

CHAPTER 4

WHAT IS AN IEC? THE PAX COMMUNITY: A BRIEF HISTORY⁷⁶

What is an IEC? How important is this phenomenon to the U.S. Catholic experience?

While it is difficult to define an IEC, it is possible to describe what it is not. A number of authors have described small Christian communities (SCCs). One such definition is that they are a small (8-12 persons) group of Christians who gather for faith sharing, prayer, community building within the context of the larger parish (which is the presumed “unit” of Christian organization) and/or a tool of parish evangelization, that is, the result of a retreat, revival, or some other “special” attempt to single out a small number of persons who would develop a group identity and “leaven” the parish.⁷⁷ By this definition there may be more than 75,000 SCCs. In the sense that these communities are less than full “churches” or that they are tools of a hierarchically-minded pastor, they are not IECs. This leads to the conclusion that the IEC must be church, that is, that it must offer, provide, or *be* church in all its fullness to its members—it is not a prayer group, a social action committee, or a social club. Even the expression of this conclusion is problematic: it suggests that church “does” to or for its members, where the members of IECs *are* church—to each other and to outsiders. This

⁷⁶ This history is based upon the personal experiences of the author and his family and is adapted from their informal archives that have been maintained since 1975. It draws also upon two comprehensive histories that have been prepared. The first was the product of a committee, vetted by several founding families for accuracy and emphasis, published on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Pax in 1989. During the anniversary year, many events were scheduled to introduce new members to the “story” of Pax. Many of those events were also documented. More recently (2004-5), using the archives of the community, interviews, and the earlier written history, Lisa Schwartz published a multi-part series of histories in the monthly newsletter of the community. However, none of these studies have attempted, in a systematic way, to explore the principal themes of an Intentional Eucharistic Community, particularly in the light of Pauline ecclesiology, the way these themes work out in practice, and the relevance of this experience in the history of the Church. Recent incidents in the community have suggested that it “needs” a theology, that is, a community self-understanding of its mission and how the relationship of the community to other communities and the universal church helps or hinders that mission. See Chapter 5 of this paper. The models of the first century churches of Paul are a starting point in this dialogue—as Cardinal Kasper has suggested.

⁷⁷ Thomas A. Kleissler, et al., *Small Christian Communities* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2003), chap 8, 110-123.

definitional element excludes hundreds or thousands of SCCs. Moreover, IEC's would consider this "means to an end" description of their role within the church (as opposed to their role as church) to be insulting, since it suggests a top-down measure of authenticity and utility. To be Pauline-pragmatic does not mean to be hierarchically-manipulated.⁷⁸

Paul's commitment to *koinonia* should raise a cautionary flag to the IEC, if it sees itself as superior and apart from the church (even if its rationale is reforming or intensely recommitting to "root-Christianity"), for this would be an unjustified congregational violation of the essential connectedness of the all of the church of Jesus and suggest a hierarchy of church form which Paul's body of Christ imagery would abhor. To the extent that the IEC is de facto not in communion with the greater church, it contributes to the overall brokenness of the body of Christianity.⁷⁹ And, this is true, even if the break is imposed from outside the IEC.

John Langen has suggested essential characteristics of the IEC.⁸⁰ Generally, it has members who have made a "personal acceptance" of all central Christian doctrines; they exhibit an ecumenical tendency; and, they exhibit dissatisfaction with "the denominational past and its structures." He notes further that particularly American features are observable in IECs and their members: democratically egalitarian (this results in suspicion of hierarchy and a reluctance to accept clerical leadership as a matter of ontological right or fundamental essence), open to new ideas, respectful of the rule of law and order (this causes IECs to be asking always, where do we stand in the church?), conscious of the legacy of "effective

⁷⁸ Kleissler is attempting to describe for the church the phenomenon of SCC's as a sociological phenomenon, but he brings to the analysis a prejudice about the structure of church which leads him to descriptions of movements for a hierarchy which are not appropriate in describing the particular form of SCC that an IEC is. IEC's would not ask how they might be used by a pastor to do *kerygma*, rather they would ask why aren't all of us involved in this *kerygma*, and why aren't we *kerygma*?

⁷⁹ Patrick J. Brennan, *Re-Imagining the Parish* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1990), 15.

⁸⁰ John Langen, "Models and Values: The Search for US Christian Community," in James Hug, ed., *Tracing the Spirit*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 151.

protest” (they are convinced that the IEC through its success can influence the mainstream), flexible, pluralist, experimental (liturgical experimentation and open communion), practical, and convinced that something is wrong in society and church (which causes endless debate about the role of the IEC in reform and a certain self-righteousness).⁸¹ These principals describe the ethos of Pax, if not the entire IEC movement.

One final issue remains: what does it mean to be “intentional”? Does it mean that the members have made a personal decision to do church in this context? Or does it suggest something more exclusive: a self-selected group of Christians who share economic status, language, geographic location, or political affiliation? It seems that both are true. It takes a certain level of commitment, education, and leadership skill to organize an IEC. Thus, the founding members tend to be of the upper economic/educational strata. But, the experience of Pax, and other IECs, is that, once started, they are not exclusive. Rather they are very ecumenical and a magnet for a widely diverse group of individuals with different languages and economic and educational characteristics, although predominantly of a liberal social justice mentality. Thus, “intentional” means that the members choose to join, and in so doing, they declare a willingness to become active church as the continuing earthly presence of Jesus. With this background, a history of Pax follows.

