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Report No. 10

THE PARISH AS COMMUNITY
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OUTLINE OF CONTENTS

Developing Community and Commitment

Social commentators identify the loss of a sense of community as a central problem of our times. Society has gotten complex and crowded. Work is often specialized, anonymous, and its products distant. Residential life is privatized, often far removed from work life or civic involvements. A deep chasm is said to separate private morality from public morality. In pursuit of excellence, acquisitions, or prominence, the individual becomes self-absorbed and narcissistic. Both public policy and consumer appeals make the individual the object of the "pursuit of happiness" or the "good."

Commentators argue there is a heavy price to be paid for such a strong emphasis on individualism. Loneliness, sense of isolation, lack of commitment, loss of meaning — all push people toward therapeutic answers. Robert Bellah and colleagues have argued that, while the citizen, the entrepreneur, and the manager were representative national characters of earlier times, the therapist best characterizes our times. Helping persons "live

with themselves" becomes a central concern of business, government, school, recreational enterprise, home — and church. For, if individuals cannot be proud of themselves or manage their personal insecurities, the argument runs, how can a corporate organization fit them into a productive enterprise, a nation achieve its objectives, a group of children learn, a team play together, a family or a church survive?

It does not take a trained social scientist's eye to sense that something is profoundly wrong with an individualism unbounded by social commitment or transcendent values. Reflecting on the tragic cocaine overdose a star athlete inflicted on himself, a coach said, "He lived in a society where enough is not enough and more is always better." Hedonism is the twin of narcissism, and it is far removed from the self-sacrifices that build community.

Most dictionary definitions of community involve notions of diverse people sharing a common geography, interest, faith, or hope. What they have in common binds them to each other. While they may act as private individuals much of the time, they also have civic obligations that cannot be long ignored. In fact, these definitions often involve other terms such as attachment, commitment, or obligation. And when we examine definitions of these latter terms, they indicate that meaning, for the individual, comes from the individual's commitment to the group. Thus, for our purposes, we shall say that community (1) develops a sense of belonging or loyalty, (2) empowers common actions, and (3) nurtures standards, from outside the individual, which direct just and honorable civic participation.

Sociologists of religion argue that religious institutions, such as parishes, offer models *of* reality and models *for* reality. Churches reflect all of the problems of their surrounding society because they share its people and deal with its dominant cultural values. Thus it is no surprise that many Catholic leaders and observers of parish life are concerned about the recovery of community within the parish and through the parish.

The Second Vatican Council called for the Church not only to assert the primacy of God in Christ and the enduring need for the salvation of the individual, but also to infuse itself in the surrounding cultures. God works through human culture, sinful though it is; revelation is embedded in human symbols. When dominant cultural trends run in directions contrary to the enduring faith, the Church focuses its sights on root causes in the culture. Confronting excessive individualism with Christian perspectives on community becomes a task especially for the local parish.

Bellah and associates find these local communities of *faith* — for that is what the church has to offer-to be ideally situated for confronting this, a central problem of our times. A parish or a congregation can be a "community of memory"-linking the stories of the past to the problems of the present and the visions of the future. Individuals in parishes are not isolated historically: they learn both the heroic deeds and dismal failings of their ancestors in the faith; they brush their contemporaries and may even come to share their joys and sorrows; and they are united in a vision of a future that both judges and gives

hope for the present. At the center of this faith is a God, a maker and redeemer of the universe, who calls His faithful into daily service as co-creators in the ongoing life of that universe. That faith is both transcendent and social; it derives from God but is learned and lived in a community of the faithful.

