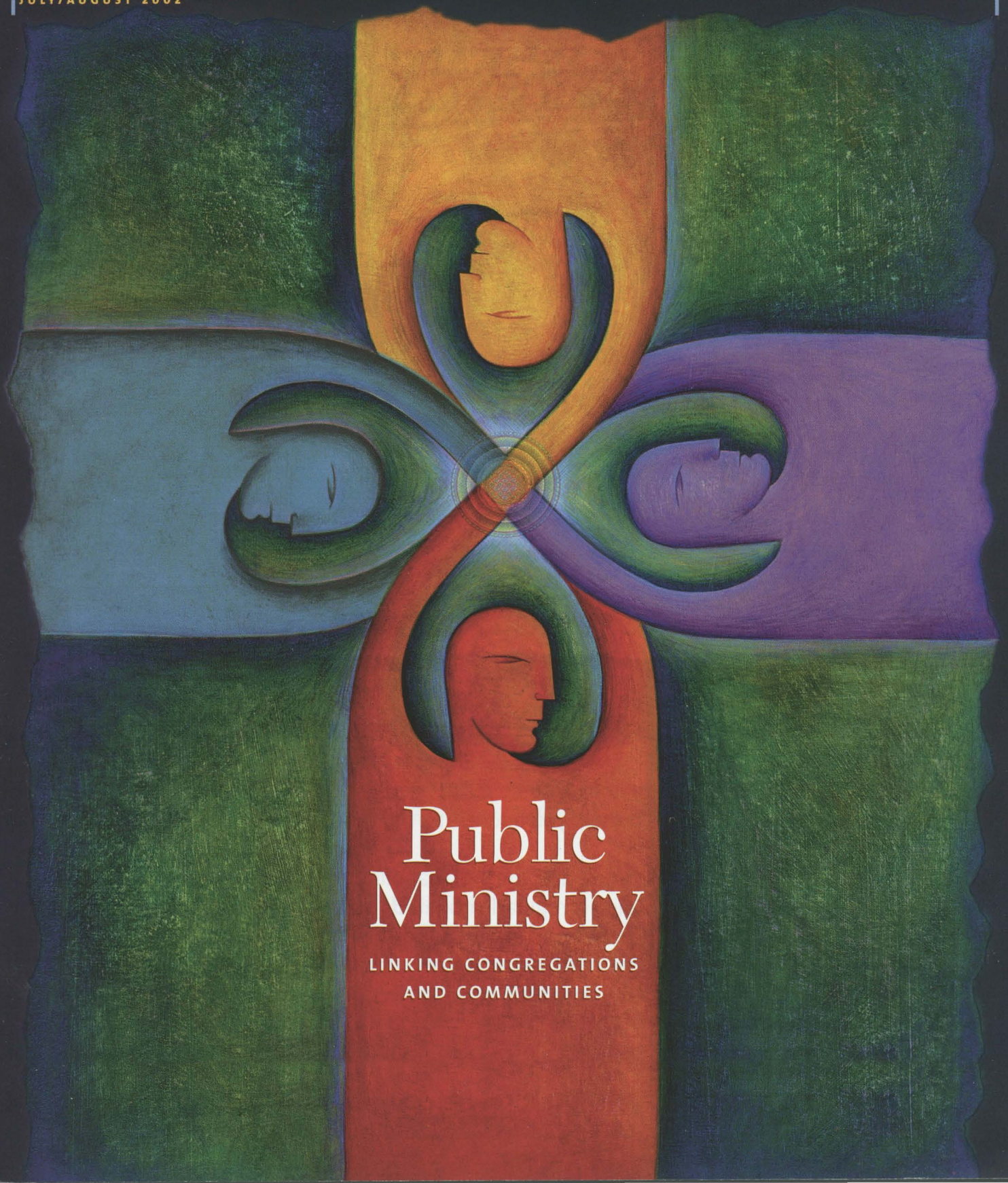
Congregations
LEARNING LEADING CHANGING
JULY/AUGUST 2002



Public Ministry

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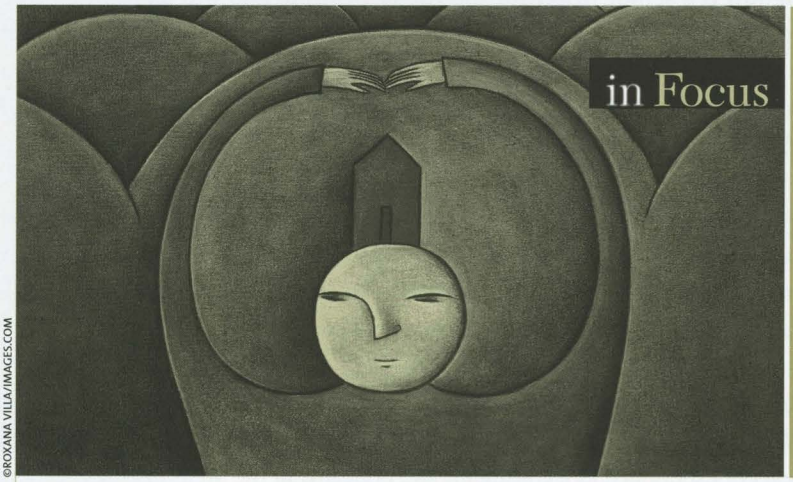


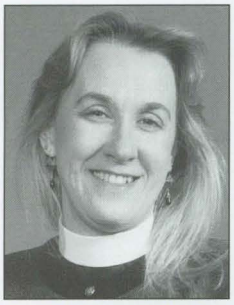
Embracing the Public Arena

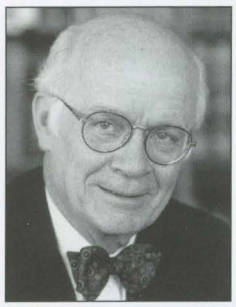
Pastor *Dennis A. Jacobsen* makes a biblical case for public ministry

page 18

Volume 28, Number 4. CONGREGATIONS is sent bimonthly to all members of the Alban Institute. CONGREGATIONS is the successor to ACTION INFORMATION, published since 1975.


Dennis A. Jacobsen


Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook


Martin E. Marty


Marlis McCollum

Joshua Brown is pastor of West Richmond Friends Meeting in Richmond, Indiana. A Quaker minister of 18 years, he also has served as an adjunct faculty member of Earlham School of Religion. He has written two books, *What Does An Angel Look Like?* (Good Read Press) and *Letters From a Chasseur á Pied* (Texas A&M University Press), and many articles and lectures. In 2001, he received a six-month sabbatical grant from Lilly Endowment's Clergy Renewal Program.

Dr. Linda-Marie Delloff is a senior writer for the Alban Institute and was its former director of publishing. She also writes a regular column for *The Lutheran* magazine, and contributes to various other religious publications. Currently Dr. Delloff is editing a book of women's meditations for Judson Press. Her article in this issue will appear as a chapter in *Public Offerings*, to be published by the Alban Institute in the fall of 2002.

Rev. Dennis A. Jacobsen is pastor of Incarnation Lutheran Church in Milwaukee and director of the Gamaliel National Clergy Caucus, a network of over 1,000 clergy that develops national and regional training events to ground the work of congregation-based community organizing in theology and scripture.

Rev. Dr. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook is the director of congregational studies and associate professor of pastoral theology at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She has over 20 years of experience as a consultant and educator in the areas of congregational life, leadership training, pastoral care, educational ministries, and vocational formation. Dr. Kujawa-Holbrook is a specialist in anti-oppression training and education and is currently the chair of the anti-racism committee for the Episcopal Church. She is the author of several books and numerous articles; her book *A House of Prayer for All People: Congregations Engaged in the Ministry of Racial Justice* is scheduled to be published by the Alban Institute in 2003.

DeAnn Lancashire is a writer, editor, and communications consultant living in Shoreview, Minnesota, with her four children. She has worked solely for nonprofit organizations and has written and edited for the Reignmaker Ministries Web site, Kingdom Oil public relations profiles, and Metropolitan State University's writing handbook. DeAnn also speaks and teaches about healthy family dynamics, and is currently developing a curriculum about parenting from the heart of Christ.

Rev. Dr. Martin E. Marty is the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago, where he taught in three faculties from 1963–1998. The author of over fifty books, he served as an editor of and writes for *The Christian Century*, edits the fortnightly newsletter *Context*, and writes the weekly e-mail column *Sightings*. A Lutheran minister, he served in pastorates for a decade. He currently is writing a biography of Martin Luther for the Viking Penguin Lives series. Many of his articles and columns have dealt with the theme of congregations.

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.

Something New

Don't you just love it when someone asks you, voice filled with anticipation, "Do you notice anything different about me?" The question always catches you a little off guard, and there's a moment of anxiety while you try to figure out what exactly is different and if you can find something complimentary to say. Well, don't worry. I'm not going to put you through a guessing game—we have a new look!

It has been a year and a half since we completely reconceptualized CONGREGATIONS with a fresh design, original illustration, themes for each issue, and new columns and departments such as "The Leading Edge," "Ask Alban," and "Perspectives." As we have been living into our new design, we have been making minor modifications and adjustments; we also have been adding new material to the "Periodicals" section of our Web site (www.alban.org) so that you, the reader, have more information at your fingertips. Your response has been tremendously affirming, and we are glad you find the magazine so valuable to your life and work.

You may be wondering, "Why mess with a good thing?" Well, the truth is that the Alban Institute has taken to heart the adage, "A rolling stone gathers no moss." As an organization we are in a tremendous time of growth and change, and the momentum is reflected in everything we do, including CONGREGATIONS. It's an exciting time to be tackling issues related to congregational leadership.

If you take a close look, you will see that the content of the magazine has not changed: we are still bringing you a mix of articles on a theme—in this case, public ministry. We also are including several unrelated articles on topics that we think will engage your church leadership. We have retained the same columns and departments, but we have moved things around a bit. The primary change is the design—and we are thrilled! The places you will notice it the most are the "In Focus" and "Reviews" sections, but the changes abound everywhere. You also may notice that we have chosen to use photography to illustrate most of the articles, a radical departure for us.

In this issue on public ministry, we bring you an "In Focus" article from Dennis Jacobsen, the author of *Doing Justice,* who sets the stage for why congregations must engage the public arena (p. 18). We also hear from Martin Marty on the need for congregations to discern their new public role in the wake of September 11, 2001 (p. 23). From a grounded and practical perspective, DeAnn Lancashire provides steps congregations can take to address the housing crisis (p. 6). We hope these and the other articles in this issue will inspire and engage you, and spur you on to further thinking about your own congregation's public role.

In this and all your other important and wonderful endeavors, I wish you well.

Blessings in your work,

Lisa

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First Class Mail

Conflicting Expectations

KUDOS TO ROY OSWALD ("Getting Feedback on Your Ministry," MAR/APR 2002, p. 4) for acknowledging that clergy cannot be adequately evaluated unless churches recognize the organic relationship between clergy and lay leadership. A visionary, energetic pastor will accomplish more with cooperative leadership than with leadership that is unmotivated, or worse, contentious. Clergy will function according to their role within the prescribed system; change the system and the pastor's functioning will likewise be recast.

To expand on the informative articles in the March/April issue, let me say that local churches are well adept at holding pastors responsible for the well being, growth, and expanded ministries of a congregation....However, clergy are also evaluated by their denominational superiors. Whereas pastors are evaluated by their congregations on their ability to assimilate into the group (i.e., integrate with the congregation), denominational hierarchies are inclined to evaluate clergy on their ability to lead the group into new ventures (i.e., individuate from the congregation). A pastor who integrates with a congregation will have difficulty leading it; conversely, a pastor who individuates from the congregation may do so at the expense of his or her relationships. The congregational and hierarchical expectations of pastors live in tension and are, at their extremes, contradictory. This necessitates pastors having the ability to adapt their functioning according to ever changing circumstances. Pastors in appointment systems may be especially sensitive to their hierarchy's expectations, for it is the hierarchy that has established the reward system for future appointments.

REV. HAYDN MCLEAN
New Holland United Methodist Church
New Holland, Pennsylvania

A Satisfying Read

NOT THAT THEY AREN'T ALL VERY GOOD, but the JAN/FEB 2002 issue of CONGREGATIONS really hit the nail on the head for me and for what I see happening in the church. It is one of the incredibly few times I have read through all the major articles in one weekend. Bleiberg's article ("A Pathway to Wisdom," p. 5) really affirmed what I find happening to me in these later years— "increased energy, patience and humor" (p. 23).... Diana Bass's article on patriotism struck home because we just went through a pretty emotional discussion at our last men's breakfast of why there was no flag in the sanctuary. I especially connected with James Wind's words about Diana Eck ("Leadership for a New Religious America," p. 29) and immigrant religion because we used the Alban video on the very same topic during December, concluding with a local Muslim leader as a guest speaker. Probably most helpful was Wood's article ("Choosing the Pastoral Life," p. 16) on how the ways in which pastoral ministry are seen as burden can be viewed as blessing. I wish I had had that insight about 30 years ago. I'm grateful to be able to appreciate it now.

REV. FRED WIESE
Gethsemane Lutheran Church
Columbus, Ohio

The Missing Link

We hear much talk these days about the role of congregations in public life. For good or ill they are active agents in shaping our shared life. President Bush and Charitable Choice advocates seek to remove legal barriers so that congregations can serve the common good with public money. Congregations, by this logic, can deal more effectively than most institutions with problems such as homelessness, illiteracy, addiction, and recidivism—and in so doing make pivotal social contributions.

Another logic runs contrary to the first: congregations in their private practices cover up issues of race, class, and economic disparity. They are too frequently places of denial about sexual abuse and homophobia—thus, congregations can weaken our public life by patterns of silence and avoidance. Instead of building bridges of understanding between religions and cultures, they foster hatreds and misunderstandings.

Paying Lip Service

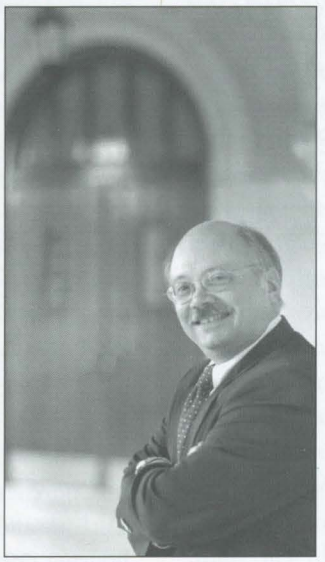
We tend to think of congregations and public life in terms of clergy who represent congregations in the public arena, or of congregations that collectively take a stand. In both conventional concepts we leap over the key link between congregations and public life—members themselves. While paying lip service to the "ministry of the laity," we revert to thinking either of official representatives or of institutional advocacy.

Both prophetic professional leaders and compelling institutional stands are essential for congregations to make an impact in public life. Both inspire and challenge. But they are not the whole story. The public is made up of citizens—many of whom are in our pews on Saturday or Sunday—and many discounted as people who infrequently attend, do not pledge, and remain inactive in most congregational programs.

