. Rightly, the Spirit is offered the opportunity to become the core of charismatic renewal, but this still needs the help of an organization which serves the movements of the Spirit.

C. A National Service Center — Basic Communities

38. While evolving, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has felt ever more strongly the need for an *organizing body*, which would provide services at the grass-roots, as well as at the diocesan, regional and national, and even international, levels. In order to continue to sustain an on-going renewal it is suggested that special care be taken to maintain the renewal of the basic communities. To this end, it is necessary to undertake ever greater efforts to carefully form those people (cadres) who are engaged in the renewal. There is a need for many moderators and facilitators who are completely familiar with the principles of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and who have an expertise in directing groups in the process of interiorization.

39. Service Centers are recommended to foster the spirit of the Life in the Spirit Seminars by on-going formation, and to develop a great care for and faithfulness in attendance at prayer groups. It is advised also that the prayer groups be continually supported, in order that they will unremittently purify themselves towards becoming communities of deep spirituality, where the faithful can gain inspiration and spiritual motivation for their daily participation in activities and human relations, and for their co-operation with other groups. Many prayer groups have been formed based on a likeness of interests, activities and interior experiences. With such support, therefore, through prayer, groups can grow into basic ecclesial communities, which will be deeply spiritual, have a thorough understanding of their faith, and strenuously live out the Christian faith. It is highly recommended that prayer, Scripture reading, meditation, the study of Church teaching, be in place to encourage participants to live their daily lives in families, in villages, in parishes, and wherever they work as genuine Christians.

Due attention ought to be given also to *Ecumenical Prayer Groups*. In a special way, the Service Centers should take particular care of those who have only recently been received into the Catholic Church, to protect those who are still weak in their sense of belonging to the Church and still have little understanding of their faith. It is recommended that these new Catholics not be allowed to participate as yet in ecumenical prayer groups. Moreover, it is good to develop the spirit of the Gospel: to await in expectation the coming of Jesus in glory, in communion with the Successors of Peter.⁴⁷ This means to be faithful to our Church in a spirit of faith, in an attitude of openness. Thus, we will not need to be worried when others try to win some of our brothers and sisters to their denomination. Yet, we truly need to remain in a strong solidarity as members of our community. We ought to help those brothers and sisters of ours who feel drawn to "look for consolation" outside the Catholic Church, especially by taking efforts to assure that our liturgy and our preaching of the Word will deeply touch the hearts of people today. In everything, though, we should always be aware that God does not speak first in order to please humans but to "reveal his holy will."

In this context we hope that the Diocesan Service Centers will pay greater attention in assuring that the faithful do not easily carry over customs and songs originating in traditions and theologies alien to the treasury of the Catholic Church. We also support efforts to compose new songs which are adapted to the way people live their faith nowadays, and which appeal to many people.

40. Basic communities need a well-organized process of *collaboration*. We are pleased to note that the Service Centers have already been established for some time at the diocesan, regional and national levels. These Centers are intended to provide *basic communities with facilities, and with spiritual as well as material assistance*. These Centers, therefore, are meant not only to organize national conventions, but also to encourage a continual renewal in all our local basic communities, and at the national level as well. In this way, these centers will help keep these communities from becoming stagnant. On the contrary, they will help the Catholic Charismatic Renewal to live ever more vigorously. This can be brought about by a system of meetings and fellowship gatherings, and also through circular newsletters, and other ways of cooperation.

41. We would like to give our support particularly to those efforts of the Service Centers at the diocesan, regional and national levels which are trying continually to promote *on-going formation programs*, which indeed have already arrived at a more integrated pattern of operation. A deeper understanding of the genuine interpretation of Holy Scripture and of the teaching of the Church and her Tradition will improve the quality of Christian life among the faithful. Moderators should be appointed in charge of supervi-

sion, so that the formation programs for participants, as well as for those who preach the Gospel, truly respond to the needs of the faithful and are in agreement with the Church's teaching, for the preaching of the Church is the proclamation of God's Word. In this way we participate in the mission entrusted to the Church by Jesus Christ, the eminent Evangelizer. Above all, care should be taken that efforts to closely intertwine faith formation and reception of sacraments be intensified. In such an important matter we are convinced that these moderators will organize consultations with the diocese and major seminaries to assure such conformity in their teaching. Hopefully, this will make their communication among themselves still more intensive.

42. We are also pleased to note how the practice of *local, regional and national conventions* is steadily developing. Experience teaches that this practice should be continued and can be further developed to strengthen the sense of belonging, and to bring about a deepening of Christian faith through workshops and seminars. More use can be made of the contributions of theologians, psychologists and experts of other sciences in order to increase the quality of Christian community life. However, care should be taken that conventions or meetings for spiritual revival be organized not too frequently. It is most important how these gatherings exercise an influence on the community life of prayer groups, and on the personal daily life of each member.

43. *Teams for Ministry in Prayer Groups, as well as in Diocesan, Regional and National Service Centers* already have developed in many places. We hope that serious efforts be made to co-ordinate these ministries, as we have insisted in the 1993 Pastoral Letter of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference on Catholic Charismatic Renewal. We wish the quality of these ministries be further improved by better organization, continual study and reflection, and reliable refresher courses.

Still more, Prayer Groups have developed for participants of the same interest or the same profession. They demand more attention with regard to the content of their preaching and the co-ordination of their ministries. We request that National, Regional and Diocesan Service Centers, as well as all other service centers, make efforts to form influential cadres on behalf of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal itself, and of the Church as well. This will only be achieved when the Catholic Charismatic Renewal pays greater attention to particular ministries and to the spiritual direction of youth.

Moreover, it is recommended that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal collaborate more closely with the "International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service" (ICCRS), which has been officially recognized by the Congregation for the Laity.

D. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the Hierarchy

44. 1 Corinthians, in chapters 12 through 14, explains why, since the very beginning of the Church, there has been an appreciation that all the activities of the Church, as manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit, can still be open to several possible understandings, so that there is need for a continuing examination of conscience. For Paul, not every time that people spoke in other tongues, nor every time there was healing, nor every time people had the gift of tongues, did all these have their origin from the Spirit. *All the faithful play an important role in discerning whether something comes indeed from the Spirit.* Hence, the representative of the congregation, or the Church leader, needs to be brought into such decision-making, so that there be a clear understanding about what gift does originate with the Spirit. This is the role which belongs to the hierarchy, who have received their own special charism, that of leadership.

