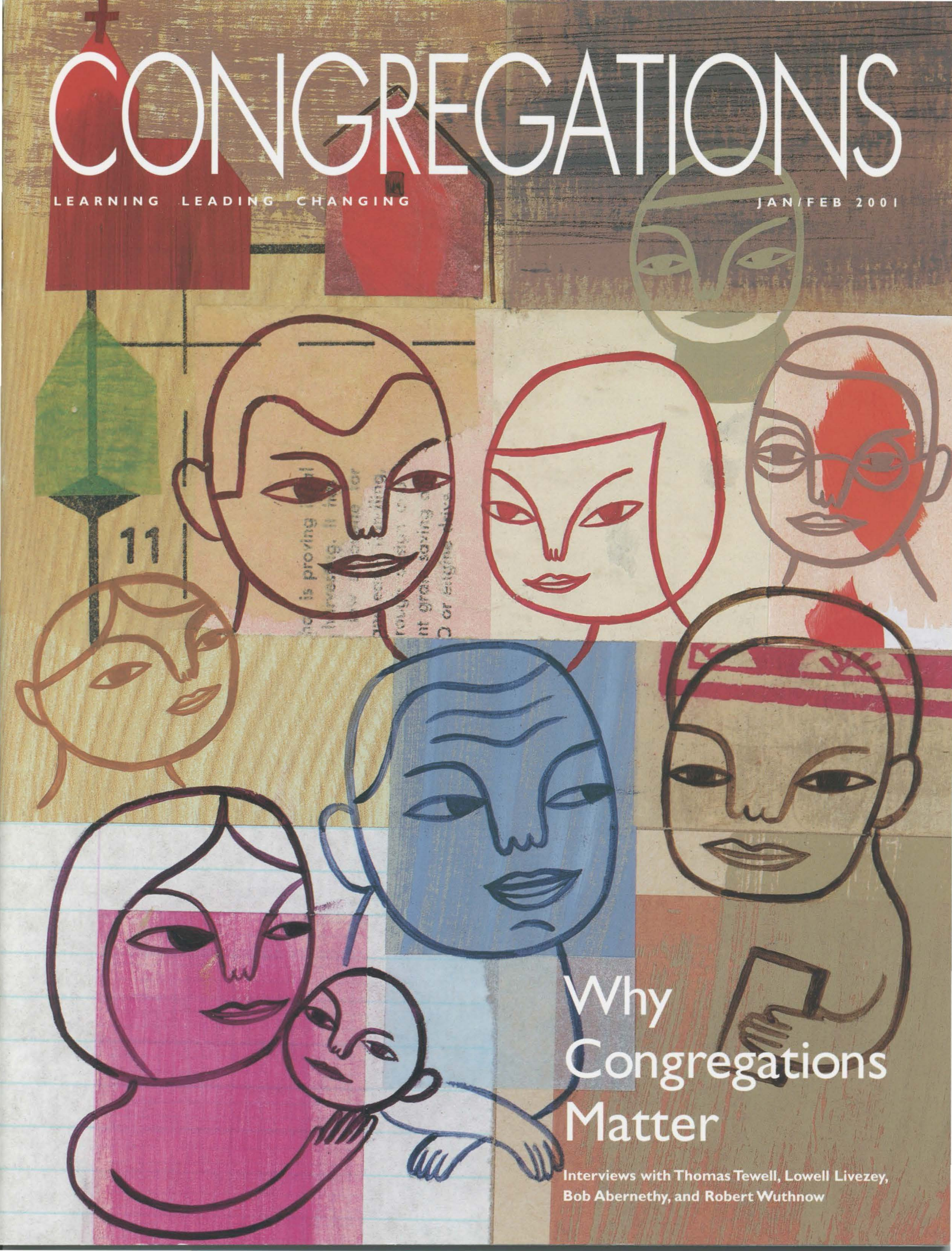
CONGREGATIONS

LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

JAN/FEB 2001



Why Congregations Matter

Interviews with Thomas Tewell, Lowell Livezey, Bob Abernethy, and Robert Wuthnow

Welcome!

I am honored to share with you the first issue of our freshly designed CONGREGATIONS. The new magazine that you hold in your hands is the result of months of visioning, discussion, collaboration, exploration of mission, and—in my case at least—midnight imaginings of the possibilities. My colleagues and I here at the Alban Institute have sought to bring CONGREGATIONS, which has not been redesigned since 1992, in line with where we are now as an organization. And I think we have succeeded.

So where are we? From the start, the Alban Institute has been both an oasis and a place to test assumptions and ideas for congregational leaders, and that has not changed. Nor has our commitment to provide the best possible resources to those who minister in both official and unofficial capacities. But now, after 25 years of growth and learning, we are able to play a still larger role—providing more and better resources, focusing attention on new issues and challenges, and bearing witness to the importance of congregations in a more powerful way.

Here's what you can expect from CONGREGATIONS as we move forward in this new publishing venture: **More content**—the magazine is now 32 pages instead of 28, allowing for more coverage of the issues you want to read about. **A wider range of voices**—we will progressively move toward articles by congregational leaders who reflect the diversity of American religious life. **New features**—for example, in our next issue we will add an "Ask Alban" section, in which Alban consultants and senior staff answer questions on a range of topics. **More reviews**—these will include not only books, but videos, reports, projects, and more.

And here's what else you can expect from us: **commitment** to engage with and inspire our readers, **passion** about our work, and a position of **advocacy** for congregations, which are among the most precious gifts of God.

Blessings in your work,

Lisa

Lisa Kinney
lkinney@alban.org

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Why Congregations Matter

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Celia Allison Hahn is the Alban Institute's former editor-in-chief as well as the director of the Institute's Congregational Spirituality Project. She is now mentoring a group of six spiritual companions to congregations in Washington, D.C. Among her books is *Growing in Authority, Relinquishing Control: A New Approach to Faithful Leadership* (Alban Institute, 1994).

Rev. Dan Hotchkiss is an Alban Institute field consultant based in Boston who writes and consults on congregational conflict and planning, clergy leadership, and the interaction of money and faith. He is a Unitarian Universalist minister and a regular contributor to CONGREGATIONS.

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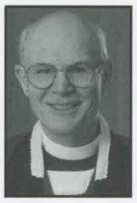
Marlis McCollum is a freelance writer from Reston, Virginia, who has published articles in *The National Gallery of Art Bulletin*, *The Potomac Almanac*, *The New Prince George's Post*, *The Prince George's Journal*, *Scrip Magazine*, and *Humanities*, the magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



The Rt. Rev. Claude E. Payne is the Seventh Bishop of Texas. Before succeeding to the episcopate in 1995, Bishop Payne served as rector of congregations in Beaumont and Houston, Texas, as well as chaplain of Texas A&I in Kingsville, Texas. Bishop Payne is the coauthor, with Dr. Hamilton Beazley, of *Reclaiming the Great Commission: A Practical Model for Transforming Denominations and Congregations* (Jossey-Bass, 2000).

Rev. Ann Svennungsen currently serves as senior pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, a 3,700-member congregation in Moorhead, Minnesota. Before coming to Trinity, she served as copastor at a congregation in Minneapolis and as associate pastor at a congregation in Iowa City, Iowa.

David Trietsch is director of the Jewish Resource Network Initiative (JRNI). JRNI is part of Boston's Commission on Jewish Continuity, funded by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies and in partnership with the Movements and other Jewish agencies in Greater Boston. JRNI works with partnering congregations on issues of building caring communities and transformational growth that leads to enhanced congregational vibrancy.

Paul Wilkes is a writer, documentary film producer, and distinguished visiting professor at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Mr. Wilkes' television credits include "Six American Families," an award-winning series that aired on PBS. His written work, which has explored various religious themes, has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *The Atlantic*, among others.

Rev. Dr. James P. Wind is the president of the Alban Institute. Before coming to the Institute in 1995, Dr. Wind's previous positions included program director at the Lilly Endowment's religion division, director of research and publications at the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics, and pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, Illinois. Dr. Wind is the author of three books and numerous articles.

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Sabbath as Spiritual Discipline

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ISSUE (July/August 2000) in which you reminded us ministers of the importance of Sabbath. I am writing to present an alternative to the prevailing interpretation of Sabbath as God's gift of rest and renewal to humanity.

First, let us recognize that the weekly Sabbath was instituted among the Israelites as a matter of law. It may still be appropriate to consider the Sabbath a gift, but we must consider it a gift in the same sense that all the other imperatives and prohibitions of Jewish law are gifts. Let us also recognize that the ancient Near East and the contemporary West are completely different socioeconomic contexts. While our biggest challenge may often be finding refuge from our overburdened schedules, our ancient counterparts would more likely be concerned with avoiding poverty and hunger. Just as we might look to God for rest, the Israelites looked to God for resources.

In light of these historical realities, I offer a different perspective on Sabbath. For ancient Israel, Sabbath-keeping was a spiritual discipline that was designed to develop the Israelites' ability to trust God. A person who kept the Sabbath exercised trust in God by abstaining from those activities that provided material resources. For one day each week, the Israelites would entrust themselves to God's care rather than to their own ability to work.

Exodus 16 is a good example of how Sabbath-keeping functioned as a spiritual discipline for the Israelites. This is the story of God providing manna each morning. The Israelites' ability to trust God was tested because manna had no shelf life (verse 20). They had to believe that God would give them what they needed each day. By the end of the first week of this diet, the Israelites had learned that trying to store manna, even for one day, was futile. Then, in preparation for the Sabbath, Moses commanded them to do just that (verses 22-23). On the Sabbath itself, no manna would be gathered (verses 25-26). The Israelites trusted Moses (and, implicitly, God) and were rewarded by the fact that the stored manna "did not become foul, and there were no worms in it" (verse 24).

While Sabbath-keeping was a faith-producing discipline for the needy, it was also an annoyance for the greedy. Amos 8:4-6 paints a picture of unscrupulous merchants who cannot wait for the end of the Sabbath so that they can return to making money. Just as the demons seemed to have special knowledge of Jesus' identity, so these unethical businesspeople seemed to understand better than most that the real purpose of the Sabbath was to put limits on the pursuit of gain.

While Exodus 16 and Amos 8:4-6 present Sabbath from different perspectives, both texts reinforce the idea that Sabbath-keeping is a discipline of abstinence from those activities that make us more self-sufficient than God-sufficient. While this discipline certainly involves rest, it is not the carefree rest for which middle-class Westerners long. Rather, it is the nervous rest of people who are (perhaps reluctantly) learning to live by faith.

Of all the contributors to that issue, Dorothy Nickel Friesen comes closest to seeing Sabbath in this way. I rejoice that the discipline of Sabbath has produced the fruit of deeper faith in her life. I hope that I also can entrust my identity to God during the days and weeks that I am away from my pastoral duties.

Rev. Douglas Gabbard
First Baptist Church of Dixon
Dixon, Illinois

Julia Gran

An Island Amidst the Storm

THE SEARCH FOR CONGREGATIONS WITH A SOUL

Paul Wilkes

Something quite amazing is happening in our day: a culture of religious practice is collapsing. In the Catholic tradition, that collapse has seen a diminution of the obligation that propelled many a Catholic to church on Sunday. In the Protestant world, denominational affiliation apparently does not have the irresistible pull it once did, insuring that generation would follow generation into a specific type of church. But to bemoan the mixture of institutional chaos and individual confusion that has accompanied this collapse is to miss the point.

People are focusing less on church and more on God. People realize that window dressing is not enough. They want to see and experience what's in the store, not simply be its lifeless mannequins. In place of that static window dressing that was displayed each week is the possibility of a loving presence not only for that Sunday hour, but throughout the week.

Paradoxically, while denominational affiliation might appear to be less and less relevant, it is actually still very important. A recent survey shows that a significant number of people still see themselves as the standard bearers of their various traditions. But there is a crucial difference today. Modern Christians' enthusiasm, affiliation, and affection comes from the fact that they have found a church that has stirred their souls, and that church happens to be of a certain kind. It was that church—a specific, identifiable island amidst the storm that is all our lives—that gave them both something to reach for and something to hang onto.

So, it is apparent that the local church is crucially important—far more important than broad institutional posturing—as the local church is still the locus for belief, the point of entry for the seeker, the school for learning a new way to live, and the launching pad into the world.

