

An Integrated Spirituality for Ministry Seminar, January 2000

Title of Paper: A White Paper of Parish Community Renewal through Partnership and (Leadership) Training

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Main Reference:

1. James D. Whitehead & Evelyn E. Whitehead, "The Promise of Partnership: A Model for Collaborative Ministry" Parts 1, 3 & 4, Translated Chinese version, Kuangchi Press, 2000.

General References:

2. Evelyn E. Whitehead & James D. Whitehead, "Christian Life Patterns: The Psychological Challenges and Religious Invitations of Adult Life", Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999.
3. Lecture notes of the subject seminar, January 2000.
4. First Draft, "Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Synod", Year 2000.
5. Meeting Minutes, Faith Formation of the Laity and Lay Ministry Committee, 1999/2000
6. Collectanea Theologica of Universitatis Fujen, 109, Autumn 1996.

Additional References for Appendix:

7. Collectanea Theologica of Universitatis Fujen, 109, Autumn 1996
8. Lecture notes and handouts of "Lay Ministry" class, Term 1, 2000

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Outline of Paper:

1. The Amazing Grace: a Parish Community Renewal
2. The Hope of a Partnership Relationship
3. The Transformation of Leaders and Parishioners
4. Growing Community Spirit through Partnership & Training
5. Concluding Remarks
6. Appendix: An Invitation to join Community Renewal

The Amazing Grace: a Parish Community Renewal

In this Jubilee Year 2000, the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong has called a Diocesan Synod. My interest is with Group One since I am a member of the Committee for the Formation of the Laity and Lay Ministry at the Saint Teresa's Church. Victoria Yeung is our leader. It is only natural to apply what I have learned in this seminar to a White Paper that good ideas are captured and reflections are applied.

The centering theme of the renewal is still under consideration. It is part of the big umbrella of **Formation** or more accurately described as a **Transformation**. The committee members generally agree to make the theme open to attract parishioners and allow them freely seek the transformations that suit them personally. The other wish is a transformation that will gradually arouse the sense of community renewal in different groups of the Parish and extend the Parish as an example to Hong Kong Diocese. The Saint Teresa's Church has gained the reputation of being generous in monetary contribution to any fund raising programs and Sunday mass contributions in the Diocese.

James inspires me with his catching phrase: A new **Symbolic and Affective System**. It is new and yet it is from ancient past. Our Parish has such amazing grace of a good tradition of generosity. The challenge is how to integrate the renewal with good old traditions that have been working fine in many aspects in the Parish. And yet it will be a system to bring new symbols of love, affections, passion and compassion into a system of renewal to enhance self, group, and parish. The wonder of the historical Jesus was to transform a fisherman to be the cornerstone and head of the Church. His wonders continue with the Holy Spirit at work in modern times and with the Father who is the Creator of everything seen and unseen. This transformation leading to the renewal will have two definitive criteria: (1) **Symbolic** as to easily attract our senses and mind, (2) **Affective** as to guide how to do and what characteristic to gauge against.

The Hope of a Partnership Relationship

The first type of symbol of a partnership relationship is the **Images of Embrace**. The transformation through formation is to start with self and then proceed to family, the leadership group, and the Parish community, the Diocese and people of Hong Kong. This is the process of transformation. This first image is to remind those who have experienced the **Embrace of holding and of love** by God just like infants and children of faith being embraced by God. In our journey of faith, the self will choose to follow Jesus. We want to be like Him. He is not our Father. He is our companion and our Lord. This second image of faith is the **Embrace of Cooperation**. This symbol signifies how close a partnership people of faith in the same parish should treat one another. It is an extension of self with others with Jesus Christ being the center of the cooperation.

Besides the expressions of relationships, the third image of embrace will define the mutual accountability of each self's and others using the **Embrace of Commitment**. This embrace will encompass a working environment and a sense of community spirit. Each individual in the Parish: from Parish Priest to laity, is basically tied together and create a sense of belonging because each one of us is accountable for self, others, and the common good of the Parish. We belong to the Parish. And we are the Church. Each individual and each small group working together are fully responsible and accountable as members of the Parish and the Church as we grow as a community of faith. It is this sense of commitment embraced in affection and love that gives us the energy to unite and be partners of each other in Christ.

The three Images of Embrace cover the three stages of Christians of Faith: from infant to childhood, from childhood to adults, and from adult to community. In the journeys of faith, we are held by love, hold together to cooperate, and being held responsible and accountable to a Christian of Faith against self, others, and as a community. Formation programs are to be designed to reflect the requirements in these stages in the journey of faith of leaders and parishioners. Firstly, on an individual basis, each person will be asked to reflect upon his own personal experiences of each image of embrace. He/she will gauge himself/herself of his/her attainment/need of development in the journey and community of faith.