I pondered this mystery as I accompanied a group of civic and business leaders on a tour of the Maryland High Technology Corridor beyond Washington's Capital Beltway. Our journey took us into a world of acronyms, high technology, specialized scientific languages, and ethical quandaries. We learned that breakthroughs at the National Institutes of Health may put a cure for diabetes on pharmacy shelves within a few years. At the University of Maryland's Biotechnology Institute we heard about protein structures, molecular modeling, and the "plasticity" of the brain that allows it to make connections or break them, and to reorganize information flows. Then we moved on to TIGR, the Institute for Genomic Research, where scientists are unraveling the mysteries of DNA and chromosomes. Most of what we saw was of such sophistication and intricacy that our group was reduced to silence or amazement. We stood on the edge of a new world—but one that was here and now.

What Role for Congregations?

How do congregations and clergy contribute to the public good in a rapidly evolving arena? Persuading a congregation to take a stand on any one of the ethical issues raised by the new science would take years—and the congregants would still lag behind the learning curve. Asking clergy and other professional leaders to acquire the knowledge to develop an informed opinion on one of these topics would require costly and unsustainable lifetime immersions in specialized arenas. So must we choose between glaring ignorance or deafening silence?



What about the scientists themselves? Even if we allow the stereotypical portrait of scientists as "more secular than thou," we still have to make room for precious anomalies—members who may sit silently in congregational discussions and then speak out bravely during work hours on the ethical frontiers of their specialized professions. How are congregations equipping their members for this important public work—the task of mediating between faith tradition and public arena? I sense that the answer is mixed.

Many congregations send messages that the only way to fulfill one's religious calling is by participating in church or synagogue work—serving on committees, reading lessons, instructing children in the faith. All are important parts of religious life. But to reduce the life of faith to activities within the congregation's walls is to lose the public connections, the links between faith and world. A few congregations—like Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C.—celebrate the daily vocations of members and see these public lives of faith as means of grace for the world. A few others seek to become leadership academies that equip and support their members to lead in these challenging spheres. But to connect faith and public life, we must value the links our members make; we must equip these people to make the connections between public life and faith that our old assumptions about ministry miss entirely.

Rev. Dr. James P. Wind is the president of the Alban Institute. Prior to joining the Institute in 1995, he served as program director at the Lilly Endowment's religion division. Dr. Wind is the author of three books and numerous articles, including the new Alban Institute Special Report on Leadership.

Addressing the Housing Crisis

How Your Congregation Can Make a Difference

DEANN LANCASHIRE

No single entity can accomplish as much as groups working together. If government, churches, businesses, financial institutions, and educational institutions combine their commitment, strategies, and resources, communities in the United States will be able to rebuild poor neighborhoods, making them communities of hope and opportunity for social and economic justice. One housing advocate and activist has been quoted as saying, "There are more churches in America than there are homeless families." What would happen in our communities if every church adopted a homeless family—or made affordable housing a priority?

Churches and faith communities are in a unique and vital position to help solve the housing crisis, as well as other social ills. Biblical injunctions, in the Old and New Testaments, make very clear our obligation as people of God to help people in need.

> *Is not this the fast that I choose? . . . Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?* (Isa. 58:6)
>
> *If you see a brother or sister in need and do nothing to help them, how can the love of God be in you?* (1 John 3:17)

As communities of faith, we are the body of Christ. We are God's hands: God's emissaries to the poor; we are God's voice: God's advocates for the poor. When we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy

will be done, on earth . . ." we are in effect agreeing to cooperate with God by bringing to our world God's design for communities of peace and justice.

The members of your church have a wealth of skills and knowledge as well as roots in the community. In your congregation there are teachers, city officials, social workers, business people, real estate brokers, contractors, bankers, and others who are aware of the many needs in your neighborhood. Some have immense financial resources. Some in your midst have very few tangible resources but can give firsthand accounts of their needs and struggles. As a gathering place for people of faith, no other organization is better equipped, spiritually and materially, to address the needs of the poor in your community. Together, with the proper understanding, guidance, and organization, the people of your church can work toward making God's kind of community a reality.

Initially, you might use the following summary of the crisis to raise awareness in your congregation about housing issues. Housing issues differ greatly from one region to another, so you will also want to do further research about the housing needs in your state, county, and neighborhood, and also share that information with members of your church.

The Crisis

Homelessness and housing issues are complex. One glaring problem, however, is found across the entire nation: a decreasing supply of affordable housing units. A 1998 study by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities found major housing shortages in almost all of America's 45 largest metropolitan areas, as well as in rural communities.

Housing is considered affordable if 30 percent or less of family income is spent on housing costs. This means a family making $3,000 a month should spend no more than $900 a month on rent and utilities combined. According to National Housing Data, there are only 40 affordable units available for every 100 low-income renters. Right now, more than five million low-income American renters spend 50 to 80 percent of their income on housing costs, leaving very little for other necessities. For them, the threat of homelessness is real, especially if they should suffer a major illness or accident, or lose a job or a spouse.

The lack of affordable housing in America is causing severe social problems, including more homelessness among the working poor. The 2001 U.S. Conference of Mayors from 27 U.S. cities reported an average 22 percent increase in requests for emergency shelter assistance from homeless families alone. Fifty-two percent of these requests went unmet. And the problem is getting worse. All over America shelters are full; affordable housing units are full; waiting lists are full; and every day hundreds of thousands of people are turned away empty.

For every homeless person in a shelter or on the streets, many more live in unstable or temporary housing situations. Staying in cheap hotels is often the last step before becoming homeless. Evidence shows that many women, especially those with children, will stay with abusive partners rather than face homelessness. Others survive by doubling up with another family, which creates overcrowding problems.

Overcrowding, a common result of a lack of affordable housing, is defined as one or more persons per room, not including bathrooms and hallways. For example, four persons living in a one-bedroom unit with a kitchen, dining area, and living room is considered overcrowded. Studies show that children from at-risk or overcrowded home environments suffer chronic illnesses, learning difficulties, and behavior problems at a much higher rate than children in adequate housing. In addition, overcrowding is illegal and such families risk eviction and may end up on the streets.

> Churches and faith communities are in a unique and vital position to help solve the housing crisis, as well as other social ills.

Roots of the Affordability Problem

Social scientists, researchers, and analysts point to several issues as sources of the housing shortage:

The Affordability Gap. The increasing numbers of poor renters combined with the declining numbers of affordable units has created the worst affordability gap on record. Between 1974 and 1993, rent climbed 13 percent and wages decreased by 8 percent.

Loss of Formerly Affordable Units. Public outcry against "slumlords" and drug houses has resulted in the demolition of much of what used to be affordable housing. Rundown firetraps and old public housing projects are being torn down and replaced by offices or market-rent units, too expensive for low or moderate-income families.

The Section 8 Wait. The Section 8 rent-subsidy program works on a voucher system and reimburses landlords a portion of the rent. People applying to the program have an average 20-month wait to become certifiably eligible for Section 8 housing. After certification they can apply for a Section 8 voucher, which they need to have in hand to show potential landlords, but the wait for vouchers takes up to 22 months. By the time they get a voucher, Section 8 renters have another wait: it takes an average of 16 months for a unit to become available. This translates to a nearly five-year wait.

Increasing Costs. Affordable housing can be an oxymoron. Land is expensive, not to mention the costs of contractors, materials, permits, and fees needed to build housing according to strict building codes. Although these higher standards in building codes ensure safer buildings and environments, they also ensure high rent and mortgages.

Neighborhood Resistance. The American public does want something done about homelessness and the housing crisis—as long as it happens in someone else's neighborhood. Whenever affordable housing is proposed in a moderate-income neighborhood, a nonprofit developer often faces red tape and intense resistance. Many neighborhoods pass strict zoning

regulations to exclude affordable housing. This "Not In My Back Yard" attitude, or "NIMBYism," has killed many nonprofit affordable housing projects.

Lack of Political Will. Government policies have turned away from housing assistance in recent years. Housing is such a complex and controversial issue that politicians rarely use it as a platform for rallying support. For the sake of balancing the budget, the government has made major funding cuts in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Little money is available for subsidizing rents anymore, and the Section 8 housing program is being downsized—to the point of becoming nearly nonexistent. The resulting crisis of homelessness and lack of affordable housing has been called by some "the problem that cannot be solved."

Basic Education

In order to help members of your church understand the need to address housing issues in your community, you might want to begin with some of the following activities:

- Include information provided in the above summary of housing issues for newsletters, bulletin inserts, and education forums to provide an orientation to the issues.
- Visit various facilities in order to get different perspectives on homelessness and housing issues. Such facilities include emergency homeless shelters, transitional housing, and permanent affordable housing.
- Contact your local Housing and Urban Development office to learn about your community's homeless assistance plans. This plan lays out the need for assistance; what housing and services are being provided to meet those needs; the gaps between the two; and what the community is proposing to fill these gaps.
- Talk to homeless people. Befriend a homeless or low-income family struggling with housing issues. Find out what life is like for them.
- Find some local churches that are addressing housing or community development issues and invite speakers to your church.
- Volunteer at a homeless assistance facility or a building project, such as Habitat for Humanity.
- Learn about the various support services for the homeless and low-income renters. Services might include job training and placement, medical, chemical and mental health, ESL, GED preparation, literacy, child care, teen programs, and legal assistance. Many organizations and facilities offer housing and services at the same location.
- The Internet is an excellent educational tool. You can learn a lot about housing issues, find organizations in your area, and discover a project you would like your church to become involved with or emulate without ever leaving your computer. Listed under "Current Issue" at the Alban Institute Web site (www.alban.org) are Web sites and contact information of various organizations addressing housing, homelessness, and other related topics.
- Print out some of the fact sheets from the National Coalition for the Homeless and the latest issues of "NIMBY Report" from the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, and read them to your board or congregation.

Next Steps

At this point your church should have a fairly good idea of your community's particular housing issues. The questions in the sidebar on page 9 are designed to elicit discussion and help your group determine its focus and mission.

People who work in successful housing and service programs highly recommend intentional relationship building and collaboration with other groups. In Richmond, Virginia, Strategies to Elevate People (STEP) social services programs emphasize the importance of proceeding "carefully, cautiously and with commitment; avoiding fads, abstaining from quick fixes, and building quality relationships with community and people of good will."

There is no set formula to tell you how to progress. Every church and every area's needs are unique, and there is plenty of room for innovation as well as replication in creating affordable housing. Your church must pray and work together to figure things out; however, if you follow the suggestions of educating yourself and your congregation, if you form discussion groups and committees of informed people, if you walk by faith and not by sight, a way will open.

Overcoming Barriers

Faith-based groups encounter all kinds of obstacles to their projects, whether organized as a legal nonprofit corporation or carried out in some other manner. In addition to the usual difficulties that come when working with people, you will face institutional fortresses, which are not built to suffer change. The education and partnership organizations listed under "Current Issue" on the Alban Institute Web site can help you prepare for and navigate around barriers such as obtaining startup, program, and staffing funds; staffing gaps; federal, state, and local regulations; discrimination, and many other unforeseen difficulties. The more complex your initiative, the more thought you will want to give to resources and strategies for overcoming barriers. A number of possibilities are available.

1. Working with government agencies. Some states, cities, or counties have a state faith-based and community initiatives liaison or someone in a local office or agency whose role it is to connect faith-based organizations to the appropriate government agencies. It is a good idea to work with one of these officials early in your development process.

2. Tailoring the program. Another important strategy for overcoming common barriers is to tailor your program to the needs of the people in your area. If you do your homework and get to know the people in need of services, you will be more likely to create a successful program. An excellent way to do this is to conduct a "listening campaign." Talk to low-income people in your church or community: visit churches in poor neighborhoods and ask the people about their housing concerns, the problems they face, and services they lack. Include at least one or two low-income people or people of color on your committee or

teams; it is only just and right that they take part in developing the programs that will have an impact on them.

3. Drawing on members' skills. It is also vital to grow your program according to the skills and experience of your parishioners. People have a hard time getting excited and involved in programs they have not helped develop. They may feel as if they are being made to fit into prefabricated "boxes" or roles and will not be able to sustain interest and enthusiasm for long. On the other hand, people who are invested in a project will commit themselves to it. A program with enthusiastic, committed volunteers will attract other volunteers with like passion. The most successful programs are ones that address the needs of the community while building upon the expertise, stories, and energies of the people of the church.

4. Establishing partnerships. Building steady partnerships with churches and other organizations will also help reduce the turnover rate and strengthen your nonprofit. Find a few people with good networking, communication, or fundraising skills who will commit to building partnerships. Let them work to create a campaign of mutual investment, so other churches, community groups, and local businesses can feel some ownership in your organization and its efforts. Educate those partnering congregations using the principles and suggestions discussed earlier, such as poverty simulation.

One inner-city transitional housing program provided a way for nearby suburban churches to take ownership in its projects. The volunteer coordinator enlisted three different churches to help buy three different buildings. Each church raised money and awareness, sending volunteers to help rehabilitate and furnish its unit. A healthy competition and unifying camaraderie developed among the various volunteers; this in turn created a connection of community between the urban and suburban neighborhoods. Each facility was named after each church, and those churches now feel the responsibility and desire to maintain an active presence in their projects. They built unity along with transitional housing units—a unity that continues to enrich their lives and neighborhoods.

5. Working with businesses. Consider working with your local banks and other businesses as well as other churches. One Minnesota bank gives substantial annual contributions to Our Saviour's Housing and also sends meals and volunteers every month. Complex projects depend on the stability that partnerships provide.

6. Learning from success. Studying other successful faith-based housing and service projects will help strengthen the development of your own nonprofit. The Fannie Mae Foundation's Web site publishes profiles of their Sustained Excellence and Maxwell Awards recipients. These stories prove that with determination and the right connections, faith-based nonprofits can overcome incredible obstacles and create wonderful opportunities for justice and renewal in even the most desperate neighborhoods.