The Search Begins

In October of 1998, I began a search for excellent congregations after visiting a Catholic parish in New Jersey, where I found myself amazed with the vitality of the place, the obvious enjoyment people had in being part of the parish, and in the stories of transformation that I heard. If that wonderful, spirit-filled place in New Jersey existed, I was sure it was not the only example of excellent parish life. Funded by a Lilly Endowment grant,

I was able to begin the Parish/Congregation Study, whose object was to find excellent Catholic parishes and Protestant congregations.

Together with research associates Marty Minchin and Melanie Bruce, I looked for congregations that had what the writer Flannery O'Connor called "a habit of being." Congregations with a soul. We were looking for congregations that were making a difference in their communities, local churches that were beacons of hope and guidance and examples of what it really means to be a practicing Christian today. What we found was that, while so-called mainline churches have seen a decline both in their numbers and in denominational loyalty over the past two or three decades, the desire for a spiritual connection with God is perhaps stronger than it has ever been in this nation. And the local church is still the place where the majority of people find spiritual sustenance and support.

Traits of Excellent Churches

After more than two years of research, while I am not able to name the ideal or best Catholic parish or Protestant congregation, I have found that excellent churches share some common traits.

They share a vibrancy, an excitement about living a Christian life. For them, being a Christian is not a leisure pastime, but a high-adventure activity. These churches have accepted this challenge and it brings excitement to everything they do.

These churches are not bound by tradition. For them, tradition is a beginning, a springboard, not a wall that cannot be breached. These churches have a sense that they are part of a continuum, that what they are doing today may be considered "traditional" in the years ahead.

These churches are beacons to us all, signs that if we trust in God, God will be with us.

Nor are these churches bound by geography, denomination, or their own physical walls. They are willing to reach beyond their comfort zone, whether this means reaching beyond what might be considered their usual constituency, using technology to make themselves known, or taking their faith into city hall, across a back fence, or to the next desk in their office. Excellent churches basically have no walls, no property lines. They are in the marketplace, in civic meetings, in boardrooms and around water coolers. They realize that there are many people within just a short distance of their doors who will never know about them if they do not reach out into the world.

Excellent churches are constantly looking for better ways to reach and serve people. This entrepreneurial spirit is not about accumulating conversions, but about genuinely doing a better job so that people naturally want to come to this church and be a part of it. The style of these churches attracts people beyond their neighborhoods and from outside their denominations. People are drawn to them because they sense that the spirit of a living God is present in them.

These churches are not static. They regularly evaluate themselves, asking hard questions like "Who are we?" "What are we trying to do?" "Are we performing in an honorable and holy way?" Yet, they don't try to be all things to all people. They have a vision and they work toward it. They continually try to discern their place in the community and the lives of their people, and they are willing to redirect their energies toward what they perceive as their mission as it changes. They are not entrenched in convention. When something is not working or a new need arises, they are ready to put aside old structures and reorganize.

And they don't try to do everything themselves. Excellent churches willingly enter into partnerships that allow them to do their work better, and they see their work as not merely serving their constituency, but as transforming the world around them, so these churches are willing to go into the world and affect the civic and social structure.

Excellent churches are also very deliberate about taking their members to new levels. They seek out people to take on responsibilities. Formal training and ordination are not prerequisites for church leadership. These churches realize the abundance of talent within their congregations, and they readily ask "Who can best do this work?" When the answer is found, that person is given the opportunity, authority, and support to do it well.

Somehow, some way, these churches have broken through the sclerotic buildup of dead practices and policies that no longer work and have opened up free-flowing channels of grace. The pastors, staff, and lay people who created change in these churches are not magicians; they do not possess secrets inaccessible to the rest of us. That is why they are worth being known. They are examples of reproducible excellence, of approaches and programs that could be done in other places as well.

These churches are beacons to us all, signs that if we trust in God, God will be with us. A living, daily God. This is not window dressing. ❁

This article was adapted from *Excellent Protestant Congregations: The Guide to Best Places and Practices* and used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press. To order, call 1-800-227-2872.

Nurturing Oneself

CAN A PASTOR'S SOUL FLOURISH IN THE CONGREGATION?

Ann Svennungsen

"Your people...are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I may be glorified." (Isa. 60:21)

"They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither." (Ps. 1:3a)

The woman in my office was interviewing for the position of office administrator. When I asked, "Why do want to work at Trinity Church?" she replied, "I think it would be great to work in a church environment. It would help heal my faith—it would nurture my soul." Her response made me nervous at best. When people aspire to work for the church primarily as a means to find spiritual nurture and healing, they are often disillusioned. What they are likely to find is a community of sinners striving, sometimes failing, to live as the people of God.

In my 20 years of pastoral ministry, I have experienced congregations full of faith, love, and vitality—refreshing gardens for the pastor's soul. I have also experienced congregations full of pain and bitterness—dry deserts where my soul has languished and withered. And these two distinct experiences occurred within the same church.

Is the congregation a good place for the pastor's soul? First, it is clear from Scripture that Christian community is vital for every Christian soul, whether pastor or parishioner. From Genesis to Revelation, God calls us into community: "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5a). "Now, you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:27). "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people" (1 Pet. 2:10a). Even our God, in whose image we were created, is a communal, triune God. We are called to community.

The Garden and the Desert

Pastors sometimes experience that congregational community with such fullness that their souls will never again be the same. In my first congregation, my husband was hospitalized for several weeks following surgery for a life-threatening cerebral aneurysm. I continue to stand in awe at the congregation's response—the intensity of their love and support. Meals appeared at our door, our children were embraced by members who filled their days and hearts with love, a work crew came to paint our house, and a devoted prayer group met every morning and kept vigil throughout the day. I felt as though I were back with the first Christians in the book of Acts. To this day, my soul is nurtured by that experience.

On the other hand, I have been in the midst of painful congregational conflicts where anxiety was expressed in all sorts of creative and hurtful ways. Angry members have blasted me for my pastoral work—as well as for my style of parenting, my choice of clothing, and the make of my car. Such desolate times have led me to lament, "How long, O Lord?" Indeed, what pastor has not joined with Moses in uttering her own version of these words: "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child,' to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? Where am I to get meat to give all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' I am not able to carry this people alone, for they are too heavy for me" (Num. 11:11-14).

Like Moses, the pastor experiences congregational life from his or her calling as leader. And since the time of Moses, the call to lead God's people has been experienced as both blessing and burden—both refreshing garden and parched wilderness, and every topography in between.

Further, many scholars point out that today's church finds itself in a situation not unlike Israel's wilderness wanderings. Loren Mead has argued that the church faces a "storm so serious that it marks the end of 'business as usual' for the churches."[1] And this change in the church is paralleled with changes in leadership: "An entire leadership ecology is shifting around and within us—making it very difficult to know who the leaders are, what leadership is, or what leaders should do."[2] Thus, in addition to the blessings, burdens, and changes of congregational life, we also face enormous

changes in our roles as leaders. How can our souls be nurtured in such an environment?

We must attend to our spiritual health by means distinct from the congregation.

Nurturing Our Spiritual Health

First, I believe that, in season and out of season, our souls are nurtured by faithful participation in weekly worship—and by a spirit of openness and trust that God's gifts await us there. Whether we currently experience congregational life as a garden or a desert, God promises to meet us as the congregation gathers for worship, refreshing us with the life-giving gifts of Word and Sacrament.

Paul Jermann

Further, I have learned during my ministry, and other pastors have confirmed, that we must attend to our spiritual health by means distinct from the congregation. Specifically, I believe that pastors need to intentionally nurture another spiritual community apart from the congregation. That community may be as small as two people—a spiritual director, a trusted friend in faith, another pastor. It may be a 12-step group, a prayer fellowship, or a *lectio divina* ministry.

To have an intentional relationship with a spiritual director, whether called by that name or another, is to be blessed with amazing gifts of refreshment. Clearly, that has been my experience. When I visit my spiritual director, a Catholic lay minister, she consistently asks if I might like to say the closing prayer, and I consistently say no. Then, when she begins to pray for me, I consistently start to cry. I am so moved by the gift of another praying aloud for me. Yet, this same spiritual director also challenges me to grow in the practices of faith—prayer, Bible reading, worship, and Sabbath keeping. She calls me to those practices that help me attend daily to the work of God's spirit in the world, in the congregation, and in my life.

A spiritual director helps provide wisdom in the journey of discernment. If we are indeed facing a time of unprecedented cultural change, affecting both the congregation and its leaders, then the need for spiritual guidance is stronger than ever. The conversation between God's Word and the changing words of our culture rarely leads to "quick fixes and easy solutions." The process of discernment is more akin to what Ronald Heifetz refers to as a "'holding environment' for containing the stresses of adaptive change."[3] A spiritual mentor can provide guidance and wisdom as we discern our call as parish pastors. Not every congregation is a good fit, a good garden for a pastor. Not every pastor is called to serve in congregational ministry. And not every Christian is called to be a pastor. It takes a community distinct from the congregation to help discern these things.

Yes, the congregation can be like a refreshing garden for the pastor or like a parched wilderness. It is critical, then, that pastors not become so enmeshed with the congregation that we lose sight of ourselves as children of God. As Christians and as pastors, our first calling is to love God with all our heart and soul, mind and strength. If we are to remain "self-differentiated, self-defined yet in touch with others,"[4] we must be very intentional about attending to our relationship with God.

As I write this, the first snow has fallen in northern Minnesota. Now, the only way my geraniums will continue to flourish is if I take them out of the garden, bring them inside, and place them on a window in the sun. Perhaps that is how we must recognize our lives as parish pastors. The congregation can be a well-watered garden where the souls of God's people are given a chance to blossom and bear fruit. However, the pastor also needs time away from that garden, in prayer and meditation, in conversation with a spiritual director or friend. We need time on the shelf by the window, that place where God can replenish our souls in our first calling, as beloved children of God. ❁

Notes

1. *Transforming Congregations for the Future* (Bethesda, Md.: The Alban Institute, 1994), p. ix.
2. James P. Wind, "New Perspectives on Leadership," *Lutheran Partners*, November/December 1996, p. 16.
3. Gilbert Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Bethesda, Md.: The Alban Institute, 1998), p. 28.
4. Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Bethesda, Md.: The Alban Institute, 1996) p. 96-98.

Nurturing Others

IS THE CONGREGATION THE BEST PLACE TO DO SPIRITUAL WORK?

Celia Allison Hahn

A woman sitting next to me in the pew stood up and said with feeling: "I don't want just to *believe in* God; I want to *know* God." In this heartfelt exclamation during the sermon feedback time at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, she spoke for many people. Like many parishioners of the church I attend, four out of five Episcopalians who answered one typical survey said that what they most needed from their church was food for their spiritual hunger. It seems increasingly clear: more people are bringing with them that longing for what is ultimately trustworthy as they venture through our church doors today.

In order to feed these hungry folk, the 300,000 religious congregations in this country need to find ways to respond to this longing and restlessness in people's hearts. What isn't so clear to mainline churches is "How can we do this spiritual work?" Most seminaries have taught pastors little or nothing about guiding people spiritually. In *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* (Alban Institute, 1995) Chuck Olsen found that, although people volunteered to serve on their church boards with the hope of enhancing their spiritual growth, at the end of their terms they often went away disappointed because they had experienced only a secular Robert's Rules of Order mentality. And many of those who left with disappointment will no longer expect churches to meet their spiritual needs.

Researching Congregational Spirituality

The split between the spiritual search and the daily life of a congregation has existed for centuries. Although monastic communities tried to recover the church's spiritual purpose, their reforms seldom made their way into the parish church system. So we have inherited a Mary/Martha split, in which the spiritual few offer their gifts to individuals, and most congregations seem busy about many other tasks. But unless "Martha" churches can make room in their busyness and survival anxiety for a rediscovery of their spiritual center, they will keep losing energy and relevance.

So, realizing that *yes*, the congregation needs to be a good place to do spiritual work, but *no*, it often isn't, I felt impelled to try to find some ways around the "no." As I gathered advisors for the Alban Institute's Congregational Spirituality Project, we searched for ways to reunite people's cry for help on their spiritual search with the life of the local congregation. While spirituality is often presented as an individual, inward enterprise, people need community. And churches today face the constant challenge of keeping the daily "church work" transparent to God and dedicated to people's spiritual growth.

As I interviewed people in five congregations, it became clear that not only individuals but churches have a spirit, often hidden, that can be uncovered. Here are stories about two ways we found church work can remain transparent to God when it is grounded in a congregation's spirit. One way centered around diversity—the ordinary fact that parishes are made up of "all sorts and conditions" of folk; the second focused on nurturing the ministry of the laity.