45. When we consider preaching, let us be sure that in the Church it is not one's own personal opinion that is to be preached. It is to be a proclamation of the Word of God, as believed in and taught by the universal Church. The hierarchy is the competent authority to serve the whole People of God in this regard. Therefore, the official recognition granted by the hierarchy is always a fundamental condition for our proclamation of the Gospel. Hence, all official preaching in the Church needs to be authorized by the local Ordinary, or carried out by someone to whom authorization has been granted.⁴⁸ The National, Regional and Diocesan Service Centers are to see to it that this guideline is properly carried out.

46. Indeed, we appreciate the very demanding role of the National, Regional and Diocesan Service Centers in forming cadres who will preach the Word of God responsibly. Therefore, we endorse their concern to *improve the ability of preachers.* We already have schools for preaching. Hopefully, the quality of these schools will continue to improve steadily. Co-operation with institutions for priestly formation and catechetical formation, and the providing of experts in the field, will enrich all participants.

47. We wish to invite priests to address the innermost needs of all the faithful. It belongs to the hierarchy to take care of the faith-communion positively, by supporting movements for unity, by making efforts to preserve unity when signs of division appear. True enough, every priest may have his personal preference about a certain manner of expression of the faith. Yet, the mission of the priest as a *unifier of the faithful* demands a readiness to perform his particular ministry of unity, and to restore the faith communion. It is evident that our Prayer Groups wish to serve others as best they can, and for this they need guidance, especially by the local priests.

E. Catholic Charismatic Renewal and Other Efforts for Renewal

48. We know that the whole Church is devoted to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit lives in all its members and among all classes of the faithful. The renewal of life in the Spirit, therefore, has its rightful place in the Church, and is one among many such movements among individuals. Hence, there is need also for *communication and co-operation* between the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the other movements for renewal, e.g., groups for Renewal of Christian Life, the Legion of Mary, Marriage Encounter, Couples for Christ, etc. Collaboration also will help all concerned to learn from one another and to remain open to such renewal.

49. Leaders of renewal groups have a delicate role to play. On the one hand, they are to stimulate the dynamics of continual renewal. On the other hand, they are also to maintain unity, which now and then demands a certain oneness among all. At times one group may take a direction of a particular kind. Yet, such an effort need not encourage a fanaticism. We also are to keep the eyes of a group set upon the wider horizon of Church life, without obscuring the particular characteristics of the group. However difficult it may be, hopefully, *the leaders of all groups* will become bridges of mutual understanding and communication, especially when tensions arise, as does occur in every form of community life.

50. In this context we are to keep in mind that the charismatic renewal will find success among Protestants as well as among Catholics. On many occasions *ecumenical meetings* will be held. The Second Vatican Council has already expressed the determination of the Catholic Church to promote ecumenism. The Catholic Church also acknowledges that it is enriched by ecumenical encounters.⁴⁹ Ecumenism, therefore, can take place — and indeed often has taken place — within the charismatic renewal. Ecumenism, however, need not mean merely praying together, and simply accepting all that is being done by people or Churches of other denominations. Genuine ecumenism follows these criteria: its participants sincerely respect one another; take a healthy stance towards each other; and are well acquainted with the traditions and doctrines of the Churches concerned. Ecumenism in the Charismatic Renewal can be encouraged and made fruitful, while at once encouraging a deepening of the knowledge and the practice of the respective ecclesiastical customs of others, and maturing in our own Catholic teaching and sacramental life. Thus, the process of reconciliation with Christians of denominations other than the Catholic Church can become quite healthy.

F. Mutual Respect

51. We know that according to Paul the Apostle the life of the Spirit and the endeavor to render the charisms fruitful in the Church will only succeed

when there is *mutual respect*. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you'."⁵⁰ Let us, therefore, within the Charismatic Renewal, respect one another.

Furthermore, participants and leaders are invited to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect for other groups and group leaders in the Church. Here we are to promote a sincere charity, the very core of the gifts of the Spirit.⁵¹ We are invited to share and revive a true friendship. Our being brothers and sisters to one another ought also to manifest itself in everyone living together in harmony, and in collaboration in building up the Church and human society.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SPIRIT CONTINUALLY HELPS US

A. "The Discernment of Spirits"

52. The Spirit is infinitely perfect, transcends humans, and surpasses absolutely all human understanding and life. We know that not all words or actions which have the appearance of piety are necessarily inspired by the Spirit. Thus, indeed, not all who show a dislike of us are necessarily our enemies. Matthew also reminds us that "not all who cry out 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of God."⁵²

Let us all renew our faith that the power of the Holy Spirit is the cornerstone of creation, salvation and sanctification. It is in the Spirit that the Father gives himself, and sends his Son. We are called to renew this faith time and time again in this world of ours, which ever more relies only on human resources and ever more becomes more secular. Yet, in that faith let us beware of the temptation to identify the action of the Spirit with all our own actions. With John we may say: "Do not trust every Spirit, but *put the spirits to a test* to see if they belong to God."⁵³ We must be one in this resolve.

53. Let us all examine our own consciences, in order to discern whether we truly walk in the Spirit. We may declare our secular activities which are drenched in rationalization to be prompted by the Spirit; or we may be deceived in considering our inspirations to the spectacular to be actions of the Spirit. When we feel emotionally the urge to repent of our sins, it is not impossible that we are being impelled to make major decisions. However, such feelings should be followed up with a deepening of understanding and with guidance by someone better acquainted with the movements of the Spirit in us human beings, in order to discover which movement comes from the good Spirit and which; on the contrary, comes from other sources. A *clear awareness of the Spirit* is called for in order that we grasp more resolutely to

what extent the Spirit is truly inspiring our actions. It is there that we find concrete expressions of genuine faith in our daily lives. Such a "discernment of spirits" is more necessary for the faithful. One of its criteria to be applied in a simple way is: To what extent does this movement flower into still greater love for brothers and sisters of the Lord in need of assistance? Group leaders are especially called to excel in helping the faithful themselves to "discern" the spirits.

54. In this perspective we request that the *National, Regional and Diocesan Service Centers first of all become institutions whose purpose is to render faith in the Holy Spirit ever more alive by promoting a genuine "discernment of spirits."* The National Service Center for Catholic Charismatic Renewal, above all, is to play such a spiritual role. Various regulations and steps in national service are themselves to be fruits of "discernment," and the means to stimulate a continual "discernment" at all levels of renewal of Christian life.

55. We invite *priests and community leaders* to submit themselves more fully to the power of the Spirit and to help the faithful in examining everything more carefully with a genuine discernment.

