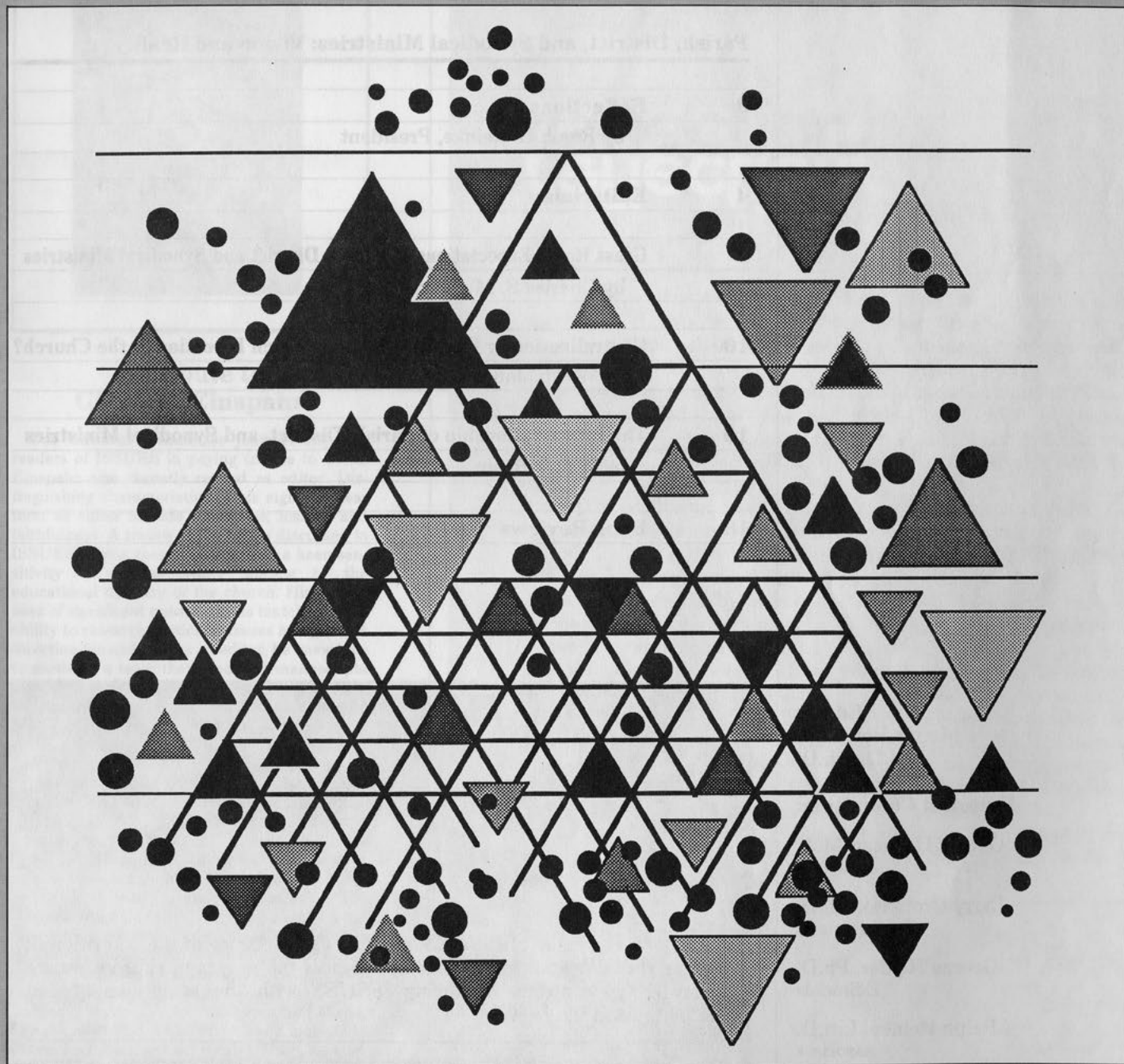


ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Spring, 1989

Vol. 23, No. 1



Parish, District, and Synodical Ministries: Vision and Reality

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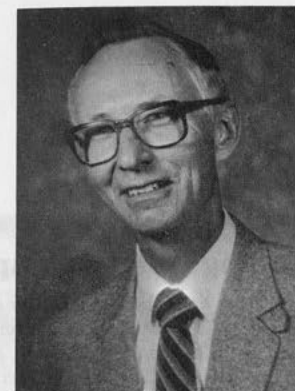
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Marlene Block, B.A.

The 1988 Fall issue of *ISSUES* was canceled because of the transition in editorial staff. We apologize for inconveniences this may have caused. We are committed to continue producing *ISSUES* with the same quality and excellence as in the past.

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A Tribute to Glenn C. Einspahr

The Editorial Committee joins faculty and readers of *ISSUES* in paying tribute to Glenn Einspahr who recently retired as editor. Distinguishing characteristics of his eighteen year term as editor include timeliness, insight, and faithfulness. A review of the topics discussed in *ISSUES* during these years reveals a keen sensitivity to central issues relating to the educational ministry of the church. His awareness of significant questions was matched by an ability to research particular issues and provide direction for authors. As an editor, he knew how to motivate a team that produced manuscripts with clocklike regularity. Most important of all, the editor reflected a grace which enabled him to deal with a variety of challenges.

While serving as editor, Glenn Einspahr remained committed to his first interest, teaching in a college classroom. Courses which he has taught over a period of years include The Christian Teachers Ministry, Adolescent Psychology, Contemporary Thought in Education, and Principles of Secondary Education. Off-campus activities included projects sponsored by the Nebraska Council on Teacher Education, the Nebraska Association of Teacher Educators, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, the Lutheran Education Association, and the Nebraska Consortium for the Improvement of Teacher Education.

Prior to accepting a call to Concordia College, Seward, in 1958, he had served as a teacher at Grace Lutheran School, Kansas City, Kansas, and Concordia High School, Seward. His higher education experiences included earning an undergraduate degree at Concordia, Seward, and graduate degrees at the University of Denver (M.A. and Ed.D.).

Commitment to the mission of the church has been evident in his participation and volunteer service at St. John Lutheran Church, Seward.

Glenn, we salute you as a leader. We also value you as a servant, mentor, and friend.

reflections on reflection

Just before His ascension, our Lord gave His followers a clear directive: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Since that day, the church has struggled organizationally in the implementation of that vision. Today, as The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod struggles to implement that vision on the parish, district, and synodical levels, it finds itself at a number of crossroads with far-reaching consequences.

In this edition of *Issues*, persons of vision have explored the organizational interrelationship of the church's ministry on the parish, district, and synodical levels in editorials, articles, and book reviews and have raised important questions. For example, if a sense of ownership by people on the parish level is the basis of cooperation among various units of the church, how can a greater sense of ownership of the church's mission on the district and synodical levels be developed? If organizational decentralization is a social force affecting the church's mission in our day, are we in the church being shaped by society, or, is the church harnessing this force in a constructive way? If the current organizational pattern of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is creating some tensions and problems that impinge on the mission of the church, what are more constructive ways of implementing our mission?

We welcome your participation in these discussions and pray that the Spirit guide the organizational decision making of the church in carrying out Christ's mission.

Ralph L. Reinke, President

editorials

Serving One Another Under The Cross

The interrelationships among the local congregation, the district and the synod have been influenced and affected by HISTORY — long past and immediate past; by EXPERIENCE — personal and corporate; by the ECONOMY — in hard times and in prosperity; by GEOGRAPHY — large and scattered constituency as well as proximity; by CIRCUMSTANCE — diversity of size of parish, potential for growth; by PERSPECTIVE — organismic or institutional; by LEADERSHIP and leadership styles — local, regional and national; to name a few of the dynamics. Consequently, expectations, priorities, levels of support, frustrations range from the very high to the nearly nonexistent. Key to all of these relationships is the way one perceives what the church — at any level — is and does around Word and Sacrament.

Clergy and/or lay expressions of trust levels are conditioned by the degree, type, and frequency of interactions between the members of the partnership. Any of the dynamics previously mentioned can narrow or widen the gaps between the parties. The wider the gap, the stronger the perceptions that the district and/or the synod are bureaucratic. Their original and intentional advisory role and function are no longer valued, and this is seen as a vestige of a by-gone era. On the other hand, when occasions for counsel, advice or intervention are sought — and such seeking is related to attitude, too — then a spirit of collegiality, a sense of support, heightened familiarity and increased confidence in the partnership are acknowledged and celebrated.

Another mark of a healthy relationship is the ability to see a bigger picture of what the church is and does — together. As this image broadens, it tends to heighten the value of what the district and the synod are able to do "on behalf of" the partnership. When concerns become too local —

at any level — and we become turned-in-ourselves, there is the tendency to negate the mutuality and contributions of the other levels.

Indeed, it is important to assess who we are and how we are doing ministry as a church body. Change must always be an option — administrative and operational. Local, regional, national and international conditions, circumstances and opportunities need to be addressed according to purpose first, and secondly according to function.