The Pax Community

Pax (Pilgrims after Christ, deliberately alluding to journey) was created in 1969 in a small parish, St. Luke, in McLean, Virginia. McLean, at the time, was an “outer” suburb of Washington, D.C., a bedroom community for government employees and others whose families needed the rural atmosphere and lower housing prices. The pastor of the parish had

⁸¹ Langen, 153-160. The parenthetical “consequences” are added by the author of this paper, based upon practical experience.

been a student of Vatican II and believed that he could effectively share the burdens of ministry, particularly liturgy, with members of his parish and that he could permit his parishioners to find the gospel through creative, participatory liturgy and the resulting responsibilities that this liturgy demanded. This would draw participants into a fuller experience of faith. Therefore, Rev. Al Pereira invited a dozen couples to a discussion. The couples selected were many of the most active in the parish, involved in family religious education, social justice outreach, and parish governance. (This should not imply that these individuals were the most devout, the “most holy,” or even the best Christians—but they did seem to have appropriated the Christian message into their daily lives in recognition that they were church.) Activists were selected, not the most pious. Most had children, but few were in the parish school. At this meeting, the group agreed to meet “off campus” in an attempt to create an intentional community (although they didn’t call it that) which would plan and conduct liturgy and educate themselves and their children in Christianity. The early notes suggest that the social justice themes developed much later out of the experience with the gospel and liturgy. In this sense, the birth of Pax followed the classic SCC formation scenario described by both Brennan and Lee—the motive force was initially clerical, within the parish, and liturgical, but soon moved beyond.^{82 83}

⁸² Brennan, 63-75. Prior to the 2001 IEC Conference, described above, a comprehensive study of SCCs was undertaken under the general direction of Bernard Lee, S.M. The results of that survey (the study was a sociological and historical survey, rather than a doctrinal survey) were published. Bernard J. Lee, *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000).

⁸³ It seems that Pax was not the first experience of Fr. Pereira and St. Luke with intentional community. In the years just prior to the formation of Pax, Cardinal O’Boyle, of the Washington Archdiocese had banned a group, self-styled “The People,” from the parishes of the archdiocese. Through the intercession of other hierarchy, the parishes of Northern Virginia were “invited” to host the liturgies of “The People” on a periodic basis. St Luke responded. Ultimately, The People, which was substantially more politicized (in the sense of Church reform and involvement of the Church in political issues) than Pax ever became, evolved into The Nova Community, another IEC which worships in secular space in Northern Virginia and shares celebrants, occasional liturgies, and missions with Pax.

The earliest Masses were conducted in a local shopping center and in a school, until about six months later, when the group moved to the parish center. At that time, the larger parish Sunday liturgy was held in the school gymnasium and daily Mass was celebrated in the rectory/parish center chapel. A few months later, as the fledgling liturgists gained confidence, the group moved to a regular position in the Sunday Mass schedule in the gymnasium.

Liturgy, both planning and doing, and particularly an emphasis on parallel Liturgies of the Word for children, was the first and always the most important aspect of the community. Given the opportunities for experimentation in liturgy opened by Vatican II, the Liturgy of the Word contained liturgical dance, multi-media presentations, gospel drama, and dialogue and shared homilies. All in the church were invited to surround the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Women were featured wherever possible. The Lord's Prayer and other lay "parts" were emphasized, often by holding hands or with other gestures of worship. For active and committed Christians, who had followed Vatican II, this was an invitation and an opportunity to live out the baptismal rights and responsibilities of all—to be part of liturgy.

Music was chosen from a new outpouring of liturgical music that was appropriate to the liturgical theme for each Sunday. Groups met with the celebrant and musicians to determine seasonal and specific themes. Statements at the beginning and end of the Mass and communion meditations underlined the theme. The liturgy became popular and, although the members of Pax at this time numbered only about sixty adults, 3-400 would often attend. Most, but not all, of the non-Pax attendees would participate actively in the liturgy. Celebrants included the parish priests and others from the Washington community who were offered the hospitality of the rectory or otherwise were invited to celebrate.

Outside of liturgy, members of Pax had undertaken a variety of social justice projects. (Many of the younger members of Pax had come to maturity during the political turmoil of the Vietnam era and were thus accustomed to responding *as a movement* to the perceived issues of the times.) Many social justice issues were brought to the attention of the community by members who were actively working in these areas—for example, refugee matters (Northern Virginia experienced a large influx of Hispanic and Vietnamese refugees at this time), soup kitchens, low cost housing (responding to the poverty that characterized the inner city), and women’s rights. Thus, Pax became a clearinghouse to publicize the social justice work commitments of its members. The community ethos seemed to be that a community could make a difference in the world by enabling individuals to overcome the obstacles of poverty, lack of education, or lack of social status. Pax itself avoided community commitments to these projects, and it was not until 1986 that Pax adopted the concept of a “mission group” to permit members to band together to undertake specific projects in sub-community. Thus, community involvement (as opposed to member involvement) in specific social justice activities occurred almost 15 years after the liturgical inception. The parish’s family religious education program also became an adjunct of the Pax ministries. Soon Pax became the center of the lives (and extended family, since many were émigrés to the Washington area with little biological family in the area) of its members as liturgy, education, social action, and entertainment merged to create community. Through periodic questionnaires and discussion sessions, Pax repeatedly emphasized that it was in, not of, St. Luke—and not just out of sense of convenience, but as an essential aspect of the view of church and the love owed by members of community to one another.

Pax began to perceive a need for organization and debated and wrote a short constitution. It was determined that a steering committee of four persons, two elected every other year, nominated from within the community and with the expectation of regular rotation throughout membership, would undertake the direction of the physical organization. Over its life, more than one-half of Pax members have served on the steering committee or as functional chairs. In addition, Pax liturgy chairs and social chairs were elected for one year terms; the former to prepare a liturgy planning guide, to recruit planners, to prepare the physical aspects of liturgy (wine, bread, linens, chair placement etc), and to plan for sacraments; the latter to see to hospitality, welcoming, care for members of the community in need, social occasions, and social justice outreach. This constitution and this organization have persisted to the present day. Pax soon adopted its mission statement:

The Pax Community is a Catholic Christian group committed to planning and celebrating meaningful liturgies, developing community, and responding to the needs of our world as those needs are revealed to us in liturgy and community dialogue.