Diversity and Social Change as "Being"

The Church of the Ascension in Silver Spring, Maryland—which reflects the racial variety blooming in this suburb-becoming-city—has seen tough times. When a leadership lock was opened up, committees headed by the same people for decades needed new leaders. Suddenly, a very diverse group of people emerged in leadership positions across the parish and several retired leaders left. Interviewees said they experienced this diversity as "a sign of a healthy church." Participating in an inclusive community is "exciting" and "adds to life's beauty." People said, "God is revealed" through this diverse community gathered. Annie, an African American interviewee, sees Ascension's diversity as an important calling for the church: "Ascension is a very inclusive church, respectful of difference at the same time as we try to be the one community. With the changes in the demographics of American society, where people are going to have to accept leadership from all kinds of folks, Ascension is a good example of how this can work."

Next, let's take a look at St. Thomas' Parish in Washington, D.C., where the interviewees told me how they experience the

corporate spiritual energy in their gay/straight community. With surprised delight, a gay visitor exclaimed: "This parish *accepts* us . . . *embraces* us!" A straight leader told me the experience of the gay/straight community "really has broadened my humanity. And dealing with these people as human beings, and seeing their strengths and their humanity, and their sameness and differentness with me, has been a very moving spiritual thing." People see this experience as a transcendent reality that is not simply of their own construction, but a gift. And this gift becomes a call: as one leader said, "I think we're being called upon to be a model."

Here is a spiritually grounded way to embrace the social action that mainline churches cherish. Social action is not a "cut flower" when it springs from the ground of the congregation's spiritual life. I see Ascension and St. Thomas' showing forth a more incarnational social activism—flowing naturally from the *being* of the congregation in a way that's deeper than a principle, plan, or task force. The church can *be* a redeemed community that incarnates diversity as a model for a world that needs to know how people can live and work together in spite of their differences. "We're called to be this place where diversity works" is a statement about the spirit of these churches.

Church work can remain transparent to God when it is grounded in a congregation's spirit.

Paul Jermann

Nurturing the Laity

A second more incarnational way we found a church can engage in changing the world is through nurturing laity. I see that positive impact on society shining forth most clearly in members' individual stories—when they walk out the church door and go to work and live their lives in their families and communities. I have heard many people say, "The hour of church is the one hour where I can just *be*!" As one member of my own church, St. Mark's Episcopal, put it, "I go to church to be patted back into shape." Many of us at St. Mark's have experienced being "upheld by the everlasting arms" in Sunday worship and sent back to our Monday world empowered "to engage boldly in the struggles of life . . . and to serve Christ where we live and work."[1]

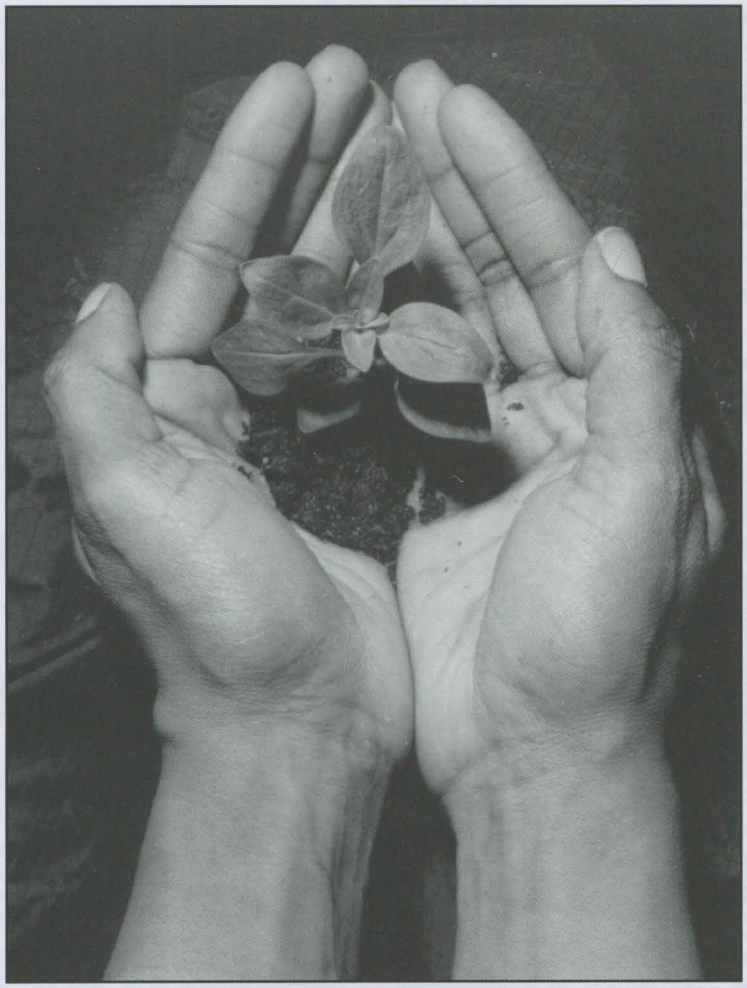
We can see an example of that empowerment at Ascension, where ministry springs from the corporate spirituality of the congregation, and is expressed not only in church but through the individual ministries of the parishioners outside the church doors. Ascension trusts lay people to be in ministry where they are instead of the church setting the agenda. Of a time when her responsibilities left little time for church work, Annie reflected: "Just the experience of being able to pull back was an important thing to be able to do, to come and sit and to be a member. And to be strengthened, and to experience church in another way." Keeping the church work transparent, encouraging lay people to look at their *congregational participation* in the context of how it affects their *spiritual growth*, the way it nourishes them to meet other demands—this is hard for church leaders to see as the pearl of great price, but vitally important.

In our research advisory meeting, Richard Chiola distinguished different ways of "equipping the saints for change in the world. One is pragmatic and functionalist: to bring them together and then aim them at specific changes. The other way is to gather them together so they become one loaf and then send them back out as pieces in their own diverse settings where they are equipped to be leaven in the dough of the world. This way you don't achieve specific ends so much as you nurture people to be where they need to be in the midst of the world."

Is the congregation the best place to do spiritual work? Both my own experience and my research convince me that it can be, when a church discerns its hidden spirit, and lives its life out of that holy, given ground. ❁

Notes

1. From the mission statement of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C.



Eve Morra

Congregations in the Community

MAKING AN IMPACT ON PUBLIC LIFE

CONGREGATIONS asked freelance writer Marlis McCollum to interview key leaders in American religion about their perspectives on how congregations make a difference and why they matter. In the first of a two-part series, Thomas Tewell, Lowell Livezey, Bob Abernethy, and Robert Wuthnow respond to these questions with a focus on public life. In the May/June issue, we will feature interviews with Donald Miller, Isa Aron, Robert Edgar, and Mark Chaves.

Making a Difference

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP BRINGS NEW LIFE TO THE CONGREGATION

Rev. Dr. Thomas Tewell

Senior Pastor, The Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City

Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church is located in the heart of midtown Manhattan, and one of the unique things about our church is its diversity. We are located on one of the most expensive blocks of real estate in the world in the richest congressional district in the country, but 36 stops north on subway number 6 is the country's poorest congressional district. One of the main things that has enabled our church to make a difference has been the recognition that both the rich and the poor are part of our parish.

I came to New York after serving as pastor of Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church in Houston, where we gave away a dollar for the needs of the world for every dollar we spent on ourselves. This experience taught me the importance of mission and ministry in the world. So, when I came to New York, I was already attuned to wanting to be involved in mission and ministry. I knew from my experience in Texas that there were people in the area who would understand the community's needs and know how the church could help. I sought out other local clergy members for their insights about the city, its citizens, its problems, and its resources. My clerical colleagues cautioned me not to tackle too many issues at once, but to focus my efforts on one or two issues.

Building Homes—and Bridges

We chose homelessness and housing for the poor as our primary focuses, realizing that, in order to serve effectively, we needed to prepare ourselves to tackle these challenges. One of the things that I believe has made our ministry to the homeless strong in New York is that we took the time to understand these people and their plight. We made a study of it. We read the prophetic narratives of Isaiah and Amos and Jonathan Kozol's *Amazing Grace*, which showed us the many faces of homelessness. We talked to homeless people and got to know them.

Out of our recognition that we needed this preparation grew another ministry, the Center for Christian Studies, which offers courses in the Bible, theology, practical Christianity, arts and literature, and church history to support members in their faith and in their community outreach. We view the Center as a way to inhale God's love so that we can exhale God's love in ministry in the world. If we try to exhale without inhaling, we burn out. If we inhale but give nothing away, we suffocate. Both are essential.

Another factor that has made our ministry to the homeless so successful and meaningful is our partnership with other congregations and organizations in the city. Neighboring clergy helped us identify resources in the city. Members of the Midtown Clergy Association supported an effort I headed on the Faith Steering Committee for Habitat for Humanity to build 15 homes. Providing homes to people in need was a moving experience for all of the 2,000 volunteers who assisted in this project, but what was perhaps even more wonderful was that this experience involved faith communities throughout New York. Jews, Muslims, and Christians worked together on this project, alongside the people who would ultimately reside in these homes. This shared experience erased many stereotypes and built bridges between faith communities and between the poorer and wealthier members of our community.

What we have discovered in our ministry is that members of other congregations and organizations are not only willing to help, they are thrilled to be called upon. The clergy in midtown Manhattan have realized that although the problems we face are bigger than any of us can address alone, in partnership we can make a difference. Even faculty members from Columbia and New York Universities have become involved, with several teaching courses in our Center for Christian Studies. We didn't realize so much help was available until we started asking, but when we did we found that people wanted to be in partnership with us, and it has helped our congregation come to life. We feel that we are making a difference not only in the lives of our members, but also in New York City, and it's exciting!

Making a Difference

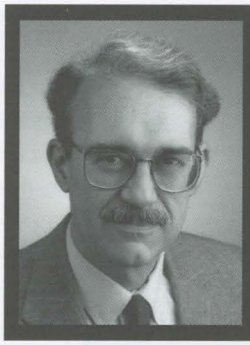
To congregations who want to make a difference in their communities, my advice is to look first at where God has placed you. Then find out about the community that exists within a one-mile radius of your church. What are the issues and needs of the people in that area? What can the church offer them?

Next, limit your focus. You can't do multiple things well, so try to do a few things with excellence. And don't try to do them alone. When you explore your community to determine its problems, investigate its resources as well.

Finally, keep in mind that what has worked in one setting will not necessarily work in another. I believe that ministry is organic, that you have to grow it. That is what we have done at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. Our worship attendance is booming, our programs are expanding, and our people are changing because there is organic spiritual growth at the center of all we do. ❁

Modeling Community

IN CONGREGATIONS, INTERNAL AFFAIRS ARE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS



Lowell W. Livezey, Ph.D.

Director and Principal Investigator of the Religion and Urban America Program, University of Illinois at Chicago

When we consider the public role of congregations, we typically think of political action and social service. These are indeed important and highly visible public roles, but many congregations also serve as models of good communities, and as training grounds for participation in the political process. The public impact of these "behind the scenes" activities is easy to overlook.

Teaching Public Participation

There is a tendency in our society for people to be individualistic and private. Churches are to some extent counter to that. Most congregations conduct themselves as small publics. They bring people together. In churches, people come out of their private domains and into interaction. They learn how to participate in public—how to work in committees, how to make arguments, and how to make decisions. This learning can then be transferred into greater and more effective participation elsewhere—in the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, the PTA, the Republican or Democratic Party, or in progressive or conservative social movements. And participation in church decision-making processes increases the likelihood, not just the quality, of participation in the political process.

The structure and organization of a church affects its ability to encourage such learning and participation among its members. The more open and accessible a church is, the more it operates as a public. For example, a church that has few requirements for membership, that conducts its meetings openly, provides copies of meeting minutes to its members, and encourages dialogue on church matters provides a model of democratic community. Congregations with authoritarian pastors or secret processes, however, tend to teach people not to participate.

In our highly individualized society, if we are not encouraged and given opportunities to participate in community, there is a danger that we will become more balkanized, and less committed to the good of the whole. If our society is to function well, there must be a social underpinning that brings people together. Historically, the church has functioned in that role, and it is important that it continue to do so.

Churches also perform educational and deliberative functions that contribute to the larger community. Many churches provide forums in which political issues can be discussed, but upon which the church does not take a position. Here, the role of the church is not to imply that the congregation should support a particular position, but to teach its members that, as Christians, they have a responsibility to be well-informed citizens and to act in accordance with their conscience in the political process. A big threat to our society is indifference. Churches have the power to contribute greatly to the betterment of society by supporting political awareness and participation.