It would seem that any sweeping move to centralize or decentralize the interrelatedness, structure and/or polity of our denomination would be inadvisable. From the perspective of one who delivers parish services, we still desperately need the three levels. The synod is there to administer those dimensions of ministry for the common good of all; to develop and create resources; to articulate our identity; to be representative in the broader circles of our society and the world; and to communicate our story in the light of His story. The district, as the synod in this place, has the opportunity for a closer intimacy with the professionals and the laity as it carries out many of the same ministries as described above. Opportunities to introduce, interpret, adapt and apply resources dare never be seen as "pushing programs." Both the synod and the district provide services with the congregation in mind, sensitive to its size and uniqueness. Clergy and congregations might well also see themselves as the synod and district "in this place." All three levels serve one another under the Cross in order to proclaim the Gospel.

Arthur L. Linnemann
Associate Director of Parish Services
(Education and Youth)
Northwest District
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Changing Relationships

My perspective on "The Interrelationship of Parish, District, and Synodical Ministries" has been shaped by a long parish ministry, and by service to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on various boards and commissions.

The word which most accurately characterizes the history of these relationships is "change." Change is a basic sociological principle. It develops inevitably in every kind of group. It is sometimes badly needed and clearly beneficial. The change in the use of the English language during and following World War I illustrates this. More than anything else World War I served as a vector toward the increased use of the English language in the worship and teaching life of the Lutheran church, and this opened up "windows of opportunity" for mission-minded congregations.

Change, like money, is amoral. What matters ultimately is what happens in the process of change. For example, the changes that have taken place in our synod's system of higher education have not all been beneficial. The permission to allow some of our junior colleges to become senior colleges has not, in my opinion, served the best interests of the colleges or the synod. It requires no documentation to show that it is much more expensive to operate a senior college than a junior college. Declining subsidies have placed a financial burden on some of our colleges which they may not be able to carry.

The interrelationships among parish, district and synodical ministries have suffered from a diminishing of cordiality and trust among professional church workers. Mobility, life-style, heavy work loads, and other factors have contributed to the failure to establish cordial and supportive relationships. We used to have "father-confessors," and this helped to develop a body of humble, trusting servants of the Kingdom.

Handbooks, personnel manuals, and other documents have spelled out the relationships among parish, district and synod. These tools are in a constant state of revision. We are not weak in terms of organization. We need organization. We cannot function well without it. But an organization can easily become an end in itself. Those who provide resources for congregational use sometimes neglect to remember that what works in one place will not necessarily work in other places. Elected and appointed leaders need to be creative and provide more new and challenging ideas.

We need to remember who we are. We are a community of sinners, set in a world of sinners, seeking to worship and serve the Lord, who by His Spirit has called us into fellowship with Himself. We have designated, God-given responsibilities. We work together to keep the community attentive to God. That is the function of our ministry together. Our primary orientation must always be the mercy of God demonstrated in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

One thing is sure. Districts and synods may come and go; even a parish may perish, but the Church of Christ will continue to live. It will live because it is His body, indestructible and eternal. He will protect it; He will preserve it; the "gates of hell" cannot prevail against it.

L.W. Heidemann
Pastor Emeritus
St. John Lutheran Church
Seward, Nebraska

Hoping for a Turnabout

The teaching profession, long considered a dead-end by most college students, appears to be making a surprising comeback in public higher education. In the May 8 issue of the *New York Times*, it was reported that public colleges and universities across the country were reporting significant increases in teacher education students. Three factors seem to emerge after more than a decade of declining enrollment. Young people today recognize that higher salaries and greater numbers of job opportunities are present in public education. Also, there is a perceptible trend away from materialism to that of seeking job satisfaction through various kinds of public service, teaching being one of them.

What is presently the scene in Lutheran higher education? Are we experiencing a similar turnabout? It appears that the enrollment growth in synodical higher education is occurring primarily among the general student population. There are some signs that seem to indicate that the declining teacher education population might be bottoming out. But no significant increases in teacher education students have come about in our synodical colleges as a whole so far.

Job opportunities have been excellent for our teacher candidates for over a decade and con-

tinue to be so. The concept of ministry is generally strong among the majority of our candidates, although the concept is not always projected in traditional ways. In terms of salary and some fringe benefits, students preparing for the teaching ministry face some formidable hurdles. In 1987-88 the average salary for a full-time public school teacher was \$28,031; whereas, the full-time Lutheran educator, many serving for 12 months, averaged \$17,587. When the costs of education at synodical colleges escalate every year, and the future salary scales do not begin to promise an equitable return, it becomes exceedingly difficult to recruit and retain students for the teaching ministry.

What might be done to help bring about a change in this picture? Risking over-simplification, I believe the following can be a start.

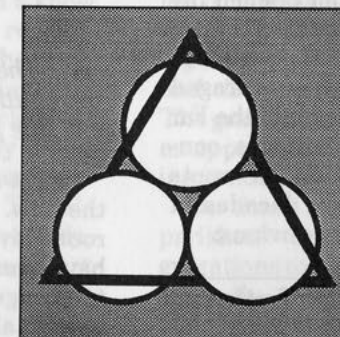
1. God's people must fervently pray for guidance and direction as they search for more effective ways to encourage and recruit young people for the teaching ministry.
2. Christian educators should project the positive aspects present in the teaching ministry.
3. The costs of attending synodical colleges for teaching ministry preparation must be reduced by one-third at the very least. This might mandate that only several colleges be utilized for the preparation of teaching ministers, allowing larger synodical subsidies to assist in cost reduction.
4. Parishes operating schools must accept the responsibility for recruiting young persons from among their memberships and estab-

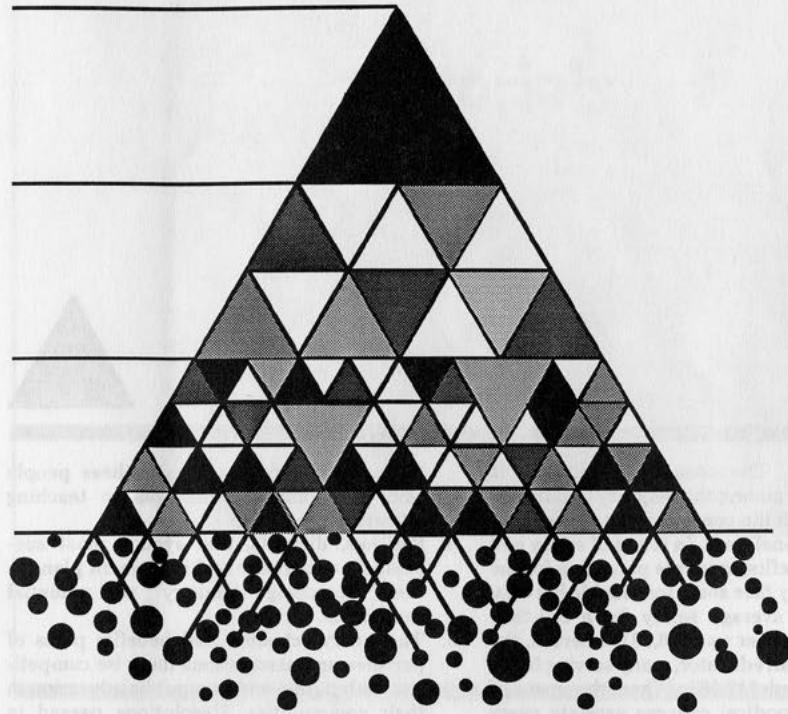
lishing scholarships to assist these people who will commit themselves to teaching ministry preparation.

5. Parishes, districts, and synods must successfully coordinate and implement plans to "sell" teaching ministry to potential candidates.
6. The salary schedule and benefits plans of parishes and associations must be competitive with public and non-public education in their communities. Resolutions passed in voters' assemblies, at district and synodical conventions that speak to more equitable remuneration policies must finally be implemented.
7. Working conditions must remain fair and flexible enough for individual adjustments. Time spent with family and in leisure time will be demanded by today's young people.

If the image of the teaching minister is perceived positively by young people; if working conditions, salaries, and other benefits are competitive with those in the public and non-public sector; if team ministry among all of the professional church work staff is favorably observed, I wager we will be well on the road to a turnabout in our teacher candidate enrollments throughout synodical higher education.

Floyd Behrens, Principal
Grace Lutheran School
Winter Haven, Florida





Grass Roots Expectations of Parish, District and Synodical Ministries

I write about grass roots, their expectations and three levels of ministry. I am qualified to do so. I am part of the grass roots. We—I—have expectations. For 35 years I have been active in, and closely watching, the three levels.

Talk about Lutheran grass roots! Both sides of my family, maternal and paternal, for as many generations back as we can trace, have been members of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. I was received by baptism into a member church of the LCMS at birth in 1929. I grew up surrounded by positive and energetic Midwestern Lutheranism. In the 1950s, I moved from the grass roots pew service to the grass roots pulpit ministry. Seventeen years as a pastor followed by eight years in a district president's front row seat during the unstable 70s further opened my eyes to LCMS grass roots reality.

Eleven years ago I returned to my first love, the parish. In addition to congregational duties, the parish encouraged me to roam the U.S.A., Canada, Brazil, and a bit of the Far East at the invitation of organizations, conferences, conventions and congregations—checking out LCMS roots and their expectations. Based on nearly six decades of Lutheran living, three early observations are obvious:

Charles Mueller is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Roselle, Illinois.

