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# LIVING COMMUNITY

## Christmas 2009

Dear Friends,

Good wishes to you. We are all too aware of the world financial crisis that has affected the lives of so many people this year. At the time of our writing to you Fr Hans Kung, the prophetic and eminent Swiss theologian, is reported in the Melbourne Age of December 9 as having addressed the Parliament of the World Religions meeting in Melbourne. He said, "A GLOBAL economy needs a global ethic in which a fair society and the environment accompany profits in a triple bottom-line for companies." The report continues, "Dr Kung launched a manifesto for a global economic ethic written by businessmen, economists and ethicists. The manifesto draws on universal principles of respect for life, justice and solidarity, honesty and tolerance, and mutual esteem and partnership". It says that "humanity flourishes only in a culture of respect for the individual, but that the common good has priority over individual interests."

As we celebrate the Christmas event we keep alive all those authentic human values which Jesus embodied for the common good of all. May we strive to put them into practice in 2010 in the church and in society. Happy Christmas holidays.

Fr Michael Fallon  
Director, CBW Australia

### NEWS FROM OCEANIA



#### AUSTRALIA

##### A Church of Communion and Participation

Members of Community for a Better World accompany parishes in the process of taking on this style of church. This includes helping parishes to review the actions of the past year and to take on new initiatives according to identified needs.

In Victoria the parishes of Sunbury and Ararat are moving towards decentralizing various pastoral services, e.g. sub-grouping families by neighbourhoods for pre-sacramental catechesis of children. Creating a web of friendliness, mutual care and practical assistance at neighbourhood level helps to give the Church a human face.

A key structure in the renewal of the Christian Community is the annual parish assembly. It is a way of enabling the people to exercise their baptismal dignity in discerning the will of God for the parish. The parish pastoral assembly gradually becomes an ordinary part of parish life.

In October Michael Fallon visited Ararat Parish where the people have held annual parish assemblies for almost ten years. They met in a classroom of their high school. People spoke up confidently and gave their points of view strongly and with great respect for one another. Their desire to build a community of faith, hope and love has highlighted the need for a gathering place on occasions of various liturgical and social celebrations. Despite the difficult financial times they have committed themselves to the necessary fundraising for a suitable gathering place.

##### Victorian Parishes Together

Each year the Victorian team of Community for a Better World convenes key people from the various parishes which are in the ongoing process of renewal. This year, ten people from Sunbury, Ararat and Greensborough North gathered at Sunbury Presbytery for a two day sharing of their pastoral experiences. Michael Fallon from the national team and Kevin McIntosh and Margaret Russell from Victoria represented the Community for a Better World. Among the various topics there was some interesting discussion on the experience of the catechumenate in Australia and the great need for some more permanent conditions for people to grow in their faith after becoming Catholics. The common experience was that people can easily

drop into an ocean of anonymity within the parish unless they have a continuing way of meeting to share life and faith.

## **PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

For some years now Community for a Better World has been working internationally with various religious congregations, accompanying them in a journey of renewal. The FMI Sisters (Daughters of Mary Immaculate), an indigenous congregation in Papua New Guinea, expressed interest in this proposal some time ago. Finally, after some setbacks, we were able to organize two week-long sessions with them, the first during July in Rabaul for the sisters in that part of the country and the second during September in Goroka for the sisters working in mainland PNG. The sessions focused on 1) the main aspects of the renewal proposed by the Second Vatican Council, 2) deepening appreciation of the church's nature of communion and elements of the spirituality of communion, 3) religious life as radicalizing the Church, 4) the process we propose and what it would entail, 5) discernment about whether to take on the process or not.

The sisters were very receptive to all that we presented and the experience made a deep impression on them. They were unanimous in recommending that they embark on this journey of renewal, and set up a team to oversee the process.

It was a great joy to work with the FMI congregation and to appreciate their quality and ability. We also had the chance to learn something of their rich history, especially their heroism under the Japanese occupation of Rabaul area during World War II.