In this process a continual conversion and renewal is called for. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal can also encourage people outside its own group to move towards conversion. Continual conversion and renewal, however, are to become the flesh and blood first, of all within the Charismatic Renewal itself, in order that it become essentially and internally an outstanding movement of unceasing self-renewal.

In this way a willingness to be ever more conscious of one's own faith in day-to-day activities can also encourage a faithfulness and at the same time a critical attitude within these movements of being Church.

B. Charismatic Renewal and Social Commitment

56. Our intention should be to help one another in order that the Holy Spirit be fully present in our lives. *An indication that could help us to discern to what extent we are being truly impelled by the Holy Spirit is to examine what attitude we take with regard to the concerns of the faithful and of society at large.* In this process a renewal of faith in the Holy Spirit ought to go hand in hand with an all-encompassing prophetic faith about the interior life of individuals and the group, and about the salvation of the whole of humanity — both spiritual and material. Again and again, we ought to be ready to insert ourselves into the full dynamics of the Church, which from our very beginning until now has always wanted to bring together prayer and social action.⁵⁴ We observe how the early Christians, deeply aware of the presence

and action of the Holy Spirit, persevered in the teaching of the Apostles and mutually shared all they possessed.

57. That is why we ought to be grateful that many of the participants in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal *are ever more able to integrate prayer and social action*. Meanwhile, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal can assist the Church in giving spiritual meaning to our social action. In this respect let us be docile to the good example of Church leaders, who more and more understand that our Catholic faith is impelling us to "give priority to brothers and sisters who find themselves in difficulties."

C. An Ongoing Renewal

58. Finally, we should try to understand that a *renewal of faith in the Spirit is the foundation of the lives of all ages*. For in this way we express our sincere appreciation for our belonging together as disciples of Jesus Christ our Master. Let us help one another to see the renewal of life in the Spirit as the very soul of the Church, if it is to renew itself without ceasing. We express our hope that the Charismatic Family will always pursue a renewal of life in the Spirit in communion with local Churches, wherever they are.

May our loving Father in heaven, and his Son our Savior, always be with us in our pilgrimage, so that we may be one whole People in the *Spirit of Union*.

CONCLUSION

59. In the first part of these guidelines we have stressed that for the Early Church *it is the Spirit who united us, the Spirit of Love*. "Through the Holy Spirit Christ builds up his Body, the Church as the sacrament of salvation..."⁵⁵ Since it is the Spirit of Love who animates the whole Church, let us pray that the same Spirit who vivifies all the faithful will renew our lives both externally and internally.

60. In this way may the hope expressed by St. Paul, when he spoke about the many charisms among the Christian people, be fulfilled. Before he describes the concrete forms these charisms take, he asserts: "the greatest of these is love."⁵⁶ In this way may "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."⁵⁷

61. May our Holy Mother Mary, who is always and in all things united with her Son Jesus Christ, and who since the very beginning of the Church was united with the Apostles, and who together on the day of Pentecost was confirmed with them as Church, and who lived under guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit, be our perfect example and powerful mediatrix as we

make our pilgrimage to the Father, in communion with his Son Jesus Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Translated by Robert Hardawiryana, S.J.
Larantuka, Flores, Southeast Indonesia.
December 21, 1995

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Lumen Gentium*, art. 12.
2. Gn 1:28-29; 2:15.
3. *Gaudium et Spes*, art. 1.
4. Lk 3:1-20.
5. Acts 1:5; 2:17-36
6. *Gaudium et Spes*, art. 7.
7. 1 Cor 14:24.
8. Acts 2:33-37; 1 Jn 1:1-3.
9. Acts 4:33.
10. Acts 2:41-47.
11. Lk 24:46-49; Acts 1:6-11.
12. Gn 2:4b-7
13. Rom 12:9-21.
14. 1 Cor 12:7.
15. 1 Cor 12.
16. 1 Cor 12:28-30
17. Moses needed evidence to convey God's will to Pharaoh. The prophet Nathan utilizes parables in order to communicate the will of God to David. In Jesus' time John the Baptist used harsh words when addressing the people of Israel.
18. Mt 28:18-20.
19. Jn 3:8.
20. Jn 1:18; 5:37; 1 Tim 6:16.
21. Jn 6:46.
22. Jn 14:26; 16:13.
23. Eph 2:18.
24. Jn 14:6.
25. Mk 1:10.
26. Jn 1:33.
27. *Lumen Gentium*, art. 4.
28. 1 Cor 12:3.
29. Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6.
30. E.g., Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 24,1: PG. 7:966.
31. Cardinal Suenens of Belgium very clearly emphasized this viewpoint.
32. *Lumen Gentium* art. 53.
33. *Lumen Gentium* art. 63.
34. *Lumen Gentium*, art. 56.
35. Lk 1:26-38; *Lumen Gentium*, art. 57.
36. Thus we perceive the faith value of the Rosary, particularly that of the three Hail Marys after the Creed.
37. Lk 11:28; Lk 8:19-21; Mt 12:46-50; Mk 3:31-35.
38. Jn 1:33. Scripture does not speak of "Baptism of the Spirit," but of "being baptized in the Spirit" (cf. also Lk 3:16; Mt 3:11); in other words: "baptized in water" (as a sign of

- conversion; hence of being purified from sin); and this happens "in the Holy Spirit" (not in superstition, or by a psychic motivation, or even for biological/health purposes). At the beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, its leaders found it difficult to discern both aspects of Baptism in the Spirit, so that, on the one hand, it would not give the impression that there was another Baptism after the Sacrament of Baptism. Yet, on the other hand, the aspect needs to be stressed, namely, the experience of being internally and externally purified again. For this, often, the expressions "renewal in the Spirit" and "effusion of the Spirit" are used. It is very important that the ordinary faithful are helped to understand the concern accurately. Leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal bear a coresponsibility for a correct two-fold understanding in this matter.
39. Note that Lk 1:15, Acts 2:38; 10:47; 11:15; 19:5,6 mention Baptism as well as effusion of the Spirit. There are differences between the two, but also a relationship. All agree that Baptism is a visible manifestation of an internal process, i.e., people receive salvation or sanctification by God.
 40. Here we note the rich meaning underlying the term "effusion of the Spirit," which, if not properly explained, not seldom creates misunderstandings. It is to be noted, therefore, that the term "*effusion of the Spirit*" is used now and then by leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, but at times it is not used. In America often the term "*Baptism in the Holy Spirit*" is used; in England "*the release of the Spirit*"; in Germany "*Firmerneuerrung*" (renewal of Confirmation); in France "*l'effusion de l'Esprit*." It is recommended that care be taken so that the faithful are not held to just one term, or to just one ceremony, or one action, but bound to the *faith process*, i.e., that to follow Christ is an internal-external process continually guided by the Spirit. The Indonesian Catholic Charismatic Renewal at one time agreed to use in the future the term "effusion of the Spirit," in order to clearly distinguish it from the Sacrament of Baptism.
 41. Lk 4:18-19.
 42. It is to be regretted that this awareness has become weak, because both sacraments are not being fully parts of our lives.
 43. *Lumen Gentium*, art. 12.
 44. 1 Cor 13:4-7.
 45. 1 Cor 14:12; Phil 3:8.
 46. Gal 5:19-22/
 47. Jn 21:1-14.
 48. *Lumen Gentium*, art. 12.
 49. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, art. 4.
 50. 1 Cor 12:21.
 51. 1 Cor 13:13.
 52. Mt 7:21.
 53. 1 Jn 4:1a.
 54. Lk 4:18-19.
 55. *Lumen Gentium*, art. 48.
 56. 1 Cor 13:13
 57. 1 Cor 13:13