- I. *There is a loyal lay and clergy grass roots LCMS membership.*
- II. *They have expectations.*
- III. *Their expectations are rising expectations.*

Every opinion poll made of the synod supports these observations. They are nothing new. By the time this article appears the results of another study will be upon the church. Sight unseen, I'm confident it will reinforce what I've observed as an ecclesiastical itinerant. But it would be misleading not to add other points to my three basics, beginning with:

- IV. *The grass roots of the LCMS are Christian in the fullest Lutheran sense, believe the Bible, and expect the same of the parish, district, and synod.*

Argue as some will, there's no confusion on this point in the pew. That's the clergy's view, too. The LCMS grass roots, lay and pastoral, are a sturdy, evangelical lot. They have been for a century and a half—plus—and aren't likely to change their foundational beliefs. They aren't likely to change about this, either:

- V. *The grass roots believe this article's title is right: the ecclesiastical sequence of importance is: 1) parish, 2) district, 3) synod—in that descending order.*

The first time I "saw" that sequencing (which I believe is both Biblical and Confessional) was in a congregational meeting. It was in the 1970s. I was a visiting district president. I asked parishioners to name their pastor, circuit counselor, district president, and synodical president. I don't know why I asked. I was probably desperate for conversation.

All knew their pastor. Less than half knew their counselor. About a quarter named their district president—and there I was, standing before them! A handful knew the synodical president.

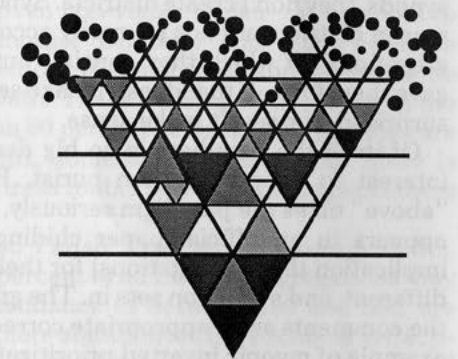
I do not offer this as scientific evidence, but just as information about an inquiry which, repeated dozens of times, gave nearly identical results. My conclusion? The further officials or institutional structures are existentially removed from the parish, the less people know or care about them.

Considering the many excellent district and synodical leaders, how could this remoteness develop? A number of answers press forward. First, for the last number of decades "the distant ones" haven't been doing what President Lyndon Johnson called "pressing the flesh," and pastors know as "visiting the members." Either descriptive is very different from promoting a program of pushing the project. There has not been enough people-to-people contact and two-way exchange between the leaders and the led. And the grass roots expect both.

Second, some leaders (at all three levels) don't know much about today's congregational life. They only remember how it **was** and clearly don't know how it **is**. The grass roots know the parish is dynamic, changing by the day. Yesterday's experiences are history, not reality. Good clergy of yesterday could be good clergy of today, but they aren't until they are. Forget the war stories and irrelevant nostalgic reminiscing of yesterday. Get with today. There's room enough, and need, for solid contemporary retreats.

That leads to a related insight: today's grass roots expect their leaders to recognize that the laity and parish professionals have come a long way in 150 years. Con-

by Charles S. Mueller



gregational laymen, teachers, and pastors of the late 1980s are often better educated than their leaders, better prepared to administer than many institutional executives, better informed on issues than professors. Paternalistic head-patting is not only counter productive to organizational growth, but embarrassing to those who understand reality.

Even though some of the negative observations I wrote about are prevalent in the church, the LCMS grass roots are open to the guidance of leaders and will practice evangelical support whenever they can.

How do they do this? They maintain reasonable expectations. Leaders are not required to be perfect. When the led occasionally confront our leaders, they generally do so with respect and without pejorative language. I'm glad to report that we who follow recognize that synodical, district and circuit leaders need a fair hearing and usually give it. The grass roots strike me as determined to give every cause an appropriate hearing, and then *let the people decide*. Voting is not only American—it is grass roots Missouri.

Do these same grass roots have expectations of their parishes? You bet! As mentioned, they expect congregations to be evangelical, Biblical and Confessional and, secondly, to hear five cries: 1) Help me with my family; 2) Help me with the youth; 3) Help me read my Bible with

understanding; 4) Help me share my faith in a way that fits me; 5) Help me grow in the Christ life. Over and over those same five expectations, expressed as hopes, crop up.

And if the expectations are ignored? What then? Three things first begin to deteriorate and, uncared for, disappear: 1) Interest; 2) Support; 3) A sense of ownership. With that the grass roots cast their ultimate veto vote. They stay away in droves, and they reallocate their resources to more friendly causes. Look and see if that be true.

Enough on that. There's another grass roots basic expectation built on this reality: the LCMS grass roots don't understand or accept the classic Missouri Synod organizational wire diagram. They expect leaders to know that and do something about it. But we still have a lot of institutional Rehoboams.

The official rationale of relationship between congregation, district, and synod is that while congregations create synods, they don't create districts. Synods do that. For that reason districts are not primarily accountable to the congregations (of which they consist) but to the synod that gave them form. If that doesn't make sense to you, don't be surprised. It doesn't make sense.

Of itself the paradigm is no big deal. It is only of real interest to an organization purist. But when someone "above" takes the paradigm seriously, as in an article that appears in an official paper chiding districts (and by implication the congregations) for their selfishness, that's different, and a reaction sets in. The grass roots don't hear the comments as an appropriate corrective but as another example of myopic inverted prioritization. They know the money isn't being squandered at the congregation—so "what's the beef?" they ask. They hear the correction as whiney discontent from the peak of a top heavy organization.

Knowing many of the writers, I recognize that perception isn't accurate. But most grass roots folk don't know the writers. So, what to do? First, correct the diagram; then correct the rhetoric.

For most parish folk the correct wire diagram is a *connected* sequence of organizational structure in a descending order of: a) the congregation, b) the circuit, c) the district, d) the synod. To the grass roots that is the organizational application of Christ's outward spiralling, ". . . you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth." (Acts 1:8). Things flow from the core outward. And the congregation is the core.

To support the importance of this outward spiralling and the fact that things in synod actually work that way, I ask you: is there any school, any ministry, any service, any world wide project of the LCMS that did not begin that way—from the local to the world? LLL? The Lutheran Hour? LWML? All of our terminal schools except the Ft. Wayne seminary? Evangelism efforts like PTRs and canvassing? All the social service agencies? Bethesda? Wheat Ridge? Valparaiso? On and on? Every organization I can think of has an anecdote of its beginning about a "local someone" who saw a need, was moved to concern, tried to

get help, couldn't, and then acted anyway. The flow is from Jerusalem outward; from the individual and congregation outward. That's not wrong. That's real.

We must do our institutional valuing the same way: expect and encourage strong, mission minded members to develop strong, mission minded congregations *where they are*. Then expect strong, mission minded congregations to do the work *where they are* and also help create and energize vigorous circuits, districts and synods (in that order) to help do His work in places where the congregation cannot. When that sequence pervades the structure, and is maintained, good things happen. *MEGATRENDS*, a best seller of a few years ago, is right: fads flow down; trends flow up. The trick is to know which direction is which in our organization. People who think synod sets the trend are wrong.

But who objects to a heavier lay and local role? First and foremost are those who believe Grabau, Walther's Buffalo Synod adversary, had it right. Grabau warned that we must beware "the papacy of the people." People aren't to be trusted. They need to have things done for them. The grass roots don't agree with that. They (lay and pastor alike) think they know what is right and best for them. When they see what has to be done, and what changes ought to be made, they quietly move ahead and effect the change. They act first and ask second. It has always happened that way. Check out the history of synodical change on *wucher*, *schwagerehe*, dancing, attending theatre, Boy Scouts, women voters, engagement and marriage, to mention a few of many examples. Reality is that the people develop the best approach in most matters which, in time, synod ultimately and reluctantly accepts. Examples? Lots. VBS, Sunday school, tracts, congregational budgets, offering envelopes, pledging. Our traditional kind of change process scares a lot of folk. But that's the way it is—and has been for a long time. The process is still working out here, right now. Consider computers, congregational foundations, lay ministers, women lectors, AA programs, and ministry to the divorced. Come and see. When you do, you'll also discover another grass roots expectation:

VI. *The church at every level realizes there's more than one kind of parish, and there's more than one right way for parishes to parish.*

Some LCMS programs from district and synod flop because well intentioned planners forget that all Confessionally faithful LCMS parishes don't parish the same way. More than that they don't parish the same way, they really aren't the same. First, let's look at an obvious bit about how we parish.

The LCMS congregational effort for the Lord in a small western Kansas town is different in many fundamental ways from work in Miami, Florida; different in other ways from that in suburban Seattle, Chicago or Albuquerque (all of which are also different from each other); different in yet other ways from campus work in New England, military



chaplaincy work at Cherry Point, N.C., and Hispanic/Black/Laotian in any community of your choosing. As our ubiquitous grass roots laity move around, they see this. It doesn't bother them. As an example, some of my parishioners report of worship they have experienced elsewhere in the U.S.A., saying, "It's okay for them, pastor, but I wouldn't like it here." And they are right. There are things fully appropriate somewhere else that ". . . I wouldn't like here." Tragedy develops when institutional know-it-alls tell how it must be done, or how it may not be done, usurping the congregations' responsibility to determine that for themselves. The term "synod" does not—cannot—mean lock-step. It means walk together, you at your pace and in your way, and I at my pace and in my way. That's not a nervous notion—unless there is low or no trust.