Your church can play an important role in helping to change society by actively addressing housing issues in your neighborhood. It will be an exciting adventure, but it will not be easy. Like all pioneers, you will face frustrations, barriers, and even dangers to your mission. There may be times when you feel like giving up, but if you organize, pool your many resources, and work together, you will discover a new way of life; a way of life that vitalizes your church and community. Individually and corporately, the people of your church will learn valuable lessons. Your faith will be challenged in many ways, but it will become stronger as it becomes more practical and tangible. ◆

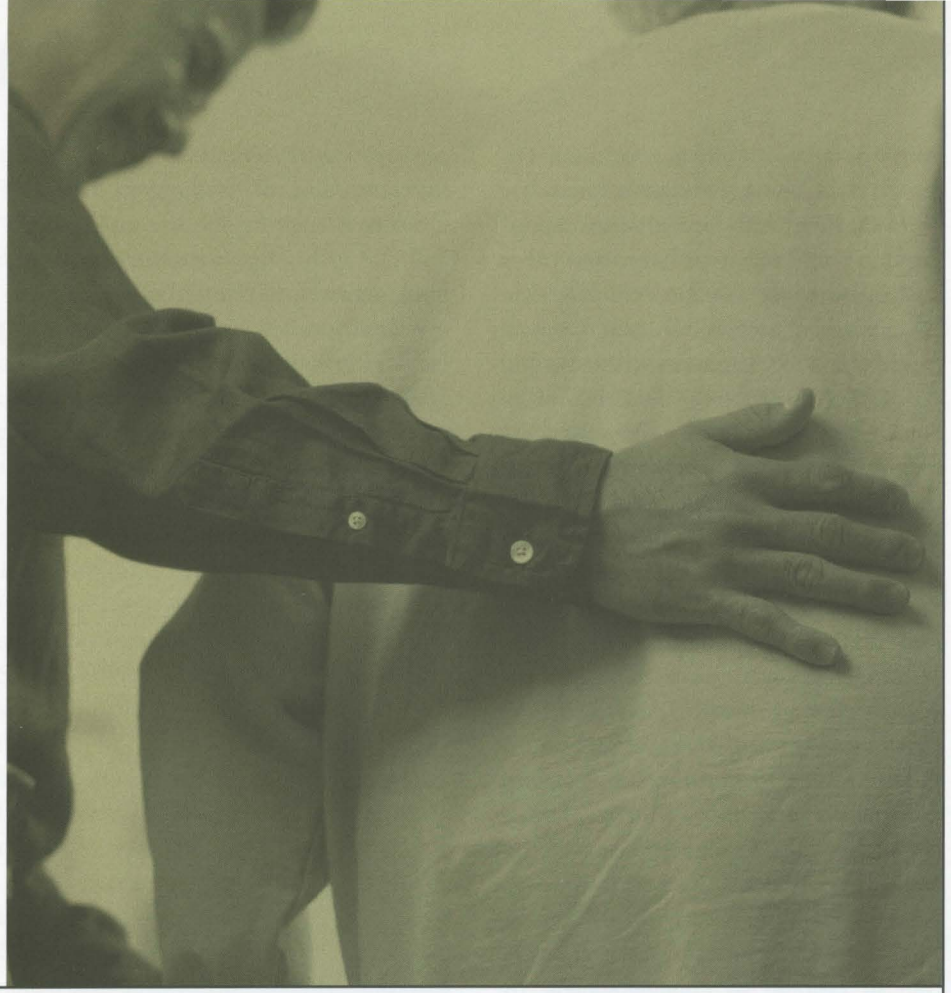
This article was excerpted from an appendix in *Starting a Nonprofit at Your Church* by Joy Skjegstad. This book will be published by the Alban Institute in September 2002 (AL255). To order, call 1-800-486-1318, ext. 244, or order online at **www.alban.org**.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For congregational stories and a list of resources, please visit us on the Web at **www.alban.org** and go to "Current Issue."

Questions You Need to Ask Before You Act

1. **Why are you interested in creating housing or home ownership opportunities for people of color and the poor?**
2. **In your opinion, why is the creation of affordable housing for low-income and people of color often fought against?**
3. **How should the community hold organizations, agencies, and governmental bodies accountable for creating affordable housing?**
4. **What entities in the community should lead the campaign for creating housing and home ownership opportunities for low-income people?**
5. **What affordable housing strategies do you think hold the most hope for success?**
6. **How should faith communities deal with public policy regarding housing and home ownership opportunities for the poor and people of color?**
7. **How can we work together and partner with other groups to strengthen our efforts? With whom should we partner?**
8. **How can we make sure that low-income people are ensured a permanent place in the planning and decision-making processes on issues that affect them?**
9. **What is in it for us as an organization to be proponents of affordable housing?**
10. **What do you as an individual need to get out of the effort?**



Public Health and the Private Soul

Inside Shepherd's Hand Clinic in Whitefish, Montana

LINDA-MARIE DELLOFF

Speaking before a group has never been Meg Erickson's favorite activity. As a skilled and dedicated nurse, she would much rather spend her time in the practice of her profession. But there she is on a Sunday morning, speaking from the pulpit of Christ Lutheran Church to the 400 or so parishioners packing the sanctuary. Erickson will do almost anything if it's in the service of Shepherd's Hand Clinic, the free medical ministry she administers in the church building with her physician husband, Jay Erickson, and a host of other volunteers. The Ericksons are members of the congregation in the small town of Whitefish, Montana, where the clinic has been operating successfully since late 1995, filling a significant need. Every so often Meg Erickson brings the congregation up to date on the clinic's latest developments.

Whitefish is located in the state's remote northwestern corner, not far from Glacier National Park. The town's economy depends largely on tourism. Here in the mountains, the tourist season is confined primarily to the warm months. Even with an increase in winter sports, jobs in the tourism industry still tend to be seasonal and temporary. Most carry no benefits. That means, above all, no health insurance.

Businesses directly or indirectly serving tourism include motels, restaurants, nightspots, recreational facilities, clothing or sporting goods stores, and gift shops. In fact, almost everyone in town depends at least partially on tourism for economic support. The area's employers are not a bunch of hard-hearted, penny-pinching grinches. Many of them would like to be able to provide employee health insurance but work under the same economic and seasonal restrictions as their workers do, and are simply not able to afford it.

The tourism workers are often young adults drawn to the area for its natural beauty and the idea of living "close to nature." They frequently come to Whitefish without a job, optimistic and full of expectation. Other tourism employees are longtime residents whose education or other circumstances have limited their job opportunities to waitressing, cleaning cabins, kitchen work, or grounds upkeep.

Meeting Basic Needs

The Ericksons came to Whitefish in the early 1990s from the Midwest. The longer they practiced medicine in the new location, the more they noticed increases in the number of people unable to afford even basic medical care. Having chosen their vocations in the first place as a way of living out their faith, the Ericksons found the situation distressing. They discussed the problem with other parishioners, and at a church council retreat in early 1995, says Meg Erickson, "The idea for a free clinic, as a mission outreach, was born." After careful research and preparation, the clinic opened in October of that year.

Since that time, the clinic has served between 800 and 1,200 patients per year and, at one time, had to turn away some seeking care. It simply could not accommodate all the people from the wider geographical area who showed up needing care. Fortunately, the demonstration of need and Shepherd's Hand's success inspired a second clinic in nearby Kalispell, run by the Salvation Army.

Shepherd's Hand is completely lay organized and lay led, but the pastors are "very supportive," according to Meg Erickson, and the ministry operates in the context of the congregation's overall theology and mission. According to the Reverend John Bent, senior pastor at Christ Lutheran, it reflects a conscious process the congregation undertook to "move from a control-based [concept of] ministry to a mission-based position. We needed to take our eyes off of ourselves," he explains. The first step in this process, says Bent, was "a worship-renewal stage. That had to come before anything else, including social ministry."

According to Bent, part of rethinking worship led to this conclusion: "The reason we exist as a church is for the sake of those who aren't here"—that is, those who are outside the church. The clinic is "an expression of our faith," says Bent. It has "opened the congregation's eyes" and helped people change their attitude about how they can perform ministry. It has even changed their views about the church building itself. They used to worry that "if other people come in, they might mess it up." Now, Bent comments, their attitude is: "In how many ways can we use our building for our community?"

A Quick Transformation

Shepherd's Hand Clinic meets once a week in the evening. The work starts with volunteers delving into church closets to take out the stored medical equipment and supplies. They quickly transform church rooms into various kinds of medical facilities. The social room becomes an intake and waiting area where the workers set up tables and chairs. Magazines are available for patients to pass the time, as are toys for children. Sometimes the church's youth group or other volunteers supply cookies.

The two pastors' offices become medical examining rooms, their regular furniture temporarily moved aside to accommodate wheeled examining tables. Another area becomes a makeshift pharmacy, where volunteer Bob Grady, a retired pharmacist, holds careful discussions with patients and either dispenses prescribed medications donated by local pharmacies or gives the patient a voucher that a pharmacy will fill. Another source of medicine is physician-donated samples. Grady was the clinic's first volunteer, and has not missed a night since its opening.

The entire clinic staff are volunteers, with Meg Erickson functioning as clinic administrator. All work on a rotating basis, serving as often as they can. In addition to church members, there are volunteers from other churches, civic organizations, and the entire community. There is currently a waiting list of volunteers. The Ericksons have recruited doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals from local practices and hospitals. Usually there are two physicians and a nurse on duty whenever the clinic is open. Hospitals and specialists take referrals for clinic patients who have serious problems such as a major illness or a need for surgery. In such cases, there are ways to help a patient finance very large expenditures.

> "The reason we exist as a church is for the sake of those who aren't here."

Carefully trained volunteers fill out detailed questionnaires with each patient about his or her health and financial circumstances. An evening's problems will range from flu symptoms, to follow-up on chronic heart conditions or diabetes, to job injuries. The latter are common among the area's self-employed construction workers who might be helping to build a new motel or a house for a wealthy summer vacationer. One night, a Ukranian immigrant who couldn't speak English arrived in a van driven by his son. He was experiencing back pain so severe that he couldn't walk, so the doctor went out to see him in the parking lot.

The staff always tries to see children first. The volunteers, including the physicians, dress in jeans or other casual wear to put patients at ease. Communication is informal—and strictly confidential. In a small town, patients are sensitive about receiving medical "charity" and don't want it voiced about. Volunteers are careful to oblige. For example, Rich Dolven, a local school principal and member of Christ Church, works as a behind-the-scenes office helper processing paper instead of doing something more visible like intake. He doesn't want to embarrass parents or children whom he may see the next day at school. Dolven notes that the clinic has had an interesting effect on the congregation and on his own spiritual life. It has "given a direction" to generalized wishes to help and has concretized the church's mission.

"It's the Economy"

Many of the clinic patients are working people and are reluctant to seek charity. According to Meg Erickson, "68 percent of our patients make less than $11,000 per year even though 50 percent of them are employed." For those who are unemployed for health reasons, one of the clinic's goals is to help them become well enough to hold a job. Even then, though, the insurance problem may remain.

Just as all work is performed by volunteers, all finances and supplies are donated—by individuals and groups from the church and the larger community. Some of the financial contributors include small businesses that would like to provide health insurance for their employees but

can't afford it. For example, two members of Christ Church own a local pub and music spot. Their employees do not receive benefits. The pub owners make financial contributions to the clinic as well as volunteering when it is in session. Other community donations have included low-cost bank loans for patients with major medical expenses.

Patients are asked to pay a token fee of $5.00 if they can afford it. In this way, says Meg Erickson, if people "become a partner in their own care," even in a minor way, they are more apt to take responsibility and follow up with physicians' advice. The patients also make contributions in kind. One volunteered to mow the church's grass and shovel snow. When patients have died, family members have donated their unopened medications back to the clinic to help others.

Step by Step

Clinic development was deliberate and methodical. The first step was to establish a steering committee whose initial responsibility was to identify and probe need. That group conducted local research, contacting the county health department, local hospitals, and physicians. Two goals were to avoid duplication of services and to build a sense of community interest and support. For example, the county has an immunization program so the clinic did not include that in its plans. A key to success at every stage, says Erickson, was "a lot of communication."

Steering committee members also researched how other free clinics around the country (not necessarily church-related) have managed and what lessons they have learned. They came at the issue from another side, too: How had other churches dealt with health-care needs in their own location?

Step two, networking within the community, included purchasing the mailing list from the local Chamber of Commerce and contacting all of its members for their advice and support. They also met one-on-one with local bankers and with community leaders to introduce the idea of the clinic and request feedback. The goal was to build community awareness, interest, and potential for cooperation. The organizers wanted to emphasize that this new ministry was intended for the entire public and that they needed help in establishing it. When it was near time for the clinic to open, organizers placed notices in newspapers and everywhere else people might see them. They gave talks around the community to inform people of the new service.

Further steps are documented in clinic records. As the Shepherd's Hand ministry has evolved, its organizers have maintained a simple history from the program's pre-beginnings up through the present. The record of each step includes dates, which provide an overall picture of the time needed for various stages. Administrators can look back and compare results with initial goals, chart progress, see where they took a wrong turn, and learn from experience. A running history can be helpful for any kind of public ministry, especially in the capacity-developing stages. A log of a previously established ministry can also be used to start a new one since many of the steps are the same regardless of the ministry's content.

Learning from Mistakes

Shepherd's Hand is a good example of a ministry that is flexible and can change according to needs and resources. For example, in 2001 the clinic added two new components to its offerings: a dental clinic and a prayer ministry.

According to Meg Erickson, clinic organizers had always hoped to include dental services. However, they moved gradually and took one step at a time. When they felt ready to expand into dentistry, they set up a trial program. That attempt ultimately proved unsuccessful due to unforeseen organizational problems. Of necessity, the dental clinic operated away from the church, in the offices of the volunteer dentists. After a time, says Erickson, it became obvious that there was too little communication back and forth between those offices and the clinic administrators.

Also, the dentists were not always clear on expectations of their services and ended up feeling overwhelmed by the program. Shepherd's Hand suspended dental care while it regrouped and reorganized. Erickson stresses that it's important to learn from mistakes—not to regard them as failures but as valuable lessons and learning experiences. On the second try, the dental clinic has operated much more smoothly. Changes have included training clinic volunteers to act as liaisons. They accompany a patient to the dentist's office and take care of all paperwork. The same volunteer accompanies the same patient each time, promoting consistency and familiarity.

Public and Private

The other new Shepherd's Hand addition is a prayer ministry directed by layperson Kris Teeples, who is trained in that skill. There was, she says, a desire among clinic volunteers to offer "more of a wholistic ministry" to patients, addressing needs beyond their specific physical problems. "We wanted to help meet their spiritual needs—but not in any way to impose on them," says Teeples. The challenge was, "How could we be available?" without being too much of a presence and making patients feel uncomfortable.

Teeples and Meg Erickson spent two years carefully thinking through and planning this new and sensitive ministry. Once again, they were flexible and open to learning from experience. For example, on a form they first prepared for patients, this question appeared: "Would you like to pray with someone?" They determined that this wording was too direct and may have seemed like an intrusion on patients' privacy. They later changed the wording to "Would you like to speak with a patient

advocate or a 'caring listener'?" They also retooled their volunteer training, stressing the importance of a volunteer's overall sensitivity toward a patient and his or her special needs.

The prayer ministry has its own mission statement that includes its scriptural foundation and the "three goals of a Shepherd's Hand Prayer Team Member." Teeples has been testing the ministry's methods, attending every clinic session. She has decided that it's best simply to sit at tables with the patients as they wait to be seen, and to strike up general conversation in a natural and relaxed way rather than pointedly bringing up the matter of prayer. That may work itself into the conversation, she says. If it does, she invites the person to go into the sanctuary with her.

Sometimes the volunteer and the patient may simply sit together in silence for awhile. Teeples emphasizes that the most important aspect of her training has been in "how to build relationship." She notes that, interestingly, the patients' most frequent prayer topic "is not their physical needs"; in fact, it's not for themselves at all. Rather, she says, "They may want to pray for problems a family member is having. One evening a mom wanted to pray for her children, who were getting into drugs."

The greatest challenge in the prayer ministry, according to Teeples, is "getting people to step over the comfort zone," that is, to learn to trust the listener and feel at ease in conversation. This is true for all aspects of ministry with strangers. Building trust is essential, but perhaps even more so with prayer since it is such a personal matter.

Part of the Shepherd's Hand Prayer Ministry includes volunteers' commitments to pray regularly at home for clinic patients. This is an intriguing type of public ministry. It does not occur "in" the public or even "with" the public, but, rather, behind the scenes in the privacy of the volunteer's own quiet prayer space. According to Kris Teeples, the experience of taking the ministry home and making it part of one's private life has the additional benefit of significantly enriching the volunteer's own spirituality. It integrates public and private in ways that nothing else can and thereby enhances both. It turns out that the "wholistic ministry approach" the parishioners desired has affected them as much as it has their public.