> If our society is to function well, there must be a social underpinning that brings people together. Historically, the church has functioned in that role.

Negotiating Cultural Identity

Many churches today are also faced with decisions concerning their own racial or ethnic identity, and these have far-reaching implications. How race or ethnicity is expressed in a church is one of the things churches make decisions about. Sometimes these decisions are imposed on a congregation by its pastor, sometimes they involve whole congregations, and sometimes they are largely the result of changes in the immediate neighborhood, which congregations address either directly or indirectly.

Even the decisions to welcome or not to welcome new people into a congregation are political decisions, with consequences both for the character of the congregation and for the wider community. While at one level these are choices about evangelism and church growth, they are also opportunities for a congregation to deliberate and act publicly for a more inclusive community.

Churches have a lot of choice in regard to whether they pay attention to the racial/ethnic mix of their congregations. They can ignore it or give it expression. A church may make the decision, for instance, to remain racially or ethnically homogeneous, and to make its ethnic/racial identity a source of collective pride. Afrocentric churches are a timely example. This racial or ethnic identity can be the glue that holds a congregation together even if the neighborhood is being pulled apart by other forces, and it can be a vehicle for bringing new members into the church.

The Importance of Being Church

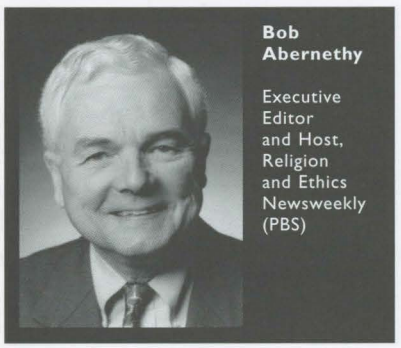
KEEPING THE FOCUS ON GOD

Other churches may actively foster a multiracial and multicultural identity. Such churches do not necessarily ask their members to "melt" into a homogeneous whole, although that is often the case. They may rather explore and celebrate their diversity and incorporate its contrasting cultures into the worship services through the use of representative musical instruments, music, or other cultural forms of expression.

In either case, even if the church has withdrawn from political forms of action, it is public because its racial/ethnic identification affects its members' sense of identity and how they see themselves in relation to people of other races. How ethnic and racial identities are expressed in a church is essentially a reconstitution of the public.

As the population of the United States grows more and more diverse, an awareness of the ways in which decisions concerning a church's cultural identity are public decisions will become increasingly important. Congregations are not private clubs—even those that would like to be. Much of what they do internally, and the processes by which they decide to do it, have far-reaching consequences for their members, potential members, and the wider community.

Congregations deserve more recognition for their public contributions. But by the same token, they themselves need to recognize more fully—and thus take more responsibility for—the public consequences of what may seem like their internal affairs. ❁



Bob Abernethy

Executive Editor and Host, Religion and Ethics Newsweekly (PBS)

When we think about religion and public life, it is easy to concentrate on conspicuous controversies such as school prayer, vouchers, and other church-state disputes. But if we do that we miss, I think, the simple, familiar, and most important contribution congregations make to the larger society: being church.

I think of church people who are superb parents, and neighbors, and coworkers. I think of people of faith who feel called to do work that helps others. Remembering all those I have known whose lives made a difference for others, I conclude that the best way for congregations to influence the rest of America is to continue to do, and do well, exactly what they are doing now: helping their members be more centered on God, more worshipful, more attentive to others, and more committed to helping children grow up to be caring and faithful adults. These public benefits of religious life are, I hasten to say, byproducts of the worship that is the church's first mission. But they are wonderful byproducts, nevertheless.

Many people find they can express their faith best in organized social and political action. I think, again, that this is a welcome consequence of the church's primary task, not the top priority itself. I think it can be effective, especially over the long term, only if it is solidly grounded in spiritual life. But there is no denying the role people of faith have had in American reform. The civil rights movement had deep roots in congregations, and the environmental movement is strongly enriched by the same source.

Community service is another great adjunct of the life of some congregations—ministering to the hungry and addicted and sick. Again, it is important to keep the priorities in order, and not attempt to do so much in the world that what happens in the sanctuary suffers. But if the balance is kept, congregations can be part of effective social ministries, and such service can be not only an expression of worship but also an inspiration to it. David Hilfiker of Washington's Church of the Savior, who ministers to homeless men with AIDS, told us on our program that he had long struggled with his beliefs. All he knew for certain, he said, was that the place he saw God was in the eyes of the poor.

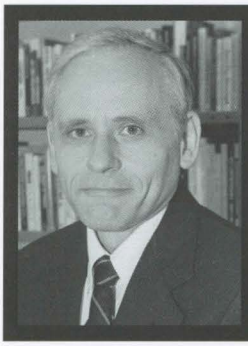
There is also a prophetic role for the Church and its spokespersons: reminding the country's leaders of the demands of faith. Again, there are well-known dangers in this: well-meaning critics can become co-opted by those they would correct. But the prophetic role remains as important as it is ancient.

In national debate, in worldwide movements, in social service on the streets—in all of life—people of faith are making an incalculable contribution to the whole society. So are people in every family and neighborhood, and all for one primary reason: people serving others—on the national stage and, quietly and just as importantly, in their communities and at home—have been nurtured and guided, directly or indirectly, by the worship and teaching that takes place every day in every one of America's 300,000 congregations.

That contribution is something no one in the larger society should underestimate or neglect. ❁

The Changing Face of Society

HOW CONGREGATIONS MUST ADAPT TO THE CHALLENGES AHEAD



Robert Wuthnow, Ph.D.

Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for the Study of Religion, Princeton University

When we undertook the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism Project two years ago, it was an attempt to understand what has happened to mainline denominations since the late 1960s. We wanted to determine whether mainline churches were still playing a vital public role or whether their public role was in decline.

What we found is that mainline denominations are much more involved than evangelical or fundamentalist congregations in service to the wider community. This commitment to service is often expressed in networks with other community organizations either through individual membership in organizations like the Rotary Club, or through formal coalitions established between the congregation and other community organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, or interfaith coalitions.

Areas of Influence

According to our research, local congregations' most effective efforts have been in caring for the needy, such as volunteering in soup kitchens and homeless shelters, setting up tutoring and job training programs, and participating in Special Olympics events and Habitat for Humanity projects. Promoting racial justice has been a high priority among mainline congregations over the last 30 years as well, but has reaped little success. The reason for this seems to be a lack of understanding on the part of largely white mainline congregations that they needed to work more closely in partnership with African American congregations to achieve their goals.

Congregations seem to be having some success, however, in opening a dialogue within their own memberships on gay and lesbian issues. Church discussions on this subject go beyond the civil and human rights issues that are typically discussed in the media and in secular organizations. In contrast, church members discuss gay and lesbian marriage, issues of family and children, the relationship between mind, spirit and body, incarnational theology, and gay and lesbian individuals' rights to ordination and leadership positions. An impressive finding from the study was that many people felt that these discussions were vitally important and that congregations perform a valuable service by providing a public space in which to examine these important issues.

The Challenges

One of the challenges facing congregations today is the changing face of society. Mainline congregations often encourage attitudes of egalitarianism and respect for single parents, divorced parents, childless couples, and to some extent gay and lesbian unions. Yet, in reality, they are heavily oriented toward the nuclear two-parent family and provide more activities geared toward this population.

One trend that will affect congregations more and more is the increasing divorce rate, and the consequent increase in the numbers of single-parent and blended families in our communities. Mainline congregations' center of gravity may therefore need to shift to an accommodation of these other family structures if they are to grow and remain vital. Research shows that divorced and separated people attend church less frequently than married people. Even remarried people go to church less than people who have never been divorced. To encourage participation among these populations, churches may need to offer programs designed to meet their unique needs and concerns.

Another major change that congregations will have to acknowledge and address if they are to remain strong is the growing religious pluralism of our culture. Our communities include increasing numbers of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, yet Christian congregations have not even begun to think of the implications of this shift, such as how to minister to mixed-religion families, or how to make a persuasive case for Christianity among these people.

Neighborhoods and people's relationships with their neighbors are changing, too. Fewer people know their neighbors, and the research tells us that people who don't know their neighbors don't go to church as often as people who do. In addition, more people are commuting longer distances between home and church. These trends suggest that churches are going to have to adapt. One way of addressing these changes may be to form larger churches, with congregations of perhaps 800 to 1,000 members, which can support a wide variety of programs, including programs designed to meet the needs of people with different work or family styles or backgrounds, thus drawing people from greater distances. It may also be that the niche church will become more important as well. Perhaps a smaller church that happens to have an elderly membership or an exceptionally good choir or youth program will attract members because of its special offerings. But these congregations will be more likely to have to interact and network with neighboring congregations to accomplish their community action goals.

What the Future Holds

Regardless of their size, congregations are increasingly going to form partnerships with or obtain the specialized help they need from outside organizations to cope with new challenges or to accomplish their goals. When congregations set out to meet a particular need in the community, they are likely to discover that there are community organizations already doing good work in the area of need, and that they can be most effective by partnering with those organizations. Congregations will also increasingly seek out the services of organizations like the Alban Institute, Leadership Network, and special offices within their own denominations that can link them with other congregations that have experienced similar challenges and may have insights on their concerns.

Individual congregations are also likely to find it necessary to work more closely with their national denominational organizations to effect the kinds of societal changes they would like to see. While we found that members of mainline congregations are active in neighborhood social service activities, they are relatively uninformed about what their national organizations are doing. This means that the Washington offices for these denominations are not able to tell members of Congress that they have an unbroken line of support back to hundreds of thousands of local parishioners for their policy efforts. Therefore legislators are less likely to respond to their concerns than they would be to those of organizations with a stronger grassroots backing. Denominations may need to select one or two major issues on which to focus their national efforts. National church leaders are frustrated that they are asked to keep many pots on the burner so that no constituency feels neglected, when it is becoming apparent that this may be an ineffective approach to achieving the desired changes.

The Role of Worship

Of the many roles that congregations play in local and national society, public worship is most distinctive, and the primary reason for their existence. While taking individual responsibility for our own worshiping experiences is important—making time for private prayer, worship and meditation—it is equally important to engage in worship in the presence of others. Social science research shows that the group experience includes elements that individual experience does not. There is a collective contagion that occurs in groups. When people gather together in like purpose, they develop mutual trust, there is a sense of emotional engagement, and the individualism that so often pervades our lives is diminished.

Another finding is that the more people engage in group worship, the more likely they are to engage in private worship, and vice versa. Each activity supports the other, and each should be viewed as a vital part of devotional practice. ❁

Mainline congregations' center of gravity may need to shift from the traditional two-parent family to an accommodation of other family structures if they are to grow and remain vital.

Tomorrow

If our congregation disappeared tomorrow, our community would not only lose a place called church, it would lose a people. As we like to say at Holy Trinity, we are an everyday people who become everyday disciples serving our Lord. Like ripples on a pond, our people live out their Christian faith as teachers, farmers, physicians, factory workers, and a host of vocational callings that touch the life of our community.

If our congregation disappeared tomorrow, our community would grieve the loss of a beautiful church. A steeple with a cross that stands as a symbol of hope would no longer grace the open skies of the Nebraska prairie.

If our congregation disappeared tomorrow, people would wander like sheep without a shepherd. Our community would no longer hear the power and grace of God's Word. Silence would replace the laughter of children. The joy of voices singing God's praises would be no more. Prayers of the faithful would no longer rise up to heaven.