The LCMS has historically trusted local folk—the local congregation, the local pastor, the local school, the local brotherhood of full-time workers, the local counselor, the local district president—to decide what fits best in their area. That trust is not without reminders of our care for one another. The asterisked reference to Bylaw 1.09b attached to Article VII of the Constitution in our Handbook does that. But the grass roots people trust. They believe that when trust disappears, so does the synod. The congregation will remain when trust disappears, but goodbye LCMS. That's why the grass roots hate those volunteer carpenter, long distance specialists, and the self-appointed judges. They see them as nine commandment Lutherans (the 8th is ignored by them in the name of order!) who are ripping at what alone can make us strong: Spirit built trust and the conversation that helps make trust grow. They feel that's the only way to help trust happen. That's not just their idea. Read Walther's 1848 inaugural address.

A second part of the expectations of grass roots vis 'a vis understanding of the parish is what people like Rothauge ("Sizing Up a Congregation," The Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Avenue, NY, NY 10017), and many others have shown. That is, congregations, even in the same area, can be very different. As a matter of fact, there are at least four different kinds of parishes.

Parish Type #1 is the *family parish* with 50 or fewer worshippers per Sunday. These congregations do church like no one else—as any pastor who has ever served one knows.

The second group of congregations, called *pastoral parishes*, has a Sunday attendance of 50 to 150. They are ecclesiastical "7/11 Stores" with clergymen holding down most positions and doing most up-front work. About 85 percent of our LCMS parishes are either *family parishes* or *pastoral parishes*. Now the sad part: both the *family parish*

and the *pastoral parish* are in serious trouble. Left unassisted and unsupported they will die, for "small" is terminal. They won't make it. Many are only surviving today through subsidy, or by sadly underpaying their clergy, or through financial sacrifice of their super laity. But subsidies are disappearing. And those who have long been underpaid are retiring, or quitting, with fewer and fewer replacements on the horizon. We still have the sacrificing laity, but they are asking a question: "How long ought we work to sustain a given non-viable parish—as opposed to linking up with another healthier and more effective parish?" Some question! We must think about that. As we do, take a deep breath. There's the smell of change in the air. When more than 80 percent of our LCMS parishes are in a category of flux, something is happening. More is bound to happen. Grass roots know that and expect others to know that, too.

That brings us to Parish Type #3: *program parishes*. Totalling about 12 percent of all LCMS congregations they have a Sunday attendance of between 150 and 350, are usually financially more stable, often have schools and support multiple staff. By their very nature they lean toward independence and bridle at attempts toward institutional control. These are great parishes to lead, but are almost impossible to drive. Ask any district president. He'll tell you.

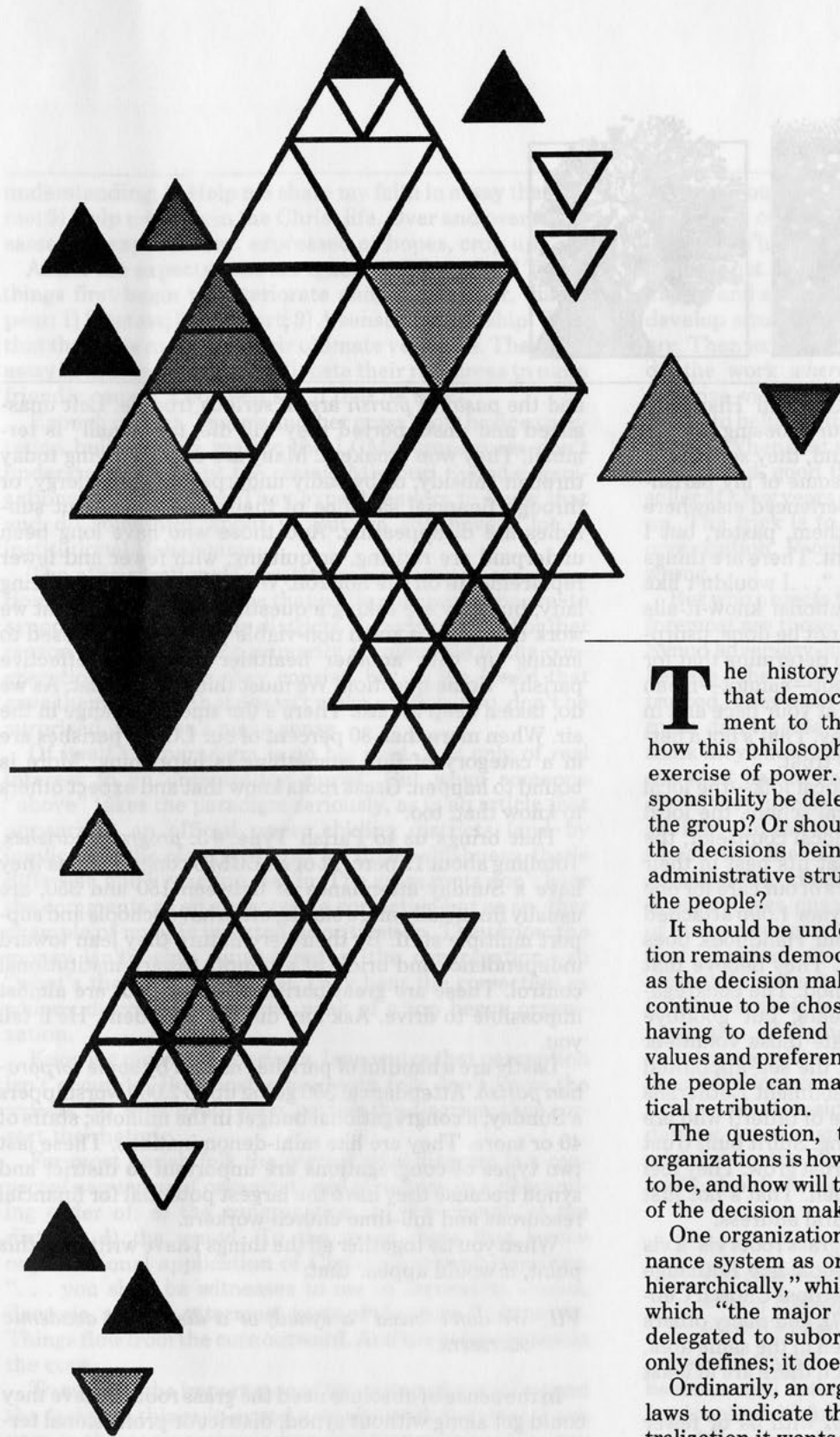
Lastly are a handful of parishes named by some *corporation parish*. Attendance: 350 going up to 2,000 worshippers a Sunday; a congregational budget in the millions; staffs of 40 or more. They are like mini-denominations. These last two types of congregations are important to district and synod because they have the largest potential for financial resources and full-time church workers.

When you tie together all the things I have written to this point, it would appear that:

VII. *We don't "need" a synod, or a district or academic overseers.*

In the sense of absolute need the grass roots believe they could get along without synod, district or professional terminal schools. What wonderful gifts they have been for making the church's work easier and more effective. But without them? We'd live—just like the church in China grew and even flourished in the dark days of the bamboo curtain. All we "need" are Christians, the local parish and pastors. If more were required, Jesus would have

(Continued on page 20)



The history of democratic government shows that democracies, notwithstanding their commitment to the rule of the people, keep debating how this philosophy should be carried out in the actual exercise of power. Should the chief decision making responsibility be delegated in large part to the top leaders of the group? Or should power be decentralized with most of the decisions being made at the lower echelons of the administrative structure, and thus, presumably, closer to the people?

It should be understood at the outset that an organization remains democratic in either of these options, as long as the decision makers, at whatever level they are found, continue to be chosen by the people, with the incumbents having to defend their responsiveness to the people's values and preferences, and with regular elections in which the people can make their choices without fear of political retribution.

The question, then, that confronts all democratic organizations is how centralized or decentralized they wish to be, and how will their choice affect their ultimate control of the decision making process.

One organization theorist defines a centralized governance system as one in which "most decisions are made hierarchically," while a decentralized organization is one in which "the major source of decision making has been delegated to subordinate personnel." (1) This, however, only defines; it does not evaluate.

Ordinarily, an organization uses its constitution and by-laws to indicate the degree of centralization or decentralization it wants. But the codes themselves are seldom enough to settle the issue. The actual implementation of

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constitution and by-laws is subject both to the interpretation of office-holders and to the mood of the people. If the central leadership is dynamic, forceful, and popular, it can pull more and more of the decision making process into its sphere of influence, as long as the mood of the people allows it. If, on the other hand, the trust factor between people and top leadership breaks down, the office holders at the lower levels and closer to the people will more and more insist on prerogatives allowed them by the codes which define the parameters of power; or they, together with supporters from the rank and file, may even attempt to modify the codes to legitimize this decentralization trend.

Factors that Influence Centralization/Decentralization

There are a number of factors that influence the centralization/decentralization options of an organization. One of the factors is the *substance* of the decisions to be made. If understanding the implications of a decision requires a high degree of specialized expertise, the decision is likely to be delegated to officers who have such expertise. If, on the other hand, a decision requires thorough knowledge of and complete commitment to the fundamental aims and goals of the organization as well as proven judgment as to how given decisions will fly inside and outside the organization, it is more likely to be kept centralized at a high level of the administrative structure.