In 1975 the Diocese of Arlington was created, a reputed conservative was named bishop-elect (Bishop John Welch), and the diocesan priests were asked to choose whether they would move south, remaining in the Diocese of Richmond (which was expected to be more “liberal” because the bishop there had indicated a liberal direction), or “join” the northern diocese.⁸⁴ Fr. Pereira moved south and a new pastor, Fr. John Hughes arrived. It soon became apparent that Fr. Hughes was not so comfortable with Pax as had been his predecessor, but initially at least he too worked with Pax. The Diocese soon established its reputation as one of the most conservative in the United States (liturgically at first)—

⁸⁴ An early member of Pax noted in meeting minutes in 1975 that small communities within Christianity often dissolve or disappear over disputes with bishops. She mused whether this would be the fate of Pax and warned it to take “leadership positions” only with great caution.

restricting communion ministers, prohibiting communion in the hand and communion in two species, prohibiting hand-holding during the Lord's Prayer, forbidding female altar servers, etc. But, the demographics of the parish were also changing. Fr. Hughes arrived at a growing and increasingly wealthy and conservative parish. He recognized the need to accommodate the worship needs of his parish, and he personally (and many of the parishioners) wanted to build a new church. Although Pax had never taken a community *political* position on matters outside the community itself (and certainly not on the issue of whether to build a church), there was a perception that Pax was attempting to sabotage the efforts of the parish to build a new church (which some members considered a waste of resources which could be used in social justice outreach), and that it had never supported the parish school which was heavily subsidized by the parish collection.⁸⁵ This was the first "voicing" of an atmosphere of "we-they" in the parish, as many members of the parish who were not part of Pax began to perceive that they were considered to be "second class" Catholics by Pax because of their refusal to become more deeply involved in church, or, at a minimum inconvenienced by the length and involvement which characterized the Sunday Pax liturgy.

An accommodation was reached. Pax members on the Parish Council agreed that Pax would support any building decision made by the parish at large, if the parish would first conduct a series of parish meetings on options, costs, and the theology of church building. Five meetings were organized (by a Parish Council member who happened also to be a member of Pax) and held in 1985, and, after numerous pleas from parishioners that a more

⁸⁵ The author was parish treasurer and on the Parish Council at this time and was aware that the school issue was bogus—Pax members, who had no children in the parish school, were nevertheless the largest contributors to the school collection particularly since they perceived that the school was a social justice project in that a high percentage of the students had linguistic issues or were underachievers for other reasons in the local public schools which had embraced the "open classroom" pedagogy.

attractive worship space be built, the parish overwhelmingly voted to build. A Pax member was asked by the pastor to chair the building committee. A structure was designed that would accommodate both the regular parish liturgy and a more interactive Pax liturgy, funds were raised, and the building was completed. This took several years as the diocese was in a rapid growth mode and approval processes were slow. The post Vatican II model of church architecture—austere, multi-functional, and emphasizing the role of the laity in its amphitheatre style—was not entirely acceptable to the conservative diocesan building committee—or, it turns out, many of the parishioners themselves); financial requirements were changing; and, the building boom taking place in Northern Virginia caused rapid price escalation and contractor tie-ups. Once again Pax was “blamed” for the delays and was accused of not supporting the church building fund.⁸⁶

After the church building was started and given the expanding size of the parish, the pastor proposed a re-districting of the parish and a new election to the Parish Board, which, at the direction of the Diocese, he renamed the Parish Advisory Council. At this election, Pax members were elected to only two of the eleven seats.⁸⁷ Within two months, Pax was requested by the pastor and the Council to consider moving the Pax liturgy out of the “core Catholic Mass times” on Sunday morning. Several reasons were given. The pastor expressed concern that Pax was a “parish within a parish” and presented him with both spiritual and physical concerns. Some members of the parish had apparently been reporting to the Bishop of Arlington that the Pax liturgy did not conform to appropriate norms, and the Bishop had

⁸⁶ Once again, the author was involved. He chaired the building committee throughout the period and attended most diocesan meetings. As treasurer he was aware that the most generous contributions to the building fund had come from Pax members.

⁸⁷ Most of the members of Pax did not live in a single “district” and, in fact, many lived outside the geographic confines of the parish, but were drawn to the Pax liturgy. Only one Parish Advisory Council seat was allocated to all of those outside the geographic boundaries of the parish—almost one half of the total votes cast in the election.

spoken to the pastor. The pastor also felt that some who worshipped at the liturgy who chose not to participate in the interactive aspects of the Pax liturgy were made to feel “left out” or “irreverent.” In addition, the Pax liturgy tended to be long, generally over an hour, and often involved post-liturgy social time, with resulting parking lot issues. Finally a group of vocal and conservative parishioners, who liked the early Mass time (at which the Pax liturgy was scheduled), disliked the style of the Pax liturgy. At the same time, the pastor indicated that parish priests would no longer celebrate with Pax—Pax needed to find its own celebrants and pre-clear those celebrants with the pastor well in advance. Other requirements were imposed: the community should cease gathering about the altar during the Liturgy of the Eucharist; dialogue and shared homilies were forbidden; the offertory collection was to be “raised in prominence” as an action of “justice” within the liturgy; the community should cease “holding hands” during the Lord’s Prayer, communion under two species and in the hand were to be eliminated.

Pax recognized that it could not survive if its liturgical practices were not supported by those who worshipped with it. It was thus, at least implicitly, recognizing that its liturgy reflected its community, and those who did not feel included in community were not part of its liturgy. Pax thus implicitly recognized the interconnectedness of community and the theology of the liturgy. “Mere observers” presented an ecclesiological dilemma. Pax asked that it be permitted to hold its liturgy in the gymnasium. This would permit the parish to have a “normal” liturgy in the new church. The pastor refused. So, in an attempt at accommodation, Pax agreed to move its liturgy to Saturday afternoon (all requests for a Sunday liturgy being rebuffed). This format held for less than a year as the many recognized the difficulties of holding a liturgy for a family-oriented community at such a time. Members began to drift

away. Others began to see the new church building as the symbol of the rejection of Pax by the parish. The two Pax members of the Council resigned in protest. By this time, the link between the parish and Pax was tenuous, if not broken. The pastor then concluded that the Saturday afternoon liturgy would become a “normal” parish liturgy, and he unilaterally allocated 3 p.m. on Sunday afternoon to Pax and strongly suggested that this not be a Eucharistic liturgy. No further dialogue was possible.