This is but one discovery in what Pastor John Bent calls the congregation's "attitude and openness to possibilities and freedom regarding mission." It is important once a ministry is established that its organizers remain flexible and responsive to any new possibilities the ministry itself might suggest. Such openness might lead to further creative interpretation of the congregation's mission. This process could result in changes to a current ministry. It could also result in new ways of thinking about that ministry or about ministry in general. ◆

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Similarities Among Successful Public Ministries

Congregations successful in public ministry exhibit a number of similarities. The first six traits listed below deal primarily with DEVELOPING THE CAPACITY to do cutting-edge public ministry, and the last five traits apply to MINISTRIES THAT ARE UP AND RUNNING smoothly.

Congregations that are successful in public ministry:

1. Are WILLING TO TAKE RISKS DESPITE THEIR FEARS.
2. Have a strong "IDEA PERSON," someone who is "inspired" to initiate discussion of a new program.
3. Have a consciously established ATMOSPHERE OF ENCOURAGEMENT.
4. Take care to IDENTIFY THE GIFTS, SKILLS, AND SPECIAL INTERESTS of members before beginning any new ministry.
5. Quickly work ideas into a PRACTICAL PLAN.
6. Make sure that, within reasonable limits, there is some aspect of the project for EVERY AGE GROUP to help with.
7. Have LAY PEOPLE LEAD the public ministries, even if an original idea came from a clergyperson.
8. Weave the public ministries in a variety of ways into EVERY ASPECT OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE.
9. Have good COMMUNICATION, through congregational meetings, reports and announcements presented at worship or meetings, stories in a newsletter, and so on.
10. ENRICH THE CONGREGATION by feeding back into the congregation in ways that benefit members, both as individuals and as a community.
11. KNOW THEIR OWN LIMITS, financial and otherwise.

Excerpted from *Public Offerings*

Beyond Outreach

Worship, Justice, and Radical Hospitality

SHERYL A. KUJAWA-HOLBROOK

As we seek to discover the true meaning of ministry, and as we struggle with what it means to be powerful servants of the servants of God, we do well to bear in mind that, as faithful Christians, we are all in this search for meaning and this struggle for wholeness together. . . . This requires of us a persistent openness to the leading and urgings of God's good Spirit. These urgings often take us down the paths of a new and surprising spirituality as we discern fresh ways of expressing the age-old faith once delivered to the saints.

Kortright Davis, *Serving with Power*

Theologian Kortright Davis's words about the birth of a "new and surprising spirituality"[1] speak to the transformation in congregations that form community amid diversity and social engagement. Many congregations offer personal support and outreach, but such efforts often reinforce homogeneity, rather than promote diversity and advocate for social change. Congregations committed to breaking from the status quo are called to develop a sense of "radical hospitality." Rather than seeking out like members for mutual support, they seek people who consider themselves beyond the reach of organized religion. "Radical hospitality" has not only social, but political and economic implications; it is the act of extending community beyond the margins to those unserved by church, synagogue, or mosque. Rather than limiting their public theology to outreach or charity that maintains the unjust distribution of power and resources, congregations formed in radical hospitality exercise a commitment to justice. This model seeks to transform both the believer and society as a whole.

Of many congregations organized for radical hospitality, I focus on two that have experienced the transformative effects of diversity coupled with social action. In each case, the commitment to worship that provides alternative "metaphors" and challenges members to work for justice profoundly affects the congregation's communal identity. Where old formation models were inadequate, leaders have found new ways to support members spiritually and structurally in action for justice.

Transformation—One Person at a Time

The Rev. Sara (Sally) Boyles, rector at Church of the Holy Trinity, Toronto, since 1993, defines her role as "animator" of the community, with a belief in the power of transformation—"one person at a time." In a congregation devoted to radical hospitality, Boyles sees her function as that of prophetic leader, based in the *process* of transformation, rather than as a minister who holds the congregation together: Boyles seeks to discern where Holy Trinity "is *not* engaged, getting it articulated, and setting it loose."

A "church of inclusivity," Holy Trinity, in downtown Toronto, is part of the Anglican Church of Canada.[2] The community orders its life around worship and the arts, as well as its commitment to social justice. Though "traditional" liturgical fare is offered at an early service, contemporary worship with inclusive language and a diverse rota of laity and clergy preachers forms the core of Holy Trinity's principal Sunday service, where the eucharistic celebration encircles the altar. During the liturgy, the worshipers—activists, theologians, tourists, writers, students, as well as those who live on the streets—share concerns and thanksgivings.

The congregation's commitment to justice is lived out through its ministries, including two downtown affordable apartment buildings, a refugee committee, an ecumenical sanctuary coalition, and hospice care for the terminally ill. A long-standing invitation to the gay and lesbian community remains in force. "We're not experimental," Boyles noted; "we're here to stay."

Holy Trinity was founded in 1846 with a legacy designating funds for a church with pews "free and unappropriated forever," as a protest against pew rents. The new congregation included artisans, shopkeepers, Irish laborers, and middle-class families.

During the 1930s and 1940s Holy Trinity provided food and shelter for the unemployed and servicemen, while addressing affordable housing and the racist treatment of Japanese Americans. In the 1960s and 1970s laity became involved in all aspects of the congregation's life and governance. Pews were unbolted from the floor to allow for creative use of space. Guitars, piano, and singers in the congregation replaced organ music and a paid choir. The congregation's agenda grew to include civil rights, feminist concerns, gay and lesbian issues, peace, and nonviolence.

The church continues to use its buildings as a resource for urban mission. An integral task is systemic analysis of the uses and abuses of power within the parish, the larger church, and the wider community. The church not only shelters the homeless; it continues to fight for affordable housing. Through worship and preaching, leaders educate and inspire.

> The congregation has rejected traditional forms of Christian formation and church membership, widening its embrace to include those underserved by institutional religion.

Boyles sees the need for balance between the individual and the corporate in Holy Trinity's life. "My primary job is to keep enough of a middle to keep the body together." She stresses the need for social activists to nurture their inner lives and to prevent burnout through regular prayer and meditation. She also works to maintain relationships with neighbors and with the local diocese. However, she notes, the justice focus of the congregation suggests that "community" for Holy Trinity is related more to the people and needs of the wider community than to other Anglican parishes. The congregation sees its mission as providing community to the marginalized, wherever they may be, regardless of religious background.

The Experience of God as Liberation

Another congregation engaged in radical hospitality is Church of the Redeemer in Morristown, New Jersey.[3] "We live in tension with belief, book, [and] structure," said the Rev. Philip Dana Wilson, rector since 1987. "The experience of God as liberation is the primary experience by which we make decisions and order our life."

Redeemer calls itself "a Liberation Community in the Christian and Episcopal traditions." The congregation has rejected traditional forms of Christian formation and church membership, widening its embrace to include those underserved by institutional religion. As Wilson noted, "It's not written in stone. We're not after some absolute standard for Christianity."

The sign out front reads: "We Are One Family" and lists the diversity that comprises the congregation—males, females, children, seniors, gays, straights, infants, liberals, conservatives, dreamers, whites, blacks, Christians, non-Christians, questioners, the partnered, the single, those in recovery, searchers, youth. The congregation refers to itself as a family united by questions and dreams "rather than our answers." Visual representations of the parish's commitments include an "It Is a Come as You Are Party" banner, a rainbow flag, the black liberation flag, and a portrait of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Like Holy Trinity, Redeemer offers a traditional worship service early Sunday morning according to *The Book of Common Prayer*, with an inclusive-language Eucharist as the principal Sunday service. The worship committee designs each service, often writing prayers and hymns, as well as observing a series of "liberation holy days" alongside Christian holy days, to underscore God's work of

liberation in the present. The congregation celebrates Martin Luther King Sunday, Recovery Sunday, Holocaust Sunday, and Gay and Lesbian Pride Sunday, among others.

The radical hospitality that pervades worship at Redeemer conveys the congregation's social agenda. The former rectory houses a program for homeless people with HIV/AIDS. The parish house, site of a soup kitchen, houses the homeless for a month each year as part of a local Hospitality Network. An interracial dialogue group meets monthly. Like Holy Trinity, Redeemer extends hospitality to the gay and lesbian community; the parish has blessed same-sex unions since 1991. Redeemer was named "church of the year" in 1996 by the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, as "an ecclesiastical haven for those who have felt themselves to be outside the scope of traditional religious care."

According to Wilson, "the Holy Spirit found" Redeemer through the life and death of Eric Johnson. The son of church members, Johnson contracted AIDS and died in 1990. Through their relationship with Eric and his family, members gained a renewed sense of compassion, and the congregation was transformed. By 1999, church membership was between 150 and 200; by 2001, it had risen to almost 400. "Really being Christian attracted people," said Wilson, "and they responded to that integrity." Today a broad cross-section of church leaders collaborates on ministries within and outside the parish. Members' stewardship commitments include both a financial pledge *and* a ministry pledge. Larry Hamil, pastoral assistant, said that Redeemer "values liberation and really tries to become a family." The role of the rector, he adds, "is to be the vision, the leadership, to hold us together." Hamil said he probably would not be in the church at all without Redeemer: "Even here the church is not God—but we do have a ministry of reconciliation." Redeemer enjoys the support of diocesan leaders, though the congregation's identity (like that of Holy Trinity) is focused beyond its denomination, to welcome those outside organized religion.

Common Ground

Though Holy Trinity and Redeemer are not the only congregations to move beyond "outreach" toward radical hospitality, their stories suggest factors supporting this transformation:

- Through worship, congregations of radical hospitality are called to reevaluate and reinvent their symbolic life and metaphors. Such worship emerges from community concerns. These congregations see *language* as a justice issue, and are sensitive to the need for inclusive

language and inclusive images. Their vibrant worship is a powerful witness and model of formation. Both congregations have collaborative worship committees central to parish life; they prepare extensive service booklets, write hymns, and craft other worship elements. Their spirituality is connected to their Christian and denominational heritage, yet they continue to reinterpret it in light of their social context.

- These congregations welcome all, especially those who would otherwise feel excluded from organized religion. Such parishes evaluate their openness by who is *not* included, and their response to the spiritual hunger of the marginalized.
- Their social justice ministries are "beyond outreach" because they are rooted in a systemic approach to oppression and social change. They envision radical hospitality as a way for the congregation to serve the marginalized. Leaders are conversant about the dynamics of power and teach it as part of religious formation. Moreover, for congregations the marginalized are *in their midst* rather than strangers who live elsewhere.
- Leadership in such congregations requires vision, as well as the capacity to cope creatively with ambiguity and risk. Skills in collaboration, the ability to hold multiple perspectives, and the capacity for discernment are important. The media-savvy leaders in these congregations effectively communicate the mission.
- Finally, ministry and stewardship are inextricably linked. All members are challenged to root their lives in worship and social justice as *spiritual* disciplines. These congregations strive to use their wealth for the transformation of church and society.

Radical hospitality is an important model for the transformation of today's congregations that live amid diversity and human need. These faith communities serve to deepen the personal and corporate dimensions of faith. ◆

Notes

1. Kortright Davis, *Serving with Power: Reviving the Spirit of Christian Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 145.

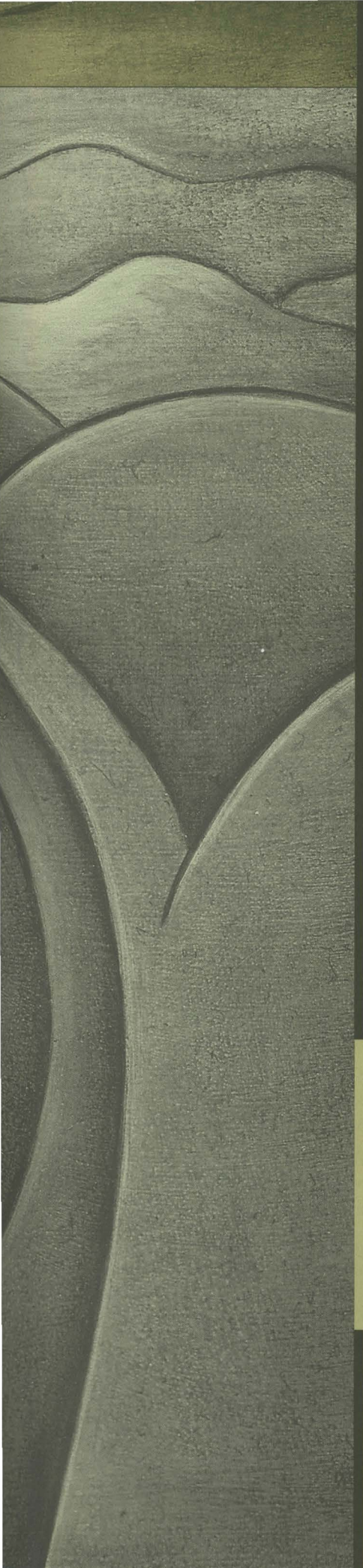
2. The Church of the Holy Trinity produces a variety of publications, as well as a Web site; these discuss the congregation's ministries. See *www.holytrinitytoronto.org*. The e-mail address is *ht@holytrinitytoronto.org*. Historical information for this article is drawn from William Whitla, *The Church of the Holy Trinity, 1847-1997: A Short History* (Toronto: Holy Trinity Press, 1997).

3. For background information on the Church of the Redeemer and its ministries, see www.redeemermorristown.org. The congregation was named one of the 300 Outstanding Churches in the United States by a project at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, funded by Lilly Endowment of Indianapolis. See Paul Wilkes, *Excellent Protestant Congregations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 234–35. See also Errol Glee and James Broderick: "Holy Unique: Rejuvenated Mission Fills Church and Other Empty Space," *Morris Magazine* (October 2000): 78; Jon Block, "Study Lauds Morristown Church," *Daily Record* (Feb. 19, 2001): A1; Darran Simon, "Church Focuses on Evils of Racism," *Daily Record* (Jan. 29, 2001): A11; Colleen Ninz, "Cues for the journey are hidden in plain view," *The Voice* (March 2001): 12.

Characteristics of Radical Hospitality

No precise recipe exists for "radical hospitality" in congregations. Transformation is a journey, a *process*, for congregational engagement, not a destination. But these characteristics suggest movement toward "radical hospitality":

1. A clear community identity and commitment to a vision of justice in a pluralistic society.
2. Deliberate inclusion of marginalized groups and others not traditionally served by organized religion.
3. Worship and ritual that communicate and support the congregation's mission, designed from a diversity of sources, not denominational sources alone.
4. Formation and education supporting individuals of all ages spiritually and in vocation and witness in the world.
5. Emerging ministries reflecting the needs of the congregation's social context.
6. Collaborative leaders willing to take risks for justice and to undertake projects with uncertain outcomes.
7. Leaders who preach and teach about the dynamics of power and oppression.
8. A perspective on the congregation as the source of both formation and transformation of members amid constant change.
9. A willingness to devote all the congregation's wealth and resources—human, financial, real estate—to the community's mission.
10. The ability to re-engage and reinterpret ancient truths in the contemporary context—a theology that is emergent and fluid rather than static.



Embracing the Public Arena

As a parish pastor, I love the sanctuary. It holds a calming, quiet beauty. One may hear shooting in the streets but in the sanctuary people share the peace. Outside is abusive, vulgar language. Inside language is sacred. Outside is gross inequality. Inside everyone stands equal in confession and kneels equal at the altar. Outside is a maddening, chaotic pace. Inside is orderly, liturgical time. Outside are the words of politicians. Inside is the word of God. I resonate to the words of Psalm 84: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord....For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere."