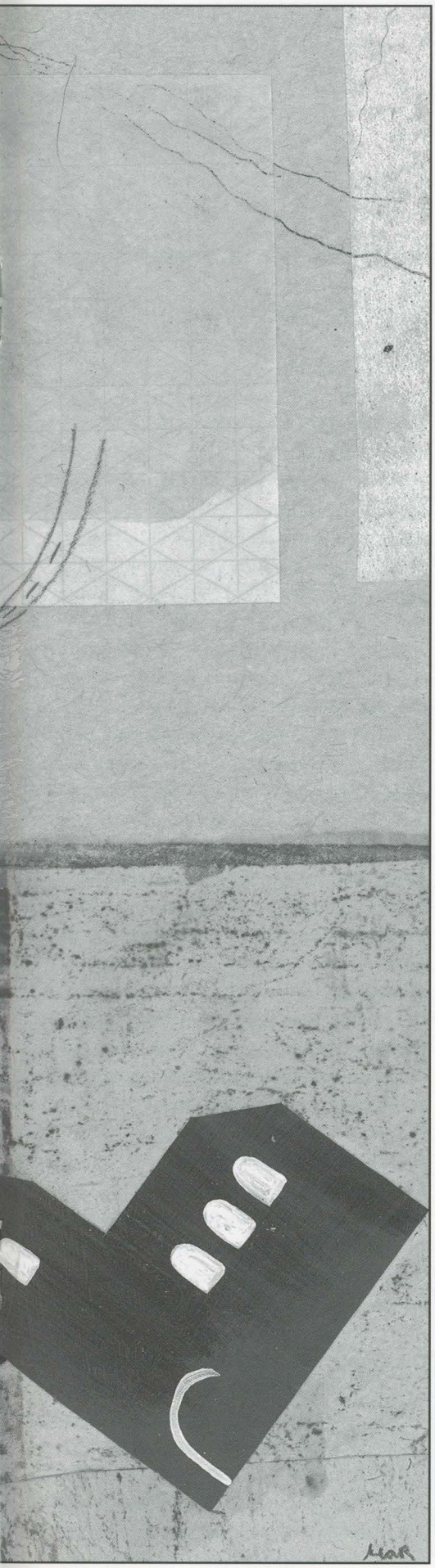
If our congregation disappeared tomorrow, miracles of faith and healing would cease. The hurts and hopes of our community would not know the healing hand of those who care. The voice of the searching soul who says, "I don't know if I believe in Jesus, but I want to," would not touch our ears.

If our congregation disappeared tomorrow, the living stream of memories that tie the generations together would cease to flow. All the joys of new children born and baptized, along with the bittersweet sorrows of funerals, would slip into forgotten memory. The journey of faith that has bound a people of faith together would have ended.

If our congregation disappeared tomorrow.

Betty Schambach, P.M.A.
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Sidney, Nebraska

Martina Witte



The Mystery of Congregations

ALBAN INSTITUTE PRESIDENT JAMES P. WIND EXPLORES WHY CONGREGATIONS MATTER

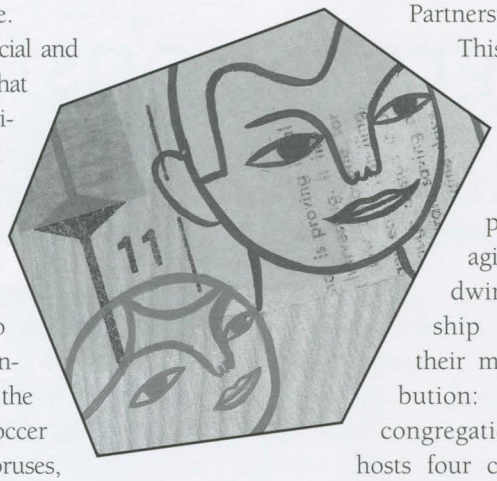
Those of us with vested interests in congregations—because we work in or for them or because we have invested so much of our time, money, sweat, and hope in them—live with an often unstated or unexamined assumption: of course congregations matter, at least the ones we work with. Everyone knows that, right? We all believe that, right?

To the millions of Americans who are floating out there in the great spiritual fog that is postmodern America, our assumption may not be so self-evident. While the pollsters continue to remind us that more than 65 percent of Americans still claim a linkage of some sort (membership, affiliation) to a local congregation, that nonetheless means that almost 100 million don't think congregations make a big enough difference to merit belonging to them. Although many of these folks are engaged in serious or even strenuous spiritual journeys, their searches take them everywhere but toward the local congregation. And, of the 170 million who do claim to belong, many find the local congregation of marginal importance, meriting only piecemeal support and haphazard attendance.

The (W)hole Picture

So, how much do our congregations matter—really? One way that I try to help people think about this question is to invite participation in a thought experiment. Pick a community that matters to you—either one you live in currently or one that has been a special place in your life. Now imagine that some new

anti-congregational virus has wormed its way into your town or city and suddenly deleted all the local congregations. What would be different? Let's begin with the easiest clues. Some of our best architecture—and some of our worst—would be gone. There would be little and big holes in the landscapes, small and large gaps in the skylines where great neo-Gothic cathedrals and tacky boilerplate suburban churches once stood. But look more closely. In countless communities, social and benevolent organizations founded by or primarily supported by these institutions soon succumb to the spreading virus and disappear. Many of our schools, colleges, hospitals, nursing homes, day care centers, AIDS clinics, and homeless shelters would go. Many more gaps are now apparent on the skyline.



What about the social and professional networks that give rise to our universities, museums, and libraries? Since many of these originated in local congregations, some of these also would disappear. So would legions of volunteers who make possible the Scouting troops, soccer leagues, children's choruses, not-for-profit organizations, and so forth, that enrich our American way of life. Suddenly, the once-full town or cityscape looks barren and desolate.

Look again. In this now congregation-free zone, what kind of communal life would remain? Lacking the First Baptists, the Temple Beth Israels, the St. Peters and St. Pauls, or the Calvary Chapels, what would the community's leadership pool look like? What about families? Would they be less stable, more prone to break down? Would there be more or less domestic or substance abuse? More or less addictive behavior, economic ruin, violence? The further we go with this experiment the more total the community meltdown seems to be.

No other group of institutions in our land is as numerous or commands the real-life participation of so many people.

Rich in Good Works

When we drive by a local congregation as we make our ways to work, mall, or concert hall we seldom pause to think of all that we don't see as we look at manicured lawns, and often very staid-looking buildings. In the last two decades a number of researchers have tried to help us count the good works they do, and the studies never fail to amaze me. Take the 1998 *Sacred Places at Risk* study from Partners for Sacred Places. This study of downtown congregations (often once proud but now struggling places saddled with aging buildings and dwindling membership rosters) reports their major social contribution: each of these congregations, on average, hosts four community service programs whose combined value is approximately $150,000. In a major city like Philadelphia, the total subsidy provided by churches and synagogues tops $100 million annually (p. 8).

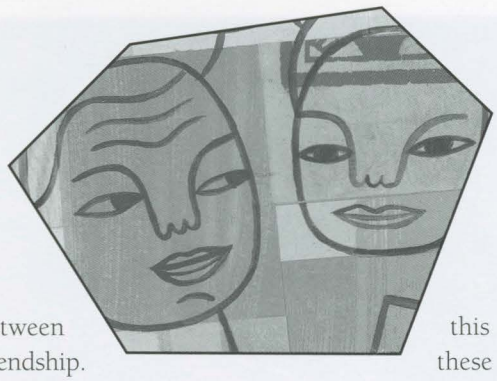
No matter how many such studies we pile up, however, I do not believe that we will ever know how much difference our congregations make. One reason for this is that much of their work is so hard to trace and that congregations spend so little time keeping records of what they do.

Another reason we don't know how much difference congregations make is that we habitually think of congregations as working only when they are gathered. So when worship is taking place at 11:00 A.M. on Sunday or at 9:00 A.M. on Saturday, we can see the congregation at work. When the choir is practicing or the vestry is meeting or the youth group is doing a service project, then we know what the congregation does. But the gathered life of congregations, as important as that is, is only part of the story.

The 1998 *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* reports that there are 373,985 congregations in North America. That figure is disputed by some who argue for a lower count and by others who remind us that a host of unaffiliated storefront congregations are on no organization's membership list. As the recent Presidential election shows, no count is ever completely accurate. But regardless of the number we choose, it is important to note that no other group of institutions in our land is as numerous or commands the real-life participation of so many people.

Embracing the Mystery

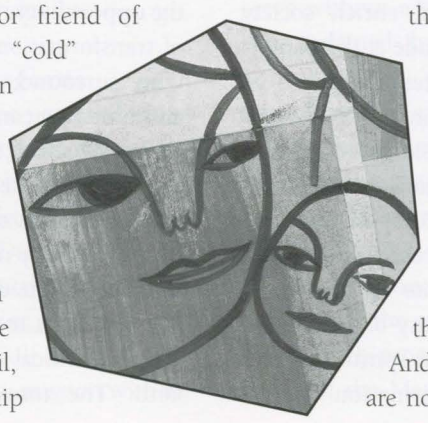
But the full story still eludes us. I have worked for more than two decades as a pastor of a congregation, as a researcher directing large studies of American congregations, as a foundation officer funding numerous other attempts to study congregations, and now as president of an organization devoted to strengthening local congregations. Despite all these ways of engaging with congregations, I confess that I still don't have the full story. I have never seen a whole congregation. I always see just a part. Further, I am convinced that even though the last quarter



century has seen a number of exquisitely detailed anthropological and journalistic accounts of congregational life, no one else has the full story either.

No one has figured out how to track congregation members into their dispersed lives in the world. We have not learned how to find the connections between what happens in the gathered congregational life and in the great world of daily life where millions of congregation members put their congregational values, heritages, beliefs, and commitments into play. My hunch is that, while we may become more adept at seeing some of this picture, we will never grasp the whole. The mystery of the congregation—its total life—will always elude us.

I do get sightings that suggest whole realms of differences made that we seldom fully grasp. A pastor friend of mine actually walked up to a troubled middle-aged male and took a loaded gun out of his hand before that person did violence to others or to himself. How many times have clergy and lay members stopped violence from happening, saved lives, acted courageously, and changed reality? We will never know. An Episcopal congregation in Manhattan rebuilt its burned-out building and now uses its beautifully restored sanctuary to feed daily lunch to hundreds of homeless people. In addition, congregation members become friends to these individuals and lives—both of helped and helpers—are changed. Another pastor friend of mine dared to make a "cold" hospital call on a woman whose home caught fire and who was severely burned when she re-entered the burning building to rescue her young son. Through years of reconstructive surgery and family turmoil, the pastoral relationship changed from one between strangers to a deep friendship. Over time he helped her weave a larger circle of friendship within the local congregation that she had never considered visiting before the tragedy.



So much congregational life takes place in one-to-one encounters that are never reported. The soul-baring times of confession and absolution that go on in pastors' studies, the reorientation that takes place as people are helped with grief and tragedy, the quiet decisions to give away personal fortunes, or to respond to God's call—few of us ever see these things happen. Even piano lessons can make a difference. My mother-in-law Lorraine Buuck, a pastor's wife, used to give lessons to young children in her congregation. Two of those boys have gone on to major careers in church music, one as a leading parish organist in the Midwest, the other as a professor at a major university and organ recitalist who plays concerts around the world. While it would be an overstatement to claim that those career paths were entirely due to one person's influence or to the complex dynamics of one congregation, it also would be an understatement not to note the congregational link that was crucial to both careers.

There is, finally, a deeper and more important dimension to the elusive mystery of congregations. These are sacred places where people meet God within them, where they tap into a higher power and a larger reality. In the pews at worship time, in the coffee hour and the classroom, there is a sacred presence "in, with, and under" everyday life, a grace that changes everything. And although congregations are not the only places where this grace works, these special sacred places provide an opening in the world—a place to breathe, to see things differently, to change, to find meaning amidst the whirl of life.

So, how much do congregations matter—really? More than we will ever know.

Facing the Challenge

But now comes a cautionary note. These institutions, which are important in more ways than we can fathom, are being challenged today in a host of ways. At this edge of a new millennium we find an irony. At the very moment when more and more people are recognizing that local congregations are indispensable institutions for our public well being—witness the turn to faith-based organizations in the Charitable Choice legislation passed by Congress as it revamped welfare in this country—they are facing economic and leadership challenges of great magnitude. Thousands of local congregations in declining rural communities and changing urban neighborhoods have closed over the past few decades. Thousands more face real survival issues. So at a rare moment of great opportunity to make new contributions, our churches and synagogues face serious challenges that may keep many from seizing the new day.

What can we do to help these precious places continue to make so many necessary differences? We can recognize them for what they are. Gifts of God, places of hope and transcendence, congregations are treasure houses full of resources that can change lives and heal the world. They are also earthen vessels, easily cracked and broken by the human weaknesses within and beyond them. We need to commit new resources and energy to them and help others come to value them. We must tell their stories and encourage them to believe that they really do matter. ❁

Fulfilling the Great Commission

CONGREGATIONS AS MISSIONARY OUTPOSTS

Claude E. Payne and Hamilton Beazley

The Great Commission is Christ's command to make disciples of the world. Reported in all four Gospels, it is the heart of a vibrant Christianity, a reflection of the kingdom of God at hand, and the source of a profound and remarkable paradox. The paradox is this: whenever Christians focus on sharing their spiritual experience with those outside their community, they find their own faith enriched, their own souls strengthened, and their own lives further transformed. The Great Commission is therefore both a goal and an expression of faith as well as a means through which that faith becomes transformative. The process of disciples making disciples, which is infused with the power of the Holy Spirit and which results in the transformation of both the disciple and the seeker, is as wondrous a phenomenon of the Christian faith as exists. Yet it is far too infrequently recognized.