**IV. COMMUNION AND MISSION:
A GUIDE ON SMALL CHURCH COMMUNITIES**

**A STATEMENT by
THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS**

PREFACE

"Communion and Mission: A Guide for Bishops and Pastoral Leaders on Small Church Communities" is designed as a tool for bishops and their pastoral ministers involved in the new evangelization. Given the uniqueness of the relationship between faith and culture in the diverse communities that comprise our church in the United States, this statement seeks to shed light on the potential that small church communities can have in the efforts to promote the new evangelization, particularly in meeting the challenge of making evangelization new in its ardor, methodology and expression.

In response to the popularity of small church communities in many Hispanic and non-Hispanic communities, the bishops' Committee on Hispanic Affairs has developed "Committee and Mission" after several drafts and over several years. The recommendations of experienced pastoral ministers as well as the theological context and the relationship of small communities to parish life have been major variables in developing a statement that responds to the many pastoral challenges faced by the church today.

Small church communities have been present in our country for many years, but in different forms and at times separated from the parish community. Perhaps this occurred because there has been little ecclesial information developed in the United States as to how to foster them, respond to their presence or work with them in our parish communities. In recent years, however, small church communities have developed significantly. Several books and articles have been published that show how they are established and how they function within the parish community. In addition, there are well-organized diocesan, regional and national gatherings of small church communities every year. In some dioceses, small church communities are also part of the diocesan structure and are vital to the evangelization process.

Given the diversity of the church, small church communities are different by nature. They respond to the pastoral needs and realities of the com-

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munities of faith that form them. "Communion and Mission" underscores the common elements that are important in preserving and strengthening the Catholic identity of these communities, as well as in fostering their identity.

"Communion and Mission: A Guide for Bishops and Pastoral Leaders on Small Church Communities" and the accompanying bilingual discussion guide and video, *Comunidad*, can be excellent resources for the new evangelization.

SMALL CHURCH COMMUNITIES: A SOURCE OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH

Since Pentecost, the Spirit has guided the church in each age so that it can credibly proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. In our time, and under the inspiration of the Spirit, a new ecclesial reality is emerging — that of small church communities — through which we can see the creative grace of God at work. Small church communities are a source of great hope for the whole church. Steadfast, active church communities linked with the larger parish community should be encouraged and promoted. These small communities are the responsibility of the bishop, who is called to be a living sign of unity in the particular church entrusted to his care. At this historical juncture, the bishops' Committee on Hispanic Affairs offers the following reflections to assist the diocesan bishops and their collaborators as they offer leadership and guidance to the small church communities in their dioceses.

Among Hispanics, small church communities are becoming an important and useful vehicle for the new evangelization to which the church is being called.¹ They are a place in which the religious and cultural identity of Hispanics is affirmed. In addition, the Christian household is a privileged place in which persons relate a faith journey, find nurturing support and focus on missionary efforts. The strong sense of family which Hispanics retain in their daily living is strengthened in the small church communities.

When solidly rooted in Scripture, church tradition and Hispanic religiosity, small church communities constitute a new moment in the church's self-understanding, epitomizing the celebration and proclamation of the church. These gatherings of the people of God are integrally linked to the parish, and through it, to the diocesan and universal church.

Today's active communities are works in progress. They have yet to reach their full potential to become authentic community centers of evangelization. This great potential exists, however, since small church communities already engage in personal relationships of faith through fellowship, evangelization, liturgy, mission and service.

The experience of Hispanic Catholics in small church communities throughout our country can also be a model that can be utilized by other

Catholic communities seeking to develop small church communities.

HISPANICS AND SMALL CHURCH COMMUNITIES

For Hispanics, a predominant Catholic presence in the United States,² the Catholic faith is closely linked with cultural manifestations of their identity. Small church communities help to affirm the Hispanics' faith-cultural identity on a personal level and provoke a communal evangelical mission. In this way Hispanics continue to contribute as a religious force to the church and society.

Through small church communities, Latino Catholics are finding a way to preserve and share the rich cultural and faith expressions and family values that help them face the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Small church communities strengthen Hispanic religiosity — a homespun spirituality that enables them to take responsibility for their Christian way of living. The church respects this emerging spirituality as a reflection of Hispanic cultural and spiritual identity, and recognizes that an attack against this identity is an attack against their Catholicity.

Small communities fortify a centuries-old tradition of faith. Affirmed and strengthened in their identity as Catholics, Hispanics can better serve the larger community. Yet, while small communities serve to preserve a vibrant faith, they are not simply warehouses of religious and cultural traditions. They are truly the expression of an emerging spirituality.

In the last few years they have made significant strides in the religious, educational, political, economic and social areas of our society. Hispanics are more visible in church leadership as bishops, theologians and lay leaders. They have become a visible presence in this country's political, economic and educational systems. Nevertheless, they still rank among the poorest Americans on the economic scale. They are represented disproportionately in the numbers of high school dropouts, pregnant teen-agers and persons in prison.

While many Latinos have not yet found a home in our society, they have generally found one in the church, especially in small church communities. Many Hispanic Catholics are more comfortable with small communities where people know one another and can interact with their priests and ministers on a personal level. Hispanics look to these communities for a credible experience of evangelization, where the Gospel is preached and truly lived in daily life.

COMMUNION AND MISSION

The origin of the church lies in the mission of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son. In him and through him, the life of the Trinity is communicated. The community of disciples saw themselves sent by God into history with the mission of Christ in the power of the Spirit.³ Thus, the small faith-communities model is taken from the church's foundation, the primary community par excellence — the Trinity. As church, the small communities are "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."⁴ At the heart of this unity is the church's mission of bringing the promises of God to fulfillment.

