

Loren M. is interviewing Ton H. (Jan/79 ALBAN INSTITUTE ACTION INFORMATION) on his parish-intervention work as Catholic priest in the Archdiocese of Utrecht, Holland. Here's a heart in mutuality with a well-trained philosophical mind.



like your own inner life and your outer life.

Mead: So you're really trying to build a culture that affirms two-way traffic individually and also between people?

Hogema: And in the next stage, between groups. The next one, which I think is very important for parish life in Holland, is to get a real two-way traffic between the parish and its environment. This is very important for me, to establish a real two-way traffic, a real interdependency, rather than dependency or counter-dependency. I'm interested in really trying to connect polarities rather than try to do one thing or the other, or on the other hand to deny them by smoothing them over. I mean by this the basic polarities in life, like inside and outside, like flexibility and stability, men and women, thinking and doing, thinking and feeling, life and death, man and God, etc., etc.

a more collaborative community?

Hogema: I think one of the most difficult changes in the relationship between a pastor and a parish council is that the role of the pastor must change. Instead of doing everything himself he becomes more of an overseer and facilitator. On the other hand, you see that the individual potential of the people on the parish council is becoming realized, and they are doing things they never thought they could do, in terms of developing themselves, finding people to work with them, and developing and executing programs.

Mead: How about telling me some of the kinds of interventions that you have found helpful in moving congregations along?

Hogema: A basic intervention, I still feel, is to help the people to listen to each other, to listen to the whole scope and not only to what is said. I try to establish in a parish a kind of feedback culture, where people grow with each other rather than feeling afraid of each other.

Mead: I like your Dutch word for feedback. I can't pronounce it -- what is the literal translation?

Hogema: Tweerichtingsverkeer -- two-way traffic. In a way, it's more than feedback; it's also the philosophical implications of feedback. For example, I speak about two-way traffic within an individual. You get a kind of two-way traffic between your own faculties, like thinking and doing, like feeling and thinking,

Mead: You have intervened in over 100 congregations in a diocese of 600 congregations. Does that affect the diocese -- the way the Bishop relates to his clergy, for example?

Hogema: Sometimes I think the people who have been involved in the parish development program are becoming real partners for the Bishop, instead of saying "yes" to him, but thinking something else. I think that's very important for the Bishop, that he has real partners with whom he can practice real two-way traffic, rather than a phony partnership.

Mead: You've been working now for two or three years on these parish interventions. What are the things you are learning that might be applicable to American churches?

Hogema: One of the things I am constantly learning is that you have to trust the system, your own system, the other persons you meet, as well as the parish system, and not go in with the feeling that "we are going to change it" within two or three years. I think you can make the best changes if you trust the system and then work with it. There's a book that says it well: "Don't push the river."

A xerox copy of the complete conversation from which these excerpts were taken is available for \$5.