Pax then entered into an extended discernment process. It invited Fr. James Hug, S.J., President of the Center of Concern in Washington, D.C., and a frequent celebrant with Pax, to assist in decision making using the broad outlines of the Ignatian discernment process. Other regular celebrants were also consulted. Over six months, the adult members of Pax met on more than a dozen occasions at the homes of various members to explore the meaning of church, to study the words of Vatican II and canon law, to examine the practical implications of various alternatives, and to look for other liturgical space. At the end of the period, after a consensus vote, and with great reluctance, Pax advised Fr. Hughes that they would leave the parish to worship at a local elementary school cafeteria. On the feast of Christ the King, 1983, Pax moved.

With the move, the administrative and organization responsibilities of Pax increased. It needed to create its liturgical space every week. It needed to find celebrants every week. It needed to educate, celebrate the sacraments, maintain a social justice agenda, and make decisions on so many issues that were taken as given in the parish context. A new surge of spiritual energy infused Pax. The sense of community was heightened. At about this time, several members of the community died after long illnesses and Pax grieved with family members, recognizing the extended family which Pax had become. A fund was created to

deal with family and individual financial emergencies and a small group was appointed to administer these funds without embarrassing those in need. Social aspects of community grew, both around special liturgical events (such as Epiphany, Easter, and MardiGras) and sacramental, life-marker celebrations (marriages, first communions, and baptisms).

Freed from the oversight of a pastor and bishop, Pax felt a need to study and understand the theology of liturgy and the rationale for Catholic orthodoxy. In this sense, Pax understood that it was local church, but it nevertheless desired to remain a recognizable part of universal Catholicism. A comprehensive program of shared education in liturgical history, scripture, and spirituality resulted.

Freed from responsibility to support a parish, it found the resources to make practical its social justice commitments. After operating expenses (like rent, celebrant stipends, and the cost of liturgical materials) were met each quarter, the balance of the treasury was given over to a social outreach committee which was charged with responsibility to “zero out” the treasury each quarter. Regular relationships were forged with various providers of social services such as Zaccheus House, So Others Might Eat, Cirimex, The House of Ruth, The Jesuit Refugee Fund, and Oxfam Relief. In every case, members of the community agreed to provide time in addition to the financial contribution. Several members agreed to host refugee families in their homes; many undertook to serve meals to the needy or pick up the homeless on cold winter nights. Liturgical commitment was maturing into social justice.

Religious education for both children and adults was undertaken. The members of the community accepted responsibility for conveying the essential elements of the Catholic faith to their children. Ultimately, through the generosity of one of its members a permanent Montessori classroom was established and equipped to provide a place for a comprehensive

Catholic Montessori program for the youngest members of the community. Thanks to the propinquity of Washington's Roman Catholic higher education resources, experts were available and speakers were engaged to challenge the adult members of Pax. A regular program of Friday night lecture/discussions on a wide range of Christian topics was instituted, as were "mini-courses" in Scripture, liturgy, and mission-enabling subjects (feminism, pacifism, social action in Latin America).

Since new members did not "come upon" Pax by attending a regular Sunday morning parish liturgy, issues of evangelization came to the fore. Many became engaged in introducing new potential members to the community, and Pax continued to grow as others were attracted to the meaningful liturgies and by the lives that Pax members were living in the community. Individuals were assigned to "hospitality" before and after liturgy; newcomers were greeted and introduced during the liturgy. A newsletter was created—and ultimately an Internet list-serve which has become the primary means of communication in the last few years.

In 1983, Pax decided that its community model was a viable one for the Church and decided to seek diocesan legitimacy. Bishop Welsh had moved and Bishop John Keating was named. It was hoped that he would be more sympathetic. A committee was formed and a canon lawyer (Rev. James Coriden, a professor of Canon Law at Washington Theological Union) was retained to prepare and present a request to the Bishop of Arlington that he recognize Pax as a "non-territorial parish." A local pastor agreed to act as chaplain and offered his parish as the "parish of record" for sacramental registrations. Several meetings with the Bishop and his Chancellor convinced Pax that recognition was not to be anticipated, and canonists advised that such a status was not a "matter of right." At the final meeting,

the Chancellor advised the bishop would not grant the status. He urged Pax to break up and “return to your parishes” where members would be welcomed. He did, however, indicate that the Bishop would not take action adverse to Pax “provided Pax does not embarrass him publicly.”⁸⁸ Since that time, although Pax has frequently discussed internally its claims and desires for “legitimacy,” Pax has not had any communication with the hierarchy in Arlington—other than periodic contributions to diocesan funds in the name of Pax (which have been accepted).⁸⁹ Its feelings about the universal church were thus in turmoil.

After ten years at schools, in 1993, Pax needed to look for a new home again.⁹⁰ Since no school facilities were available at affordable rents, various other alternatives were considered. By this time, the community was very concerned about the “appearance of propriety” and the avoidance of scandal. It was a functioning Roman Catholic Church within the tradition of the universal church, and it consciously determined to present a “mainstream” image. This left out several possible venues, such as halls and restaurants. An opportunity presented itself. A Serbian Orthodox Church in McLean, Virginia was having financial difficulties due to dwindling population, at least partially due to sympathies within the

⁸⁸ During the period when Pax was searching for a new home, it had come into contact with four other IEC’s in the Washington area. Three of these (including Pax) were theoretically under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Arlington since they met in the diocese. One other met “across the river” near George Washington University; another crossed the river into Maryland after a stormy, well-publicized series of disagreements with their pastor and the bishop which were referred for “Roman” decision. Thought was given to “merger” with one such community, NOVA, but the liturgical styles of the two groups were sufficiently different that a looser cooperation and “sharing” of liturgical celebrants and materials resulted.

⁸⁹ During the first two years of the “exile,” there were periodic attempts at reconciliation. Several active members of both Pax and St. Luke Church in McLean attempted to mediate, but the pastor was unrelenting in his view that Pax members were welcome back, but not Pax as an organization or as an IEC. When the pastor retired and was replaced, the new pastor proposed discussions, but it was clear that he too was not prepared to host a liturgical community within the larger parish, although he invited participation in social action, education, and other parish activities.