A second factor is the *policy/personnel relationship*. The theorist cited above claims that centralization is not a simple matter of who makes decisions. "If personnel at lower levels in the organization are making many decisions," he argues, "but the decisions are 'programmed' by organizational policies, a high degree of centralization remains." (2)

A third factor involves the *evaluation process*. "If evaluation is carried out at the top of the organization, there is centralization, regardless of the level at which decisions are made." (3) This is because evaluation decides whether

work is done properly and in keeping with organizational policy, with the result that lower level decision makers can be corrected or even replaced if the evaluation is negative.

A fourth factor is *organization size*. The research with reference to size comes to mixed conclusions. One study concluded that "the large size of an agency produces conflicting pressures on top management, as it heightens the importance of managerial decisions, which discourages delegating them, and simultaneously expands the volume of managerial responsibilities, which exerts pressure to delegate some of them." (4)

One example of this tension is found in institutions of higher education. Studies show that large universities do indeed tend to be more decentralized than smaller ones. However, the decentralization takes place mostly in the areas where specialized expertise is required for decision making, for example, the evaluation of academic competence in teaching or research personnel. At the same time, university decisions tend to be highly centralized in such areas as student admissions, budgeting and financial development, and capital expansion. Thus "size is clearly in interaction with a technical (professional expertise) factor in its contribution to decentralization." (5)

A fifth factor in centralization/decentralization dynamics is the *level of turbulence* within an organization. In groups where a high level of harmony with respect to principles and procedures prevails, the trend will be toward centralization. Top officials will be allowed broad decision making powers, and lower level personnel will function primarily as reinforcement agents for the policies and programs that are developed higher up.

But when an organization's membership is divided on basic values, policies, and directions, divergent elements in the group will try to bring the decision making process closer to the constituency. Thus they will hope to have more direct contact with and influence over the decision makers so as to increase the possibility that their particular point of view may prevail. Such contact and influence is

considered more feasible when the decision maker is closer to the bottom of the hierarchy.

Support for this hypothesis is found in some of the research which has examined the effect of turbulence or nonstability in business organizations. (6) It seems plausible to argue that if turbulence encourages decentralization in "for profit" corporations where the public has no formal role in determining how power is distributed, decentralization stemming from turbulence would be at least as likely, if not more so, in democratic, voluntary, non-profit organizations where the governance structure is subject ultimately to the will of the electorate.

Centralization/Decentralization Trends in American Society

One of the most striking governance shifts in American history took place during a time when our society was experiencing a severe economic trauma. For most of American history, up until the 1930s, politicians and economists had supported, with few exceptions, a governance structure that provided a minimum of power at the federal level and a maximum of power at the state and local levels. Then came the Great Depression and the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the presidency. The Roosevelt plan for the restoration of America's economy, labeled "the New Deal," involved unprecedented massive moves toward centralizing the control of our economy and the welfare of our citizens at the federal level.

Predictably, the centralization trend which began as an effort to solve the economic problems of the nation soon crossed over into other important areas such as education (Head Start, Higher Education Facilities Act, student grant and loan programs) and family life (family planning, mental health clinics, abortion). Many people questioned the propriety, even the constitutionality of this trend. They held that our founding fathers wanted the federal government's role to be limited basically to the maintenance of law and order within our borders and defense against enemies from without.

Nevertheless, the half century from 1930 to 1980 saw a virtual reversal of this philosophy. More and more control was shifted to the federal level; less and less remained at the local level. Great federal programs, though bitterly fought by some, came to be the order of the day. The federal personal income tax, denounced as an unconscionable centralization of power when Congress passed the Underwood Act of 1913, has gradually gained acceptance in principle, with the debate having narrowed to how progressive it should be and whether the rates should go up or down.

Social security, at first condemned as a monster that would push the country over the brink into radical socialism, is now universally acclaimed as an entitlement. Federal farm subsidies, which have travelled an even rockier road into the national consciousness, have also entrenched themselves so firmly that their challengers tend now to focus more on their form than on their substance.

Yet latent suspicions of and opposition to this trend have never disappeared. Political rhetoric has consistently scored points when it has decried, in general terms, the invasiveness of the federal government in the average citizen's daily life. At the same time, every national election reveals widespread ambivalence in the electorate. Politicians who denounce the encroachment of central government into individual lives are applauded, yet they can be elected only when they promise not to roll back federal programs such as social security and subsidies.

This brings us to the "Reagan Revolution" of the 1980s. The term itself suggests a radical reversal of the centralization trend. How accurate is this? Admittedly, significant shifts toward decentralization have taken place. Yet to imply that the nation has returned to anywhere near the power distribution balances that prevailed before the Roosevelt presidency is clearly more rhetoric than reality. The federal role in areas like education, regulation of corporations, supervision of discriminatory practices, and funding and monitoring of regional welfare programs, indeed has been diminished to a degree, but in almost all instances their basic substance remains. At the same time, the largest examples of centralization, involving the biggest percentage of the national budget, programs such as social security, medicare, and medicaid, remain fully intact.

What lies ahead? Now that the Reagan presidency has passed the torch to the new administration, will the decentralization trend continue? Will it even gain momentum? And will the trend that is at work in government impact trends that develop in other institutions of society, for example, the church? We cannot answer these questions here, but we can examine what is currently happening in the church.

The Influence of Social Forces on Church Trends

Books have been written premised on the thesis that society and religion tend to be mutually supportive and functionally interdependent. It is held that forces that move the one in a certain direction tend to be reflected in the directions the other takes. This is argued specifically with reference to the interaction between religion and the government. (7) The implication is that massive structural or functional changes in government are likely to be reflected in similar changes in church polity and process.

An application of this theory is discussed in Carl S. Munding's *Government in the Missouri Synod*. He takes up the question of whether the polity (congregational as opposed to hierarchical) that found its way into The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's constitution stemmed from the fact that the Saxon founders were influenced by the democratic system of government which greeted them when they landed on American soil.

Munding, however, rejects the functional interdependence explanation. Instead, he argues that the Saxons' shift from the hierarchical system which characterized the church in Germany to the congregational system which the Saxons adopted in Missouri stemmed from their Lutheran

background, not from American political theory and practice. Having examined the documents that recorded the discussions among the settlers in St. Louis and Perry County, Missouri, he concludes that "any democratic theories which the founders of the Missouri Synod might have entertained they did not get from America, but from the same source from which they derived their theology and church polity, viz., from the writings of Martin Luther." (8)

When we now take a look at the contemporary situation, one can see concurrent trends toward decentralization in both the American government and in the Missouri Synod. Once again one must ask whether these trends are functionally interdependent or whether they are independent of each other. The writer believes that there is insufficient evidence to support claims of functional interdependence, and that the most anyone can safely posit at this point is that these trends are coterminous in time.

What are some examples of decentralization in the Missouri Synod? An article in the November 1988 *Lutheran Witness* addresses this question, though it does not use the word decentralization. It describes instead what it refers to as "weakened links" between synod and the local congregations. (9) Two examples of "weakened links" are cited: 1) while individual giving has increased, giving to districts and the national synod has been cut by more than 70 percent since 1965 in terms of constant dollars. 2) a new emphasis on "at-home ministry" has affected the ability of the synod to accomplish the tasks requested by the congregations it was created to serve.

Other examples can be cited. It is common knowledge that synod's national nomination process has been challenged in recent years by self-organized groups who prepare their own slates, claiming that their nominees better reflect the perceived grass roots of the synod. Furthermore, the synod's board functioning process, particularly the functioning of the boards that control synod's higher education institutions, has been decentralized by allowing some of the board members to be chosen, not by the national body, but by the district and by the board itself.

Any suggestion that these decentralization trends are linked causally with what is happening in society at large must be viewed with considerable skepticism for at least two reasons. First, the Munding theory, giving ecclesiastical and historical considerations more weight than social forces, seems as plausible in the current situation as it was when the Saxons organized the synod. Second, for every example of movement toward decentralization someone will cite a converse example of power shifting in the other direction, namely toward centralized decision making.

The writer, in a number of casual conversations with professional colleagues in the pastoral and teaching ministries, asked whether synod was moving toward more centralization or toward more decentralization of the governance process. The respondents thought it was a mixed bag; that one can find examples of both trends. While the trends toward decentralization cited above were acknowledged,

examples of centralizing tendencies were also mentioned. Among these were the massive synod-run special gifts efforts of recent decades, the growing tendency to look to synodical headquarters for program development covering virtually every area of congregational life, and the perceived expanding influence of synodical executives.

All of this suggests that to analyze these trends more research is needed to determine whether one trend has ascendancy over the other.

Reacting to the Trends

How people react to centralization or decentralization trends seems to depend on how they evaluate the current state of the organization and whether they are for or against any change that is occurring. This suggests that when people have confidence in the national leadership and perceive the goals of the organization as being responsibly and efficiently met, they are likely to favor, or at least allow, movement toward centralization in the organization. If, on the other hand, they feel that national leadership is not adequately responsive to their concerns, inefficiently conducts the business of the organization, or, worst of all, does not properly support and promote the purposes and values for which the group exists, they tend to support momentum in the direction of decentralization on the assumption that lower level officials will more readily reflect the sentiments of the rank and file.