The Episcopal Diocese of Texas has embraced a vision based on the Great Commission and, therefore, on the transformation of individual lives. Furthermore, these transformed lives become a catalyst to change and enrich society. Because disciples are made at the congregational level, the diocesan focus is on congregations, which, in the Diocese of Texas, are termed "missionary outposts." Together, the 156 missionary outposts of the Diocese of Texas compose the "one church" of the diocese. That "one church," like each of its congregations, has become a community of miraculous expectation in which the spiritual growth and glorious transformation of its members are an essential part of the Christian experience.

The concept of the congregation as a missionary outpost serves several purposes. In the increasingly secular world of America, congregations really are missionary outposts—spiritual settlements on the frontier of the unchurched—with the opportunity to share the divine power of transformation with the hurting souls who surround them. Those with no church home can be found in the school across the street, the office building down the road, or the house next door. The mission field in contemporary America is rich—tragically rich because of the failure of the mainline denominations and their congregations to teach and live evangelism as a critical element of the Christian faith. The term "missionary outpost"

John Lythgoe / Masterfile

reinforces the need for evangelism, captures the energy of discipleship, and challenges larger congregations that can easily become complacent about disciple making and growth to continue to see their mission in evangelistic terms.

As a missionary outpost, a congregation learns to rely on other outposts for resources and on the judicatory for overall direction and coordination. As part of the "one church" of the diocese, different missionary outposts can focus on different segments of the unchurched and can, in combination with each other, enable the judicatory to minister to people of all ages, races, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Together, missionary outposts can take on large or complex outreach projects that would be daunting for them individually.

Christ Church, Matagorda

A striking example of the power of evangelism expressed through a missionary outpost is Christ Church, Matagorda, an Episcopal church founded in 1838 as the mother church of the Diocese of Texas. Matagorda is a tiny, unincorporated town of 750 people in an economically depressed area of the Gulf Coast. Christ Church was a chaplaincy mission with an average of 12 in attendance when Bishop Payne became the Seventh Bishop of Texas. For many years, the congregation had been subsidized by the diocese in order to support a resident, seminary-trained vicar. When the paid vicar of Christ Church left to assume another position, Bishop Payne appointed Harley Savage as lay vicar. Mr. Savage, a rice farmer and lifelong resident of Matagorda County whose great-grandfather had been married in Christ Church, agreed to serve without a salary. After training, he was ordained by the bishop under a special church provision that allowed him to serve as a priest for the locality of Christ Church only. The newly ordained Rev. Harley Savage embraced the diocesan vision of evangelism and the concept of congregations as missionary outposts.

> Congregations really are missionary outposts—with the opportunity to share the divine power of transformation with the hurting souls who surround them.

The resurrection of Christ Church began with the vicar's proposing an outreach lunch program to meet the hunger needs of the Matagorda community and to fulfill the diocesan vision of reaching those beyond the congregation. "The idea of the luncheon was not to grow the congregation, but to be an outreach to the community," says the vicar. There was no assurance that anyone would come or that the tiny church could afford to sustain it for long. But the congregation stepped out in faith; and the outreach has been successful beyond anyone's dreams.

What started as a small group of disciples offering food for the body and spirit has grown into a weekly gathering of more than 70 guests who settle in at family-style tables to see old friends and meet an ever-changing assortment of visitors. Wizened citizens of Matagorda, businessmen in town for a meeting, pipeline workers clad in the clothes of their trade, the homeless, and cowboys driving cattle through town mingle over home-cooked meals prepared by the people of the parish. When somebody suggested that an offering basket be placed next to the

14 Characteristics of Missionary Congregations

Missionary congregations are invigorating places to be. Alive with the presence of the Holy Spirit, they:

1 View themselves as missionary outposts of the "one church" of the diocese or judicatory, embracing evangelism and the Great Commission as fundamental to their ministry and church growth as a natural and desirable result.

2 Focus on making disciples and on the spiritual development of their members, which leads to miraculous expectation and to the glorious transformation of lives rather than to maintenance of the status quo.

3 Make the Christian faith and the church relevant to everyday life, especially as a source of meaning, challenge, direction, and inspiration.

4 Communicate the Good News in clear language that is devoid of Christian jargon and is therefore meaningful to seekers and newcomers.

5 Emphasize the power and importance of prayer and provide multiple opportunities for individuals and groups to pray or to be prayed for through prayer meetings, prayer teams, prayer chains, prayer walks, prayer ministries, retreats, and so forth.

6 Create many small groups within the congregation through which individuals can experience community, meet personal and spiritual needs, and share their faith and fears.

iced tea so that diners could make a freewill offering for their meal, the result was a basket overflowing. The lunch program is now self-supporting.

The energy, commitment, and faithfulness generated by the luncheon outreach program manifests itself in many ways within the congregation. Average Sunday attendance has increased from 12 to 60, young people have become involved in the life of the church, stewardship has increased dramatically, new educational and outreach programs have been initiated, and the congregation has just completed a $100,000 addition to the parish hall (paid for on the day it opened). The number of acolytes and lay readers continues to grow. The congregation has a new choir director (with a master's degree in music education). Fundraising projects have enabled Christ Church to send five children to Episcopal camp in the summer and four senior high students on a home-repair mission trip to Colorado. Through a foundation grant, a new mobile medical clinic has been acquired to serve Matagorda County, providing much-needed free medical care that was previously nonexistent.

As remarkable as the statistics are, they don't compare to the impact that the missionary outpost of the Diocese of Texas has had on the lives of its members, the unchurched in its area, and the citizens of its community. "We're out of the 'keep the church open' stage to the 'we have to spread the Gospel' stage, and we can't do that by keeping it in the building!" proclaims the vicar. These changes at Christ Church are examples of what can be accomplished with love, enthusiasm, and the power of the Holy Spirit. "The Gospel is about really touching people," says Father Savage. "It's about giving them something they can hold on to! God intends ministry to be a delight and a joy. It should be fun."

Christ Church has become a dynamic place, a growing organism with a vitality and a life of its own—one that is invigorating for its members and life-changing for the spiritually hungry who walk through its doors. Members "see themselves as missionaries," the vicar says. Many of the new members had never held a Prayer Book before or even been to church except for "weddings and funerals." They had to be trained and educated. People who have never attended church come to see how much it has to offer them. "We bring them in one at a time," the vicar says, "and minister to them as individuals." Christ Church is an inspiring example of the transformative power of evangelism born of a diocesan vision of community and mission.

Mission vs. Maintenance

The culture of a congregation like Christ Church that is devoted to making disciples and committed to the concept of the missionary outpost is different from the culture of a maintenance-based congregation in many ways. These include:

Focus on others rather than on self. Evangelism is outwardly focused. It leads to compassion for others and away from self-centeredness and self-indulgence. It provides meaning and sustenance for the soul, returning many times the investment made. Because it involves the Holy Spirit, evangelism is a great blessing for the disciple as well as for the disciple-to-be.

Spiritual orientation rather than an institutional orientation. Missionary outposts acknowledge that the institutional dimension of Christian life is important, but that it is ultimately secondary to the dimensions of service and mission. The orientation and passion of the members are directed at making disciples and at spiritual transformation

7 Provide diverse educational opportunities for both adults and children to learn more about the tenets of the Christian faith, about spiritual growth, about the mission of the church, and about how to share their spiritual treasure with others.

8 Offer many and varied lay ministries developed to meet the needs of both church members and the unchurched in order to teach service and discipleship and to involve the vast majority of the congregation in Christian service.

9 Explain the uniqueness of the denomination's religious tradition so that newcomers and members can understand the beauty and richness of the Christian faith as it is expressed in the individual denomination.

10 Accept doubt and disbelief as part of faith; welcome difficult questions about God and the church; and are supportive and tolerant of seekers, newcomers, and others who are still "disciples in the making."

11 Encourage open and honest sharing among members about their faith and its powerful effect on their lives, including stories of the miraculous and the transformative.

12 Understand the importance of biblically literate members and so offer multiple opportunities for biblical studies, including regular Sunday Bible study classes, Bible study in other Sunday school classes, weekday Bible study groups, and special Bible study groups such as Bethel, Navigator, Trinity, or Disciple Bible studies.

13 Provide meaningful and enthusiastic worship experiences that feature a spiritual component, offer an encounter with God, and carry a powerful homiletic message that is relevant to the struggles and joys of daily life for both visitors and disciples.

14 Enthusiastically welcome visitors and newcomers and attempt to integrate them rapidly and deeply into the life of the congregation.

rather than at the mechanics of maintaining the institution of the Church.

Sharing rather than hoarding. Evangelism and congregational development encourage the sharing of spiritual treasure so that all can be enriched. Evangelism teaches disciples not to hoard that which has been given to them, but to share it so that it can be multiplied. A congregation that is devoted to maintaining the status quo is grounded in selfishness. By hoarding that which God has commanded to be given away, congregations lose their vital connection to God's will and stagnate. A missionary outpost, on the other hand, is eager to share with the suffering people outside its walls. Like the Good Samaritan, its faithful offer aid to those who are hurting along life's highway. The disciples of a missionary outpost are not concerned about whether those who are suffering are "like us," but only whether they are in need. Such an attitude of sharing "outside the church" spreads easily to time, talent, and treasure offered within the church.

Congregational collaboration rather than isolation and competition. When the judicatory operates as "one church," missionary outposts are led to collaborate, each making a unique contribution that is valued by the whole. The tendency for individual congregations to compete with one another or to suffer in isolation is reduced.

Love rather than indifference or hostility. A judicatory that envisions itself as one church living in miraculous expectation of glorious transformation and that carries that vision outward through its missionary outposts to the unchurched is a community living in love. Such a community does not focus on internal issues that divide but on issues that unite, such as the call of Christ to make disciples of all nations. Self-righteousness, intolerance, and condemnation are replaced by compassion, discernment, and acceptance. In the spirit of the Great Commandment to love, people are allowed to change and grow.

A Glorious Transformation

When a congregation becomes a missionary outpost and shifts its focus from its own needs to those of the community around it, the profound changes that occur in the lives of its members are echoed in the larger community. In Matagorda, for example, the mobile health clinic has dramatically improved the physical health of the area just as Christ Church has improved its spiritual health. Once a missionary outpost embraces the Great Commission and the glorious transformation of lives that discipleship makes possible, it becomes a catalyst for change that draws others to it. When a congregation becomes committed to evangelism and so knows what it wants to do and for whom, it becomes open to missionary leadership. Harley Savage provided that kind of leadership at Christ Church. Part of a congregation's "getting well" is to develop a missionary vision and then identify the person who is called to fulfill it.

What began as an intellectual respect for the missionary vision of the Diocese of Texas has evolved over the past five years of Bishop Payne's episcopate into a deep understanding of its purpose and promise. Out of that understanding has grown a genuine and abiding love of mission, evangelism, and the Great Commission. What had once been a dream of the diocese and its congregations has become a reality for the "one church" and its missionary outposts: disciples making disciples in a community of miraculous expectation devoted to the glorious transformation of lives. ❁

Searching for the Key

DEVELOPING A THEORY OF SYNAGOGUE SIZE

Alice Mann, David Trietsch, and Dan Hotchkiss

Temple Aleph, founded by 12 families five years ago, has grown to 67 families. At the annual meeting there were two candidates for president: one was a "founding" member and the other was a "new" member who spoke of change and greater inclusiveness in decision making. The election became unpleasant and the new member's family and several friends left the congregation.

Temple Bet has grown to 300 families with a full menu of programs and activities. While the temple is perceived as successful, several members have become critical of the rabbi's lack of personal attention. At a recent board meeting, congregants described the rabbi as distant and unavailable except in times of crisis. These sentiments have become part of the group's agenda for upcoming contract negotiations.

Temple Gimmel, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in January, has had about 450 members for two decades. Its leaders wonder why the temple has not grown despite three recruitment drives, a sound religious school, and the lowest dues of any temple in the city.