⁹⁰ Fairfax County and Arlington County, Virginia which owned and operated the elementary school have policies of renting school facilities to not-for-profit organizations for below market rents for periods of up to five years. The second five year period is priced at 150% of fair market rent. The third five year period is priced at 200% of fair market rent. This policy is designed to assist in start-up, but not to offer permanent homes to these organizations.

congregation to various sides in the ongoing Balkan strife. There was only one downside to the location—it was only one-half mile from the original home of Pax and on the same road and with the same name—St. Luke. Some feared that operating so close to the “mother church” would raise political issues for the old parish. However, since there was little else open as an alternative, the move was made. Pax has worshipped at that site since that date.

As it approaches its thirty-fifth anniversary, Pax is once again self-examining—its mission, its meaning, and its future. A comparison with Paul’s churches of the first century provides some interesting insights, and some ready comparisons. Before beginning a compendium of the comparisons and contrasts between Pax and a Pauline model, it is appropriate to validate the demographic and decision-making similarities; that is, can Pax be legitimately compared with a Pauline house church?

Demographics

Extensive research has been done on the demographic composition of the “typical” first century Christian community, and particularly the Pauline churches.⁹¹ Contrary to popular belief, “typical” members were not agrarian, poor, undereducated, and disenfranchised. Paul tells us that “not many” were wise (i.e. formally educated), well-born (i.e. members of the patrician class), or powerful (i.e. politically and economically influential) (1 Cor 1:26). But, some obviously were. Meetings were held in households of members—implying land ownership and homes sufficiently large to accommodate up to 50 people, as archaeological evidence has determined. But, some were slaves (1 Cor 7:21; Philemon). Murphy-O’Connor concludes that the Pauline communities included various grades of the

⁹¹ This section is a composite picture drawn from the frequently overlapping conclusions of Stegemann, 288-317; Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul, A Critical Life*, 271-273; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth, a Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 22-32; and Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002).

middle of the social scale.⁹² Some had the skills of a secretary (a valuable asset at the time) (Rom 16:22). Others obviously were involved in various aspects of the Corinthian trade and commerce on which the city was built. Paul himself worked with Prisca and Aquila in tent and sail making, a skilled trade in support of commerce.

Greek, Roman and Jewish names appear (suggesting multi-ethnicity), but Jewish culture does not predominate (note the nature of the questions that Paul is asked by his communities). There were women, and probably women of influence, wealth and power, such as Chloe.⁹³ Many of these women had functional, ministerial roles in the community. There is no indication that most of these women were involved because their “spouses brought them”—although there is evidence that a householder might involve his entire household as a result of personal conversion. There were members whose spouses were not members. And, they were urban. In fact it appears that virtually all of the first century Christian communities arose in cities, small and large.⁹⁴

The letter to the Corinthians and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Galatians and Thessalonians all suggest that the variety of backgrounds, social status, economic position, and education caused significant problems for unity within the Pauline community. In fact, the development of a horizontal view of community, patterned on a co-dependent body part metaphor is remarkable under these circumstances. The early Christian community was open to all, and once membership was accepted, the community assumed a responsibility for all members. Some moved easily into functional positions in the community, perhaps because of

⁹² Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul, A Critical Life*, 273.

⁹³ Stegemann points out that the Pauline ekklesia differs from the secular ekklesia of the time in that in the secular model only male citizens participated. Stegemann, 287.

⁹⁴ Stegemann, 265.

their greater time, financial wherewithal, social skills, or education, but, at least theoretically, all had the opportunity to do so.⁹⁵

The Pax Community presents a demographic composition that is, in many ways, similar to the Pauline community.⁹⁶ Most members are families, but there are single members. Membership spans three generations. Many members have spouses who are not members. Women play key roles in the community. There tends to be a high level of education, including ministerial education. (A number of the male members of the community have, at one time, studied for the Roman Catholic priesthood; two men are former priests; several members are priests. A number of the women have been or are religious women. Many graduated from Catholic colleges and universities.)

Most are homeowners. Some, but not many, own homes large enough for the community to gather. Many are professionals or white-collar workers; a majority of the women work outside their homes. But, there are some with much less education and lower-paying jobs. They are drawn from all parts of the United States, and there are a number of first generation immigrants. Most would describe themselves as solidly middle class, although there is a significant range within that appellation. There are few who are genuinely poor or wealthy. Almost the entire community is drawn from “cradle-Catholics,” although there are a number of non-Catholic Christians in membership and adult baptisms have frequently been celebrated.

Politically, it would appear that the average view is left of center, but there are wide extremes from the most conservative to the radically liberal. This description carries over to

⁹⁵ Contrast this with the set of personal requirements for a position in Church leadership suggested in First Timothy (1 Tim 3:1-13).

⁹⁶ This description is drawn from the author’s personal experience, although there has not been a formal survey.

views on religion—particularly with respect to the largest issues of moral theology that are currently debated. It is only in the area of the Church organization, hierarchy, and liturgy that the community is very liberal—being overwhelmingly and vociferously in favor of reduction of hierarchical authority, “whole Church” involvement in the “election” of bishops, a married and female clergy, flexibility in liturgical practice, a “Church in the world” theology, and openness to the participation by people of other faiths.

Members have consciously chosen membership, often at substantial inconvenience and cost. Some see the community as a “support group” for daily involvement in social action/justice. Others, who work in more secular positions, see the community as weekly “leavening.” But, all understand that membership in Pax and the corresponding commitment to the Christian gospel require that lives change. Pax members would hope to be known as Christians by their personal conduct and commitment in an essentially secular world.

Decision Making

From time to time, the Pax community, just as the Corinthian community, has been confronted with issues and problems of an organizational, spiritual, or doctrinal nature.⁹⁷ In Corinth, the community seems to have appealed to Paul—or at least those who were unhappy with the decisions that the community might have made or might be making through conduct appealed to Paul. And, for the most part, Paul gives advice and puts the decision back to the community.