This hypothesis did indeed receive support in the informal conversations the writer referred to above. When asked, "Which trend do you consider to be more advantageous to the church, toward centralization or toward decentralization?" the respondents' answer, in summary, was: "It depends on who occupies the top positions in the church."

On the other hand, it is not hard to find loopholes in this theory. What happens when a popular leader himself promotes decentralization? During his two terms in office a popular Reagan not only talked decentralization, he actually took steps to implement his rhetoric. At the time of the Missouri Synod's founding, a popular C.F.W. Walther not only declined to wear a bishop's miter, he encouraged and helped the new church form a constitution in which decision making was kept as close to the people as possible. Thus the attitude of top leadership toward decentralization, particularly when it enjoys a popular standing with the populace, can become an important intervening variable.

The presence of such an intervening variable, then, can have the effect of providing greater continuity to the decentralization trend, whereas in its absence the organization may experience a *see-saw* effect. As administrations change and their acceptance rates vary significantly, organizations may find themselves shifting back and forth between centralization and decentralization preferences. Might one not argue, in fact, that the Missouri Synod has experienced this see-saw effect as changing praesidia are viewed differently by emergent activist groups who attempt to influence synodical directions?

Other variables that could affect how a constituency views these trends are: 1) *denial*, that is, a psychological unreadiness of a population to face up to the reality of changes taking place; 2) *overaccommodation*, that is, a sort of "go with the flow" attitude that conditions a community into accepting change for the sake of change rather than for the substantive effects of the change; or 3) *super-traditionalism*, that is, a "wir bleiben beim alten" (the old ways are timeless and should never be modified) mentality in which the group refuses to be confused with the facts as it clings irrationally to the past simply because "that's the way we've always done it."

Questions and Suggestions

There are a variety of questions on which consensus is difficult to obtain, yet they deserve continued and careful study. These questions include: 1) what are the relative strengths and weaknesses of centralized and decentralized decision making systems in the church; 2) which system has the greater potential for preserving and promoting the basic values and purposes of a particular church organization; 3) which system best reflects the historic governance philosophy of a particular church; 4) which system best takes into account the demographic changes a church has experienced since its founding; 5) which system best facilitates the building of unity and morale in a church; 6) which system best facilitates the forward march of progress in the mission, education, stewardship, social ministry, and youth programs of a church; 7) which system has the greater potential for controlling disruptive tendencies and minimizing the abuse of power in the organization; 8) which system has the greater potential for providing strong evangelical leadership, for providing maximum participation of the rank and file in the decision making process, and for helping the entire constituency understand that the energy for preserving the doctrine pure and for proclaiming the Good News powerfully comes ultimately not from organizational structure but from the Spirit of our God working through His saving Word.

Suggestions for improving the organizational structure of the church are easily made but difficult to convert into synodical consensus. This is evidenced by the long list of committees and commissions appointed by synod over the past three decades, each of which received a mandate to study and make recommendations for organizational improvement. The list includes:

- 1956 - Survey Commission
- 1969 - Committee on Organization
- 1973 - Committee on Reorganization
- 1975 - Task Force I on the Reorganization of Synod's Structure
- 1977 - Task Force II
- 1981 - Commission on Structure

Wouldn't one expect that so much energy expended almost continuously over a period of 30 years would have resulted in massive changes? Such, however, is not the case. Admittedly, some changes have been made, by-laws

have been revised, but the basic structural framework of the synod varies little from that which was put in place by the fathers.

The writer believes that any thoughtful approach to the centralization/decentralization issue must always begin with the fundamental realities of our synodical history and our present situation. These include: 1) the fact that the synodical constitution gives the congregation ultimate authority, under the Word of God, in all matters of faith and life and describes the synod's role in these matters as advisory; (10) 2) the fact that synod's by-laws do not establish a single, all-inclusive line-staff pyramid of administrative authority but instead locate administrative decision making power at a variety of points in the organization, starting with the synodical president and including various synodical boards and commissions, as well as important decision points at the district level; and 3) the fact that synod has grown since its time of origin from a small, homogeneous group to a large, complex, heterogeneous organization, and that this change, as much as anything, calls for continuing review of the administrative and power distribution systems that were developed to serve a smaller church.

Notes

¹Hall, Richard H., *Organizations: Structure and Process*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982, p. 115.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*

⁴Blau, Peter M. and Richard A. Schoenherr, *The Structure of Organizations*, New York: Basic Books, 1971, p. 130.

⁵Hall, p. 117.

⁶Burns, Tom and G.M. Stalker, *The Management of Innovation*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1961.

⁷Vernon, Glenn M., *Sociology of Religion*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962, p. 251.

⁸Mundinger, Carl S., *Government in the Missouri Synod*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947, p. 209.

⁹"Who Will Pay the Bills," article in *Lutheran Witness*, November, 1988, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰1986 Handbook of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod," St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1986, p. 11. The Handbook says: "with respect to the individual congregation's right of self-government it (the Synod) is but an advisory body."

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The Interrelationship of Parish, District, and Synodical Ministries

In an unpublished report prepared for the synodical Survey Commission in 1961, Dr. August R. Suelflow includes the following paragraph:

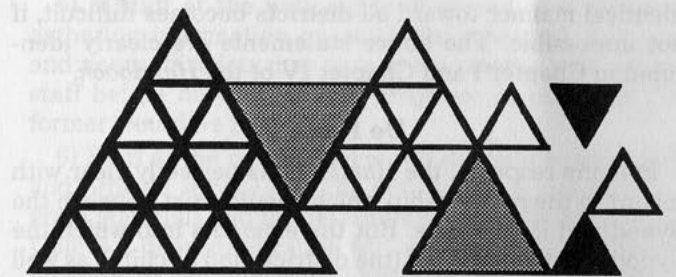
Sometimes efforts to define the Synod-district relationships have been amusing. A synodical representative was attending a district convention, and emphatically emphasized the need for individual cooperation in carrying out the synodical program. One of the "good fathers" and leaders in the district responded: "Schogut! Aber das Hemd ist doch naeher als der Rock!" ("Ok, but the shirt is much closer to the body than the coat!") The inference was made that the district was much closer to the people than the Synod, and consequently could lay a more effective claim upon their time, talents, and treasures. Thereupon the synodical representative immediately responded: "Hier ist nicht die Rede vom 'Hemd' oder 'Rock' sondern vom 'union suit.'" ("We don't speak here of a shirt and coat, but a union suit.") With this analogy the synodical executive emphasized that the relationships did not consist of a "we" and "they" arrangement, but that they were or ought to be completely integrated and coordinated as in a single garment.

An exchange such as that quoted above is not atypical. It represents the difference of opinion which still exists today and demonstrates that it is not a difference of opinion of recent origin as some might suppose, but one which has existed almost from the time of establishment of the first districts of the Synod in 1854.

De Jure Humano

The title which was assigned for this article already indicates the problem in its basic form as it immediately raises the question, "What is the Synod?" The implication of the title is that "synodical" is somehow different from "district" and continues the "we-they" approach. The *Handbook* which contains the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod would not support that view. Because of confusion which has existed with regard to what "Synod" is or what is "synodical," the 1986 convention of the Synod, by adoption of a new Chapter I, attempted to clarify this as it sought to define "Relationships Within and Through the Synod." In reality, the Bylaws comprising this chapter contain nothing new.

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Viewed as an organizational structure, the Synod is and always has been a federation of congregations joined together to carry out certain activities and achieve certain objectives which could not be accomplished by each congregation acting independently. From the very beginning, it was recognized that the Synod, as an organization, was only advisory in relation to the congregation which retained its right of self-government.

The same was not true, however, for districts. The underlying principle dealing with the relationship between the Synod and its districts is based upon the fact that the districts do not create the Synod but are created by it. Throughout its history, the Synod has reserved the right to approve the creation of new districts and apart from grammatical improvements, change in word order and a substitution of terminology, Article XII of the Constitution, as well as many of the bylaws relating to the district have remained virtually unchanged and have served as the basic definition for the district-Synod relationships since the districts first came into being. Although efforts to create districts were based on a variety of reasons and were initiated largely by congregations, the actual establishment of the districts remained and still remains the prerogative of the Synod meeting in convention. The creation of a district was considered to be the business of the entire Synod.

It is consequently incorrect to speak of the Synod and the district as two separate entities. The district is the Synod in a particular location. It is rather more proper to speak of the Synod at the national, district and circuit levels. Based upon this understanding, the Synod at the national level, as congregations act in convention, has the authority to direct its districts and circuits to carry out certain functions. It

cannot direct congregations to do so but may only advise, urge, encourage, ask, suggest, etc., them to take such actions.

By their decision the congregations, through convention action establishing bylaws, have, however, authorized districts to adopt their own structures. While the Constitution of the Synod and the district is the same, each district may be and is incorporated for certain purposes and has its own Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. These may be developed in any form and have any regulations or stipulations which the district determines to make as long as they do not conflict with the Bylaws of the Synod at the national level as determined by the congregations in convention. The freedom thus granted tends to create tension as the attempt of the Synod at the national level to relate in an identical manner toward all districts becomes difficult, if not impossible. The above statements are clearly identified in Chapter I and Chapter IV of the *Handbook*.