These scenarios echo patterns found in churches, patterns that have given rise to "church size theory," a body of experience and observations about how church behavior changes at different sizes, and how they can get "stuck" at size transitions. But what would a synagogue size theory look like? Exactly how do synagogues change as they grow and decline? What are the challenging transitions, and how can leaders help congregations to move through them successfully?

Applying What We Already Know

Nineteen synagogue consultants met in Boston last summer to explore these questions and others with Alban senior consultant Alice Mann, whose writings on church size have drawn attention in the Jewish world. In the top-floor conference room of Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies building, Mann described the theory of church size most often used by the Alban Institute, and drew on the experience of participants to learn how the ideas have already been adapted for use in synagogues. The group discussed the best way to measure synagogue size, the characteristics of synagogues of various sizes, and the challenges that transitional stages present in Jewish congregations.

Since last summer's workshop, the three of us have met to consolidate what we learned and to clarify the questions stimulated by the encounter. In applying church size concepts to the Jewish setting, it became clear to us that some generalizations useful to mainline Protestants need to be "relativized" in order to apply them to the different institutional realities in synagogues. A broader perspective will help consultants, including Alban consultants, to serve Jewish congregations. In the process, we hope to expand our understanding of congregation size in ways that will help us to better understand the full diversity of churches.

Alban's approach to congregation size makes three basic assertions:

- Congregations fall into distinctive size categories, and congregations of different sizes organize differently.
- Congregations do not grow or decline smoothly, but tend to "plateau" at predictable sizes.
- In order to grow successfully past a plateau, a congregation must deliberately break with familiar patterns of behavior and begin to act like larger congregations.

At this conceptual level, the theory applies not only to synagogues but to all faith-based institutions. It is an established observation that humans tend to form primary groups of 12 or so, and clans of about 50. At about 150, a qualitative shift (the "tipping point") occurs and a true organization comes into being, with official roles and structures, overt communication, and formal procedures. Larger organizations seem to work best when built of combinations of these natural-sized groups.

For synagogues (and perhaps for churches as well), there may be no one best measure of congregation size.

Church Size Categories

These numbers underlie the specific size categories most often used by the Alban Institute in its work with churches. Developed originally by size theorist Arlin Rothauge, the categories are:

- **Family church (up to 50 adults and children at worship).** A small church organized around one or two matriarchs or patriarchs who often are the heads of extended biological families in the church. The pastor functions in a chaplain role, leading worship and giving pastoral care. A pastor who challenges the authority of the patriarch or matriarch or presumes to be the primary leader of the congregation generally will not stay long.
- **Pastoral church (50–150).** The pastor is the central figure, holding together a small leadership circle. Two or three major "fellowship groups" compose the congregation, but each member expects personal attention from the pastor. The pastor's time is largely taken up maintaining direct pastoral relationships with each member, coordinating the work of the leadership circle, and personally leading worship and small group programs.
- **Program church (150–350).** Churches of this size are known for the quality and variety of their programs. Separate programs for children, youth, couples, seniors, and other age and interest groups provide entry points for a wide range of people. The minister's role is to recruit, equip, and inspire a circle of key lay leaders and staff. Decision making is distributed, and pastoral care is shared by laity.
- **Corporate church (350 or more).** This category of church is known for excellence in worship and music and for the range and diversity of its programs. There are specialized ministries to narrowly identified groups of people, several of which aspire to be known beyond the congregation for their excellence. The senior pastor spends more time preparing to preach and lead worship than most clergy, and must be skilled at working with a diverse staff of full-time professional leaders. Decision making is carried out by a multilayered structure of staff, boards, and committees. While clergy continue to provide pastoral care, especially in crisis moments, most members find their spiritual support in small groups or from lay visitors.

The first three of Rothauge's categories account for the vast majority of churches, but not the majority of attenders. According to University of Arizona sociologist Mark Chaves, "only 10% of American congregations have more than 350 regular participants, but those congregations contain almost half the religious service attenders in the country."[1] Some practitioners are calling these largest congregations "resource churches." Not all congregations over 350 are the same "size." Carl George describes transition points between super-churches (1,000-3,000), mega-churches (3,000-10,000), and meta-churches (10,000 and beyond).[2]

The question, then, is how basic concepts of church size apply to the different norms and patterns of synagogue life. The question is complicated by the fact that synagogues vary a great deal among themselves. The Boston workshop, which drew consultants from various denominations of Judaism, has begun to define the questions that require research.

Searching for the Key to Measuring Synagogue Size

For churches, as noted previously, average Sunday attendance—including both adults and children—generally is the best measure of size. Church membership statistics are notoriously unreliable, subject as they are to pastors' boasting and the accumulation of "dead wood." The number of pledging units is a second-best measure, as it includes only people who have taken action, but changes in this number tend to lag reality by two or three years. Also, pledging units may include either one or two adults. So attendance seems to be the best size measure for most purposes.

Synagogues customarily report their size as a number of family units. Because most congregations require annual dues payments, this figure is analogous to church pledging units, only perhaps a little firmer because a church "pledge" can be a token.

Worship attendance is less useful as a size marker for synagogues, which often have many dues-paying members who rarely attend regular worship services. Shabbat worship attendance is commonly as low as 10 to 40 percent of membership, especially in Reform and Conservative congregations. High spikes in the attendance graph frequently occur when a bar or bat mitzvah service is held during the Shabbat service. The High Holy Days are often the one time when almost all of the membership attends services.

Sabbath worship attendance does not play the central binding role in most synagogues that it does in most churches. Other forms of participation, including sending children to religious school, Brotherhood or Sisterhood activity, home ritual observance, study group participation, and holding leadership positions may be regarded as equivalent indicators of "active" membership. There are exceptions: in Orthodox congregations and the growing number of informal home minyans where Shabbat worship is more central. Workshop participants, however, reported a

renewed emphasis on worship attendance as a central element of Jewish living.

The ways synagogues differ from churches call attention to some of the ways churches differ from each other. There are mainline Protestant churches where, temporarily at least, activities other than worship—Bible study, music groups, women's organizations, or committees—play the central role of binding members to the group. In Southern Baptist congregations, the kind of participation leaders track most carefully is Sunday school attendance (adults and children); while it is generally assumed that most will attend worship, church size and health are gauged by the Sunday school numbers. There are also new ways of organizing churches that divide the public "seekers service" from the smaller worship for believers; the seeker event seems more like an educational presentation or a rally than like traditional worship. The most common patterns of church life are not the only ones.

The Answer Depends on the Question

These observations suggest that at least for synagogues (and perhaps for churches as well) there may be no one best measure of congregation size. The most useful measure probably depends on the question you are trying to answer.

If you want to know how many clergy and staff a congregation should employ, you need to understand the level of expectation for staff-intensive services such as religious school, adult education, and youth and young adult programs. In most synagogues, the most labor-intensive constituents are children up through bar or bat mitzvah age. A second group is older youth who remain active. A third is the active circle of adults who attend worship, call on the rabbis for pastoral care, and participate in adult study groups. The largest and least labor-intensive group is those who attend only occasionally and call on the synagogue only for weddings, memorial services, and so forth.

If you want to know how large most members perceive the synagogue to be, then it will be important to look at the largest gatherings of members. Invariably this will include High Holy Days worship, but may also include the annual fundraising dinner or other events for which the entire congregation is expected.

If you want to describe the decision-making dynamics of the congregation, then you need to look for measures of the number who are active in synagogue governance. Possibilities include attendance at the annual meeting, size of the temple board, and participation in committees and affiliate groups. How many members would show up at a meeting to approve a new building? To select a rabbi? Such numbers may be estimates, but it is important to have some idea how large a group may become involved, actually or potentially, in major synagogue decisions.

The Need for More Research

In future studies of synagogue size, we suggest the following tentative list of statistics that should be gathered, in approximate order of their systemic impact on the synagogue:

- Number of children up to age 13 in member families who are enrolled in the synagogue religious school
- Number of children up to age 13 in member families who are enrolled in Jewish day schools
- Number of youth over age 13 who participate in synagogue youth programs
- Number of adults who belong to member families
- High Holy Days attendance
- Average Shabbat worship attendance

It may be that with research and experience this list can be reduced to a simplified heuristic. But only by comparing all these measures (and perhaps others) with descriptions of the shape of congregational life can we define the typical size categories that will be most useful to leaders of synagogues.

What's Next

Churches and synagogues are different in many ways, and yet like all organizations they shift to new patterns of organization and behavior as they grow and decline. This proposition has rung true enough to leaders and observers of synagogue life that some of them have used, adapted, and translated congregation size ideas first developed for churches. Consultants in the Boston workshop were able to substantiate from their experience in congregations that, as congregational communities shifted from one size category to another, three characteristics observed in churches hold true: **First**, the expectations of congregants change. **Second**, the roles of rabbi, professional staff, and lay leadership are redefined. **Third**, the infrastructure—number of staff, ways needed to communicate, etc.—needed to support the organization changes.

In the dialogue begun last summer, we have started to clarify the questions that need to be answered on the way to a size theory that is indigenous to Jewish institutions, not adapted to them from elsewhere. In the process, we expect to gain insights that will be of help across the full spectrum of diversity in congregational life.

Notes

1. *How Do We Worship?* (Bethesda, Md.: The Alban Institute, 1999), p. 8.
2. *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), p.54

An expanded version of this article will appear in *Size Transitions in Congregations*, the second in the Alban Institute's "Harvesting the Learnings" book series. To order, call 1-800-486-1318, ext. 244.

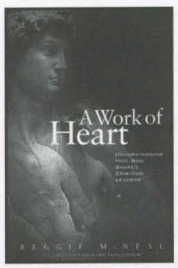
BOOK REVIEW

A Work of Heart

UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD SHAPES SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Reggie McNeal
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000

McNeal's thesis in *A Work of Heart* is that leaders in the church are shaped primarily through an "interplay between divine and human dynamics." He writes, "A marvelous and mysterious interface of divine and human choices conspires and contends in designing a life and in shaping the heart that lies at the center of it" (p. xii). That interface is what the book is all about.



The author, director of Leadership Development and Pastoral Ministries for the South Carolina Baptist Convention and a consultant to churches, pastors, and denominations, begins by exploring how God worked through Moses, David, Paul, and Jesus to illustrate what he means by "divine heart-shaping." McNeal's idea is that as leaders see God at work in these biblical characters they can more clearly see him working in themselves.

The second part of the book is structured around six themes or "subplots" that are the major aspects of a leader's heart-shaping process. They are

1. Culture—all the environmental influences that shape the leader's life and ministry context
2. Call—the sense of having received some life assignment or mission that must be completed
3. Community (or communities)—the role of the family of origin and other people who help shape the early life of a leader
4. Communion—the conscious cultivation of a relationship with God
5. Conflict—personal, inter-relational, demonic, or organizational conflicts
6. The Commonplace—the ordinary, everyday, run-of-the-mill, when-nobody's-looking activities of a leader

This is not a "how to be a leader" book. McNeal's focus is on self-understanding as a way for readers to be more aware of how God may be working through them.

McNeal also addresses the question, "Why does God create leaders anyway?" His answer is that "God creates leaders in order to share his heart with his people. This observation can be verified when we consider what we have come to know of God through the lives of our biblical heroes" (p. xiv).

One limitation of the book is its male orientation. I wished McNeal had used some of the women leaders from the biblical narratives instead of selecting only males. Most of the illustrations show male leaders as well, and the author always refers to God using the male gender.

In spite of this, the book is well worth reading. McNeal's observations on leadership as exemplified in the biblical characters and his delineations of practical strategies in each of the six arenas of heart-shaping make the book a useful and enriching read.

Rev. Terry E. Foland
Senior Consultant
The Alban Institute

BOOK REVIEW

Public Religion and Urban Transformation

FAITH IN THE CITY

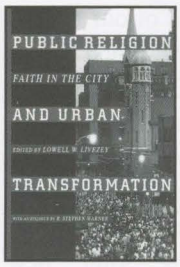
Religion, Race, and Ethnicity Series
Lowell W. Livezey, editor
New York: New York University Press, 2000

"'Viva Mexico!' calls the youthful nun, standing in full habit at the front of the large Gothic Catholic church. 'Viva Mexico! Viva Mexico!' respond a thousand voices from the crowded pews and aisles."

Thus begins Lowell Livezey's excellent introduction to Part I of *Public Religion and Urban Transformation*, an extraordinary product of the Lilly-funded Religion in Urban America Program (RUAP). Since the early '90s, RUAP has focused on congregations and religious organizations in metropolitan Chicago and their roles in society. Based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, RUAP complements a long history of urban studies in Chicago.