The recovery of community within and through the local parish is not easy. For example, Rev. Philip Murnion argues that parish as community is not a product solely of friendliness but of feeling rootedness. The loss of community comes when common faith, common worship, and a common way of life are lacking. Recovery of community is assisted through a clear proclamation of faith and social ethics by the bishops. But even then a dialogue about faith and ethics must ensue in the parish for that community to embrace it as *their* faith and *their* ethics. Often that dialogue takes the form of community actions that share joy, grief, or suffering- — when a parish tries to come up with collateral to stave off foreclosure on a farm family, when it supplies food, clothing, and shelter for a burned out family, when it unites with other parishes in establishing a center for AIDS victims, a hospice for the terminally ill, or a home for pregnant unwed teenagers, when it offers its facilities as a sanctuary for political refugees. Community is proclaimed by the way it is lived. To return to Murnion's metaphor, roots sink in soil and draw vitality from the nutrients around them.

Some of the nutrients are nurtured by the pastors and church professionals who enable the laity to grow, to settle on common parish goals, to identify parish needs and develop community-run ministries toward those needs. Nutrients also come from liturgies that build community, that recognize the *community* as sacramental when it joins around the sacrament it celebrates, that encourage the peoples' participation in liturgical acts, and proclaim the relevance of scriptural and church teachings to both private and public morality.

Many writers feel that there was once a stronger sense of community in American Catholic parishes. They argue that the urban ethnic parishes and the small-town parishes of yesteryear were sources of deep attachment for their people. For example, Rev. Thomas Sweetser contends that common language, customs, fears, isolation, and the desire to "make it" in America led to a strong sense of parish as community. But now that Catholics have made it, now that many reside within the complex social and economic institutions of suburbia, and now that many experience the impersonality of huge parishes with the rapid turnover of parishioners who live where their employers send them, the possibilities of developing a sense of parish community or of civic commitment are more limited.

Sweetser argues that parishioners still have a deep need to belong, to have the support and friendship of others, and to have values shaped by forces outside themselves. But he does not decry the passing of the ethnic enclaves. Instead he finds hope in the ways large parishes recognize their diversity and unite parishioners into smaller groups through a *common interest* or *social concern*. These tend to grow out of "natural" social groupings — those who attend Mass at the same time, who are parents of school children, who participate in or watch the same athletic events, who engage in Bible study or prayer

groups, who have experienced similar life-threatening health problems or lost a spouse, who recognize suffering, whether it be in foreclosed farmers, burned out families, AIDS victims, pregnant teenagers, or political refugees. The groups cannot be manufactured artificially. Sweetser argues there is a progression in parishioners' involvements from (1) recognition of common social interests to (2) participation in common spiritual exercises to (3) provision of services to those in need. Each stage enhances the sense of community.

Building community and developing attachments are vital assignments for American parishes. This report examines not only how well they do it, but how best it can be done. Within the limitations of the questions we have asked and the 36 parishes we have studied intensively, the report draws some lessons about the factors that lead to community and commitment.

Aspects of Community in Previous Reports

While we have not addressed the topic directly until now, the concern for parish as community has been evident in previous reports. Consider the following findings:

• Within our 36-parish sample, 57% of the respondents felt their parish has a strong sense of community, but 73% would not feel very upset about the prospect of leaving their parish. (Report 1)

• While 84% of the respondents feel their parish meets their spiritual needs very well, 45 % claim that it fails to meet their social needs very well. (Report 1)

• About one in every fifteen people on the membership rolls of our parishes actually attends Mass regularly at another parish. (Report 1)

• Historically, one of the most important factors in increasing the people's participation in the liturgy and their shared responsibility for ministry and parish decision-making is the Vatican II change in the central metaphor that describes the Church-"the People of God." (Report 2)

• Young Catholics are slower to connect with a parish nowadays because of their later age of marriage, fewer children, greater tendency toward interdenominational marriage, and greater educational and geographic mobility. (Report 2)

• Except for Hispanics, fewer Catholics today live in ethnically homogeneous urban neighborhoods and more reside in ethnically heterogeneous suburbs. (Report 2)

• In part because parishes are so heterogeneous, the same parish may celebrate vastly different styles of liturgy in successive week-end Masses, and the members of the same parish practice vastly different devotional styles. (Report 2)