De Facto

In many respects, the *Handbook* is perfectly clear with regard to the relationship which should exist between the Synod and its districts. But the elements into which the Synod has divided itself (the districts and circuits), as well as those which comprise the Synod (congregations), involve people who are vitally concerned with mission and ministry. As such, the organization also has the characteristics of an organism or group of organisms rather than a static structure. This characteristic has evidenced itself almost from the beginning of the formation of districts, nowhere more so than in the establishment of missions.

Historically, with the proliferation of districts, increased functions and activities were assumed by them or were assigned to them, and these increased functions and activities created a greater independence and autonomy. Some districts began to assume that the work of the Synod, as carried out by the district, began and ended within their geographic boundaries. In the beginning, for example, all districts contributed surplus funds to be used for what was known as home missions, and a national Home Mission Commission, after receiving individual requests from districts, allocated the necessary funds to the districts on a percentage basis. As districts saw the mission opportunities immediately before them, many of them determined that there were no "surplus" mission funds to transfer from their district treasury to the common treasury for allocation by the Home Mission Commission. In attempting to gather as many funds as possible for their own specific needs, the tendency to develop autonomous, independent districts received support.

Districts attempted to retain as much of their "balance" at the end of the year in case of unforeseen or emergency developments. Newer and younger mission districts were unable to secure the income needed to meet their specific needs and continued to rely on the common synodical treasury for their support. Because their needs were great and their resources small, they were at the mercy of other districts which had developed a form of self-sufficiency. As

the situation progressed, the original relation of the Synod towards its districts and their work was changed, and while it was the Synod which had originally divided into districts in order to carry out its work more effectively, stronger districts, whose work might have been carried out more effectively through division, were afraid to divide, believing that in the process they might lose some of the independence which they had gained as they grew stronger financially and numerically. The result was that the Home Mission Commission was unable to carry out its work because of the independence which had been granted to individual district commissions in carrying out home mission responsibilities.

In his report to the synodical Survey Commission, Dr. Suelflow makes the following comments which contain some penetrating questions which are still applicable to situations as they exist today. He writes:

In view of the fact that the Synod had a Commission on Home Missions, and that each of the districts had a similar commission, it is extremely difficult to understand why in 1917 the Home Mission Commission was authorized to present its needs to the districts either through its own membership or by proxy. Why the synodical commission could not utilize the district Mission Commissions is a question which remains unanswered. Was there inadequate liaison between the two? Weren't the district commissions sufficiently acquainted with the overall picture in the Synod to give a clear, comprehensive picture? Was their orientation too parochial? Did the synodical commission have a hidden fear that the overall work would be neglected if a member of a district's commission would present the comprehensive program?

The reason for growing independence and autonomy of districts may be attributed to a number of factors: 1) There often appears to be, and a tension may actually exist, between decisions regarding work which is felt to be necessary by the Synod at the district level and the Synod at its national level. This is reflected in Bylaw 4.11 b, where it is stated that the elective officers "shall have primary responsibility for district implementation of decisions of the Synod, as applicable, and for implementation of decisions of the district conventions and district boards." The question of who decides "applicability" is unresolved. 2) Since dollars and cents are required for carrying out action and work, since congregational funds are forwarded to the district, and since funds to assist the districts in carrying out their mission work in the district were retained by the district and were not available to the Synod at the national level, the tendency is to transfer greater authority to the districts. 3) A third factor to be considered is the view that the districts are more aware, not only of the work which must be done, but of the way in which it may be done most effectively in their particular locale.

Again, Dr. Suelflow raises some pertinent questions regarding the shifts which took place and which are still relevant today.

- "A. Was it because the districts are closer to the synodical congregations?
- B. Was it purely because it concerned financial matters?
- C. Was it because the Synod met only triennially, and exercised no real interim action?
- D. Was it because the Synod lacked leadership?
- E. Was it because the conventions had forgotten the original position of the founders of the Synod in district/Synod relations?"
- F. Was it because the Synod grew too rapidly and consequently failed to adjust its administrative machinery accordingly?"

Whatever the reason, the tensions which developed and which existed almost since the beginning of the creation of districts continue to the present day.

What was true of the relationship between district mission boards and the Home Mission Commission on the national level also developed with regard to other areas. In some cases, district boards promoting and supporting activities such as parish education existed before national boards were designated. Work which was being done at the district level was sometimes assumed or referred by districts for direction at the national level and, in some cases, was transferred at a later date back to the districts.

As a result of all of this, as well as the latitude for district structures and organization provided in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod, patterns for such structure varied and continue to vary widely from district to district. While nearly all districts now have full-time district presidents, the number of specific boards and staff members in the individual districts varies widely. In some districts, there are no full-time staff members. In others, the number of staff members is parallel and equal to those on the national level. In still others, staff members assume responsibility for several program areas and relate to several staff members and departments on the national level.

As a result of the *de facto* situation and in spite of relationships as spelled out in the *Handbook* of the Synod, the Synod, in many respects, is viewed by some not as a federation of congregations but a federation of districts. Each district has its responsibilities and must carry them out. The function of the national level in this view is to support the district boards and staffs, each of which may develop its own specific program as long as that program is in harmony with the program direction determined by the national convention of the Synod.

Future Relationships

Obviously there are many frustrations and problems which arise because the relationships between the national and district levels of the Synod in all aspects of its work have not been fully defined. As a result, it appears that in the future one may expect the following:

1) Because of the different size and structures of districts, the relation between the staff and programs on the national and district levels will vary from district to district.

2) Because of the desire and perceived need of some to have a uniform structure which applies to the national relationship to all districts, tension will be present and can be expected to continue.

3) Districts, by virtue of the fact that congregations are assigned to them by the national convention, will relate most closely to congregations. Staff on the national level does not and will not relate to congregations or circuits but will assist the districts as they do so.

4) Program materials for the support of congregations will continue to be developed by staffs on both the national and district levels. This is especially true with regard to larger districts with staffs paralleling those on a national level. Bylaw 4.11 d, in fact, specifies this as a function of the district.

5) If staff at the national level serves as a center for gathering information on available programs, materials, and needs, districts may or may not consult with national staff before developing new programs or materials. The former would be preferable.

6) Staff at the national level will develop a program for and provide services for the networking of available program materials and for determining congregational needs. Unless it does, duplication will continue and tensions will increase as national and district programs compete for support.

7) Districts need to be aware of, support, and disseminate information about those activities and programs which the congregations, in national convention, have determined to carry out. These should not be presented as secondary or separate from programs and activities of the Synod at the district level but rather be presented as a unit to congregations and as complimentary to one another. Because of the "as applicable" statement in Bylaw 4.11 b, there is no assurance this will occur.

While a modification in relations between the national and district levels of the Synod can be envisioned with respect to parish education, social ministry, youth work, etc., can the same be true of higher education and missions? Both of these have consistently been viewed as responsibilities of the "Synod," meaning Synod at the national level. Here, too, history may be instructive, particularly as it affects the colleges of the Synod.

A review of the origin of the various educational institutions makes it clear that in most cases they were the product of local or district action. In the case of one, for example, a district began the college, offered it to the "Synod" which received it and transferred it to another district which, in turn, after a few years gave it back to the "Synod," meaning the Synod at the national level.

History further shows that support for capital expenditures on the college campuses by districts is not a recent development. Over the years individual districts provided funds for construction at individual campuses located within their boundaries and gave the buildings constructed with such funds to the "Synod." Over the years, it was assumed and directed by national conventions that that support was the responsibility of the "Synod." Failure of

the income of the Synod at the district and national level to keep pace with inflation and with the growing needs of the institution has caused the educational institutions of the Synod to once more depend on a source of income other than that provided by the national level of the Synod.

What all of this may imply is that we have now reached the point where individual districts or regions need to take ownership of those educational institutions in their region or district. It no longer seems realistic to expect that the day will come when the same level of support can be expected from a single national source as was once the case. It can be expected, however, that the gathering of third source income can be coordinated, again through a kind of system of networking.

Some of this is already occurring, of course, in relation to the support of seminaries. Through a joint seminary development effort, coordinated at the national level of the Synod, funds equal to or greater than those forwarded from the operating budget of the national Synod are gathered and provided for seminary operations. Perhaps the same procedure may some day be fully coordinated for the support of the colleges as well.

What has happened in regard to higher education has also taken place with regard to the foreign mission efforts of the Synod. Those missions formerly funded entirely from the national operating budget are now funded partially and increasingly through personalized missionary support as congregations band together to support a specific mission effort. The program, while supported in part in a different manner than formerly, is coordinated through the efforts of national Synod.

The point simply is that if the Synod is to grasp the mission and ministry opportunities which God has placed before it, it must be willing to adapt to a new and changing situation. This does not necessarily mean a change in the structural relationship between the national and district levels of the Synod. It does, however, mean that there is a need for reassessment of the manner in which that relationship is practiced. The 1989 convention, just as every convention in the past, including those which considered the report of a synodical Survey Commission, recommendations of a Task Force II, and the recommendations of an on-going Commission on Structure, will have the opportunity to make that reassessment.

book reviews

society throughout the past century. In addition, it is the laity who seem to be posing the prophetic questions to the Church. Such questions fall into six categories.

The first is spirituality as it deals directly with our age of knowledge. Unlike the church of the past, today's leaders are finding a constituency eager for "direct and experiential" knowledge of God versus knowledge about God. As a result, the desire and need for adult education within and beyond the parish is growing.