Editor Lowell Livezey is the founding director of RUAP, which Livezey describes as "from the beginning a collective, collegial undertaking." In addition to the book's nine contributors, many experts in the field have participated in this decade-long research project, which has also been supported and affected by events such as the five Neighborhood Forums on Religion in Chicago in 1996 and 1997.

Taking a "bottom-up" Chicago School sociological approach, Part I provides ethnographic studies of more than 75 diverse, mostly urban congregations in eight neighborhoods. Each chapter begins with a helpful demographic map.



Part II, the heart of the book, is a collection of fascinating essays, often enriched by quotes and photos, about those neighborhood congregations and selected religious service organizations. Part III, "Religion and the New Metropolitan Context," includes a valuable chapter on Cardinal Bernardin's plan for restructuring the Archdiocese of Chicago, which includes 2.3 million Catholics, 40 percent of the metropolitan population.

The richness of this book would reward a second reading. I suggest that the reader start at the beginning and read a few chapters at a time, then reread favorite chapters, Livezey's excellent first chapter and R. Stephen Warner's insightful epilogue.

By now you know I like the book. I think it will alter—or perhaps confirm—your thinking about "public religion" and how traditional and immigrant congregations address (or don't) member and community needs and attitudes and actions toward larger societal issues.

For proactive liberals like myself, a layman originally trained as an urban planner and external "change agent," it may come as a surprise that so many congregations focus on nurturing their own folks and building their own community. This realization provides an opportunity for us to rethink the public roles and contributions of a specific congregation or religious organization in a rapidly changing society.

The book is an obvious choice for religious and congregational studies and urban sociology programs. It is also valuable reading for any cleric or layperson interested in how contemporary urban religious collectives are shaped by—and help shape—the lives of their own members, surrounding communities, and the larger society.

Victor Claman
Coauthor, *Acting on Your Faith: Congregations Making a Difference*
Boston, Massachusetts

BOOK REVIEW

Partners in Ministry

CLERGY AND LAITY

Roy W. Trueblood and Jackie B. Trueblood
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999

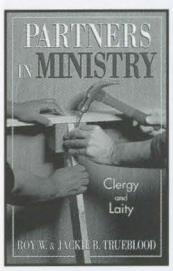
Living on the Border of the Holy

RENEWING THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL

L. William Countryman
Harrisburg, Penn.: Morehouse Publishing, 1999

An understanding of ministry as the vocation of all baptized Christians has gained wide acceptance among churches since *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* was published by the World Council of Churches in 1982. For many congregations, however, practicing such ministerial partnerships remains an elusive goal. These two books, *Partners in Ministry* and *Living on the Border of the Holy,* provide two contrasting perspectives about how the whole people of God can live out their vocations.

Partners in Ministry is a practical guide for congregational leaders based on a training program developed by Roy and Jackie Trueblood. It is filled with tried and true tips for effective team ministry, interspersed with biblical references and models. Many of these team-building suggestions arise from the Truebloods' successful experience as consultants in the corporate world and with United Methodist congregations throughout the country.



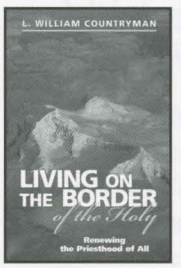
Beginning with the premise that all baptized Christians are called into ministry, *Partners in Ministry* advocates HEART principles by which team members are expected to live (p. 15):

- **H**ear and understand me.
- **E**ven if you disagree, please don't make me wrong.
- **A**cknowledge the greatness within me.
- **R**emember to look for my loving intentions.
- **T**ell me the truth with compassion.

Each chapter in this easy-to-follow book elaborates aspects of the HEART covenantal commitment and instructs congregational teams on closing the gap between current conditions and their vision of the future.

The Truebloods state that "there are no levels of leadership in the church, only different functions depending upon the personal gifts and graces, the call of God, and the confirmation of the church" (p. 15). They advise clergy to relinquish control by focusing "time and energy on what counts by actually delegating authority and responsibility" (p. 100). As partners in ministry, "Pastors who are team leaders can devote more of their time to articulating the vision of the church" and "inspir[ing] followers" (p. 101). While such pastors do not perform hands-on ministry for team members, they clearly remain at the helm.

Living on the Border of the Holy, by contrast, is not a how-to book. William Countryman, Episcopal priest and professor of the New Testament at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, offers a prophetic, cogent, theological, and practical articulation of the fundamental priesthood, or ministry, of the whole people of God. In an intricately woven theological argument, Countryman claims that "At the center of our experience as humans is our priesthood to and with one another" (p. 30). All human beings minister as priests, he believes,



and receive priestly ministrations from one another, giving or receiving some new understanding of the world. Some of this priestly work is obvious: teaching, parenting, mentoring, coaching, and working with the arts, for example. Other priestly activities, such as prayer or scientific research, involve unveiling the unknown. Each priest's vocation, whether fundamental or ordained, is "discerned through honest assessment of our individual gifts and longings and in conversation with one another" as well as with the HOLY (p. 143).

The "fundamental priesthood" of all Christians is based on Jesus' priesthood as a layman. According to Countryman, "The church turns out to be the principal repository of the good news of Jesus' priesthood." He reasons, "Priesthood, like all human existence, is intrinsically social. It takes place in our interactions with one another in the presence of the HIDDEN HOLY, and it therefore gives rise to some sort of community"—such as the church (p. 83). Ordained priests are members of the fundamental priesthood, but they also fulfill a sacramental function by becoming "signs by which the churches express their relationship to their own past, to the churches with which they are in communion, and to Christians of other traditions" (p. 86). In this capacity, they are responsible for the sacred religious rites of baptism and Eucharist.

Countryman flattens the hierarchy that permeates denominational structures. He points to ways in which the fundamental priesthood of all can be

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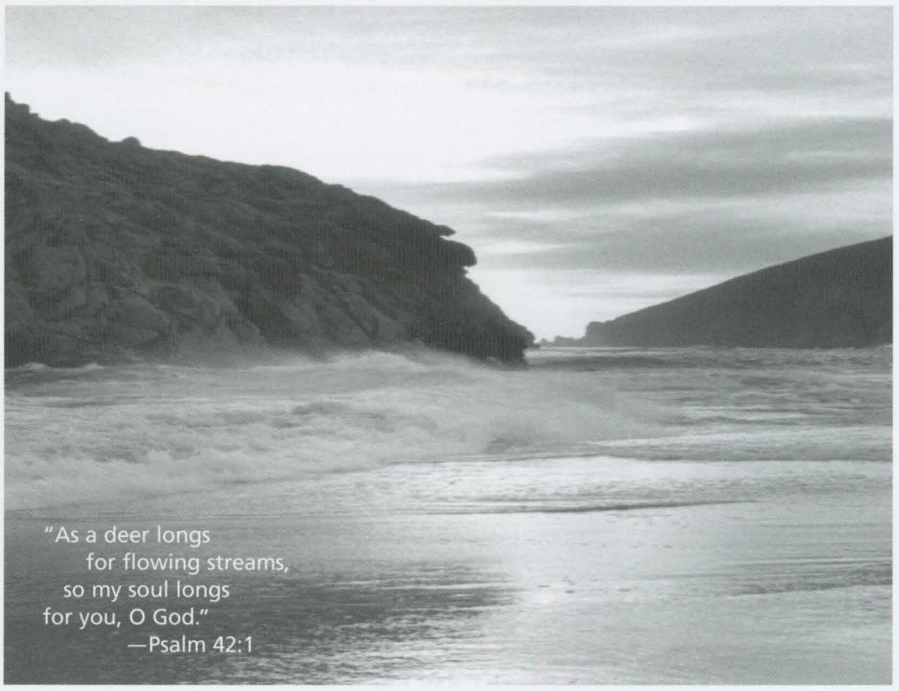
NATIONAL CLERGY RENEWAL PROGRAM



AT THE CENTER OF THE CONGREGATION IS THE PASTOR. Spiritual guide, scholar, counselor, preacher, administrator, confidant, teacher, pastoral visitor, and friend, a pastor has a privileged position and performs many roles. In season and out, a pastor is called upon to lead communities to the life-giving waters of God.

THE NATIONAL CLERGY RENEWAL PROGRAM, offered by Lilly Endowment Inc., is intended to strengthen Christian congregations by providing an opportunity for pastors to step away briefly from the demands of daily parish life and to engage in a period of renewal and reflection. The Endowment will provide as many as 100 grants of up to $30,000 each directly to congregations for support of a renewal program for their pastor.

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For information: Send an e-mail to clergyrenewal@yahoo.com or call 317/916-7302 or write Lilly Endowment Inc., Religion Division, 2801 North Meridian Street, P.O. Box 88068, Indianapolis, Indiana 46208. Indiana clergy should apply only to the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations.

facilitated in congregations: He advocates re-envisioning "team ministries so that they are not merely extensions of the rector or chief pastor" (p. 165); he suggests that the formation of cluster groups of congregations having shared leadership might support ministries that none can accomplish singly; he argues for the wider participation of nonstipendary clergy and highlights the leadership role of deacons in churches preserving the classical three orders of ministry. Implementation of Countryman's theology of ministry would require fundamental revisions in the denominational ordering of lay and ordained ministry, in seminary education, and in the way congregations function.

Congregational leaders seeking a clear, straightforward guide for improving the functioning of ministerial teams will find *Partners in Ministry* helpful. Those looking for a more substantive, comprehensive treatment of the vocation of all baptized Christians will be stimulated by *Living on the Border of the Holy*. Countryman's provocative perspectives are worth consideration by those seriously interested in the revitalization of the ministry of all baptized Christians.

Rev. Dr. V. Sue Zabel
Wesley Theological Seminary
Washington, D.C.

VIDEO REVIEW

Jews and Christians

A JOURNEY OF FAITH

Potomac, Md.: Auteur Productions, 2000

What makes Tom Lehrer's depiction of the earliest days of interfaith (at that time, Christian-Jewish) relations in the United States funny in his song, "National Brotherhood Week," is the chord of truth it strikes. While he depicts people grudgingly talking to one another—a great advance over silence—it still is clear that cross-boundary talk is difficult.

Clergy, activists, and academics know we have, blessedly, come very far from those times. Nevertheless, that message has barely made its way to the masses. Many Jews still view Christianity with fear: from the right, we fear proselytism and from the left we fear being loved to death. New books, including the volume edited by Frymer-Kensky, Sandmel, et al., *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, help overcome those fears and the pervasive lack of mutual understanding. Likewise, many Christians still fear Judaism. From the right and the left, the same questions bring different answers: Why are you still here? What does your continued existence mean to us?

This two-hour-long video, *Jews and Christians: A Journey of Faith*, can begin to move the dialogue in the pews away from fear and toward understanding. Not everyone will want to walk this journey—there is comfort in the old fears. Nevertheless, many clergy and religious leaders know it is a journey we must walk. We must walk this path for our own good, for the good of our communities, and to the glory of God. It is up to all religious leaders to not only walk that path ourselves, but also to lead those who look to us for guidance. We will lead when we preach and when we act in concert across religious lines. We will teach and we will model the dialogue we seek to stimulate. I heartily recommend using this tape, either in pieces or as a whole, in congregations, in classes, in community settings—wherever we find the opportunity to spread the not-so-new news of interfaith respect, cooperation, and shared journeying. The personal as well as academic testimonies will go a long way to opening up people to self-reflection, prayer, and forward movement.

The highly professional production values add to making this a most attractive piece. While I especially liked the musical selection at the end, others will also relate to the great scenery, personal interviews, or "eavesdropping" on dialogue in action. This variety of presentation offers the possibility of many people finding that to which they relate. Not only do I heartily recommend using this video, I urge it!

This video can be ordered directly from Auteur Productions by calling 1-866-299-6554 or sending an e-mail to auteur@worldnet.att.net.

Rabbi Susan B. Stone
Temple Beth Shalom
Hudson, Ohio

About the Alban Institute

CONGREGATIONS is a bimonthly publication of the Alban Institute, a nonprofit, interfaith **membership organization** founded in 1974 to provide a comprehensive range of resources to Christian and Jewish congregations. **Our mission** is to provide clergy and lay leaders with practical, research-based information and ideas for effective ministry as they grapple with an ever-changing environment.

The Alban Institute serves leaders—both ordained and lay—across the denominational spectrum through **consulting services, education events, book and periodical publishing,** and **research**. Our work is supported by membership revenue, grant funding, and the sale of programs, services, and publications.

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