One of the challenges for us now is to provide the training needed for the team, given the cost and difficulty of travel in PNG. Jill also appreciated the opportunity to continue to help our Group in PNG facilitate this process in the future.

**Jill Gibbs**  
Area Co-ordinator; Oceania

## **INSIGHTS of Fr. LOMBARDI**

### **React to being closed**

Today it is more urgent than ever to insist on the fact that we humans must love one another, because the temptation of each living one's own life and ignoring others is so great; being so physically close, we run the special risk of defending ourselves, each one entrenched in selfishness.

## **Social dimension of human beings**

Those who promote, in total sincerity, the social dimension of the concept of human beings as God's children and, consequently, brothers and sisters to each other, are the only ones who, in today's drama, speak genuinely of the future and indicate the way out of the blind alleys in which we seem destined to perish.

**Fr Riccardo Lombardi 'Spiritual Writings'**

## **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

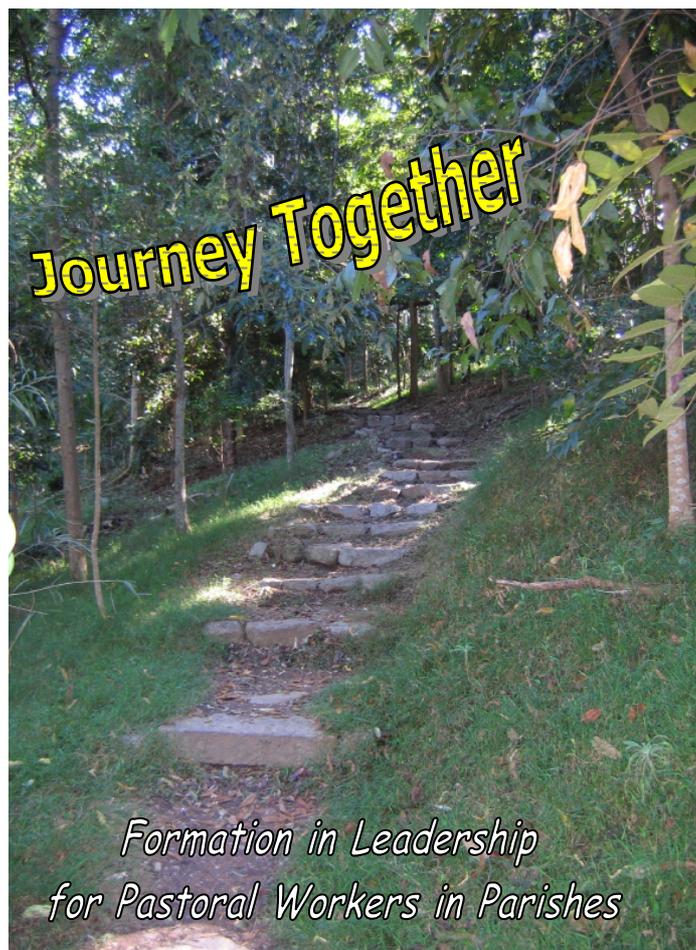
It is easy to identify a church building – it is there for anyone to see. What is more difficult is to see a church community, to identify a group of people with a Gospel style of life, a sense of belonging together in Christ, a mission to extend in the world God's reign of justice and goodness, of peace, love and unity.

People see us “coming to Church” on Sundays, after which we disperse and go about our ordinary lives. Generally this is a small percentage (less than 15%) of people who identify themselves as Catholics on the census. An even smaller percentage is involved in some parish activity. We have no way, however, of knowing how our faith affects us in our work situations, in our political opinions, in our social behaviour, in our values and attitudes.

With the current combining of parishes into larger pastoral regions, is there an increased risk of the church becoming even more remote from the everyday lives and experience of the majority of Catholics?

Perhaps very few of us have any image or experience of neighbourhood church in our own locality and any idea or understanding of the family itself as the church at home. Yet it is in such small groupings, close to home, that people can get to know one another, care about one another and share what faith means for them in daily life. Then there is the increased possibility of their becoming aware of themselves as part of the Body of Christ, conscious that they not only belong to the church but that the church exists because they are present there in that place. Is this a more effective way of making the church, and therefore Christ and his saving Love, visible and accessible?