• Parishes are increasingly using communal symbols — such as communal penance services — alongside individualistic spiritual practices. Yet, despite the fact that 31 of our 36 parishes offered communal penance rites at least during Lent and Advent, half of the parishioners had never participated in a rite they recognized as communal penance. (Report 3)

• Participation in religious rites intensifies as people move through the life-cycle, with it being lowest among those who are not yet or have never married, and highest among those who have grown children and those who are widowed. One of the reasons participation is lower nowadays, then, is a simple demographic fact: the bulge caused by the baby boom has placed a higher proportion of Catholics in those categories where participation is lower, i.e., unmarrieds in ages 20s and 30s. (Report 3)

• Although our Study was not well-designed to discover the growth of base Christian communities, about 6% of registered parishioners are regularly participating in the activities, liturgical and social, of parish-like communities — house churches, social action groups, retreat centers — rather than in their own parish. About 1 in 8 of our 1099-parish sample has parish subdivisions, and some of these function as distinct liturgical and social communities. (Report 4)

• When parishioners are asked to define the purpose of the parish, most make community references rather than individualistic references. The most popular references (42% of parishioners) involve metaphors like the *people* of God, a *family*, a religious *community*, or the *fellowship* of believers; only 28% of the parishioners refer to parish as a place for *personal* religious growth, holiness, or a way to get to heaven. (Report 4)

• Those who use community metaphors are more likely to participate in parish social activities than in social action or social welfare programs. (Report 4)

• Those who use community metaphors are more likely than others to engage in parish community-building activities, e.g., liturgy, adult religious education, evangelism, and especially renewal. (Report 4)

• Those who use community metaphors are more likely to prefer devotional practices that are expressive of their religiosity, e.g., "witnessing their faith" or engaging in frequent religious discussions with Catholic and non-Catholic alike. (Report 4)

• Yet when it comes to deepest foundational beliefs (fundamental problems of human existence to which religion responds, their solution, and the outcome), twice as many Catholics will make *personal* references (*my* problem — *my* salvation) rather than *social* references, thus establishing a potential paradox between the meaning of religion and the purpose of parish. (Report 4)

• Based on observations at 70 weekend Masses in the 36 parishes, few parishes attach importance to "gathering" the people before the Mass; parishioners seldom greet each other and ministers of hospitality are rare. (Report 5)

• Shared ritual is less likely nowadays to be a form of *community* expression, because even the common parts of the Mass fluctuate from week to week in some parishes; enthusiasm seems to be replacing taken-for-grantedness in liturgy. (Report 5)

• Although the emphasis is now placed on people's participation in the liturgy, widespread participation in hymn singing (which liturgists regard as a community-building expression) occurs in only about one-eighth of the Masses; widespread participation in the singing of the common parts of the liturgy occurs in only one-fourth to one-third of the Masses; participation is better when tunes are repeated for a season of the Church year and when hymnals are used rather than missalettes. (Report 5)

• Most of the time Saturday evening Mass is spoken, hurried, and poorly planned. It seems to generate little participatory commitment and is aimed at those individuals who are there to fulfill a weekly obligation. (Report 5)

• Whether a parish places much emphasis on "gathering," (i.e., friendliness and/or social activities aimed at building community) is also reflected in the sense of horizontality in the liturgy (recognition of the community of God's people as sacrament), a friendly greeting by the celebrant in his opening remarks, and in homilies that stress social morality and "this" life rather than the "after" life. (Report s)

• Those parishes that balance the celebrant's horizontal awareness of the community of God's people with a vertical reverence for God, encourage widespread participation in the singing of common parts and make careful application of texts to current life during the homilies are likely to have parishioners more satisfied with the celebration of the liturgy. (Report 6)

• Durkheim defined "moral consensus" as an important characteristic of true communities. On most Church policy and position questions pastors and parishioners accurately perceive each others' points of view. When misperception occurs, rural pastors overestimated the "conservatism" of their parishioners and urban pastors overestimated the "liberalism" of their parishioners. Generally, pastors are less supportive of "conservative" Church positions than their parishioners realize, i.e., they are actually closer to the people's viewpoints. (Report 7)