The Transformation of Leaders and Parishioners

The frame of reference in the transformation process is relative for each individual. The measure of one's status of **scarcity** or **abundance** is a state of **personal adequacy**. The recognition of one's scarcity is a reflection on one's need for a conversion or transformation spiritually and psychologically. Formation programs are designed to help leaders and parishioners alike to detect where he/she is between the two poles of his/her own yardstick. Programs for support and self-care will be accompanied with reflection exercises of scarcity and abundance. Furthermore, two levels of exercise can be carried out to measure the two groups, i.e. leaders and parishioners.

The objective is to realize the **personal power** in each leader to lead the Renewal of the Parish community and the leaders to collectively help parishioners to transform. Besides individual programs, there should be group programs to help the integration of personal power of the abundance to support and care about those who are in need. It is important to recognize Jesus promises us of the abundance of grace (John 10:10). We have to believe the good works of God. The program for individual and group exercises are targeted to raise the awareness of one's scarcity is already a grace from God.

It is part of the transformation to **psychological maturity** that we realize our true self, our personal power to recognize both our own scarcity and our belief/confidence of our ability to attain abundance. The signs of maturity are when we sense the call to **Discipleship** – a central biblical image that means conversion, conviction, and commitment. Discipleship is an adult choice. It is a time of adult's choice of faith. These are responses to the call and a decision to God's grace – a new awareness of God with adult experience. Discipleship grows into **stewardship**. It is the stage when the disciple in us has reached maturity. I become more authoritative.

Stewardship comes from the parable in the Gospel to describe the authoritative servant. It is the renewal of the traditional concept of leadership. The steward is both a leader and a servant. He/She leads by servicing and he serves while he/she leads. The authority comes from Jesus. When the Lord is absent, the steward has the authority to lead and give instructions. Transformation from disciple to steward is through two bridges: **charisma** and **conscience**. Charisma describes what we are good at. We find it because of God's working in us and not by our own merits. Charisma is what St Paul describes in Cor I as the different gifts that we have. But they are all gifts from the same God.

The second bridge is conscience. Through learning or studies, we are educating our conscience. Catholics are good at forming conscience but not so good to trust conscience. That's why we ask ourselves if our voice of conscience is the voice of God. Conscience grows in our journey of faith. It comes a time when we grow to listen, not only to voices from others, but to our own voice as steward. I do not just repeat what other people say, "That Christ is in me." Stewardship, however, does not imply possessiveness. The desire to possess is in fact a temptation. A great voice of the

steward is not to hold onto a project, a post, or the Parish. The **freedom to let go** is a sign of winning of a steward – Christ’s model to transform leaders and all His followers – the parishioners.

Growing Community Spirit through Partnership & Training

The freedom and willingness to let go is how a leader as steward will promote collaboration in the community of faith. Co-labor means working together – forming partnership. Common goal(s), shared planning, and coordinated activities are signs of Collaboration. Common goal(s) will yield same results. This is the experience of collaboration with shared planning so that the community of faith can have coordinated activity. Collaboration demands that we have goals in common. We participate in the common plan. Collaboration, however, is not automatic. It is not always easy.

Partnership is an advanced style of collaboration. It means initiative, influence (i.e. impact of individual has on results), and accountability are shared. It does not mean we are doing the same thing. Working in collaboration means differences are cherished. Partnership is needed because we are different. It may mean that there should not be a dedicated leader. Collaboration means genuine democracy and not counting on individuals. Neutrality rather than equality describe genuine partnership. Many hierarchical orders will come down. Hence partnership will not mean decision is made and being told what to do. Neither will evaluation be done by higher up in the hierarchy.

The Church used to be that way. But this is not partnership. In a partnership, there should be an impact from the traditional grass-root level. This means wider sharing of responsibilities and better ways to structure leadership where partnership is needed. In such structure, influence and change can be effected from many different persons. The promise of partnership in the Church is therefore derived from members who are parts of the Body of Christ! Partnership in the church means, “shared power” as in Christ’s model of steward.

Shared power does not mean control nor autonomous. It derived from God’s power in us. As Paul mentioned in Ephesians 3, God’s power in us is beyond what we can imagine. Imagination is what makes it possible for God to come to our heart. If we are worried or doubt about imagination, we lose the chance of God’s presence. Community spirit can only exist with this symbol of Christianity in an affective system of partnership. Shared power also means that our freedom to exercise true adult obedience to legitimate authority. A prudent steward knows how to exercise legitimate authority. A mature adult also knows that he will exercise his freedom to obey in the spirit of the common good.