Children of poverty are drawn to the sanctuary. They come, often without their parents or guardians. They come, with little encouragement or invitation. They come, often out of destructive, abusive households. They come because in the sanctuary they experience beauty, peacefulness, warmth, affirmation: the presence of God.

Pastor Dennis A. Jacobsen offers a biblical mandate for churches in the 21st century

I am struck by the impact of the sanctuary on those who enter it. I have seen drunks, addicts, and criminals become subdued and attentive when they enter the sanctuary. Some fear it, as if they will be stricken by God for entering unworthy into a holy place. When congregants approach the altar for communion, I am moved to tears at times by the aggregate pain of the private lives made known to me as pastor. And I am struck by the hope, the determination, the trust in God that these congregants find in the sanctuary. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.

But the attraction of the sanctuary can become a seduction. The sanctuary can be exploited and used to create false catharsis instead of authentic hope. The liturgy can be a vehicle for entering a disembodied drama instead of an incarnational vision. The

sanctuary may serve only as a comfortable substitute for the harsh realities outside its walls. A mystery religion may be the result, void of any power to impact the world as it is.

Biblical Understandings

Biblically speaking, the preeminent activity of the church is in the public arena, not in the sanctuary. The Holy Spirit calls and gathers the church and sends the church into the world with the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit takes the church into the public arena so that the church can be the church. The explosive outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the subsequent narrative of the book of Acts are powerful descriptions of the emerging church engaging the public arena, witnessing to the resurrected Lord Jesus amidst prinicipalities and powers, and paying dearly for its witness through prosecution and imprisonment. To resist this summons to public life is to resist the Holy Spirit.

The church enters the public arena because it is mandated to do so by the Great Commission of Jesus. The church is sent by its Lord to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing . . . and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). This commission has nothing to do with church growth. The primary concern of the church in the public arena is not to find more members to fill the pews of the sanctuary. The church is sent into the public arena with the ethical imperatives of Jesus. The church is to proclaim the kingdom of God over against the kingdoms of the world. The church is to make disciples who actually live by and observe the teachings of the Lord.

The evangelistic mission of the church conforms to Jesus's own mission. The Spirit of the Lord who anointed Jesus "to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18-19) sends the church into the public arena with the same mission as its Lord. The evangelistic proclamation of the church must be liberative, must offer good news to the poor, must be faithful to the ethics of Jesus. Evangelistic efforts that claim to flow from the Great Commission but ignore or violate the Sermon on the Mount are not only ignoble but also heretical.

The church focused only on self-preservation may indeed grow and prosper but it will do so at the cost of betraying its Lord and belying its identity. It may save its institutional life while losing its soul. It risks no longer being the church, becoming instead a pseudo-church, a corporate business that markets a product. In a revealing statement to a reporter, the senior pastor of a megachurch in suburban Phoenix was quoted as calling his congregants his "clientele."

The church enters the public arena in order to be the church, in order to be true to itself, in order to be faithful to its Lord, in order to heed the summons of the Holy Spirit. The church faithfully enters what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls the "this-worldliness" of the public arena because God is encountered in the encounter with those who suffer in the world. Jesus was not born in a church but in a stable. Jesus died, not from a heart attack from too many high-cholesterol church dinners, but of crucifixion as an enemy of the Roman state. The public arena is God's arena.

Public Leadership

Who takes the local church into the public arena if not the pastor? If the pastoral leadership of the local church is resistant to a public arena ministry, even the best-intentioned laity will be blocked or deflated in their efforts to engage their congregation in public arena issues. The ambivalence, reluctance, or disdain of most clergy toward the public arena keeps most churches in the sanctuary. Clergy are perceptive enough to know that the public arena can get rough and tumble. The public arena is where you can get crucified. And so clergy stay in the sanctuary where they are comfortable and where their status is secure. In what is probably an honest gesture, Willow Creek and other megachurches have simply removed the cross as a symbol from their sanctuaries. Forget the public arena. It is easier to worship and adore the middle-class life of comfort and security.

Churches that have been seduced by civil religion—which promotes national enterprise rather than the ethical imperatives of Jesus—engage the public arena but usually do so to support capital punishment, military build-up, or other social policies that are punitive toward people in poverty, immigrants, and people of color. They are guided by servitude to the dominant culture, not by servanthood to the Sermon on the Mount. This response is nothing new. Historically, the church has often aligned itself with oppressive forces and crucified its Lord anew. Small wonder that many reflective persons would prefer to see the church

In what is probably an honest gesture, Willow Creek and other megachurches have simply removed the cross as a symbol from their sanctuaries. Forget the public arena. It is easier to worship and adore the middle-class life of comfort and security.

stay in the sanctuary where it can remain irrelevant and do little harm.

This does not alter the summons of Jesus to the public arena, however. The Great Commission demands it. The Sermon on the Mount guides it. As St. Augustine says, "God has a work to do with us that cannot be done without us." This work of God with us has to do not only with the sanctification of our inner being but with the salvation history of the world. In fact, both are interrelated. Any sanctification that precludes involvement in the world must be rendered suspect. Any involvement in the world that disregards sanctification is dangerous. The activity of God in the public arena is incarnational and co-creational. God's work is done through human beings. There is no purity in this work, just as there is no purity in human beings. If the church awaits pure action, it will never act. If the church keeps one ear to the Sermon on the Mount and the other ear to the cries of suffering humanity, perhaps it will learn to act in ways that contribute to God's salvation history. If not, God will find other servants than the church for the work that must be done. God's activity in the world is certainly not limited to what the church does or fails to do.

The Christians who are so generous with food baskets at Thanksgiving or with presents for the poor at Christmas often vote into office politicians whose policies ignore or crush those living in poverty.

Works of Mercy

What is the nature of the church's work in the public arena? I recall meeting with a group of bishops and judicatory leaders in Erie, Pennsylvania, to encourage their support of an emerging congregation-based community organization affiliated with the Gamaliel Foundation. One of the bishops was resistant and suspicious. He said, "The role of the church in society is not to engage systemic injustice but to fill in the gaps." This view is, of course, the practical, working theology of most churches in the United States whose social ministry, if it exists at all, is devoted to food pantries, homeless shelters, or walk-a-thons to generate money for this or that cause.

Now, clearly some merit lies in such an approach. The Parable of the Last Judgment directs us to a charity based on personalism and compassion. The hungry must be fed. The homeless must be sheltered. The works of mercy are central to the teachings of Jesus. When we engage in a personal ministry of mercy, we have an opportunity to learn from those who suffer. We move beneath tidy statistics to the complexities of the human dimension. We begin to see how systems are designed to benefit the prosperous and to keep the poor down. Our prejudices and false assumptions are challenged. We learn to see the world in a new way—from the perspective of those at the bottom. This view can be quite threatening to us. We cling to our fragile security and try to preserve a safe distance. The works of mercy reveal our own need for mercy, our own limitations, our own poverty of spirit. Benefit can be found in these revelations.

On the other hand, the works of mercy are considerably limited if they are done without regard to systemic injustice. Society is pleased to have the church exhaust itself in being merciful toward the casualties of unjust systems. I recall a friend of mine who was asked to go to Guatemala to work with homeless children. At first, she was drawn by compassion to accept this offer. But then she learned that this charitable effort was being funded by the ruling families of Guatemala. The children being served were those whose parents had been disappeared and murdered by right-wing death squads who were supported by the ruling families. The wealthy wanted to assuage their guilty consciences by providing for children whom they had helped to orphan. The director of the shelter for children made it clear to my friend that any critique of this arrangement would be unacceptable.

This prevailing protocol surrounds much of what passes for charity in the United States. Those providing direct services to the poor are often reliant on the financial contributions of wealthy donors. Providers cannot risk offending such donors by asking hard questions or challenging unjust systems. The Christians who are so generous with food baskets at Thanksgiving or with presents for the poor at Christmas often vote into office politicians whose policies ignore or crush those living in poverty. A kind of pseudo-innocence permeates this behavior. It makes me feel good to be charitable, but I don't really want to understand or challenge the systemic causes of poverty.

The works of mercy can degenerate into merciless works when wrought, not by a doer of good, but by a do-gooder. The do-gooder operates out of condescension. The do-gooder is always "for" the other and not "with" the other. The do-gooder seeks to help while secretly despising the one who is helped. The do-gooder needs the powerlessness of the other in order to

feel powerful. The do-gooder basks in the gratitude of those who are helped. The do-gooder needs to be needed. The self-identity and sense of importance of the do-gooder are enhanced by his or her role in tending to the misery of others. The do-gooder gathers tragic stories to tell to entranced audiences at social gatherings. The do-gooder has much at stake in keeping things as they are. If the powerless were empowered, what would the do-gooder do?

Alternative Options

So what are the options for churches that are not enthralled by a do-gooder mentality? Many congregations often turn to advocacy. They are at the side of the one in need. They speak on behalf of the powerless. They enter into the maze of systems. But such advocates at best bring about exceptions to the rule. They are able to create individual justice for the moment but lack the power to create the systemic justice that is lasting. Advocates do not change systems.

Action by resolution is another means by which some churches seek to engage the public arena. These resolutions may be heatedly debated on the convention floors of denominational assemblies. The problem is that such resolutions usually state what others should do, whether it be government or corporate America, without setting forth what the church will do. Little in the way of conscience or courage comes out of these resolutions. Unless a public policy resolution is attached to a judicatory budget, it usually matters little how the vote goes. The same holds true for church social statements—all too often the church deludes itself into imagining it has now taken a bold and courageous stand.

For people of faith who are alert to the limitations of direct service, advocacy, church resolutions, and church statements, a vital alternative remains. Congregation-based community organizing offers a faithful and effective vehicle for seeking justice in the public arena. ◆

The Congregation as Public, in Public, among Publics

MARTIN E. MARTY

Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once suggested that people usually approach life with *routine* but sometimes need to draw upon *understanding*. It saves time to tie my shoes without reflection. But let me injure my hand, and reflection comes into play: I may have to ask a friend to do the tying, or find slip-on loafers.

Congregations could function one way before September 11, 2001. Call this *routine*. Now they are called to be reflective, to rethink their character and situation. They need *understanding*. They must seek to discern their *public* role.

Joining the Human Race

Facing sudden cultural change, uprooted from the luxury of routine, congregations demand inquiry for understanding. The crisis of insecurity is one element that demands the congregation's understanding. In 1951 theologian Reinhold Niebuhr described the United States as a paradise of domestic security suspended in a hell of international insecurity. On September 11 that cord was cut, and we joined the vulnerable human race. We have had to re-explore our ties—to family, country, voluntary association, and religious institution. The congregation is by far the most pervasive social form designed to "house" the 1.8 billion people that make up that one-third of the human race called Christian. Four decades ago these institutions seemed confined to private and personal life, to family and leisure time, beside the point in a culture of relevancies. Things political, economic, mass communicative, and commercial were relevant; they had their act together. Local churches seemed powerless and unimaginative.

Surprise! No institutions today (including, one must say, congregations) have their act together in a way that merits boasting. Congregations, however, have outlasted many of the other forms, and bid fair to endure. Routines that went with relative irrelevance must be replaced by the understanding that comes with a new situation.

> Clergy and lay folk alike shifted gears and faced the "long pull" of using the religious message to build community, minister to fears, and inspire acts of mercy.

Momentary Oneness

The crisis of September 11 brought people together momentarily, as if in one national congregation. Yet these gatherings had no mechanism to sustain them. Yes, we had to pull together for defense, military mission, and fiscal support. But the ad hoc national conversation and community gatherings were not self-sustaining.

In the following weeks I monitored the public press. Many newspapers reported on reactions and adaptations in congregations as they had not for decades; they even quoted sermons. Why? Because local laypeople and their clergy had the stronger sense of what was happening, what toll it took on the human heart, and where to find resources to face the future. Press coverage is not the whole story. Dealing with and observing congregational leaders, as the Alban Institute sets out to do, is more revealing. Clergy and lay folk alike, in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic spheres, knew that the increased attendance after 9/11 would not last. They shifted gears and faced the "long pull" of using the religious message to build community, minister to fears, and inspire acts of mercy. When the lights went out after the interfaith gatherings at Washington National Cathedral and Yankee Stadium, local congregations with their often small flocks set out to address global and national needs and situations of hungry hearts in the age of insecurity. This paragraph points to a feature of congregations I want to highlight—their public circumstances and impetus. I think that conceiving of the congregation as a public, in public, and among publics is basic to the plot, though often neglected in "routine" times.

Such an observation goes against the grain of folkloric observation. To many, the congregation represents the plural version of private life in a nation where people have often deemed religion "a private affair." Yet many dimensions of congregations are public.

Congregations as a Public

Thus, we can see the congregation *as* a public. Critics rightfully see that many congregations can look like huddles, become enclaves, develop carapaces, and attract look-alikes and be-alikes. Yet whoever serves even the most apparently homogeneous of these knows that they include diversities of personality, interest, taste, worldview, ambitions, and ministries. Romantics may look back with nostalgic favor on, say, medieval synagogues or New England parish congregations, as they might look with disfavor on suburban cookie-cutter parishes organized after World War II.

When social historians get close to those synagogues, compressed as they were in the small ghetto and made up of one people, they find tremendous contention, variety, and creative chaos. New England historians find that the village green suggested homogeneity only superficially.

If congregations were that way in times before pluralism and mass communication jostled most citizens, it is ever more true that congregations are made up of publics. Quaker educator Parker Palmer's *The Company of Strangers* serves better to describe most than would words like *The Ideal Community*. Good preachers know this; committee leaders and agents of voluntary action to support justice and mercy soon learn it. The congregation *is* a public.

In Public

Second, more than we used to notice, the congregation is *in* public. Decades ago most who heard that notion would think one was supposing that all congregations were or should be engaged in political action (or should shun it). But public does not equal politics; it is a genus of which politics is a species. The congregation is "in public" because it is largely tax-exempt and concerned about zoning, building permits, and protection. It is in public beyond this sense, however, in positive ways. First, it disperses congregants into their vocations and professions, their situations and circumstances, all week long. Second, most congregations seek, beginning with "public prayer" and continuing through acts of care, to have an impact on public transactions. Third, its members often become part of alliances through which they work with people who do not agree on all details of religious confession and may, indeed, have nothing to do with religion.

> Congregational members often become part of alliances through which they work with people who do not agree on all details of religious confession and may, indeed, have nothing to do with religion.

Among Publics

Finally, congregations are among publics. First Presbyterian shares city space and agenda with Second Presbyterian, and both with First United Methodist, and all three with Holy Rosary, and all four with Har Zion, and all five with the friendly neighborhood mosque. All these get jumbled in the Yellow Pages under "churches and synagogues." But they deal with publics on racial grounds. First United Methodist and First African Methodist Episcopal relate partly to diverse and sometimes contending publics. They may share concerns pro and con with the American Civil Liberties Union or Focus on the Family. They may represent different classes and aesthetic predilections.

In all these, the congregation is poised to do two things. The first looks "private." It represents the core, magnetic, centripetal aspect: members hear the message, celebrate the sacred rites, nurture the next generation, comfort and console and inspire. And it is "public" if it then sets out to overcome thick walls and vast boundaries, shares some rites with other "publics," cares about the civil order, and sends members out into it.

Now, these aspects look somewhat different in the present crisis, when we need new *understanding*. But I would hate to leave the impression that "understanding" always drives congregations to be kinetic, fickle, desperate to be busy and relevant. One hopes that members are given the luxury of having adjusted to some dimensions of the understood life sufficiently that they can render some of them routine.