Since the beginning the church has recognized itself as communitarian (Acts 2:42). A small church community, by nature, is a communion with a mission. This belief is grounded in the truth that the mystery of God and the mystery of salvation are inseparable. God's self-emptying love, which draws us into life with the Trinity, is lived out in his saving deeds among us. It is a way of living the mystery that is the church. As groups with a mission, small church communities realize the Trinitarian relationships and God's saving activity among us.

The triune God invites us to communion. Jesus Christ incarnates this invitation, initiating the reign of God among us. Some reject this invitation, while those who accept it share in God's glory.⁵ Small church communities respond to this invitation through their efforts to form authentic communion as church and through their mission of fostering the reign of God. The Spirit enlightens them so that they can understand Jesus' message. This Spirit reveals to them the true identity of Christ and empowers them for the mission. Since this communion also invites them to include others, giving preference always to the rejected, marginalized, abandoned and forgotten, the church is renewed in its self-expression as communion for all. This basic sense of communion enables the church to authenticate itself by seeing itself in a new light.

Partaking of life in the triune God has dramatic consequences. It means entering, in the most profound sense, into God's saving project for a new humanity. Living in communion with the triune God calls members of these communities to enter into a life of love and communion with all their brothers and sisters. In this sense, small communities — communally and prophetically — live out the call as artisans of the coming reign of God.

Integral evangelization is at the core of the faith life of the small communities:

"There is no gap between love of neighbor and the desire for justice....

The evil inequities and oppression of every kind which afflict millions of men and women today openly contradict Christ's Gospel and cannot leave the conscience of any Christian indifferent.

"The church, in her docility to the Spirit, goes forward faithfully along the paths to authentic liberation.... But a vast number of Christians, from the time of the apostles onward, have committed their powers and their lives to liberation from every form of oppression and to the promotion of human dignity. The experience of the saints and the example of so many works of service to one's neighbor are an incentive and a beacon for the liberating undertakings that are needed today."⁶

In their efforts to bring God's providential plan to fulfillment, small communities are confronting obstacles to communion with God and with one another, dictating a reordering of life at all levels. They work to triumph over the social, political, economic, racial, gender and environmental relationships that humanity creates as tools for destruction and death. This struggle against the obstacles that are contemporary society's idols of death serves to renew the small communities, which are not set up for themselves, but for mission.⁷

Small church communities should not be isolated from the rest of the church's life. The church is not simply a community of communities. It is an organic whole that expresses itself in ways such as small communities. While these structures are local and particular, their reality is universal and truly Catholic. So is their thrust. As realizations of the mystery of the church, small church communities do not exist separately from the apostolic ministry of the bishops. Small communities ultimately attest to the faithfulness of God's relationship with us and with our world.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL CHURCH COMMUNITIES

The following constitutive elements are common to many authentic small church communities throughout the country. These characteristics can serve as a guide in working with newly formed church communities or in getting to know those communities already in place. It is our sincere hope that by supporting all church communities they will continue to mature and bear fruit.

1. Composition

Small church communities allow their members to relate to one another at a personal level, sharing in their common journeys of faith. Their small size reflects an attempt at a qualitative, rather than quantitative, approach to faith development. This allows greater emphasis on a person's

lived experience as seen through the lens of church tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Hispanic history of suffering and hope.

The smallness of the group allows for concentration of church life and mission. It is not an effort for separation from the parish. The strength of the small groups comes from a concerted effort to delve more deeply into Christian life on a more personal level, while at the same time remaining intimately linked to the church's universal mission. In a small group the experience of God's daily effect on life stands at the center of the group's activities. Knowing firsthand the needs of its members allows participants to experience a sense of belonging and interconnectedness with their co-journeymen. The small gathering enables a more direct faith formation and personal sharing of stories of God's saving deeds.

2. Communitarian Life

In a society plagued by individualism, separatism and a general disregard for the well-being of others, small church communities reinforce the communitarian nature of church life. By calling their members to make the connection between faith and daily life, small ecclesial communities can credibly live out the church's preferential option for the poor through their close links with the homeless, the poor and those suffering at the bottom of the unjust social pyramid.

The essence of church life in the Christian community is to become one with the Trinity through communion with one another. Living in community is to live in communion with the triune God. God is present where there is authentic communion. A life of communion and love with our brothers and sisters is the path to divine life.

The sharing of faith stories reinforces the experience that Christian life is communitarian. Reading and meditation upon the Sacred Scriptures in community help us to understand the meaning of Scripture with the mind of the church, thus avoiding individualistic and erroneous interpretations. This leads to a renewal link with the Christian tradition and a deeper understanding of the church as *koinonia*.⁸

Through a communitarian life all members are challenged to a shared vision of the life and work of Jesus Christ and the call to imitate him with a view of service to the world. The group aims for authentic community, which is centered on life with God and the mission of bringing the world to full unity in him. Although the Christian community is called to be of one mind (Acts 2:46), differences and conflicts are bound to arise. Living in community, however, calls all to deal creatively with tensions in obedience to the unfolding plan of God. Overcoming difficulties brings new life and depth to each member of the community.

The communitarian life of small church communities invites its members to full life and growth in God. These communities are not simply associations for intimate self-disclosure and emotional support. They promote their members' growth through the experiences and processes in which they discover and accept their God-given vocation. In keeping with the mission of the church, they become artisans of their own destiny.

In communities people come together to authenticate their interactions and to share in the struggles of their journeys. The communitarian lifestyle, however, poses challenges for its members. In our busy society, small groupings become reflective environs, raising the question of God's saving deeds in our lives and our world. The challenge of living in community is to enlarge a person's vision of God's saving plan without undermining one's development and growth. Individuals can feel accepted, welcomed and invited to maturity.

The community does not close in on itself, but rather integrates families of grandparents, parents, sisters and brothers. It promotes strong interpersonal relationships based on faith, love and unity. Members share their daily lives, their basic problems, their joys and their struggles. All feel welcomed there — integrated and co-responsible — with a fundamental equality, even if there is a diversity of function. Members of the community demonstrate a mutual, profound, caring, loving and committed partnership that brings them together in solidarity.

Small ecclesial communities can avoid the trap of being self-serving through a grounding in their mission and through interconnection with other levels of church. The communitarian aspect strongly emphasizes this unity as an essential element of being church. This unity forms a bridge with other communities, allowing the mission of God to flourish.

