

**2004 BLD Inter-District Conference  
Cavite, Philippines**

**Fr. Paul J. Lehman  
Eucharistic Celebration Homily  
January 25, 2004**

1. It is a great honor for me to have been invited to celebrate this mass with you during this very important event in the life of the global BLD community.

2. Even though we are all very much aware of the importance of the Covenant of Communion, I would like at this opportunity to share the more important and more fundamental role of the wider charismatic renewal within the Catholic Church. With a deeper appreciation of the charismatic renewal, we can understand and appreciate better the important role of covenant communities within the wider Church.

It was Leo Cardinal Suenens who reminded the Council Fathers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council during the discussions on the reality of the Church, of its necessary charismatic dimension which had been minimized in the past due to an overemphasis on the visible and structural elements. Thus in *Lumen Gentium* (Chapter 1, Par 4), we read “The Church, which the Spirit guides in way of all truth and which He unified in communion and in works of ministry, He both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with His fruits.”

There is only one church with visible and invisible realities. There is a necessary and God-given tension between the two. If the Church is defined merely as a structure or organization, the success of that church depends solely on its organizational skills and human efficiency. On the other hand, if the Church is defined solely by its charismatic dimension, we have an invisible church in which relationships are hard to identify.

Jesus Himself combined the visible and invisible: God-man incarnation, human and divine. The Church itself being the Sacrament or visible sign of Jesus in the world has, like Jesus, visible and invisible, human and divine elements. The seven Sacraments likewise are made up of ordinary visible signs like water, bread, oil, etc. which mediate our real contact with the risen Lord who communicates invisible graces into the very souls of the recipients.

3. I believe our challenge in the community is to reflect and emphasize this charismatic dimension. The Church needs covenant communities which reflect in a deeper way the living reality and action of the Holy Spirit. Covenant communities do not need an intricate structure. The structure is already in place there in the diocesan structure in which the local BLD district finds itself. There is no need for another parallel structure. When the centralized governing body of any covenant community overemphasizes its own structure and system, it comes close to erecting a parallel church.

Obviously, any community needs guidelines and direction because we are a visible people. The Acts of the Apostles gives evidence of the necessity of structure for the small Christian community that met after the ascension of Jesus. But underneath a simple and uncomplicated structure, covenant communities should reflect a servant model even as it “nudges” and encourages the structure to look within and discover the Spirit as the motivating and empowering force in the wider Church.

4. The same document *Lumen Gentium* reminds us all of the universal call to holiness. The basic means of holiness are in possession of the whole Church. Its sacraments, especially the Eucharist, liturgy, Scripture, the lives and models of saints, its call to prayer- even mystical prayer- are the material for great sanctity. Covenant community holiness is not an alternative type of holiness but a call to use in a deeper way the elements of sanctity given by Jesus to all the members of the Church. Holiness is our vocation not because of the BLD covenant but because of the Baptismal Covenant that incorporates us into the body of Christ, the Church.

5. I have prepared a “white paper” summarizing the recommendation made by the Archdiocese of Newark for the revision of the Covenant of Communion. These recommendations I am sure reflect the universal teachings of the Church, not just the arbitrary reflections of our local theologian and an overbearing Archbishop. The second part of that paper are some practical pastoral issues that I have found important but which may not be as basic as the first section. I mention the need to have enough priest confessors on weekends; the importance of following liturgical directives especially regarding the exposed Eucharist during healing service and the Baptism of the Spirit. We are also “bragging” a little bit about our religious vocation successes, as we have now one seminarian who will be ordained to priesthood in May, four young men in the minor seminary and two in the high school seminary. Three of our young women have likewise entered the convent.

6. In this Sunday’s gospel reading from Luke, the Lord Jesus declared, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for He has anointed me...” That same Spirit is upon us to empower us and enrich us with those special charismatic gifts that are listed beautifully in the second reading today and last Sunday (1 Cor:12). Through this Spirit, we are able to transcend our natural capacities and exceed our level of competence. There is what is technically called “obediential potency” given to us to go beyond our past achievements, all of which is achieved through the Holy Spirit who was given to us in Baptism and experienced personally through the charismatic renewal.

I am reminded of the letter of Pope John Paul II given at the conclusion of the Jubilee Year 2000 called “Anno Millenio Ineunte”. In it, he challenges the Church to go into the deep- “Duc in altum”. He uses the incident in which the apostles had fished all night and caught nothing. He tells them to try again. Even though they were reluctant to do so, since they realized Jesus knew nothing about fishing, they do it, as Scripture says “at Your word.” And at His word, they filled the boat with fish. So with us. At the word of Jesus, we are urged to go into the deep waters of holiness and evangelization – Duc in altum. This going into the deep can put us over our head unless the word of God directs this community.

The challenge for all of us then is immersion in prayer and the Word. You are given a tremendous mission to lead the whole world into the depths of holiness and evangelization. My experience here in your country for four months during my sabbatical in 1985-86 and witnessing not only a joyful revolution but even more importantly seeing the many spiritual movements here and in the US have convinced me of the special role the Lord has for you. You must think bigger than Filipino, even if Filipinos are our leaders. That is why the preamble to the Covenant of Communion should no longer indicate a mission to the Filipino neighborhood or parish. Because of your gentleness, your spiritual sensitivity and strong family life, you have been chosen to lead.

I don’t care if they call you the third world. I know that we in the US need you to help rescue society from secularization and relativism that afflict it today. You may have problems in this country, but so do we in the US and Canada. I encourage us all to go forth and renew the face of the earth, convinced that the Spirit will guide and lead the Church to the end days when Jesus will come again in glory to bring us into His eternal kingdom.