⁹⁷ Most of the early “leaders” of Pax have died, retired, or moved away, although a few are present in the community from time to time. In this sense, the current situation in Pax resembles the crisis of leadership in the first century Church, when the apostles began to die, leaving a vacuum of authority (at least with respect to the personal experience of Jesus). Pax seems to be moving in the direction of consensus decision-making whereas by the end of the first century, it appears the Church was moving toward a hierarchical, “inherited” form of governance.

Within Pax, the decision-making techniques have been remarkably similar in each instance. Some of the decisions appear relatively inconsequential; others go to the heart of the Pax vision of church. Pax has had to deal with (1) venue and liturgy time (on several occasions); (2) variation from the Roman Missal, such as the use of inclusive language, use of alternative canons, or lay participation in parts of the Eucharistic Prayer; (3) the decision by a popular celebrant to marry and remain a priest; (4) the request of a growing part of the community, which had migrated farther west, for liturgical support closer to home (which could signal the advent of another community); (5) requests by mission groups that Pax, as Pax, take a stand on politically charged issues such as women in the church, right to life, war, or capital punishment.

In each case, the process was commenced by a request from an individual or a mission group voiced at an extended “announcement” time, scheduled at the end of each Sunday liturgy. The proposal was discussed on a preliminary basis at the next general meeting, and if there was sufficient interest (or if the matter were sufficiently important), the matter was referred to an *ad hoc* committee to present the issues. Another meeting, generally for the sole purpose of discussion and deciding was scheduled. Decision was by substantial consensus, with a conscious effort not to offend any significant part of the community. Appeals to external authority, i.e. how the rest of the Church does it, have been minimal and rarely carry the day, but many members, having a Catholic heritage, are mindful and desirous of retaining substantial unity-in-form with the universal Church. As a consequence, matters relating to changes in liturgical form have typically been adopted as the whole community recognized the needs of various constituencies within Pax. Matters that tended to separate Pax from the universal church have been avoided, such as permitting female or married presiders at a

Eucharistic liturgy. However, there is an implicit view of many that non-liturgical issues are not “core” and thus do not require consensus. (Others believe, as the Pax mission statement attests, that social justice activities are both core and required by the gospel and the liturgy.) Thus, attempts to forge “community” social and political positions have also been generally avoided, although Pax supports many “mission groups” with special purpose agendas so long as they do not present their views as essential to membership in Pax. Throughout all, participatory democracy, attempts to forge consensus, and a genuine concern for the deep feelings of each other have been the hallmarks of process. There has been no appeal to outside authority. In this sense, Pax has no “Chloe’s people” who ask for advice or Paul to appeal to authority.⁹⁸ Through all of this, Pax exhibits both the “freedom in community” and the essentiality of preserving unity about which Paul writes, although it is clear that Pax is of the 21st century and much more accustomed to self-governance than is obvious in Corinth.

⁹⁸ Of course, a strain of Pauline scholarship argues that Paul is not authority—even in Corinthians. He maintains his anti-nomian stance and attempts to convince and recommend by appeal to the essential gospel. In this sense, the “advisory” or “presbyter” role played by the founding members is directly comparable to the Pauline model. See Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “1 and 2 Corinthians,” in James D.G.Dunn, *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Press, 2003), 83.

CHAPTER 5
PAX AND THE PAULINE CHURCH: AN
ECCLESIOLOGY FOR THE IEC?: CONCLUSIONS

Following the methodology of bottom-up ecclesiology, having determined that Pax is, in many ways, a typical IEC, and having recounted the brief history of Pax, we now attempt an “ecclesiological” characterization of Pax. Doing so leads to the conclusion that Pax strongly resembles the Pauline community for modern times. And conversely, the Pauline model is found to be unexpectedly modern. Eight observations characterize and support these conclusions:

1. **Unity in Diversity.** Pax emphasizes unity in diversity. Unity, which does not sacrifice individual needs and views, is the fundamental characteristic of the Pax Community. This is exhibited in a profound respect for difference in belief and in the actions of its various ministries. In fact Pax thrives on diversity and is stimulated by it. Pax also demonstrates that modern individualism is compatible with active participation in a Eucharistic community—provided individuals recognize their individualism results in a freedom *to* recognize and form community, not a freedom *from* interdependence. Paul did not preach individualism, but he implicitly recognized diversity (as being secondary to the primary purpose of community—the recognition and furtherance of the Reign of God) and focused on interdependence—as in his concept of the Body of Christ.

2. **Equal Charisms.** Pax appreciates, and by necessity and philosophy, draws upon all of the charisms of its members, irrespective of gender, age, education, or social status—and the individual members of Pax offer up their charisms in an atmosphere where all are equally valued. There is an active attempt to draw out charisms and recognition that the body of

Christ (Pax) is strengthened by the fullest exercise of those charisms which are the unearned gifts of God. These charisms include teaching, music, preaching, hospitality, financial management, sacristan, communications, ministry to the sick, prayer, outreach, Eucharistic ministry. Pax doesn't usually speak of these as charisms, but they are, and they are all equally valued by the community. No hierarchy results from performance or responsibility, and the tasks often revolve around the community. This is a central message of the Letter to the Corinthians.

3. **Lay Leadership.** By choice and necessity Pax is a community with revolving lay leadership—where all members of the community are called to lead. But, leadership is functional, temporary, and facilitative—emphasizing horizontality, equality, and validity of all potential contributions. Pax is radically anti-authoritarian and perpetually vigilant to prevent accretion of power to the derogation of the community prerogatives. Paul celebrates community, and, creating new churches in the context where there was no precedent, Paul was reliant upon “lay” community members who were willing and able to demonstrate leadership. Although he periodically steps in and “offers recommendations,” Paul’s churches are essentially autonomous, under the umbrella of the Christian creed. We know, however, that the radical pre-hierarchical nature of the Pauline church gave way to organization and institutionalized hierarchy within a few generations. Will this happen to Pax? Will the passage of founders, growth in size, or similar factors force an institutionalization?