Community spirit is therefore the result of partnership, shared power, mature obedience, legitimate authority, and advanced collaboration. The structure has to be neutral. The significant play of partnership demands education and training of individuals to become mature member of the community. The program should provide a continuous development process to renew the ancient culture established by Christ with symbol and images of embrace, the awareness of personal adequacy, the exercise of personal power, the sense to follow discipleship, and the growth to stewardship. Partnership exists because of our different charisma from the same God. Through training, we educate our conscience to become a true partner in the community as promised by Christ – to have life and live to our fullness. For we are members of the community in the Church of Christ Today!

Concluding Remarks

The paper has outlined an integrated approach to Spirituality for Ministry in our Parish – the Saint Teresa’s Church. The content is based on reflections of the learning from the Seminar taught by Doctors James and Evelyn Whitehead in Hong Kong. It will be submitted to the Parish Council as the White Paper from the Committee of the Faith Formation of the Laity and Lay Ministry. The centering theme of this proposal is continuous renewal and partnership in the community. The model of formation is from infant to childhood, from childhood to adults, and from adult to community.

Thanks to the Drs. Whitehead for such an inspiring seminar!

Appendix - “You are invited to launch a promotion to Catholics to join Ministry work in the Church, how would you design the program and what would you emphasize, why?”

The Amazing Grace: a Parish Community Renewal

Dear Parishioners,

In this season of Advent, we are all preparing ourselves to celebrate the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This is a special Christmas since this is the Christmas of the Jubilee Year 2000 and the first of the new Millennium. Pope John Paul II has called for all in the Jubilee Year to missionary works, disregards of whether you are poor, sick, young, old, or handicapped. Everybody has a role to play in Ministry in today’s world and a chance to lead the life that Christ has brought us and live to the fullest (John 10:10). That’s the real good news brought to us by Jesus and is the real meaning why we are celebrating, not just in Christmas but at all times as we experience the fullest of life in us and in others through good works of Ministry.

The Vatican II started the signal of renewals. Structure and emphasis of Ministry have shifted to a clearer identity of self in the Church. We, Christians are the Church. People can only live to their fullest if they can integrate the rich tradition of Christian Faith with our own culture and inner self. However, this is not automatically clear unless we empty ourselves to hear the voices of God and prepare our path of renewal. Renewal prepares us for an integrated spirituality for Ministry. We cannot give or share with others unless we have such experiences ourselves. The sharing is of experiences and not possessions. Experiences are stories of how God has cared for us, both in times of bad and good. Renewal is a self-initiated move to cooperate with the Spirit to find our better self.

Renewal is the amazing grace of God. It is a call God has prepared us, as community of faith, to recognize the lives we have to live to the fullest. A Parish Community Renewal is therefore a natural integration of us, followers of Christ to share the experience of God’s grace as a community of faith. When we are sharing our experiences through acts of faith, hope, and charity, we are celebrating our Ministry together as a community. The more we share, the more we can experience the acts and grace of God. God’s grace is in abundance. That’s the meaning of having life to the fullest and in abundance. Life is never empty with sharing especially if we live in Christ. Because we are human, we have weaknesses. God’s grace is our strength of renewal. Ministry is the work to help those in need for a renewal to enrich life. The experience of enrichment from scarcity to abundance is renewal. This is an act of God with cooperation of self and collaborative ministry by others. That is community renewal in action.

A call to Discipleship & Stewardship

Renewal starts with grace. It has a starting point, the state of scarcity, and an ending point – the state of abundance. But an ending point is not an end. It only signifies the stage we are in as we walk in the journey of faith in our lives. We have many starting and ending points in our lives. Scarcity and abundance are all relative. It varies with people and even with ourselves as we are in different stages of our lives. An “abundance” in childhood does not mean an “abundance” in adulthood. We have to grow and put on our new self as St Paul said, to reach a higher level of abundance and then to the fullest as we are with the Lord. This is a growth in spirituality integrated to our secular lives. To grow in age but remain in our “old self” of a child means spiritual scarcity. Our “old self” of a child does not fit our “new self” as adult any more. An old “abundance” in the past could become a new “scarcity” in the present. In spirituality, we can only be childlike but not remain as a child.

To be alert of such calls to changes and renewals is an important reflection of our lives in Christ. As a community, we have to remind parishioners of such calls. Dr. James and Evelyn Whitehead are modern prophets of our time to speak to serious Christians today of such awareness. They tell us about the call to Discipleship and Stewardship. I will extract from my paper submitted for the seminar of the meanings of discipleship and stewardship as Appendix for completeness sake. These are significant transitions and renewals of our Christian lives. It demands not only awareness. Above all, it demands a search of experiences to achieve such stages of our development to maturity and recognize them as graces of God. Then we have to bring the experiences out again to share with others with confidence in faith, hope, and charity as our responses to our call of Ministry. The confidence is a sign and an act of maturity. Ministry is a result of mature sharing of live experiences in words, prayers, and in actions, either in private or in community.

