

To bridge your worlds

By David Gibson
NC News Service

For several months, a new project in his office had consumed much of the man's attention. It was a project carried forward by the efforts of a team. The man's role in the project was challenging to him.

This man felt exhilarated by the project. It involved him in something fresh. Best of all, it allowed him to work with others in ways he found rewarding.

At the same time, many of the man's older tasks in the office still demanded his attention. Not that he objected. For he placed considerable value on those tasks too; he believed he had grown as a person because of them.

This man's agenda for most workweeks included several duties that he performed individually — on his own, you might say. The only fly in the ointment was that, as the new team project demanded more and more time, it began to conflict with the man's individual tasks.

Little by little, he began to experience this conflict as a problem. As the days rolled by, the problem became a source of stress to him.

Readers undoubtedly will recognize this man's dilemma: How can he balance the team work he values with the individual work he also values? Is there room for both in his life at work?

Actually, the perfect balance between individual life and life with others is hard to come by for anyone. Most people know what it is to feel somewhat "unbalanced" about this. At times, people may even begin to doubt that this balance is important.

—Since society appears to reward individual and independent accomplishments, the value of pursuits carried out with others can be lost sight of at times.

—Or, the value of individuality may drift out of sight in situations where community pursuits alone are valued.

Exhilaration can turn to exasperation when people sense that the balance they require between community and individuality is missing. Think of the parent who exclaims after several days of unending activity with children: "I never have time even to sit down and think!"

Catherine de Hueck Doherty found that the balance between the busy pace of life with others and quiet time alone — however brief — is a key factor to reckon with in the Christian life. Her discussion about this took shape in the image of a bridge.

It is a real bridge spanning the

short distance from an island where Mrs. Doherty has lived in the Madawaska River near Combermere, Ontario, to the community of Christians at Madonna House, which she founded.

For her, community life and individual life are not opposed. In fact, she wrote, only in community can a person "attain to the full measure of individuality and personality." That is part of the mystery of community.

But she found a mystery in the quiet life on her island too. Whenever she crossed over the bridge to life alone on her island, Mrs. Doherty said she sensed an important task awaited her that could not be accomplished on the mainland.

In all of this she saw a basic pattern of life for Christians. And, she suggested, without this pattern people begin to experience stress in various ways:

