



Guidelines and Recommendations for Ecclesial Movements and Associations in Canada

1. Criterion of Accountability

Criterion: *Ecclesial movements and associations have a duty to hold themselves accountable to the competent ecclesial authority.*

Rationale: Good stewardship invariably entails being responsible and answerable for one's initiatives and actions to the competent authority. The ways for doing this of course may vary from case to case and according to the nature of the movement or association. Yet, it makes eminent ecclesial sense that every movement or association be honour-bound to provide periodic reports of its initiatives, programs and activities to the local Ordinary or his representative.

The reason this is very important is because the responsibility of the diocesan Bishop is not restricted to supervising matters of faith and morals. He must also coordinate the works of the apostolate in his diocese (Can. 394 § 1) and, with due respect to the autonomy of these associations and ecclesial movements, he must ensure that the exercise of their apostolate is directed to the common good (Can. 323 § 2). The exercise of the right of association is not absolute or unlimited. Given the ecclesial nature of this right, the faithful "must take account of the common good of the Church" (Can. 223 § 1) and accept that the "ecclesiastical authority is entitled to regulate, in view of the common good, the exercise of rights which are proper to Christ's faithful" (Can. 223 § 2). Vatican Council II is very explicit: "The hierarchy's duty is to promote the apostolate of the laity, furnish it with spiritual principles and support, direct the exercise of this apostolate to the common good of the Church, and see to it that doctrine and order are safeguarded" (Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 24).

Recommendation: In addition to formal reports, it is strongly suggested that channels of communication be established whereby an on-going and more systematic dialogue be initiated between the leaders of the movement and the local Ordinary or his designated representative. Such a dialogue, which conceivably would include mutual sharing of information, encouragement, exchange of ideas and pastoral support, would foster a greater co-ordination of needs and resources in the diocese. It would harness the vitality and differing charisms of these movements and allow them to become more "in tune" with, and at the service of, the existing diocesan and parochial programs. Such regular exchanges would not only provide the Bishop and the ecclesial movements an opportunity for closer collaboration, but it is even conceivable that out of such regular encounters new creative insights will emerge to meet the more urgent pastoral needs of the local church, at both the diocesan and parish levels.

2. Criterion of Implantation

Criterion: *The criterion of implantation stipulates that every ecclesial movement and association be conspicuously rooted and involved in the life of the parish and in some area of its mission: celebrating, evangelizing, caring, teaching and participating.*

Rationale: Past experience has shown that one of the dangers of any movement or association is a tendency to isolation and hence a certain detachment from the life of the local church. If not properly integrated in the life and institutional structure of the local church, ecclesial movements may come to be seen, or see themselves, as floating ‘above’ or ‘parallel’ to the local church, with scant direct involvement in the life and programs of the parish or diocese. Since they are all ecclesial in nature, these movements and associations should be ‘grounded’ or ‘implanted’ in the life and structures of the local church, especially at the parish level.

Recommendation: There are many channels open for ecclesial movements and new communities to be truly ‘grounded’ in the life and mission of the local church, but priority must be given to those programs and local structures that already exist within a diocese. These constitute the ‘heartbeat’ of the parish community. Notwithstanding their distinctive charism and spirituality, members of an ecclesial movement are seen (and must consciously see themselves) first and foremost as members of the Church. Firmly implanted and involved in the life of the parish community, the distinctive charism and richness of these ecclesial movements will permeate the faith life of the entire local community. Parishes will become enriched and vibrant through such intentional involvement. As St. Paul reminds us, we need each other, as each part of the body needs every other part. “If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body” (I Cor.12:19-20). The criterion of implantation is meant to ensure a collaborative use of resources and personnel, the combining of gifts and creativity, and the edification or ‘building’ up of parish life so that all the faithful may be exposed to and experience the fullest possible manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

3. Criterion of Authentic Doctrine

Criterion: *Fidelity to the authentic doctrine of the faith.*

Rationale: “Test everything, hold fast to what is good” (I Thess. 5:21). The first duty of the local Bishop is to oversee matters of doctrine and spirituality. Whatever contradicts the doctrine of the faith does not come from the Holy Spirit, since the Spirit who bestows his gifts is the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures and who continues to assist the Magisterium of the Church in the authentic interpretation of these. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II reiterates this basic criterion for evaluating an association of the lay faithful in the Church: “The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith, embracing and proclaiming the truth about Christ, the Church and humanity, in obedience to the Church’s Magisterium, as the Church interprets it. For this reason every association of the lay faithful must be a forum where the faith is proclaimed as well as taught in its total content” (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 30).

Recommendation: Not only should the discernment of the Bishop focus on the doctrine professed and proposed by the movement, but also on its spiritual praxis and the concrete manner in which the members of a movement relate to God, to the Church and to society. Such discernment is incumbent upon the diocesan Bishop even if the movement does not enjoy juridical status in the Church as a recognized association. The purpose of this supervision is to preserve the integrity of faith and morals, and to ensure that “abuses in ecclesiastical discipline do not creep in” (Can. 305 § 1). “The local Ordinary may intervene, should there be reason, not only when a diocesan association has its headquarters in his diocese, but when an association of the faithful, diocesan or not, is active in his diocese, even if its headquarters is elsewhere” (*Recognition of National Catholic Associations*, CCCB, 1993, p. 19).