The communion that God desires does not end with the small church community. It reaches out to other levels of church life, including the parish, the diocese, the region and the universal church. Small ecclesial communities are in communion with these other elements as well as with their legitimate pastors. They participate in a strong *pastoral de conjunto*.⁹

3. Ecclesial Role

Small church communities are a communion of God's people living out the mission of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. In these communities new and effective ways of living the mystery of the church are being formed. This phenomenon challenges us to look at ourselves as church. Since it is still too early to know where this movement of the Spirit will lead us, we can only point to the reality and offer constructive direction.

The numbers of small church communities emerging within parishes indicate that parishes are providing pastoral leadership and fostering credible structures. For this we are grateful to their pastors and pastoral leaders, and to God, who gives the growth. Other parishes could also benefit greatly from the presence of small church communities. Without parish support and proper leadership, small groups could arise but lose direction. Furthermore, fundamentalist groups could easily move in to fill a vacuum.

Small church communities must not be seen in isolation. They are not another church, but part of the one church. Their major contribution is the new expression of Christian life. They offer the church a new inner life. Small communities are not a new movement in the church. Nor are they simply neighborhood subgroups of the parish structure. They are the church itself. They are a smaller expression of the universal church. As such, the church is developing new structures to allow this inner life to flourish. As communities of faith and mission, they give witness to a renewal of the church's inner life. Where this will lead depends on the Spirit.

Pope John Paul II has called for new parish structures for the Christian faithful. He calls for "adaptation of parish structures according to the full flexibility granted by canon law ... in promoting participation of the lay faithful," and sees small communities as "true expressions of ecclesial communion" when united with their pastors.¹⁰ These vibrant small communities allow Catholics to regain their universal momentum at a local level.

Small church communities understand their ecclesial nature as they strive to balance their inner life with their missionary thrust. Without this effort they run the risk of losing their credibility as ecclesial communities. Evangelization in all its dimensions enables the communities to blossom and remain on the path of constant renewal in faithfulness to Christ.

4. Prophetic Mission

Our God is a God of life. As prophet, Jesus announced and initiated God's life as the rule of his coming reign among us. Small communities are called to make as their own Jesus' prophetic vision of the coming reign. Like Jesus, they must stand in solidarity with all who suffer. Thus it is important that these communities study the church's social teachings and remain open to living in solidarity with the poor. As small prophetic communities, they exist in the concrete realities of daily life, announcing the reign of God's new life.

In their commitment to fostering the reign of the triune God, small church communities experience the mystery of God and the mystery of salvation as inseparable. As prophetic communities their task is to examine human real-

ity from the perspective of God's purposes so that their efforts are connected to God's designs for a new humanity.

Small church communities critically investigate the root causes of the idols of death, which are the obstacles to God's plan. They also interpret the signs of the times from the view of the mission of Jesus. Therefore, when small communities discuss, plan and focus on what direction to take, they begin and end with their commitment to the task of the coming reign of God. In this way these church communities become faithful to Christ's mission by refusing to give idols of death a place in history. As prophetic communities, they confront sin as an annihilation of communion with God and with one another.

Since God's plan for us is communion, small church communities are seen as countercultural in a society torn by division. The profound alienation felt in today's society is tied to the root cause of sin masquerading in the form of injustice, marginalization, abuse, abortion, drugs and violence. The communities' task of integral evangelization is to view people in all of the dimensions affecting their lives: spiritual, political, cultural, economic, social, educational and environmental, among others. In this way they can proclaim Christ as true Lord of all creation.

Bonding together under the banner of the God of life, small communities can critically examine the prevailing culture. They support an alternative way of life in a materialistic and consumption-driven society. The tendencies toward individualism and separatism and the disregard for the good of others are challenged by the presence of prophetic communities. Small communities invite and help people to be different in society, calling them to a conversion to the ways of God. This leads to communion.

As prophetic church communities, these groups attest to the possibilities of a new life with the triune God, bearing witness from the very place where the Gospel is lived. They profess communally that God is for us. Small communities affirm the faithfulness and truthfulness of God's relationship with us and with our world. For this reason we can call them communities of hope. As such, they proclaim that the God of life is victorious over all the forces of destruction that threaten true communion between sisters and brothers, among themselves and with the triune God.

Latinos resonate with the prophetic dimension of small church communities because they have often lived as strangers in their own land. Yet they have remained united by a profound faith and hope in the providence of God. In spite of historical obstacles, faith is at the center of their lives. Hispanics are experiencing a reawakening of cultural identity which is, at the same time, a rebirth of faith identity. Small faith communities affirm what is

inherently good about being a Hispanic Catholic, while at the same time challenging members to grow in light of the church's universal mission.

5. Liturgical Life

The life of the church is directed to the worship and praise of the living God. Worship and praise are, therefore, an essential part of living in small church communities. In this worship, the eucharist is the heart of their life and their essential link with the unity of the whole church. Life in service to the reign of God is connected intimately with praise of God. The eucharist celebrates the paschal mystery — the communion of God with his people — and anticipates the table of the new humanity where all will be one in Christ (Jn 17). It is the summit toward which all is focused and the source of all new life.¹¹ The eucharistic life of the small communities is inseparable from their commitment to partake in the mission of God's saving plan. The members bring to the eucharist their lives as Christians to offer as a part of worship. They become renewed in their commitment to begin again as agents of the reign of God.

These small assemblies gather as a people of praise and lift up to God key moments in their common journey of joys and struggles. They celebrate in prayers of thanksgiving and petition. While they share in personal devotions, community prayer unites the group with the prayerful chorus of the whole church. As assemblies of praise they are centers for celebrating the gift of faith and the promise of new life.

In light of their evangelical mission, it is important for small worshiping communities to develop prayer lifestyles and forms of communal reflection in keeping with the church's tradition and practice. In so doing, the Bible is primary among their sources. Special sensitivity must be given to the inclusion of the faith traditions and customs of all the members present. Inculturation is indispensable in order to make the people's faith-expressions a part of their prayer life. In this way people touch the mystery of faith in their own language and through their own symbols. They are thus led to a renewed commitment to Christian living.

Hispanics tend to view all of life as sacred and have generally developed a profound sense of the divine in daily living. This is evident in their popular religiosity. Unfortunately, liturgical celebrations reflecting the Hispanic life of faith and other events that are dear to them, such as Guadalupe celebrations, *posadas*, processions and *quinceaneras*, are often not incorporated into the worship life of the parish. In small communities Hispanics find support to retrieve this sense of popular piety and to reaffirm the values contained in these celebrations. As a people of praise, Latinos have a profound sense of celebration, or fiesta, and view life as a victory of grace over

sin. Fiesta celebrates a moment of God's presence among us and anticipates the joy of the coming reign of God.