4. **Church is Local.** Pax recognizes that what *it* does, what *it* means, and what *it* will become is and will be determined by what *its* members *do*. Pax sees itself as the building block of church, because it is, for the most part, the only encounter that its members have with church as the successor to Jesus. The universal church is a theological concept related to the

Body of Christ and universal belief in the message of Christ. On this basis, Pax is fully confident that it is also universal church, without requirement of a single language, a single form of liturgy, or a single culture—or the validating stamp of a church hierarchy. Paul's churches exemplified this—and not only out of early necessity.

5. **Kerygmatic Impetus.** Pax is not vocally evangelical. But, Pax members recognize that their vision of church is an authentic version that works for many modern Americans. As a consequence, all are constantly looking for others who are searching for a community and a vision of gospel that works today. New members are regularly introduced and welcomed and are soon participating. There is an active attempt to involve and incorporate new members as soon as they evidence the desire to do so. A Pax member is a recognizable Christian in society. The Pax model is one which holds promise for the democratic, free thinking communities of America. But, this model is not for everyone. Some fall away, not embracing the personal commitment, freeform structure, or anti-authoritarian premise.

6. **Reign of God.** Pax's view of the mission of Christians corresponds to the views of many modern "bottom-up" ecclesiologists. There is minimal attention to organizational detail and hierarchy and no organized "mission to the heathens." Rather there is a confidence that though well-created liturgies and dialogue, the members, individually and as community will be transformed. This transformation will be reflected in the conduct of Pax members and in the significant social justice activities in which they engage, individually and collectively. They will be recognized by their lives. And, in this sense they will bring about broad-based *metanoia*. They are actively involved in bringing the Reign of God to themselves, their families, and their secular communities. As noted above, Paul *assumed*

that effective *koinonia* would inevitably bring about the Reign of God. Pax starts with the individual conversion (as would be expected of a 21st century American religious community), but quickly proceeds to community conversion, and universal concern. Paul would have found the personal focus alien to his innate view of the meaning of personhood, and he would not have understood the universal *diakonia*, but he would have endorsed the need for community *metanoia*. For Paul, *metanoia* requires community.

7. **Eucharist/Liturgy.** As a Eucharistic community which was founded on the principal of involvement in liturgy as the essential element of community, Pax is truly enlivened by this aspect of church. Its liturgies are uniformly refreshing, thoughtful, and challenging. Celebrants are carefully chosen who can work with the community (who for the most part, know each other and have genuine feelings of concern for each other) in creating meaningful opportunities for community building, education, and the promotion of social action. All of this comes to its apex in the Eucharist which is intentionally the high point of each week. It is deliberately inclusive and reverential—but the Eucharist also acts as the catalyst for personal change in community and community outreach. Pax fully illustrates the ideal of the Pauline model where Eucharist is simultaneously community-building and the sacrament that the community has been built.

8. **Diakonia.** Seeing community as family and as social agent, Pax is totally committed to the welfare of the members of the community, and, unlike the Corinthian community, sees the obligations of bringing about the Reign of God in *diakonia* as a truly global responsibility. Thus, Pax takes on the injustices of the world and contributes materially to their redress.

Ecclesiology of the IEC

A bottom-up ecclesiology starts with observations of how the IEC is church and proceeds to draw conclusions about the implicit theological assumptions which can be drawn from those observations. As the people of God who live, work, play and worship together in community, the IEC is the modern day Pauline house church. These statements, however, imply an ecclesiology which is rarely explicitly stated or discussed.

The IEC is outward sign that the church, as body of Christ and Christ-with-us, is possible in the post-industrial, democratic, commercial world. This church engages all of its members to shine forth their charisms by (1) promoting the formation of community bonds through familiarity (which in turn provides security and self-confidence to individuals to free up their gifts for the community); (2) actively involving them in community governance, liturgical planning, and the other essential aspects of the community institution (with the consequence that individuals feel they are church rather than observers or consumers of an objectified church); and, (3) by integrating a life in Christ with a life in the world. The first objective emphasizes that church is a community of believers, and that the community is enabling, rather than restricting. The second emphasizes that church results in a personal and communal experience of God (primarily, but not exclusively, in liturgy) which does not require mediation. The third personalizes the continuousness of the Incarnation by emphasizing that we are the modality of Christ's continuing impact on the world.

In community, non-didactic *metanoia* is possible. The changed members of that community know and care for each other, draw sustenance to mission individually, and recognize the strength of community outreach. Liturgy, particularly *eucharistia*, naturally flows into *diakonia* so that the full threefold meaning of Eucharist is readily apparent: the

soteriological sign of history, the creation of the Body of Christ in the present, and the requirement for service as the community goes forth. Thus, the IEC provides an extraordinary example of what *eucharistia* can be.

By engaging individuals, living in a society which values hyper-individualism and self-reliance, to form, draw sustenance from, and recognize the strength of community, the IEC is counter-cultural—but it is quintessentially Pauline.

The *implicit* ecclesiological understandings of the IEC are therefore:

1. The local community (rather than the individual engaged in pious activities or the universal institution) is the essential building block of church. Perhaps it is the best building block of church, because the evidentiary fruits of such communities most effectively sign the coming of the Reign of God.

2. The formation of an authentic community will necessarily bring forth individual charisms and individual *diakonia* for the entire community. This, in turn, assumes a basic option in social anthropology: humankind will act in service to others and in self-denial if accorded both a moral imperative and a social network which produces security and support of others similarly inclined and exhibiting the same conduct.

3. The community must be ever-mindful of both the liberating message of the gospel and the contemporary understanding of that message—so that the authenticity of its practices can be periodically tested on the standard of how it helps individuals to image their Creator. In other words, a “good” church is tested by how its members “do” church throughout their lives.

4. As in the case of the Pauline church, there must still be an objective to obtain creedal unity. This requires that the IEC place a high priority on studying and understanding

the creed. In this regard, the community avoids the pitfalls of contemporary American social humanism, by recognizing that the impetus for the Christian community is based on its continuing sacrament-ing of Christ.

5. All of this requires a high level and priority of commitment (time, education, resources) of members because there is no opportunity for vicarious participation. In a sense the Body of Christ metaphor is a perfect match: how could the hand “pay” the foot to do its job for it while the hand “watched TV”?