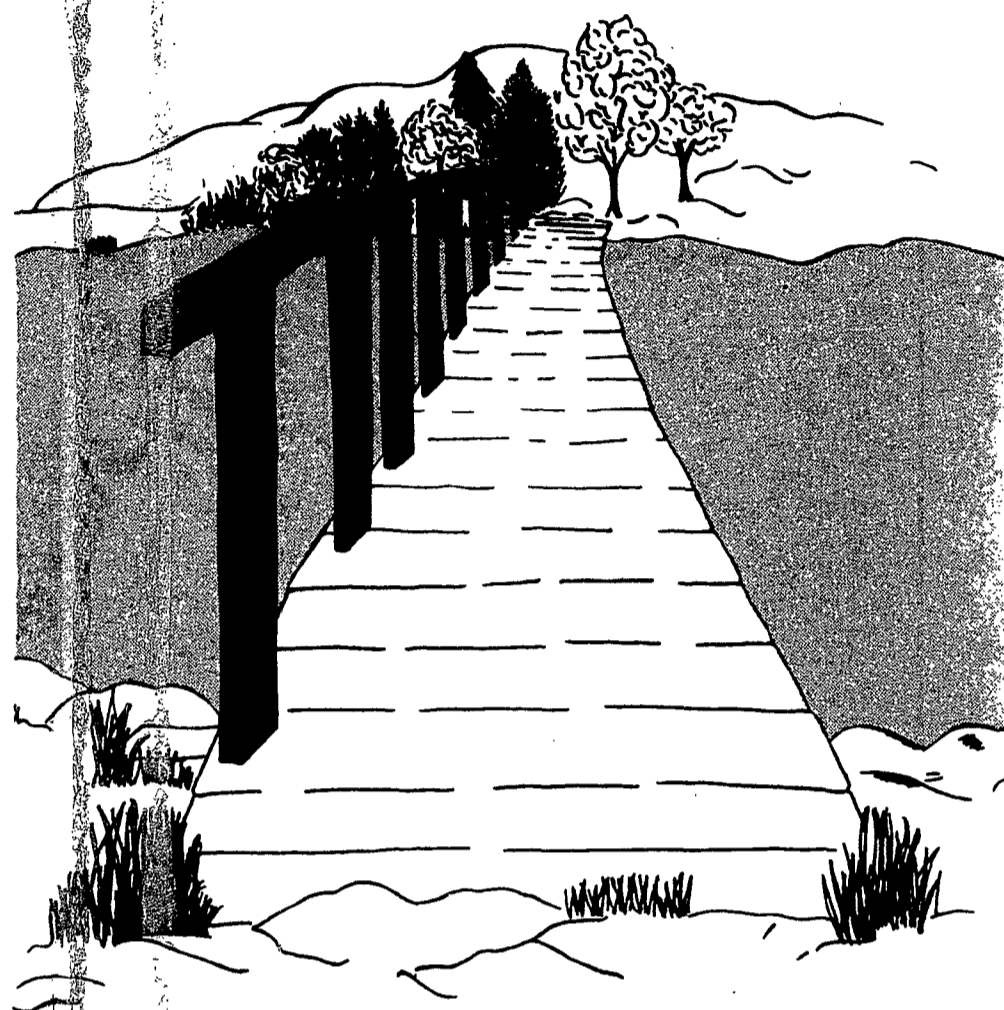
—Without community, where one experiences what others are really like, one may become fearful of those who are different.

—Without some solitude, one may begin to feel confused and diffused as a person.

The movement back and forth from individual life to life with others actually may be a basic rhythm in all of life — at work, at home, wherever.

Mrs. Doherty would argue that the rhythm is good for Christians to ponder. For her, time alone enriches the time spent with others; and time with others enriches the time spent alone.

(Gibson is editor of Faith Today.)



Spanning life's dimensions

The prophet's pace: burning the midnight

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

Amos was a shepherd, putting in long, lonely, toilsome hours. He really was a busy man.

"I was no prophet nor have I belonged to a company of prophets," Amos exclaims in the Old Testament account of how God called him. "I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores. The Lord took me from following the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" (Amos 7:14-15)

In effect, God called Amos while the prophet-to-be was at work. Interestingly enough, Amos was ready to hear what God would say.

Something similar happened with the prophet Isaiah. He was an aristocrat. What's more, he

was deeply involved in state affairs. Still he must have been sensitive to God's presence. He was ready when the shattering experience that changed his life came — when he saw "the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of his garment filling the temple." (Isaiah 6)

Jesus was presumably a carpenter or an artisan of some sort before his public ministry began. This meant working long hours with relatively primitive tools and equipment.

And when his public ministry began it was not the beginning of a period of leisure, but one of intense activity. In fact, Jesus' ceaseless activity gave his family cause for grave concern, and we learn that it was difficult for him to withdraw from the crowds.

Yet, in the midst of his activi-

ty, we read that on one occasion, "rising early" in the morning, "he went off to a lonely place in the desert; there he was absorbed in prayer." (Mark 1:35) The Gospel of Luke is punctuated with references to Jesus' prayer in the midst of unremitting toil.

It would be hard to imagine anyone busier than St. Paul. Yet prayer was the very fabric of his life — and a hard life it was. Some scholars estimate conservatively that Paul walked about 1,200 miles over difficult terrain to preach the good news.

Paul founded and instructed many new communities of Christians. It was demanding, time-consuming work. And all the while Paul insisted on supporting himself by manual labor.

Still, even a casual reading of Paul's letters reveals the extent to