4. Criterion of Complementarity

Criterion: *The criterion of complementarity stipulates that an ecclesial movement should strive to have some knowledge of and contact with the other existing ecclesial movements in the local church.*

Rationale: Conscious of the fact that many ecclesial movements co-exist in a diocese or parish, it is important that they themselves come to recognize and appreciate the complementarity of their respective gifts and objectives. When an ecclesial movement has little or no appreciable contact or established relationship with its “sister” movements, it can all too readily acquire over time something of a ‘ghetto’ or ‘elitist’ mentality. Severed from the life and gifts of these other movements in the diocese or parish, its own charism will do little to complement theirs. The criterion of complementarity is intended to prevent an ecclesial movement from being too inwardly turned in upon itself, or focused too exclusively on its own particular gift or charism and thus isolating itself from other ecclesial movements in the diocese or parish. It is important that they be made aware of the complementarity of their differing gifts and charisms, their respective spiritualities and agenda. This implies more than just mutual esteem or superficial familiarity with the other ecclesial movements that exist in the diocese or parish. It means a clear willingness to cooperate in working together for the good of the entire faith community.

Recommendation: In much the same way that the various religious congregations who work in a region or diocese have now established closer collaborative links and joint projects – indeed have even given themselves a permanent structure, i.e., the *Canadian Religious Conference* – so too the different ecclesial movements should forge closer ties with one another for the good of the wider community. In the same way that the ray of light joins all the colours that appear in the rainbow, only by joining forces and talents can ecclesial movements and associations give light to those around them. The criterion of complementarity would insist that there be a certain concerted effort to bring these ecclesial movements together periodically – possibly in an annual forum in every diocese and parish. This will enable them to become more aware of one another and their respective spiritual resources. Such forums would also provide ecclesial movements the opportunity for further study, reflection and joint action.

5. Criterion of Social Involvement

Criterion: *This criterion seeks from every ecclesial movement a commitment to a presence in human society. Whatever their charism, they must be seen as fruitful outlets for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are more just and loving within society (cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 30).*

Rationale: Ever since the Synod of Bishops on “Justice in the World” (1971) declared that justice is a “constitutive dimension” of the gospel, the link between justice and spirituality has become constant. Before that, the Catholic approach to justice often separated the issue of human rights and responsibilities from spirituality. Since then, it has become incumbent on every spiritual person, group, and organizational structure in the Church to work for the dignity of all persons, for a greater equity in the way the resources of the earth are produced and distributed, and for better ways to foster solidarity between the rich and the poor. “Participation in the struggle for freedom and justice is a duty for each one of us, as it is a central element of the Church’s mission of redemption and liberation” (U.S. Catholic Bishops, *The Eucharist and the Hungers of the Human Family*, 1975, no. 12). In short, with this new reading of the *signs of the times*, it is inconceivable that an ecclesial movement or association in the Church today should remain unconcerned and uninvolved in the pursuit of peace and social justice as an integral element of its spirituality.

Recommendation: There are numerous ways that an ecclesial movement or association can become involved in the plight of the poor and the oppressed in the world and assist in bringing about greater equity, justice and reconciliation in a troubled world. However, before creating any new program in this regard, ecclesial movements and associations should be made aware of the existing diocesan and parish programs for social justice and be encouraged to lend their support and assistance to these. The issues involved in social justice are not only complex, but it is very important that the Church be seen and heard as “speaking” with one voice. In this area, especially, there is need for close collaboration, even with other non-ecclesial organizations with a similar purpose. As well, it is recommended that each ecclesial movement be invited to reflect prayerfully on how their *specific charism* is inherently related to this larger mission of the Church in today’s world and how this charism may indeed be enlisted in the struggle for a more just and compassionate society. Thus, while rooted in the local church, ecclesial movements will remain open to the Church’s broader mission *ad extra*, as well as its mission *ad intra*.

6. Criterion of the Call to Holiness

Criterion: *This criterion stipulates that every ecclesial movement be conspicuously seen and bent on being an effective instrument of holiness for its members and an inspiration to all the faithful.*

Rationale: One of the dangers that can beset an ecclesial movement is when it concentrates solely or too exclusively on its one defining charism, as though this one special gift exhausts or captures the total experience of the faith and the integrity of the Gospel. When the charism

of a movement is absolutized, members can come to perceive *their* way of following Jesus Christ, *their* method of prayer, and *their* way of relating to God as the only legitimate form of Christian holiness. The call to holiness is of course the fundamental imperative of every Christian of whatever rank or status: “Thus it is evident to everyone that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 40). The call to holiness is not the vocation of a select few or special group within the Church, but the universal vocation of every Christian. The primacy given to this quest for Christian holiness is also one of the authenticating criteria for discerning lay groups and movements in the Church.

Recommendation: It might be argued that the criterion of holiness is too broad and variable, too elusive and intangible to really serve as an authenticating criterion for ecclesial movements. While it is true that there are many different approaches to holiness in the Church, many legitimate traditions and schools of spirituality, there is one “over-arching” and readily discernible hallmark of authentic holiness, namely, *the love of charity*. In the final analysis, every individual Christian and every ecclesial movement is and must be forever judged by love. Pope Paul VI saw this clearly when he affirms that charity is one of the basic criteria for discerning ecclesial movements (cf. Pope Paul VI, Address to the Third International Congress of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, 19 May 1975, in *La Documentation catholique*, 15 June 1975, p. 563). He said that of all the spiritual gifts, the *gift of love* (agapè) is the only one that guarantees not just the bestowal of some special gift, but also the *very presence of the Holy Spirit in Person*. However desirable the other spiritual gifts may be, the love of charity alone is what makes a Christian perfect and most agreeable to God. It is also good to remind members of ecclesial movements – and indeed all the faithful – that even though our human efforts to become holy are praiseworthy, God – and God alone – is the One who ultimately makes us holy by communicating and bestowing his own divine life on those whom He loves. “Be holy because I am holy” (I Pet 1:16).

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