6. The small size of the average IEC, their proliferation after Vatican II, and the currently and projected available ordained ministry suggest that there must be a rethinking of ordained ministry so that there is a closer alignment between the rights and responsibilities of all of those who are baptized and the needs of church members for liturgy which is currently only available through ordained ministers. When this is done, the IEC must create methods for calling out and electing ministers for the community—even if those ministers are part-time or periodically replaced. There will come a time in the life of most IEC’s when ordained ministers (that is, individuals who have been specifically chosen by the institutional Roman Catholic Church to minister) are not available (or are denied to it by an external force); the IEC must act now to provide a substitute for this institutional ministry.

7. All of the previous ecclesiological characterizations are internal to the IEC—but it is clear that the universal church itself must modify its approach to the IEC. The institutional church must move from passive disregard or active ignorance to a pastoring model. The IEC has specific needs if it is not to become totally congregational or schismatic. At present, the universal church maintains control over the validation of ordained ministry, and the IEC, currently at least, needs those ordained ministers for its

liturgy or *a wholly new model of ministry* (as many thought would ultimately emerge from the teachings of Vatican II). At present, the universal church is the guardian of orthodoxy, an orthodoxy of uniformity and hierarchy, which is increasingly viewed as pre-Vatican II and incompatible with the IEC. The IEC needs external validation of its creed, where creed is used in the broadest sense to include doctrinal matters, liturgical form and meaning, and style of governance. It needs external resources to study itself and the church that it is. Given size, structure, and membership, it cannot do this with internal resources, or it will inevitably widen the gulf between itself and the rest of the church. Thus, the ecclesiology of the IEC lacks *most* of the universal dimension of church, and this lack can only be filled with continued dialogue and openness between the IEC and the institutional Roman Catholic Church. Paul's collection for the poor of Jerusalem was ultimately rejected; he was the cause of a riot; he was imprisoned and deported. Is this what the IEC can ultimately expect?

Pastoral Suggestions

The ecclesiology of the IEC is thus local, culturally-sensitive, focused on the individual in community, linked to one church by creed, participatory, intensely demanding of its members, and integrated with secular life. The biggest threat, other than the sheer physical demands of "smallness," is the future lack of institutionally-ordained clergy and institutional recognition.

Deep down, Pax knows it is church. It needs to consider what this means. By expressing what it means to be church, Pax will be able to envision its future and weather the problems of the passing on of its founding Paul's. The Pax theology of church, like that of Paul, is pragmatic. It doesn't have or propose to have all the answers. Nor is it a model for all people. Pragmatic theologies, however, have limitations, and those pastoring to Pax

(in the case of Pax, this essentially means the entire community, since all are pastor to all others) might consider these:

--Pax needs to think about and formulate explicitly its *implicit* view of mission and church—to contextualize what is happening and what it means. That is, there needs to be recognition that Pax has a place in the universal church, and an important place as a model of what local church is and can be. This will permit Pax to measure specific proposals against a view of what Pax is and where it is going. It must have a “mission plan” if it is to survive more decades with new members. The Pauline churches were institutionalized not long after the first generation of members died out: is this the path for Pax? It must study models of ecclesiology and understand its place in the spectrum of church through history.

--Pax should consciously consider what it means to be community and discuss it openly. Pax celebrates community in liturgy and declares that liturgy is the agent motivating its members to justice, but for many, liturgy is only the sign of community, not an invitation to justice. Liturgy is the beginning of the developing community. A view of what it means to be community—and the demands of community which go beyond assisting in creating liturgy—would place a supportive platform under the periodic debates about how uniform the views of Pax must be on a wide range of issues from the political process to inclusive language in the liturgy.

--Pax is quintessentially *not* a triumphal Christian community. But, it needs to balance the psychological demands of its members to be nourished at the weekly liturgy, with the fact that liturgy itself also demands *diakonia* and *metanoia*. Liturgy simultaneously fulfills needs and opens up challenging voids. This dialectic is inherent in *eucharistia*.

--Pax needs to develop the self-confidence that comes from knowing that it is church. Many have noted that since leaving the institutional walls of a parish, Pax has been less willing to experiment with liturgy, lifestyle, and community expression. Perhaps this is attributable to the insecurity of independence rather than the desire to continue to demonstrate outward similarity with parish models. At any rate, the lack of creativity has been noted. There is a serious “disconnect” between the views of many on the role of women in church and the actual practice within Pax, particularly with respect to liturgy. There is no reason why Pax could not adopt a liturgical format which gave women much greater role in presiding.⁹⁹ The role of women in the church is at the heart of many of most important issues within Pax. Pax needs to recognize this and take the necessary steps to be radically inclusive of women. Contrary to much popular belief, Pauline teaching would support this. It could then consider widening its notion of minister for liturgy and begin to think about techniques for calling out and “anointing” its ministers.

--And, finally, Pax should take the time and the effort to understand its Catholic Christian heritage and the reality behind the signs of church which are in it and all around it. All of this would give Pax the strength to respond to challenges as they arise, permit it to be more creative in its liturgical formation and mission achievement, and would place Pax in a service role, and perhaps a leadership role, in ecclesiological development in Roman Catholicism.

Pax seems to have struck the correct balance between the nurturing model of church (attention to worship life, catechesis, fellowship, and stewardship)--which tend to be over-

⁹⁹ Throughout the Church in the United States, because of the shortage of priests, women are serving as pastoral administrators who periodically celebrate liturgies in the absence of priests. If there is validity to this practice, there is an opening for Pax to do so.

emphasized in the typical parochial setting today--and the outreach model (evangelization, ecumenism, and a global social justice ministry).

Pax is too valuable a model to lose—and too valuable to hide or silence. It is indeed an attempt to recreate the earliest, authentic model of what it means to be church: the continuing physical embodiment of Jesus in the world which Paul, with the guidance of the Spirit, understood. In this sense, followers of Jesus seek the Reign of God in their midst, and church is this joint activity—not the other way around. Pax, as the Body of Christ is on this missionary pilgrimage: to convert its members to a lifestyle which in every way proclaims that the Reign of God can be now even as it works for the future, and in this, it is church.

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