At their best, congregations can relegate some of their finest features to the ordinary, the habitual, the taken-for-granted—so that they can be free to pursue new understandings, and thus fulfill missions of justice and compassion to which virtually all of them, they will say, are called—when they congregate. ◆

Characteristics of Congregations Involved in Public Ministry

The National Congregations Study, based on a 1998 survey administered to 1,236 randomly selected congregations, provides valuable information about many facets of American religious life—including public ministry.

One survey question:

"Has your congregation participated in or supported social service, community development, or neighborhood organizing projects of any sort within the past 12 months?"

Consider the following percentages of congregations that responded "yes" to this question (we are not implying a causal relationship in these responses):

Number of regular attendees, including children
Fewer than 100: 47.8%
From 100 to 249: 62.9%
250 or more: 78.4%

Total budget or spending
Less than $100,000: 55.2%
From $100,000 to $499,999: 75.9%
$500,000 or more: 89.8%

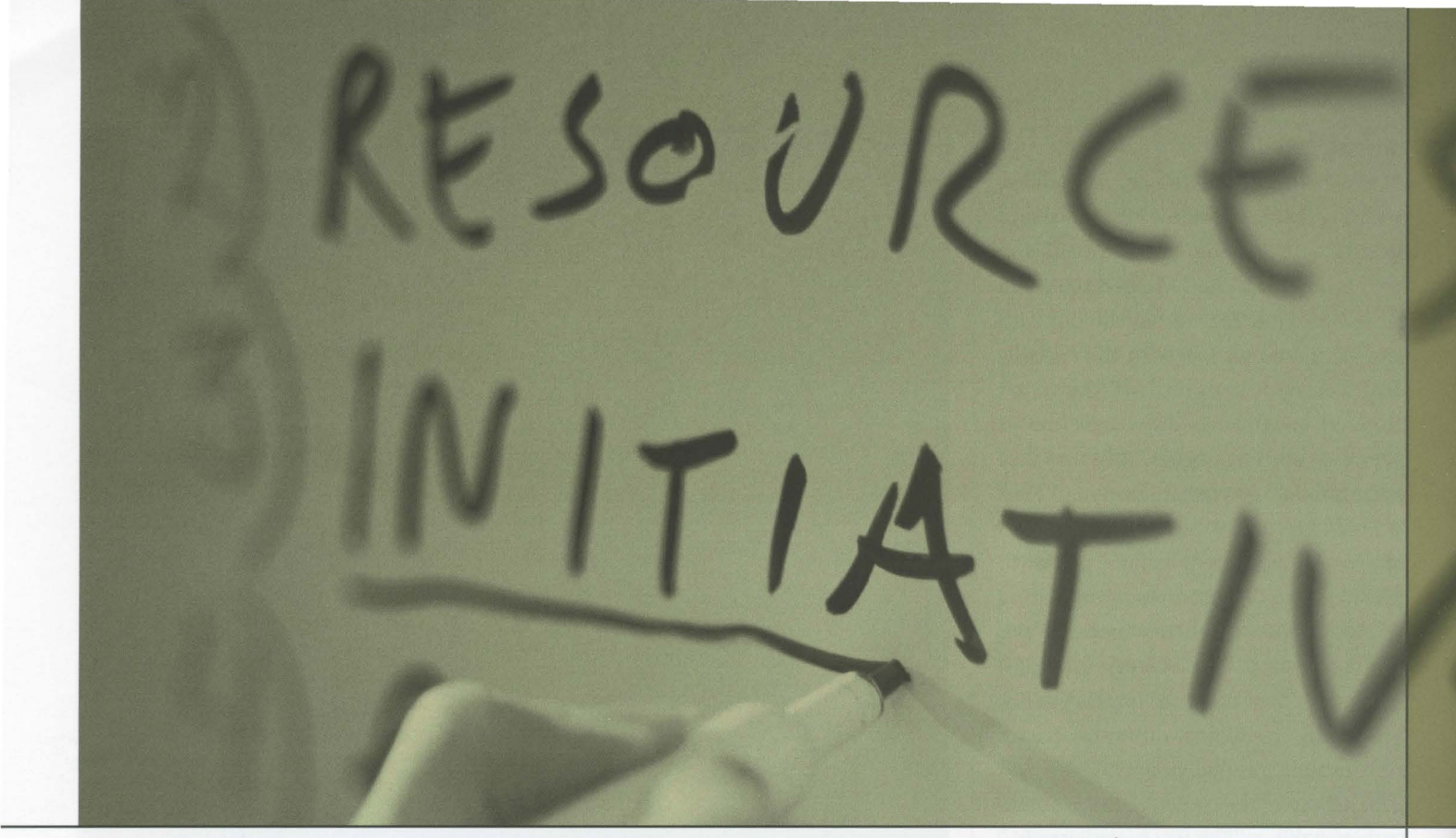
Age of senior/head clergy
40 or younger: 54.2%
Between 41 and 60: 61.4%
61 or older: 53.3%

Sex of senior/head clergy
Male: 55.8%
Female: 72.8%

Theological orientation
More liberal: 70.8%
Right in the middle: 58.7%
More conservative: 54.1%

Length of sermon
20 minutes or less: 68.7%
Between 20 and 40 minutes: 55.8%
More than 40 minutes: 30.5%

Supported by a major grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., the National Congregations Study (NCS) was developed by Dr. Mark Chaves of the University of Arizona. The Alban Institute now hosts the NCS online. For more information, visit www.alban.org/NCS.asp.



Congregations and Foundations

Meeting in the Spaces Between

MARLIS MCCOLLUM

"Everything is connected...no one thing can change by itself." Paul Hawken, entrepreneur

The nation's clergy and congregations might be dismayed or exhilarated by what foundation leaders had to say at a recent meeting convened by the Alban Institute. The meeting grew out of the Faith and Money Project, a three-year effort funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., that was designed to explore the chasm between faith and money in American society.

The project has revealed that faith-based foundations find it difficult to work with congregations, considering them uninformed about the mission of foundations, lacking in vision, unwilling to account for spending or results, and unable to sustain programs after funding runs out. All of these deficiencies relate to key criteria that must be met if funding is to be provided. The Alban Institute therefore convened a meeting of 11 foundation executives in March 2002 to identify what is working and what isn't in the grant-making process, to determine what other issues might be having an impact on the relationship between congregations and faith-based endowments, and to open a new a dialogue between the two groups.

Conversion Foundations

The leaders who participated in this meeting all head "conversion foundations," created through the sale of faith-owned hospitals or health plans. The combined assets of the 11 organizations these leaders represent are approximately $1 billion, and there are about 90 other such foundations nationwide. These faith-based endowments, many of which are headed by individuals from religious life, have a desire and willingness to support congregational efforts that are in line with their own goals. Nevertheless, many of their executives are becoming increasingly frustrated in working with congregations.

Recognizing the Foundation's Mission

One of the core problems foundation executives say they face is that many congregations do not understand the foundation's mission, viewing its role as a charitable one and often seeing themselves as entitled recipients. But, the executives say, foundations do not exist to sustain congregations, nor to finance their individual missions. Instead, they look to congregations to help them forward their own goals, which may be as focused as reducing teen pregnancy in the local community or as far-reaching as wiping out hunger worldwide. The largest grants go to organizations that are prepared to take on an aspect of the foundation's mission.

Foundations regularly solicit grant applications for programs addressing their targeted issues—often specifically requesting such applications from congregations—but these requests are often met with silence. This has led to the impression that congregations do not have the interest, resources, or business know-how to seek out such grant funding and put it to work. Jerry Paul, president and chief executive officer of the Deaconess Foundation, describes a two-year period during which foundation representatives met with local clergy to invite them to submit grant proposals for amounts ranging from $10,000 to $100,000, but received virtually no applications. Other foundation executives report similar experiences. Given this lack of response, foundations find it difficult to view the relationship between themselves and congregations as a symbiotic one.

Foundations responsible for their own fundraising need to provide potential donors with evidence of the difference they are making. Therefore, not only are successful projects crucial, so also are the stories, facts, and figures associated with them. According to foundation heads, however, congregations have a poor track record when it comes to reporting this information. Without this evidence, people have less motivation to give to the organization.

Congregational Challenges

Focus is also a problem. Congregations often demonstrate what one foundation executive calls "global empathy"—a concern for all the socially disenfranchised of the world. But without a distinct focus for their efforts, congregations can have little impact, and consequently, neither can the foundations.

In some cases, resources, rather than lack of interest or initiative, is at issue. While in the last six years there has been a resurgence of interest in social issues, many congregations simply do not have the capacity to take them on, a fact recognized by foundation representatives. Recent research has shown that the budget and participation levels of many congregations leave them struggling for their own survival. These congregations sometimes seek support from faith-based foundations, but foundation executives say providing such support is not their primary function. "One of our main concerns is that the endowment not dissipate into normal church coffers that should find funding elsewhere," says Byron Harrell, president of Baptist Community Ministries.

Many foundations find that proposed projects are often extremely limited in impact or duplicative of other organizations' efforts. An example would be free blood pressure screening with no follow-up other than providing test results.

Sometimes congregations cannot sustain programs once funding runs out, leaving communities with a gaping hole where helpful services once existed. Foundations are reluctant to simply re-fund projects because their mission is to seed projects that can develop a life of their own, not provide ongoing support. Sally Duffy, vice president of the SC Ministry Foundation, says that foundations and congregations alike need to sustain their resources for future generations through effective programming.

Many and Interconnected Causes

The roots of these and other difficulties, foundation leaders acknowledge, are many and interconnected. The landscape of American religious life has changed dramatically in the last 40 years. Pastors are now underpaid and unfamiliar with the resources that might assist them in fulfilling their roles, many congregations are shrinking and on the verge of collapse, social engagement by private organizations has declined, and expectations that the government will assume socially responsible roles have increased. It is within this complex set of realities that congregations are attempting to survive and make a difference and within which foundations are trying to engage congregations in their own missions—no small task for either.

"We are in an environment that is throwing all of our roles up in the air," says John Wimmer, director of the Alban Institute's Indianapolis Center for Congregations. "Not one institution has a cut-and-dried mission; not one of us has a clear job description. Old ways of being and leading congregations are going to have to be set aside. The world of philanthropy is also changing. Foundations are thinking about offering basic support to existing organizations because they see program after program ending up without results." At the same time, he says, "there is tremendous opportunity to engage this world in a different way, to be more faithful, to break out of institutional boxes, and when I look around the country for people to engage this, I think the foundations are in a pivotal place."

Foundational Failings

Foundation executives recognize that they are in part responsible for the divide between themselves and congregations, admitting that many foundations have what one executive calls "foundation disease," a tendency to view congregations as the servants of the foundation rather than as essential partners. They also acknowledge that the impact of social ministries is not always immediately noticeable, let alone measurable, and that a focus on efficiency may fail to appreciate the ministerial aspects of the congregation's work. They have begun to ask themselves questions like, "Have we reduced congregations to social service agencies?" "Have we stripped away the theological grounding that causes them to be participating in these efforts in the first place?"

Foundations are realizing that they may be speaking a language that congregations don't understand and trying to teach them that language rather than meeting them in what one meeting participant referred to as the "spaces in between." They are asking themselves, "Are we seeking to find a common vision that comes from God?"

Despite the difficulties they have experienced in working with congregations, foundations continue to want to partner with

congregations in addressing health and social issues, and they are working to find ways to make these partnerships more satisfying and effective for both parties. While none can offer a foolproof template for others to use in their work with congregations, some have discovered approaches that appear to be working.

Glimmers of Hope

The SC Ministry Foundation, for instance, has had success at creating partnerships with nonprofit and faith-based organizations. "We put a lot of emphasis on building relationship," says Duffy. "We share our expectations and invite congregations to do the same and work closely with them to identify mission compatibility. We talk about how we can best join forces to serve the people we want to benefit. It is the theological vision that engages the other party," she says. "It is a point of contact, a shared learning." The foundation has also begun building capacity in organizations by taking on an educational role, such as providing workshops on grant-writing, which several other foundation executives report they are doing as well.

The Lutheran Charities Foundation, as well as Alban Institute consultants working with congregations seeking foundation funding, are encouraging congregations to form alliances with each other and with other types of organizations to build the capacity they need to qualify for the funding they want. Some foundations are having success with matching grants, which they say builds commitment. Others are providing short-term grants and giving preference to outreach projects over internal congregational initiatives. The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund is trying a "step-down" model that reduces funding in the second and third years of a three-year grant to encourage congregations to take the steps necessary to make their programs self-sustaining.

A deep inquiry into the foundation's mission has led the Texas Methodist Foundation to its approach to working with congregations, says the foundation's president, Tom Locke. "The Texas Methodist Foundation had historically been a provider of financial services," Locke says. "A couple of years ago we came to the recognition that there was something larger for us to do. Clergy were coming to us, asking for seminars on issues like how to manage multiple staff, and within our culture of 'what can we give?' as opposed to 'what are we going to get?' this became the starting point for a new area of service. We also began to look within ourselves to discover our core values and our core purpose and our own servanthood—the competence and integrity to do what we say we will do, to see what needs to be done and to have the courage to do something about it, as we empower the Church in accomplishing her God-given missions." In its work with congregations, the foundation encourages them to undertake a similar inquiry, and to discover their own core values and purpose, and in doing so, to find their ultimate reason for being. "What we have found," Locke says, "is that the more we give the more we find ourselves receiving."

The Indianapolis Center for Congregations is in itself an experiment in finding ways to help congregations find the resources they need to survive and thrive. The Center's work begins, explains John Wimmer, with the congregation's goals and the challenges it faces in accomplishing them. "This has the power of recognizing congregational life—the integrity of the congregation's purpose and mission," he says.

Among the Center's core activities are educational programs, one-on-one "resource consulting" to assist congregations in finding the resources that match their needs, and grant-making, which has grown out of the Center's educational and consulting work. The Center now provides matching grants of up to $7,500 and has launched a second grant-making program addressing congregations' computer technology and information needs, which became apparent through the Center's conversations with them. Unable to find a resource that could address this need, the Center created an educational program that includes on-site consultations to assist congregations in applying what they are learning. "We have found that the learning and excitement tend to dissipate without support," says Wimmer. The Center has also found that there is a capacity-building and decision-making process that becomes strengthened by engaging in the grant-making process. "The secondary learning is stunning," Wimmer says.