Secondly, the domestic church, defined as marriage and the family, is the institution within which spirituality is most often fostered and nurtured. During the past century, both marriage and family have moved from an economic and legal arrangement to a personal and relational agreement which is continuous and protective and demands accountability of its members. Because of these changes, parallel adjustments must be made in ministry and mission to the family.

As the roles and status of women have changed both in the secular world and the church, women have looked to Christianity for a new charter of freedom, reminded often of Jesus' actions as hope for the oppressed, the humbled, and the condemned. This third issue challenges spiritual leaders to discuss those roles and expectations

which are culturally based versus those which are God-given.

In addition, laity work within the marketplace of the global world. Increasing numbers of such individuals are seeking to bring meaning to their existence through a blending of their beliefs, values and morals as they apply to their occupations. Such needs have historically been overlooked by most denominational bodies.

Fifth, laity are posing questions about their missions and ministries through the understanding of the "priesthood of all believers." With these questions comes the need to "live our life as ministry" and all that such ministry entails.

Finally, the parish and the denomination of which it is a part are seen as a community of relationships (with both God and humankind) in a world which is struggling to define community as it was once known.

The work is thought-provoking and easy to read. The author not only offers some interesting ideas for both church leaders and lay persons, but also some suggestions for ministering individually and ecumenically to this changing church.

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CONGREGATION — STORIES AND STRUCTURES by James F. Hopewell. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

If someone were to ask, "What's the history of First Lutheran? How have they done through the years?", I suppose most of us would go to some sort of statistical annual. There we would find information about the number of baptized and communicant members of First Lutheran. We could also, by looking at a series of annuals, determine how much First Lutheran has grown through the years. Depending upon our analysis of the statistics, we might come to some conclusions about First Lutheran and perhaps could categorize them as "growing" or "stagnant," or perhaps in some other way.

Hopewell's book argues—and quite convincingly so—that statistics cannot tell the story of a local congregation. What can tell that story is the "story" of the congregation itself as told by its members. His argument is that the structural logic of a local congregation is *narrative*.

The pivotal chapter of the book is Chapter 11, entitled, "Christ and Eros," with Eros essentially being culture. He states that in any congregation there are actually two stories, one of Christ and one of Eros. Christianity, he explains, is not freed from culture, but operates within a cultural context. Therefore, one who would attempt to analyze a congregation must listen to its "stories," both as they relate to Christ and as they relate to culture.

Since a story requires setting, plot, and characters, so, too, does the narrative of a congregation. He demonstrates from his research of local congregations that plots, for example, twist and thicken and get resolved in real life much as they do in a drama. So, too, with setting and characters. The setting of a church is important to understand, as it may indicate why a certain situation was resolved in a certain way. The "characters" of the church are simply the members and professional staff who weave their way into and out of the church as characters do in any narrative.

The editor's foreword states that this is a "complex work." That it is. However, the author does a good job of defining and giving examples of unfamiliar terms or expressions for those who may not be well-versed in the technical terminology of the world of literature.

If you are looking for a little light reading in which deep subjects are discussed in popular vocabulary and presented in such a way that you can understand them without too much effort, then this is not the book for you. But, if you are interested in being challenged to think about something in a vastly different way than you have ever done previously; if you enjoy a good argument (indeed, this reviewer does not agree with the author in many areas); if you are searching for something to stimulate you to take a new and fresh look at your own church, then, by all means, buy and read this book.

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PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOLS: THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITIES by James S. Coleman and Thomas Hoffer. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1987.

What kind of parents send their children to Lutheran schools? Do Lutheran schools differ from private schools? Should Lutheran schools model public or private schools? Those who ponder the mission and direction of Lutheran schools—especially high schools—take note: James Coleman and his associates are back with *Public and Private High Schools*, a follow-up to their 1982 study, *High School Achievement*. Based on a large-scale body of research sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education, the authors draw remarkable and often unexpected conclusions about high school education in a changing society. Their conclusions have implications for teachers, administrators, and boards at all levels of Lutheran education.

The earlier volume cautiously reported that students from private schools "showed higher performance on the standardized tests than did students from comparable backgrounds in public schools." The new up-date confirms but clarifies that finding with special significance for religious education. Parochial schools make the difference.

Coleman and Hoffer identify three orientations for schooling: the school as agent of 1) the larger society or the state (public schools); 2) the individual family (private schools); 3) the religious community (parochial schools). Public schools seek to release students from family and social constraints and to sustain pluralism, and they lack a set of dominant community values. Private schools promote a single value—such as military school, college prep, or the arts—important in a very individualistic sense to families not otherwise linked by geographic or functional community. Parochial schools function as true community schools representing not only a whole set of common values, but also intergenerational consistency, and community expectations and goals. The private sector, then, does not include religious schools, since private and parochial orientations are markedly different. What's more, it's the parochial and not private school that yields better educational performance. Coleman and Hoffer spell out what this performance means in several chapters thick with charts and tables. Among the findings is their study of clientele which demonstrates that parent participation is higher in parochial schools than in public or private schools, and that this is NOT explained by ethnic or economic advantage. The research shows the high participation rate cuts across all family backgrounds.

The most controversial results center on academic achievement. The data confirms "strong evidence of greater growth in [parochial] schools than in public schools." Again, economic resources do not explain such growth; instead, social resources do.

The three orientations for schooling also affect dropout rates. The striking result is the much

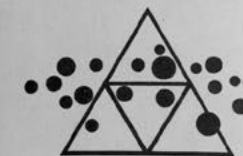
lower dropout rate from parochial schools than from either other sector, especially as contrasted with the relatively high dropout rate from private schools. The sampling between sophomore and senior years showed a public dropout rate of 14 percent, a private rate of 12 percent, and a parochial rate of 3 percent.

Chapter Five may have the strongest implications for support ministry. By identifying the "disadvantaged family" (low levels of income and education) and the "deficient family" (marked by working mothers, broken homes, and uninvolved parents), the research shows the source of dropouts is the deficient, not the disadvantaged family. Students of families participating in the functional community supported by church and school are least at risk in high school achievement.

Coleman and Hoffer draw their findings together in the last chapter, "Schools, Families, and Communities." They explain the consistently positive effects of the parochial sector by building on the concept of human capital. "Human capital" means the skill and competence a person has for coping with life's challenges. The authors propose the idea of "social capital": the relationship linkage between people required for transferring human capital. Children today are desperately short on social capital, relying most on peer relations and mass media for personal formation, while adults withdraw further from involvement with youth. The parochial school, they argue, may be the last functional community where kids receive consistent signals from a spectrum of adults.

For Lutheran schools that would genuinely educate, the message is clear; be very conscious of which orientation our students' parents have—and which orientation our teachers have. Orient our schools in a direction that trains servants and leaders for our functional communities of congregations. Guard against the single value "academic excellence" slogan which emphasizes academics over the whole set of community values. Coleman and Hoffer have demonstrated that the best way to serve both those in and out of the church is to continue the impact of our community on our schools. Academic excellence is not excellent. Community excellence is the difference between parochial schools and the private or public sectors. Read the results in *Public and Private High Schools*.

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(Continued from page 9)

established a full-blown organizational apparatus, together with colleges, seminaries, certification processes and handbooks. The grass roots believe that.

Don't get them wrong: the grass roots are not anti-intellectual or anti-structure. While they know we do not "need" a synod or seminaries, they also know what a blessing such structures usually have been. That's why congregations "invented" them: to bless the grass roots. But the structure is not the roots. The key congregational word of the 1850s was "selbstregierung." In growing parishes its Anglicization; "self-governing" is still key. Everyone needs a serving synod. No one wants or needs another organizational lord—at any level.

As a conclusion I offer a series of grass roots desires. They want to be:

- 1) More actively involved in how pastors and teachers are trained and certified. If they aren't involved, they may not want to take our system's untested products, especially when over a period of time it is clear to many parishes that some of our graduates do not respond to clear congregational needs!
- 2) Involved in evaluating their local mission opportunities and then actively participating in the allocation of resources, the choices of ministries to be started, and the supervision of the operation. The grass roots think they know as much about their community and what their community needs as someone living a hundred miles or even ten miles away.

- 3) Participants in where our (... that's right, *our*...) mission dollars go, even having the joy of selecting specific areas for support, realizing that they may be compromising someone else's hierarchy of importance.
- 4) Allowed to vote on issues that affect them. In the day of instant communication, computers, video and more individual competence, what is wrong with synod-wide, congregational referenda? If the matter is so complicated that it can't be explained to the most educated laity and clergy in the history of Christianity, then maybe it's too complicated! And it also may be that some of the stem fears the root.

The days of pray, pay and obey are passed, say the grass roots. The days of be aware, share, and together dare are here. We have such a great history. How energetic and visionary our forbearers! What a heritage from which to move into the future. But which future?

Futurists speak of three: the *probably future* built on the assumption that the status quo is our future (grass roots vote, "No"); the *possible futures* (note the plural); the future we need to find: the *preferable future*.

The grass roots want the preferable future and have three expectations: 1) that our leaders know it exists, 2) that our leaders are actively seeking it, and 3) that the grass roots will have opportunity to participate in its development.

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