# Journey Together



This booklet has been developed by **Community for a Better World** as a resource to serve the spiritual, theological and pastoral formation of the many lay persons who minister to the life of their parish communities.

It has been designed for use in small groups so that the time spent together can be fruitful and enjoyable. Each participant will need a personal copy of the booklet.

**PRICE:** 1-50 = \$10 ea.; 51-100 = \$9 ea.; 101+ = \$8ea.  
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## **TOWARDS COMMUNITY SPIRITUALITY: ACTS OF FAITH**

Those of us of a certain age finished Catholic primary school with a number of prayers committed to memory, among which were “Acts” of Faith, Hope and Charity. The Act of Faith went something like this: “O my God, I firmly believe all the truths that the Holy Catholic Church believes and teaches. I believe these truths, O Lord, because Thou, the infallible Truth, hast revealed them to her. In this faith I wish to live and die. Amen.”

Noble sentiments, but more a statement than a prayer, and it does betray a rather narrow or restricted idea of faith. What is emphasised is the content of revealed truth (all that the Holy Catholic Church believes and teaches) whereas biblical faith in God or in Jesus Christ has a much more personal dimension: believing not just what they teach, but believing **in** them, trusting in them, committing oneself to them.

Living a ‘communion life-style’ in our everyday relationships can indeed be summed up under the headings of faith, hope and charity – what have traditionally been called the ‘cardinal virtues’. They hold the key to expressing a communion spirituality. And of course, it is God first and foremost who must be the object of our faith, hope and love. But building on that, we ask how our act of faith, directed primarily to God, can and should also embrace others.

Living in faith means trying to see all (persons, things, events) with the “eyes” of God, from the point of view of God’s wisdom. In that way, it becomes an important dimension of a God-related attitude or outlook on life.

Having relationships of faith with one another means, first of all, recognising one another as sons and daughters of God, and therefore as brothers and sisters in God’s family. This involves seeing others as loved by God, eternally valued by God, and so worthy of being loved. Through Christ, God gives to every human being that dignity which gives him or her the right to be loved.

All others, therefore, are worthy of the kind of faith that God places in them. This means faith that each one is capable of becoming, has the potential to become his or her best self. Such faith in others gives them the opportunity to reveal who they are, and who they want to be. Having faith in others helps them to have faith in themselves. It strengthens them to overcome difficulties and grow

in their ideals. In this sense, our faith is a gift we offer to others. They do not have to earn our faith in them.

Faith implies seeing or perceiving the other from God’s point of view. It means, in other words, seeing others in their closeness to Christ, and in their distance from Christ, because Christ is the ideal model whom God has given us. It means seeing them with an attitude of faith, recognising in others the seed of salvation planted in them, being alert to what is best in the other person, to what the other person is called to be.

In the words of Genesis 1:26-27, it means recognising that the other is created in the “image and likeness” of God, and going beyond the externals of looks, personality, character and so on. It means affirming others, but also helping them to identify those aspects in which they need to grow. It means helping what is best in others to emerge, so that they might overcome their limitations and sins.

That does not mean we point out to others what we think their limitations and sins are. We obviously must avoid any judgmental attitude. And to be sincere, we must be prepared and even want others to have and show faith in us in the same way. When we express faith like this through our ways of relating, we help to create the conditions for people to experience being loved by God.

Along with hope and love, faith is an important part of the style of life we are called to live, both within the Church community, and with society as a whole. We have been baptised into a ‘new humanity’, to breathe in the wisdom of God and breathe it out by our response to God in faith. Day by day we try to make that wisdom part of who we are. By relating to one another in faith, we enable the wisdom of God to penetrate the world and the life of the Church through us. This enables the Church and the world and to become more “communion”.

**Fr Bill O’Shea**

**Adapted from “Exploring the Spirituality of Communion”  
a resource of ‘Community for a Better World’**