6. Missionary Thrust

As the Father has sent me, so I send you (Jn 17:18). Small church communities are fundamentally missionary agents of the reign of God. The Second Vatican Council stressed the notion of the church as missionary to the world. In more recent times, Pope John Paul II emphasized the right of all peoples to hear the good news and called the church to a new evangelization in preparation for the third millennium of faith.

Small church communities engage in evangelization as an ongoing process, with life in a missionary community calling the members to constant conversion. This implies an encounter with Christ and an openness to allowing the reign of God to penetrate and guide one's whole life. To remain faithful to any evangelization effort, missionary church communities need to make solidarity with the poor a priority. This helps the community endure and retain sight of its ultimate goal of communion and mission. A community matures by being missionary; otherwise, it becomes self-serving and self-destructive.

Missionary communities assess how best to concretely live out their evangelical mission by critically studying the causes of alienation, emptiness and suffering. They question why society supports obstacles to God's plan. As missionary church communities, they challenge the causes of individualism, separatism and death-dealing ideologies that masquerade as being for the good of others. Small church communities protest all that attacks the coming reign of God. They plan as a group, within the framework of a *pastoral de conjunto*, to more effectively respond to the needs of the people with whom they live. Their efforts attest to God's activity to eradicate sin and death, and form a communion where all are brothers and sisters in union with the triune God.

7. Ministerial Role

Small church communities are ministerial because they are made up of baptized persons who are called to be collaborators in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

"Christ, the high priest and unique mediator, has made of the church 'a kingdom, priests for his God and Father' (Rv 1:6; cf. Rv 5:9-10; 1 Pt 2:5, 9). The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his proper vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet and king. Through the

sacraments of baptism and confirmation the faithful are 'consecrated to be ... a holy priesthood' (*Lumen Gentium*, 10.1)."¹²

Through the church God calls forth its ministers and forms them into ministerial communities. They exercise their role by linking the new evangelization with efforts to manifest among us the saving works of Jesus Christ, the high priest. Seen from this perspective, communities call their members to assume their rightful role in the mission of the whole church. In this way, the laity will move from seeing themselves as simply father's helpers to seeing themselves as responsible collaborators in the life and mission of the ministerial community. The more the faithful fulfill their work in the home, the parish, the neighborhood and the world, the more they make present the saving work of Christ, the high priest.

While all members belong to the ministerial community through baptism, confirmation and eucharist, not everything that the community does is considered ministry. The community engages in authentic ministry when its members' activities are carried out for the sake of the reign of God and in the name of the church. Ministry is directly tied to the saving works of Christ. For this reason, communities should offer their members proper and adequate training and formation. Ministries will flourish and new ones will emerge as long as members creatively collaborate with their pastors, so that all ministry is done in the name of the church.

"A rapidly growing phenomenon in the young churches ... is that of 'ecclesial basic communities.' ... They ... become leaven of Christian life, of care for the poor and neglected, and of commitment to the transformation of society. Within them the individual Christian experiences community and therefore senses that he or she is playing an active role and is encouraged to share in the common task. Thus, these communities become means of evangelization and of the initial proclamation of the Gospel and a source of new ministries."¹³

In affirmation of the hierarchical nature of the church, small communities foster a discipleship in solidarity and equal responsibility. According to their proper call and mission, all ministers have the duty to make present the vision and work of Jesus Christ, the priest, prophet and king.¹⁴

Ministry is a call, a vocation. Small church communities call their members to promote vocations for all the church ministries. Members involved in ministerial activity are not volunteers who simply help the church or the clergy, but are responsible disciples participating in the ministry of Christ, the high priest.

CONCLUSION

The elements outlined above are not an exhaustive list of the characteristics of small church communities. Others will emerge as these communities continue to bear fruit. We single these out simply to highlight certain characteristics of church life that will bind us as one church. In these basic elements we see factors that renew the church in a way that makes all of us more credible and at the same time faithful to the Lord. We offer guidance to help small church communities mature as an integral part of the universal church, especially in light of the new evangelization.

Ultimately, communion and mission are a gift of the triune God. It is the Father who offers us this gift in the person of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit. It is the triune God who brings into life these small communities and who sustains them. It is this Spirit of the living God who again calls the church to credibility in communion and mission, bearing witness to God's faithfulness to us and to our world. As Mary was present at Pentecost with the original church community, may she, model of faithful discipleship, continue to challenge and inspire the small ecclesial communities to bear much fruit.

QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATING SMALL CHURCH COMMUNITIES

The following questions can serve as a guide for small church communities. They may be used for the self-evaluation that each community should conduct from time to time. They may also be used by the pastor (or bishop) when he makes a pastoral visit to a community. Finally, the questions may serve as a guide in the formation of new communities. The questions can be addressed as the community develops each of its constitutive elements.

1. Composition

The small size of communities allows their members to relate on a personal level and help to develop interconnectedness and belonging. The smallness of the group encourages concentration of church life and mission, not separation from the larger church community.

- a. How do members get to know each other in community?
- b. How do members become integrated into this community? Is it by an evangelization retreat or a personal invitation? Are they part of a neighborhood grouping or a section of a parish?
- c. What is the composition of the group? Who is included (youth, elderly, etc.)?
- d. How do people experience a sense of belonging in this small community?

- e. How do members get to know the needs of the persons in the community and in the larger parish community?
- f. How committed are the members to each other?
- g. What type of sharing occurs in the group? Is personal faith shared? Is it focused on Christ and his mission? Do members tell stories of God in their lives?
- h. Who is the facilitator? How is this person selected? Is the selection done in consultation with the pastor and parish council?
- i. How are the members helped to articulate their personal faith journey and their call to participate in the mission of Christ to build the reign of God?

2. Communitarian Life

The communitarian aspect of small communities reinforces a strong tradition of community in church life. A communal lifestyle challenges the members to a shared vision of Jesus' life and work.

- a. How do the members help each other understand the group's role in the mission of Christ?
- b. How do the community's members relate their faith to their daily lives?
- c. How does the group help each member become a mature adult Christian?
- d. How does the group help its members discover a common purpose in applying Gospel values to all aspects of their lives?
- e. What values does the group hold in common?
- f. How are the members called to deeper faith?
- g. How is the Bible used in the group's gatherings?
- h. Is there an environment in the community that encourages ongoing conversion and constant refocusing on the group's mission?
- i. How does the community demonstrate care and concern for the needs of its members?
- j. Who participates in the *pastoral de conjunto*?
- k. How are the gifts of the members being used to strengthen the life and work of the community?
- l. How does the community resolve conflicts among its members?
- m. How does the group deal with diversity?

