

CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #1

In July 1994 a small group of Catholics gathered in Sydney to discuss their role in the Church and the world. A variety of factors brought us together. One seemed to be of particular significance – a strong desire to be part of a Church that is good news for our world.

It seemed to us that many are feeling frustrated in their attempts to participate effectively in the life of the Church. Many have stopped trying to participate. None of us particularly wants to leave the Church. We cherish its tradition. We also share both a faith in the Incarnation & God's promise to dwell with us, and a concern that the Catholic Church should play the life-giving role in society which is its privilege and responsibility. The Catholic Church's effectiveness as a sign of God's love and goodness seems to be diminishing at this time – a development we cannot simply blame on a 'materialistic world'. With the Second Vatican Council we acknowledge that "believers themselves bear some responsibility (for this situation)" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n.19).

We share Pope Paul VI's perception that "we live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.75). We want to listen intelligently to the signs of the times, as Pope John XXIII called us to do, and respond generously to the call of the Spirit. We seek to participate in the life and mission of the Church as Christian faithful, accepting both the rights and responsibilities that come with our baptism. We see a special and highly significant role for the Second Vatican Council and the work of renewal that was begun there. Pope John Paul II summed it up nicely in his encyclical, *Tertio Millennio Ineunte*: "Now that the Jubilee has ended, I feel more than ever in duty bound to point to the Council as the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning" (57).

The times in which we find ourselves see us all facing questions and issues that demand the most serious attention. We must all participate in the best way we can in the processes whereby we will address those issues and questions. Those processes cannot and must not be left in the hands of a few from whom we will then be expected to silently accept answers, explanations and decisions. We all must, to the best of our abilities and opportunities, join with the Church in her struggle to find new expressions of the Gospel at this time.

We are mindful of the temptations of perfectionism, of expecting more of the Church and her human representatives and structures than is realistic. Our desire is to work with and in the institutional Church, freely, honestly and compassionately. We desire to be part of that growing energy within the Church that is inspired by and subject to the Spirit of Christ. That Spirit blows where she will, revealing herself through the Sacred Scriptures, through the actual institutional life of the Catholic Church, through the historical, social, political and cultural reality we have inherited, through other religious traditions and through the issues and questions of our own day.

The heart of such an endeavour has to be the Paschal Mystery. Like her Founder, the Church lives the death and resurrection mystery in every age. The Church – along with each of the Christian faithful – must submit willingly to the dying that alone can bring life. If we evade the death we will not know the resurrection. In Him, with Him, and through Him, we pass over from death to life. Apart from Him we are nothing (cf. Jn. 15:5).

In this spirit we named our group Catalyst for Renewal. In accord with our mission statement, we will do what we can to develop forums of conversation. In those forums we will encourage adults who share our concerns and intentions to engage in lively debate, to listen respectfully and intelligently to each other, to learn from that experience and thus participate more effectively in the renewal of both Church and society.

Our first forum for conversation was Spirituality in the Pub and we are continuing to develop that forum. We have also begun to hold a series of Catalyst Dinners at which conversation is

promoted. A series of Reflection Mornings for Friends and Volunteers has also been introduced. In 1997 we invited two Maryknoll priests - Bill Frazier and Larry Lewis - to Australia to conduct a series of adult education courses. Our journal *The Mix* is now received by more than 1600 people.

Become part of the conversation. We are the decisions we make. The shape of the Church in future generations will be determined as much by our decisions - or lack of them - as it will be determined by the Holy Spirit.

Those choices we make might demand much of us. They might in fact cost us everything. So be it. Our Paschal Lord is the example. Let us make the choices thoughtfully, freely & generously in the spirit of abandonment to the Eternal Mystery.

Like Jesus, our desire is to do the will of the One who sent us (cf Jn. 4:34). We can be at peace then with the outcome. "For us there is only the trying, the rest is not our business" (T. S. Eliot).

What future do we want? What choices shall we make? What sort of Church shall we pass on to the next generations?

WHAT CAN I DO?

From time to time *The Mix* will carry a **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET** as an insert. The purpose is to assist our Friends and others to become actively involved in the process of renewal by either initiating a forum for conversation or participating in a forum for conversation that is already established.

On the reverse side of this sheet are some thoughts about groups. You might be able to meet with one or more others and set up a little group. This could be focused on, for example, the Sunday Readings, a chosen book, a bible study program, prayerful time together considering designated subjects and so on. Upcoming Suggestion Sheets will offer creative ways to meet and engage in good conversation.

HELP US HELP OTHERS

We would also love to hear from you if you have some good suggestions for conversation. Where are the signs of hope? What good things are being done? Let us know and we will let others know!

(CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEETS are published by Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated, PO Box 139, Gladesville 2110)

RULES AND HINTS FOR GROUPS

Purpose

To provide a forum within which adults can grow in their faith and learn from:
the Spirit working in "two or three gathered" in His name;
speaking of their own lived experiences and considered reflections;
listening to the experiences and considered reflections of others.

Suggested Group Rules

The success of the group presupposes that all members:

take responsibility for the group's success;
care for the others in the group;
endeavour to be there consistently and on time;
prepare material conscientiously;
be willing to listen *and* speak;
maintain the confidentiality of material discussed.

Leadership

Generally it is best if leadership of the sessions is shared. If the group is worth having all must contribute something to its life.

It is also generally the case that if there is not one or perhaps two to take responsibility for getting things done, things do not get done. Watch that those one or two do not get overburdened.

Power struggles can be disastrous for the life of the group. These generally hinge around personality clashes or differences of understanding the purpose of the group. Power struggles must be dealt with openly and honestly.

Good group leaders tend to be invisible

Hints For Participating Fruitfully

Consider the group as having a certain "energy" which must be kept moving. The more the group members share that "energy" or pass it around, the better will the group be. Grace builds on nature - the "Energy" of God with our "energy".

That flow of "energy" can be inhibited or locked up - e.g. by talking excessively, moody silence, failing to listen sensitively, cynical or cutting comments, restless body movement, forming sub-groups or alliances, depending too much on the facilitator for promptings, arbitrations or answers.

That flow of "energy" can be released and moved - e.g. by thoughtful and honest comment, sensitive listening, paying attention to the one speaking, encouraging remarks, good humour, gently challenging evasions, allowing people to disagree with you or share a contrary opinion, deliberately taking up the "energy" respectfully then letting it go.

Focus on the learning possibilities in the group. Even a "bad" group experience is an opportunity to learn.

If the group's "energy" or your own seems to be chronically inhibited or locked up, address this issue - reflect on what is happening, discuss it with another member of the group or the facilitator or simply raise your concern publicly in the group. Do something about it!

When you see that another member of the group has been distressed, is angry or otherwise has "unfinished business" when the discussion concludes, don't leave that person alone. See that they have some opportunity to express their feelings to someone. However, respect their privacy should they choose not to pursue the matter with you.

It is not the end of the world if someone leaves a group, or the group disbands or you find that

participation in the group is no longer lifegiving for you so you decide to leave. Do what you must do in faith.

Suggested Reading

Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing*, Bantam Books, 1986. (Personal listening and awareness)

John Heider, *The Tao of Leadership*, Bantam Books, 1986. (Developing your skills as facilitator)

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