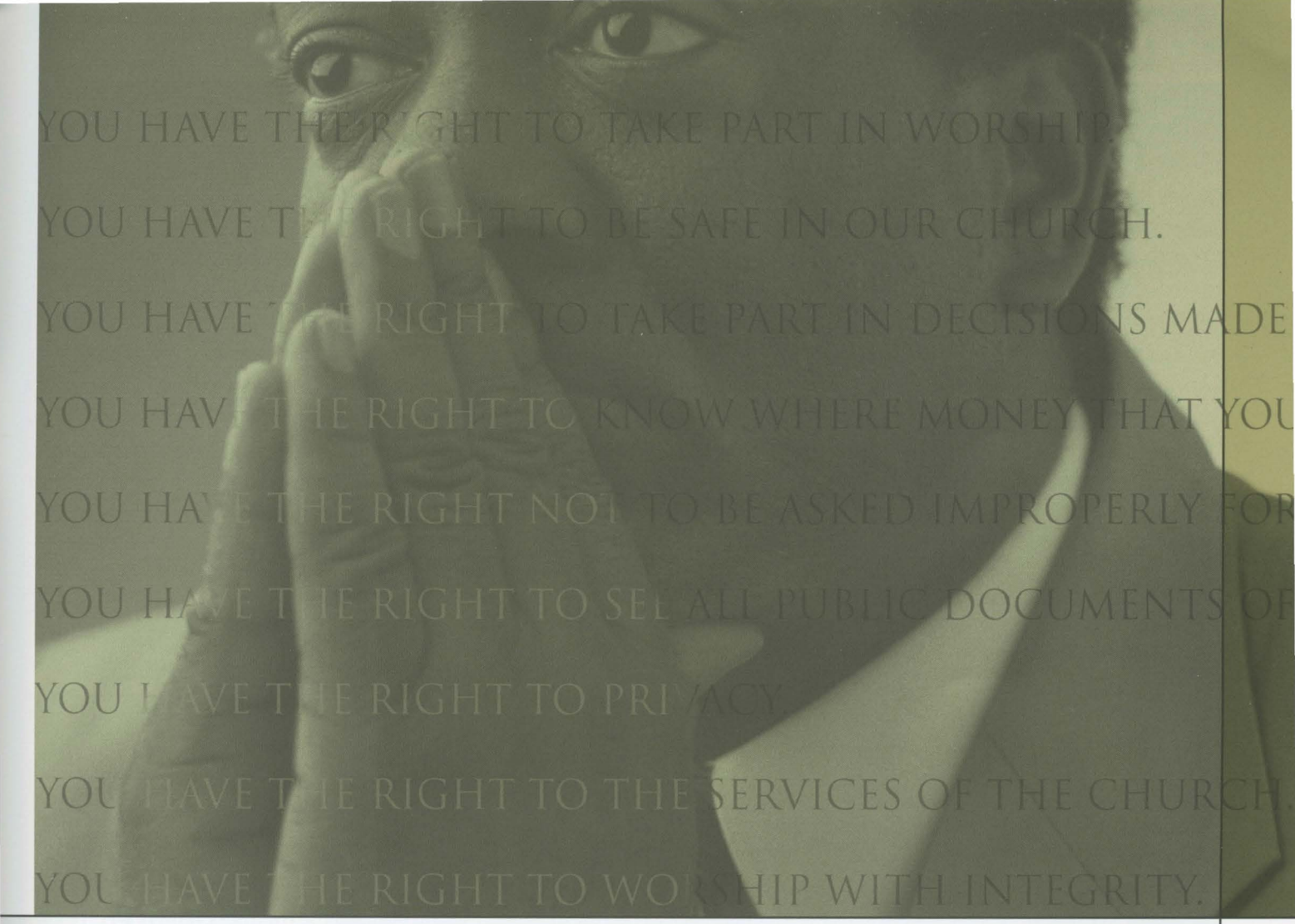
A Time of Changing Identities

During this time of shifting roles, identities, and relationships, foundations are grappling with a number of questions: What is the nature of foundations' obligation to the local church and the church in general? What do we believe about social justice? How do we encourage nonprofit organizations providing duplicative efforts to come together with a common infrastructure? Is the congregation the right place to do social outreach or should other organizations be created to respond to those needs? What is a foundation's responsibility to support capacity building in a congregation seeking grant funding? Have we forgotten our own sense of ministry?

There are no easy answers to these troubling questions and no quick ways to construct bridges across the chasm that currently exists between foundations and congregations—only a commitment to try to do so and a hope that, with a concerted effort by both parties and a meeting in the spaces in between, that a God-inspired vision can be recognized and fulfilled. ◆

READ MORE

For an analysis of these dynamics from a congregational perspective, see Alban Institute vice president Gil Rendle's article at **www.alban.org/periodicals.**



Does Your Church Need a "Bill of Rights"?

JOSHUA BROWN

When I came to serve the West Richmond Friends Meeting in 1993, the church was recovering from a major fight that had resulted in the non-renewal of the pastor's contract. Two years later, we were shattered by a case of sexual harassment—a respected member of the congregation had made unwelcome approaches to several women. When I then recalled a crippling disagreement over handling money in a church I had previously served, I became convinced that we needed to talk about what climate of expectations and behavior is appropriate within the church.

Different Expectations

Our congregation has a high turnover rate—50 percent of our attenders weren't here six years ago. Each year, new faculty members and students from a nearby college and pair of seminaries join us. We also enjoy visits from missionaries home on furlough or in residence for training, since Richmond is the administrative headquarters for our international mission work. And a growing local economy has attracted many new families to our area.

All of these people bring different expectations about worship, stewardship, ministry, discipleship, and decision making. Many are unfamiliar with our church's tradition. In the past, newcomers were expected to keep quiet and learn by observation and osmosis. In today's world, it's more realistic to provide a clear, explicit statement of what to expect.

A Higher Standard

An opportunity to create such a statement arose when I worked with an adult study group on Faith and Practice, the discipline followed by churches in the Society of Friends. Trying to guide them away from complaints and "war stories" about bad church experiences, I suggested that the group focus on positive expectations. What would a good church look like? How does a good church behave?

We covered the main areas where abuse can occur: money, sex, and power. We looked at existing church policies and didn't hesitate to suggest new ones. Over several weeks, we grouped

our ideas into major categories and worked out a rough draft of a "bill of rights" to share with the rest of the congregation. Church leaders and people who were not part of the discussion group had an opportunity to suggest changes or additions. This broad-based discussion format let everyone in the congregation know we were looking for a higher standard for our life together.

Bruised by the Past

Let's face it: Churches aren't always good, or fair, or honest. Many people come to our congregation with hurt feelings because they've been abused in some previous church. It may have been a church split, a pastor who browbeat them, or even sexual abuse. Every religious leader can tell stories of affairs or adultery or sexual harassment taking place in the supposedly safe environment of the church

The issue isn't whether to soothe or scold, but how to ensure safety. In a spiritually safe church, hard words can lead to healing. The truth isn't exaggerated or understated, but presented clearly and accurately.

When people have been hurt, it's especially important for them to know that the experience won't be repeated. We at West Richmond do more than just promise to be a model church. Our bill of rights not only allows new people to form clear expectations and specifies behaviors we will not tolerate, it also spells out the process we will use when mistakes are made or when abuse takes place. When people know what to expect, they feel safer.

Spiritual Safety

A culture of politeness and denial makes it impossible to address pressing spiritual issues. Jeremiah has harsh words for preachers who say, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. On the other hand, many preachers who think they're speaking prophetically are simply scolding.

The issue isn't whether to soothe or scold, but how to ensure safety. In a spiritually safe church, hard words can lead to healing. The truth isn't exaggerated or understated, but presented clearly and accurately. The Bible isn't misquoted or used against the speaker's pet peeves. People are treated like responsible adults responding freely to God's invitation.

A related spiritual safety issue is confidentiality. In a safe church, people can speak fully to a pastor or counselor without fear of the conversation being shared inappropriately. Even in a public worship service, people need to be able to confess their brokenness without becoming grist for the rumor mill. Our worship service includes 20 to 30 minutes of "open worship," part of which is used for responses to the sermon, personal testimonies, spiritual leadings, and prayer requests, in the tradition of 1 Corinthians 14:26. This wide-open time is one of the most exciting parts of our worship, but it can also leave people vulnerable to abuse.

Putting It All Together

Instead of our former piecemeal approach to spiritual standards and practical expectations, we now had a comprehensive view. Weeks of discussion had allowed us to make an intentional statement about what kind of congregation we wanted to be.

The working group agreed that our church should require, at a minimum, certain spiritual freedoms, practical safeguards, and standards of behavior. We argued whether "rights" was the best term; to some people, it seemed too legalistic. But we agreed that these were more than just privileges, more than guidelines. These were the ways every person who came to West Richmond Friends should expect to be treated.

Most of what we included in our bill of rights wasn't new. Some things we had discussed or affirmed years ago. Other items fell into the "of course" category. In every case, though, someone agreed, "Yes, this needs to be said!"

So Now What?

Many church policy statements wind up in the dead letter file. Once they're approved, they're forgotten. In order for this not to be the fate of our bill of rights, we shared it as widely as possible. It went into a special issue of the church newsletter. I went over it line by line with our elders, and preached about it on Sunday.

Our bill of rights is now one of the basic components of our membership course. Every new member of our congregation gets a copy; we discuss it carefully and make sure everyone knows what it means. Other congregations have asked to use it as the basis for their own discussions.

Another step we've talked about is a second round of study and discussion, centered on responsibilities corresponding to the rights—active participation in worship, generous giving, taking part in our church's various ministries. One reason we haven't pursued this is that the bill of rights spells out issues for us as a congregation. We don't yet feel ready to ask our members and attenders what they want to do as individuals.

I encourage you to start this kind of discussion in your own congregation. It's helped us to get past old hurts, create solid guidelines for our congregational life, and let new people know what they can expect at West Richmond. ◆

BILL *of* RIGHTS

1. You have the right to take part in worship. All people are welcome to worship with us, regardless of age, sex, race, education, physical or mental ability, economic or social position, religious belief, or political affiliation. During our time of open worship, all people are free to speak, as they are led by the spirit of Christ. However, people who speak in ways that our elders judge unhelpful to others may be asked to find other times to share their thoughts.

2. You have the right to be safe in our church. We will not tolerate sexual, physical, verbal, racial, psychological, or spiritual harassment by anyone in the church. The church or its committees will take prompt steps to deal with violations and will notify all parties of its actions.

3. You have the right to take part in decisions made by the church. All members of the church may participate in the decisions of the monthly business meeting. Decisions affecting the whole church will be made using Quaker process, which seeks for unity under the spirit of Christ, not majority rule. Decisions that have been made by the business meeting will not be undone, publicly or privately.

4. You have the right to know where money that you have given is being used. You may ask for a receipt for any gifts you make, unless you give anonymously through the Sunday collection. You will receive a statement twice a year itemizing your giving. You may expect that your gifts will be used for the purpose you have designated, unless that purpose is contrary to a decision of the business meeting. In that case you will be informed, and you may ask to have your gift returned. Gifts in memory of an individual will be placed in the Memorial Fund and used as directed by the donor or by the business meeting. Large gifts or bequests will be handled in accordance with our bequest policy. Gifts to the church will not be converted to the personal use of staff or individuals. The church's tax-exempt status will not be used for anyone's personal benefit.

5. You have the right not to be asked improperly for money. The Stewardship and Finance Committee will coordinate special fundraising efforts to prevent too many from being made at one time. The church will not use methods such as raffles, games of chance, or lotteries, which appeal to the spirit of greed. Children may initiate school fundraising projects in the church at the discretion of their parents.

6. You have the right to see all public documents of the church. You may ask to receive copies of business meeting minutes, budgets, and financial statements. Minutes of regular meetings will be open for inspection unless there is some reason for confidentiality. You may ask to have any documents, or any terms or decisions included in them, explained to you. Members and attenders of the church will receive the newsletter.

7. You have the right to privacy. Pastoral conversations, confessions, and counseling sessions will be kept confidential. When committees deal with matters that need to be kept confidential, they will be particularly careful in wording their minutes so as not to injure the people involved, and the chairperson will remind committee members of their need to safeguard feelings and reputations. Records concerning counseling, scholarships, loans, or financial giving will be accessible only to those with a need to know.

8. You have the right to the services of the church. You may ask for help from the church staff and its committees as you need them. If they are unable to help, they will refer you elsewhere if possible. If you are a member or regular attender of the church, you do not have to pay extra for services such as pastoral calls, hospital calls, funerals, pastoral counseling, and weddings. You may freely borrow books from the library, and other materials from the church, under our established loan policies. The church will make every effort to see that its facilities are physically accessible by everyone.

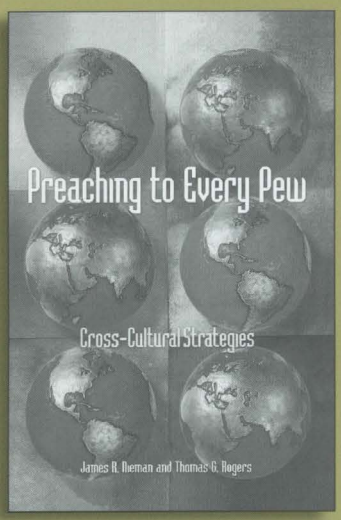
9. You have the right to worship with integrity. The Scriptures will be quoted accurately and interpreted carefully. Sermon illustrations will not be fictional, unless clearly identified as such. Speakers will not scold individuals or make unfounded accusations from the pulpit. In an effort to provide spiritual nourishment for everyone, hymns and other music will reflect a broad range of spiritual sensibilities, language will express the spiritual experience of both men and women, and the needs of all ages will be considered.

10. You have the right to the support and discipline of the church. You may ask for prayer, personal support, or advice and counsel from your fellow members and attenders. You may ask a support committee to help you with special needs or in making important decisions on matters such as marriage, a job change, family issues, or education. If others in the church are concerned about your actions or about ideas that you have expressed, you have the right to ask for the assistance of the appropriate committee. If the business meeting takes actions regarding your membership that you disagree with, you have the right to appeal its decision to the annual meeting of our denomination.

Preaching to Every Pew

CROSS-CULTURAL STRATEGIES

James R. Nieman and
Thomas G. Rogers
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001



review book

I had hoped to breeze through *Preaching to Every Pew* while taking a break from writing for another project. But because it is such a wonderful and compelling work, it made me slow down and listen carefully to the writers, both professors of homiletics, and to the chorus of voices of preachers present in the text through personal interviews. Present also are the voices of psychology, sociology, and historical analysis, as the authors weave these disciplines into what reads like a wonderful sermon on a practical theology for preaching in multicultural contexts.

For this study, the authors used a protocol of questions to interview over several years scores of pastors who served in congregations with a significant presence of Native Americans, Latinos, Asians, and others living in economic hardship. In the first chapter, the authors ground their work in a discussion of what it means for preachers to be neighbors to the rest of their community. Then the authors do a fine analysis of culture, and make the case for looking at culture through four frames: ethnicity, class, displacement, and beliefs.

In each of the next four chapters, the authors look at preaching in multicultural contexts through each frame. First they illustrate their learnings with a wonderful narrative. Then they organize what they have gleaned from the interviews into group characteristics about the congregants and preaching strategies that are practical and applicable to all preaching contexts, including my own African American context. Thus they turn an analytic lens toward exegeting the context and toward the preacher's use of self. Along the way the authors model great preaching; they use alliteration, imagery, repetition, triads, narratives, and memorable sayings to keep the reader tuned in while they build their case. For Nieman and Rogers, preaching in a multicultural context is ultimately about being a good neighbor—about "making serious engagement" with the particular setting in which the preacher lives and works (p. 14).