3. Ecclesial Role

Small communities are church and should not exist in isolation from the parish and diocese. They are not another church, but are part of the one church, offering new expressions and new inner life.

- a. How is the small community linked with the parish community?
- b. How does the group share its experiences with other communities?
- c. How are the bishop, pastor, parish pastoral leader and parish council connected to the small community?
- d. How many times do the parish/diocesan leaders visit the community?
- e. Are the parish leaders members of small communities?
- f. What type of relationship does the small community have with other parish groups?
- g. What type of leadership does the group need?
- h. How does the group express its openness to the movement of the Spirit in the church?
- i. How is the small community a sign of the presence of Christ in the world?
- j. Give examples that show how the community is maturing as church.
- k. How are the group members contributing to the life and ongoing renewal of the church?
 - l. Are members clear about their mission? What is the group's understanding of the mission of Jesus in today's world?
 - m. How are activities co-ordinated? How does the group handle evaluations of its members and the group's mission efforts?
 - n. How do the members promote the domestic church?

4. Prophetic Mission

Small church communities are prophetic when they proclaim that God's ways lead to communion with God and one another. They are prophetic when they give witness to the possibilities of new life with the triune God.

- a. What are the community's efforts toward integral evangelization? How does the community evangelize?
- b. How does the group witness as artisans of God's new humanity?
- c. How are the members enabled to articulate Gospel values for themselves so that each gives witness to God's coming reign?
- d. How does the community plan to give direction to its prophetic stance as a countercultural community and servant to the reign of God?
- e. How does the community analyze problems in the neighborhood or city in light of the mission of the church to foster the reign of peace and justice?
- f. How are members trained to critically assess any obstacles to God's plans?
- g. What efforts are made to reach out to the alienated Catholic, to the marginalized in society, to rejected members of society?
- h. What type of formation is offered to members regarding the social teachings of the church?

- i. How does the community make present the saving work of Jesus Christ?
- j. How does the community offer hope to the world?

5. Liturgical Life

Life in service to the reign of God is connected intimately with praise of God. Inculturation in the liturgy is instrumental to express the Hispanic sense of the sacredness of daily life.

- a. How does the community relate its mission to its worship?
- b. What is the prayer life of the community?
- c. How does the group incorporate the Hispanic popular religious traditions into its prayer and worship?
- d. Are services celebrated in Spanish? If necessary, are the services held bilingually?
- e. How is the community sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of its members, and how is this expressed in worship?
- f. Do all members of the community help in the liturgical preparations for special occasions such as *quinceañeras*, weddings, baptisms and *posadas*?
- g. Does the community participate in the sacramental preparation of its members: baptism, first communion, marriage?
- h. What provisions are made to incorporate children, youth, the elderly and the physically disabled in the prayer life of the church?
- i. Does the community have an appropriate setting for prayer (*altarcitos*, religious symbols)?
- j. When does the community gather to celebrate and pray with other communities? With the larger parish community?
- k. How does the group prepare to participate in the parish's liturgical life?
 - l. What type of Scripture reflection is used in the small community?
 - m. When does the group have fiesta?
 - n. How often does the community go on retreat?
 - o. Who organizes the calendar of celebrations for the community?
 - p. How are members helped to discover the sacredness of life in ordinary life experiences?

6. Missionary Thrust

Small communities are missionary agents for the reign of God. They make the church's option for the poor a priority in their missionary efforts.

- a. How are the members called to conversion? Retreats, workshops, missions?
- b. In what way does the community relate conversion to Christ with

the mission of Christ?

- c. How is the group in solidarity with the poor?
- d. How does the community reach out to those who have not yet heard about Christ?
- e. How does the community plan and formulate goals to give direction to its missionary efforts?
- f. How does the group assess its faithfulness to Christ?

7. Ministerial Role

Small communities foster the active participation of their members as collaborators in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The main thrust of all ministry is the reign of God.

- a. How are the gifts of the members called forth in community?
- b. How are the gifts of the community placed at the service of the neighborhood and parish?
- c. How are the members trained to be ministers and leaders? In the community, in the parish, in the diocese? What type of training is being offered?
- d. Do all ministers work in collaboration with the pastor and parish pastoral leaders?
- e. What efforts are made to foster vocations to the priesthood, religious life and to all other parish ministries?
- f. How is the role of women in the communities respected?
- g. What is done in the community to develop a serious commitment to ministry?
- h. What is being done in the community to help members move from an attitude of being simply Father's helpers and parish volunteers to being responsible collaborators in the life of the church?

A SUGGESTED MODEL FOR GATHERINGS

The structure for these gatherings varies depending on the region of the country, the liturgical season, the number of years the group has been together and so forth.

Welcome.

Prayer of praise and hymns.

Scripture reflection or a teaching.

Group sharing on the reflection or teaching (as it applies to their faith journey in light of the church's mission).

Prayers of the faithful.

"Our Father."

Announcements and other community concerns.

Closing prayers and hymns.

Hospitality.

FOOTNOTES:

1. The experience of small communities among Hispanics/Latinos in the United States is different from the Latin American experience of *comunidades de base*. In the United States, Hispanic Catholics are a minority in a Protestant country, often experiencing cultural and linguistic alienation. Since U.S. Hispanics have forged intimate ties between their self-identity and their faith expressions, small church communities serve to affirm their faith and cultural identity.
The rich Latin American experience of small base communities called for in Medellin, Puebla and Santo Domingo will continue to enrich the discussion and formation of the church in the Americas. Furthermore, the experience of Hispanic Catholics in small church communities can be a help to others in this country in the formation of these communities.
2. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference Publishing Services, 1983); National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry (1987)
3. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 2-4; Eph 2:18.
4. The expression is from St. Cyprian's *De Oratione Dominica* 23: *Patrologia Latina* 4, 553, and is quoted in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 4.
5. "He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:11-12).
6. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation" (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1986), 57.
7. Paul VI, "On Evangelization in the Modern World" (1975). In No. 58, Paul VI calls the small communities to be in solidarity with the church's life, nourished by its teachings and united with its pastors.
8. Acts 2:42-44; 2 Cor 13:13.
9. National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry, 9-17.
10. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (1988), 26.
11. Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 10.
12. Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994), 1546.
13. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), 51.
14. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1268.

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