Joining the Partnership

Experiences of lives in Christ are evidences of grace. St Paul calls it charisma. Before the seminar, charisma means only areas of our strength to me. Like abundance and scarcity, strength and weakness are also relative. For a person in the journey of faith, charisma to me now should simply mean experiences of lives in Christ. The experiences of my weakest moments of life often have been my best experiences of God being with me. When God is with me, I am in abundance. I am strong and my weaknesses overcome. I use “often” because of my own human limitations. I am not perfect but as I am becoming perfect (as my Father in heaven is), then I can use “always” instead. That’s why we need community. A community of faith is the source of grace that will bring the community always to live in Christ. We help and remind each other of becoming perfect. This is renewal in a community of faith. I feel and experience this is Ministry, don’t you?

So, renewal starts with me and relates very much to community in order to be effective. This effectiveness is a community living to its fullest. Why not? This is true partnership in the community of faith. It is living and alive! A joining of the community creates fullness in self, through partnership in the community. This is promised by Christ, saying, “Whenever two or more gather in my name, I am in your midst.” God’s presence means abundance is present. To tell what it means in the grace of God is prophecy. We learn in the seminar prophecy was an old gift from God that has not been detected in abundance since 400 BCE. The professors call for a renewal by being modern prophets themselves. A prophet speaks for God. A prophet tells people the meaning of what he/she says for God. The words become prophecy.

Then, what is the meaning of “joining the partnership” as related to Lay Ministry? Participating and contributing to the formation of a community is “joining the partnership. Proclaiming the Word of God and serving God’s people in the community are also functions of “joining the partnership”. So, Ministry is a function, not a state or status of recognition. Yves Congar defines the various levels of ministry as follows:

1. General Ministry – expressed in occasional, passing services to others (e.g. parents catechizing their children, helping others who might be in need, leading Bible study groups, etc.)
2. Publicly Recognized Ministries – being more directly related to the habitual activities of the Church (e.g. permanent catechists, lectors, Eucharistic ministers, etc.)
3. Ordained Ministries – are public offices with a sacramental base (e.g. ministry of diaconate, etc.)

Ministry is the realization of joining the partnership. It represents actions. It means commitments. It demands sharing, giving, let go, and not possessiveness (of recognition and status inclusive). It is a renewed form of leadership that Jesus has taught us as a steward in the community of faith or in the modern society. It is a renewal model of a servicing leader, a servant of servants as proclaimed by the Popes since the last Millennium,

Enjoying Collaborative Ministry

The call to become a disciple and steward to join the partnership with the community of faith is collaborative ministry. Much has been written and referenced in our class under the topics of ministry and office, from ministry to bishop, creative ministry, collaborative ministry, and spirituality for collaborative ministry. The message of all these tell us that we have a history, a rich tradition of ministry as disciple and steward. Ministry to me should be a natural way to respond to God’s call and His gift of life to live to the fullest. This will mean different thing for different people. For some, it may mean to do every daily job well for the sake of Christ. Saint Teresa of Child Jesus is such an example. Her vocation is love. God sees our intention and sees that we enjoy His call to our collaborative ministry. Partnership is an advanced style of collaboration. Our ministry is to start with self and grow into psychological and spiritual maturity. With this experience, we can then share, give, let go of our possessiveness in a collaborative form of Ministry. We enjoy the freedom of non-possessiveness in the process of discipleship, stewardship, and partnership!

Growing maturity will also set us free in our conscience and enjoy our charisma. We practice mature obedience. It is obedience that frees our conscience of internal conflicts. We let our charisma explores freely from all temptations of possessiveness and transforms our personal power to enjoy being a member or leader of the community of faith. There will be no concerns to obey authority. Mature obedience belief freely and whole-heartedly legitimate authority for the common good of the community. The self will become smaller and the community in us will become larger. This is the transformation and renewal of self. Collectively, this is the basis of a Christ-like Renewal of the Parish Community. This is a transformation and process of enjoyment!

Conclusion

My dear Parishioners, we are all called by Christ to be Christians. We are the Church and this is our Parish. The Parish Community is a living body that should grow and transform. We can do it together by joining the partnership and stewardship. Lay ministry is becoming part of the Church’s life in the new millenium. It means services by truly

equipping oneself. It means receiving the life from Christ and living to the fullness in Christ. Ministry is life enrichment leading to true enjoyment in life.

A Big Thank You and May God reward you all!