Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography

*This exercise is usually completed individually. One may seek direction and help from a clergy person, the Commission on Ministry, an Education for Ministry (EFM) mentor, or a trusted friend. A person might want to set aside several hours to complete this exercise. It has proven helpful to consider the first piece to be a draft which is put aside for a while and then reviewed to make sure it says what the person intends it to say. This particular guide is taken from Common Lesson A of the Education For Ministry program. This can be used as a guide with variations and adaptations made for each individual.*

A spiritual autobiography is the story of the significant events, people, and places that have influenced your relationship with God. It tells the story of how you have come to hold your own beliefs. Your spiritual autobiography describes the patterns, themes, and motifs by which you recognize the flow of your life.

There are many ways to tell y ur story. This process provides you with one way to do that. Your spiritual autobiography is a continual resource for connecting your life story with the story of the people of God.

A skeletal structure or outline helps when writing your autobiography, because without one, the experiences, thoughts, and themes of your life become more than you can tell.

Begin by framing your life in fifteen-year segments. The first segment would begin with the time of your birth and end on your fifteenth birthday; the rest of the segments would continue likewise.

In each of the segments consider the following Significant Persons

Your life has been shaped by certain persons -parents, teachers, siblings, church leaders, characters in books, etc. Beginning with the first fifteen-year segment of your life, consider who the people are who contributed to your understanding of yourself and of God during this time.

Name each person, and describe as best you can his or her importance in your life. Perhaps you can recall and describe a particular event which has special significance for you.

When considering the significant persons of this time frame, you may recall some who did not constructively influence you. It is important that you recall these people also. Several persons will have influenced different time periods, but for now record only what the person meant to you during each of the fifteen year segments of your life. Perhaps you can recall someone who was a special mediator of grace to you. How did this happen?

1

Material and Economic Life

Material surroundings involve the obvious things such as houses, neighborhoods, and valuable possessions. They also include the technologies that influence and define our situations. "Economy" is basically defined as the system used to distribute resources. Record the description of your material and economic circumstances during each of the fifteen year segments of your life. If changes in these situations occurred during the time periods, note them as well.

Pleasures and Recreations

How you have fun is a very important part of your story. Each of us finds pleasure in remarkably different activities, and during our lives our pleasures and recreations are likely to change. Think back to each time period of your life to what was fun for you - what kind of entertainment you sought out and enjoyed.

Religious Atmosphere

In considering this aspect of your life story, it is helpful to think beyond your formal religious experience. The religious atmosphere of your life necessarily is affected by your cultural and family context. Was religion something you addressed one d y of the week, never addressed, or did you live in a religious atmosphere which permeated every event in your life? What religious-beliefs were-p resentecl-to-you?-Bid you attend-a-e h ureh-affiliatedschool? Were-your friends­ from families with like-minded religious attitudes? What was your community's notion of religion? Again, consider this aspect during each fifteen-year period of your life.

Themes and Motifs

As a final consideration for the segments of your life story, record any themes, symbols, underlying values, or motifs which name the reality of your life during certain times. There may be several.