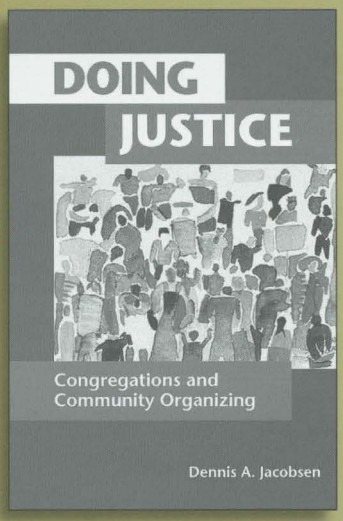
What the authors teach us about preaching to diverse audiences applies well to other lessons. For example, they conclude that "the sermon itself is not finished (if it ever is) until the displaced themselves bring it to closure in light of their present needs" (p. 110). This is something for preachers in many contexts to note. In fact, most of what they share can be used in every pulpit, as preachers reach across personality and individuality to touch the hearts of all of God's people. In today's world, *Preaching to Every Pew* should be on every preacher's shelf.

Rev. Jacqueline J. Lewis
Project Consultant
The Alban Institute

Doing Justice

CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Dennis A. Jacobsen
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001



review book

"The world as it should be is in direct opposition to the world as it is. The world as it should be is rooted in truth, love, and community" (p. 8). So says Dennis Jacobsen in *Doing Justice*, a primer of the theology of, and rationale for, congregation-based community organizing for urban ministry. A Lutheran pastor with more than 14 years' experience in congregation-based community organizing, Jacobsen speaks directly and challengingly, offering observations such as, "The world as it is would rather perish than embrace a moral vision" (p. 11) and "Agitation is a skill...it is a vehicle for summoning forth the best from...leaders" (p. 66).

The author illustrates his thesis that, biblically, "the preeminent activity of the church is in the public arena, not . . . the sanctuary," with examples from his and others' work in congregation-based organizing. He covers topics such as the roles of power, money, and self-interest in building and sustaining organizations.

Doing Justice includes an index of organizations involved in congregation-based community organizing, such as the Direct Action Research and Training Center and the Gamaliel Foundation. There's also a study guide by Rick Deines tucked in the back. It is organized into 12 sections and designed for use by adult study groups.

Doing Justice is long on theology and stories, and a bit short on practical advice for setting up a congregation-based community organizing effort. In spite of that lack, the book would be helpful to congregations exploring the possibility of doing such organizing or looking for confirmation of their current ministry and experiences in this area. As Jacobsen says, "Congregation-based community organizing offers a faithful and effective vehicle for seeking justice in the public arena" (p. 22). His book encourages just that.

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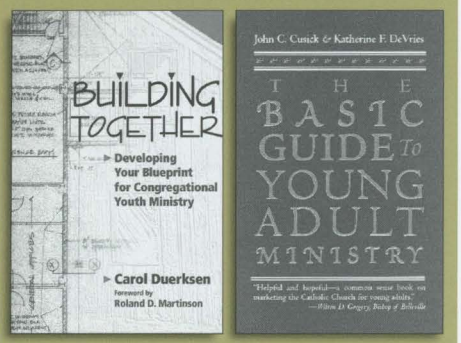
Building Together

DEVELOPING YOUR BLUEPRINT FOR CONGREGATIONAL YOUTH MINISTRY

Carol Duerksen
Newton, Ks.: Faith and Life Resources, 2001



The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry

John C. Cusick and
Katherine F. DeVries
New York: Orbis Books, 2001

review book

Over a decade ago, we saw the return of tribalism to the world political scene. Unfortunately, both of these works—*Building Together* by Carol Duerksen and *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* by John C. Cusick and Katherine F. DeVries—contribute to that trend. In fairness, I admit that the authors may have intended their work for a limited audience—the Cusick and DeVries book for a Roman Catholic audience and the Duerksen book for the Anabaptist tradition, specifically the Mennonite Churches and, perhaps, the Church of the Brethren.

Carol Duerksen, a well-known author within her denomination, rewrites and makes more accessible the traditional Anabaptist work in youth ministry. Her brief, well-written, and easy-to-read work achieves that objective. However, her book has limited use outside Anabaptist circles because it adds nothing new to the plethora of books about youth ministry published in the last fifteen years. Additionally, she does not appear to be acquainted with the growing trend in youth ministry toward differing worship concepts. She continues the notion that somehow, through its worship, a congregation ought to be able to socialize young people into its tradition without a serious reevaluation of the fact that its worship has been conceived, designed, and carried out in a culturally biased way. The book appears to suggest that churches ought to connect young people not only to Jesus Christ, but also to an alien culture that has little meaning in their lives. Duerksen's is an argument that has been around for years, especially in seminaries, and it is elitist. It suggests that the "worship culture" of a European-based church not only is particularly necessary to the young people of America, but is also superior to forms of worship they may devise from within their own culture (for more on this topic, see *God at the Mall* by Peter Ward).

The most impressive part of the book is the preface by Abe Bergen (Director of Youth Ministry, General Conference of the Mennonite Church), in which Bergen admits trying to find the latest trend in youth ministry that will be its "savior." His answer is "mentoring," which, in my opinion, has the most potential for success, but has been difficult to implement in local congregations. Bergen also considers family-based youth ministry, praise and worship services for youth, and the Spirituality Project, which he describes in the appendix. Ultimately, he seems to suggest that youth and adults need to come together into a faith community, the plans for which Duerksen's book is supposed to provide. But again, in order to achieve Duerksen's "community," young people must reject their culture in favor of the church's—a model that has resulted in youth ministry's most spectacular failures of the past thirty years.

By contrast, the Young Adult Ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago, directed by John Cusick and Katherine DeVries, is one

of the best young ministries in the country. *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* reflects their experience with this successful model, which other Roman Catholics should emulate. Although the perspective is even more tribal than Duerksen's, the book's topic is one of the most neglected areas of ministry in the Christian Church in America. The book is full of practical wisdom and insight, extending its discussion well beyond what only concerns Roman Catholics and those in young adult ministry, and conceptualizing issues around volunteer leadership. As such, the book is worth reading, no matter what one's religious tradition (however, the reader will need to possess a basic Catholic vocabulary). Additionally, significant parts of the book deal with developing young ministries beyond the local church. Those from a more congregational form of church government may not find such guidance useful.

Over the years, I've noticed that Roman Catholic youth and young adult ministry models do not expect young people to be in service to the church or community until they reach a certain level of spiritual maturity—a model that survives in *Young Adult Ministry.* Many of us who have been active in any type of mission or service find this position peculiar, since the young people involved in our mission have been working successfully without "commitment" or "faith."

This book is worth the read, if only to see how one group of Christians has reached out to young adults in a positive way. Reading this work may inspire you to think creatively about one of the most neglected groups of people in local congregational ministry—young adults.

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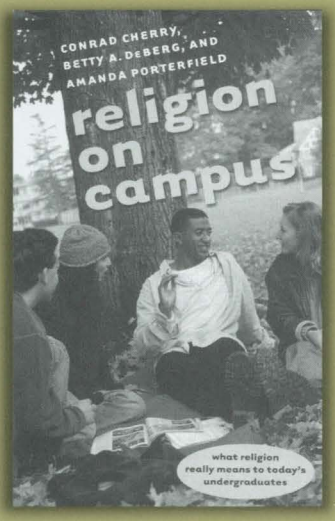
Religion on Campus

Conrad Cherry, Betty A. DeBerg, and Amanda Porterfield
Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001



review book

The authors of *Religion on Campus* argue against the stereotype that American universities are bastions of secular culture whose indifference and pluralism imperil the faith life of students. It is certainly true that the once ubiquitous practice of required chapel is gone from most campuses. And many once denominationally affiliated colleges are now either independent or functionally independent. The authors concluded that this open culture actually allowed for both religious diversity and enthusiasm.

The authors present case studies of four campuses. The institutions include a state-sponsored university, an African American church-related college, a Catholic university, and a Lutheran college. Each case study includes reflections on student religious life, the work of chaplains, the role of religion departments, and the overall stance of each administration. Throughout each campus the authors found many students engaged in religious practices and popular professors teaching about religious traditions. These case studies lead the authors to conclude that college students are more religious than is commonly believed.

Yet there are moments when the authors' own observations seem to reaffirm the very point they do not want to make. The case studies describe some phenomenal religious events—active Bible studies, student-led Ignatian retreats, and crowded chapels. At the same time, these events are drawing only a small percentage of students, leading the authors to observe that supply of religious opportunities outstripped student demand. But the authors give too little attention to why this is the case.

The real strength of the book is the engaging, often endearing people the authors describe. The well-rendered descriptions of experiences of particular students on each campus allow the reader a sense of what life at that school might be like. The depictions of campus ministers and chaplains are equally detailed. The result is a believable and compelling picture of religious life on a campus. Such portraits made the book a pleasure to read and a helpful introduction to people who care about student spirituality.

The next step beyond this book is investigating the relationship between congregations, denominations, and the campuses. In only one case did a local congregation near a campus engage in significant ministry on campus. The most compelling religious life programs were supported directly by the college or run by parachurch organizations. The neglect of university communities by surrounding congregations and traditional denominations and ways to breathe vitality into those relationships is the next volume these authors need to write.

Rev. Andrew B. Warner
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Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Learn More

RESOURCES ON PUBLIC MINISTRY FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE

Bos, A. David. **A Practical Guide to Community Ministry.** (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993). This practical guide for congregations helps them assess local community needs and offers guidance on starting and developing community ministries.

Center for Public Justice. P.O. Box 48368, Washington, D.C. 20002-0368. www.cpjustice.org. This Christian civic organization's major policy studies include welfare reform and government and religious sector partnerships.

Devlin-Foltz, David, ed. **Finding a New Voice: The Public Role of Mainline Protestantism.** (Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 2001). Available from the Alban Institute. This booklet contains an essay by James P. Wind on the many impacts of mainline congregations, additional comments from practitioners, and a solid resource list.

Dudley, Carl S. **Community Ministry: New Challenges, Proven Steps to Faith-Based Initiatives.** (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 2002). Carl Dudley guides congregational leaders in establishing and supporting community ministries. He looks at congregations as learning organizations, explores the relationship between faith formation and social action, and presents examples of outstanding new ministries.

Harper, Nile, ed. **Urban Churches, Vital Signs: Beyond Charity Toward Justice.** (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). Each of the 28 urban churches whose stories appear in this book has been rejuvenated into a community ministry center by launching social service and economic development projects and by taking political action to achieve justice for marginalized groups.

Jacobsen, Dennis A. **Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing.** (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001). A primer on the theology of congregation-based community organizing, *Doing Justice* covers topics such as the roles of power, money, and self-interest in organizations and explores how to build and sustain ministries that promote justice.

National Congress for Community Economic Development. **Restoring Broken Places and Rebuilding Communities: A Casebook on African American Church Involvement in Community Economic Development.** (Washington, D.C.: NCCED, 1997). Explores twelve case studies from African American churches that have undertaken significant ventures in community economic development around the country, including housing, small business development, capital formation, and commercial development.

Queen, Edward L. II, ed. **Serving Those in Need: A Handbook for Managing Faith-Based Human Services Organizations.** (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000). Intended for both congregations and faith-based organizations (FBOs), this book explores their roles, relationships, and responsibilities in the provision of social services.

Sherman, Amy L. **Restorers of Hope: Reaching the Poor in Your Community with Church-Based Ministries that Work.** (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1997). The stories of seven church-based or parachurch ministries that have helped transform communities and lives are presented in this book.

Skjegstad, Joy. **Starting a Nonprofit at Your Church.** (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 2002). Recognizing that many congregations are establishing church-based nonprofit organizations for community development, the author guides readers through the rationale and process of creating and maintaining a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization connected to a congregation.

www.congregationalresources.org

The Difficult Art of Saying "No"

Q: We are developing a new vision of ministry for our congregation. In the past, new initiatives sometimes faltered because we didn't stop doing some things that misspent time, talent, and money. How can we make choices this time that really support our vision?

A: Development of a new congregational vision promises exciting possibilities . . . and rough waters. A new congregational vision entails change, which is frequently met with ambivalence, trepidation, and disagreement. When the new vision is accompanied by saying "no" to some ongoing programs or ministries, the possibilities for conflict are multiplied.

Though there is no single tried-and-true formula, the following suggestions may guide congregational leaders through the many, varied dilemmas that can emerge as a new vision is implemented:

Prepare to stay the course. Congregational leaders need sustained resolve to implement the new vision and the necessary accompanying decisions. Initial and ongoing training, periodic review of the vision and long-term commitments, and both personal and collective support are necessary to pursue any new strategy that may take several years to implement fully. Consider occasionally using an outside consultant to help leaders see the big picture.

Involve many congregants during the planning phase. Participation in decision making expands ownership of the plans to the entire group, and increases their commitment to the outcome. Communicate proposals enthusiastically and redundantly.

Expect tough decisions. Alert congregational leaders that change and new directions may also create tension and conflict. Include training about conflict and decision making as a part of ongoing leadership development.

Establish criteria for decisions in advance. Prior to making decisions, discuss guidelines for selecting, discontinuing, or saying "no"—then stay the course without heavy-handed imposition of rules that stifle enthusiasm. A compelling, positive image of the congregation's future and ministries can help leaders cope with vested individual and group interest. Strive to avoid creating the impression that previous choices were wrong or bad.

Anticipate difficult situations. Saying "no" to persons or groups who value particular activities is distressing. Yet the whole church body may suffer if we allow ineffective programs to continue. Some challenging ideas may fit the vision but be impractical to implement, at least in current circumstances. The burden of saying "no" needs to be thoughtfully shared among leaders, not relegated to a single individual.

Let a project decline and quietly fade away if it doesn't interfere or drain resources. Alternatively, it may be reconfigured in light of a new vision.

Reframe old plans to align with the new vision. For example, is a time-intensive fundraiser really a community social activity? If so, is this the best way to foster social interactions? Invite participants of the former effort to design the new initiative.

Relieve an overburdened individual or group. Sometimes people are grateful when a demanding or demoralizing effort is discontinued, freeing them to get involved in a ministry that better uses their talents.

Collaborate with another group. A program that does not fit a congregation's new vision may fit that of another agency, community group, or congregation. Support their effort. Some members may choose to work with them.

Talk individually with affected or vocal members who may see the new vision as a threat to their leadership, power, or favorite program. Seek ways to redirect them to the new vision. While some may benefit from individual conversation, others may need to experience the compassionate but firm resolve of their peers.

Postpone good ideas and incorporate them into the long-term plan.

Celebrate endings. Publicly recognize and honor people and groups who are completing their tenure. Build a periodic program review into the planning process by using previously established criteria, but don't micro-manage it. Reviews may need to occur yearly or less frequently, depending on the circumstances; however, do it for all, not only for a few when something goes wrong. Whenever possible, establish an ending date—it can always be extended.

Effective leaders focus members' energies toward the future that God has provided. But no congregation can do it all, and some possibilities will need to be set aside. Saying "no" effectively is both an art and a critical task for congregational leaders.

Rev. Dr. V. Sue Zabel is a field consultant with the Alban Institute and is especially interested in whole systems planning, such as Future Search, Appreciative Inquiry, and Open Space. She leads retreats, coaches leaders, and works with conflict situations. Dr. Zabel is also professor of the practice in ministry and mission at Wesley Theological Seminary, where she teaches in the areas of contextual education, congregational studies, systems, change processes, and leadership. Her current research is in the area of spiritual gifts of the individual, congregation, and community.

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.

The Alban Institute encourages dialogue with many faith traditions, people of diverse ethnicity, men and women, large and small congregations, and urban and rural congregations. We invite you to join in conversation with us by becoming a member or writing an article for CONGREGATIONS – or both! Please call us at 301-718-4407 or send an e-mail to pwalker@alban.org.

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