• On Church issues, there is more consensus *within parish* than *within demographic groupings*. People within the same parish have viewpoints closer to each other than would, for example, a 64 year-old woman in an East Coast parish and a 64 year-old woman in a Rocky Mountain parish. (Report 7)

• The organizational complexity of a parish (i.e., the kinds of programs, ministries, and activities it offers the people) depends partly on its size and locale. The large suburban parishes are the most complex. (Report 8)

• Pastors consider bingo and other social activities to be more important expressions of parish vitality (second only to Mass) than religious education, prayer groups, or related activities. (Report 8)

• Parish leaders are more oriented to the performance of their parish as a religious and social community than they are to diocesan programs and the unity of the larger church; for them, community is a "property of the particular," i.e., it is developed through the actions of the *local* church. (Report 9)

• Relationships among the volunteer leaders and paid staff and sense of community in the parish are deeply affected by the pastor's manner of conducting his duties; enablers build satisfaction and loyalty; pastors who fail to stimulate lay involvement face declining parishes, and pastors who try to roll back lay responsibility face intense hostility. Lay leaders are congregational, not episcopal, in orientation. (Report 9)

This summary suggests that we have already learned much that bears on parish as community. The present report will continue to focus attention on community and will utilize our many data bases (described and critiqued in previous reports) for testing hypotheses about community and belonging in various types of parishes. In particular, we will rank the 36 parishes according to their parishioners' perceptions of community, looking for regularities that may account for high or low rankings. We will then examine the correlates of lay attachment to the parish. We will describe the kinds of parishioners whom parish leaders feel are alienated. Finally, we will explore additional data on shared perceptions between pastors and their parishioners. Similar to Report 9, we have sprinkled this report with vignettes that try to capture the sense of community and attachment *within* some parishes.

Sense of Community: A Property of the Parish

We asked parishioners in our 36-parish sample: "How much of a sense of community is there in your parish?" and offered these response categories: "There is no feeling of community (a score of 1); the parish shows some feeling of community (a score of 2); and the parish shows a strong feeling of community (a score of 3)." The average response for all parishioners was 2.53, which means that parishioners generally placed their parish somewhere between *some* feeling of community and a *strong* feeling of community. The average sense of community within each leadership sample — pastors, paid staff, and volunteer leaders-is almost identical to that of parishioners.

Information on perceived sense of community is most useful, however, when it is averaged within a specific parish and then compared across the 36 parishes. Social

scientists refer to such a measure as a *contextual property*. Through it we can characterize a parish by the feeling its people hold toward it.

Table 1 rank-orders the parishes, from low to high, by the average (arithmetic mean) sense of community its people attribute to it. It also shows the size and location of each parish and notes when a parish counts over 67% of its members from one ethnic group. Parishes with less than 100 family units are treated as small, with 100 to 749 family units as medium, and 750 or more family units as large. The column entitled "dispersion" gives the standard deviation (a measure of dispersion) for the "sense of community" score. This tells to what extent parishioners share the same point of view about sense of community. The higher the score, the less the consensus; the lower the score, the greater the consensus. This measure will be used later in the report. Finally, the dashed lines divide the table into quartiles.

The table indicates that parish size is not so prominent a factor as some would think in accounting for sense of community. Perhaps that is so because there is a tendency for parishioners in the small and medium-sized parishes located in *towns* to rate their parishes as having a weaker sense of community. There is also a slight tendency for parishioners in city and suburban parishes, which are typically larger, to rate the parishes as having a greater sense of community. The range of difference for the entire table is quite large — almost a whole point on a three-point scale (2.06 to 2.88).

TABLE 1

SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN 36 PARISHES
BY SELECTED PARISH CHARACTERISTICS

Rank-Order of Parish	Average Sense of Community	Dispersion (Standard Deviation)	Parish Size	Urban-Rural Locale	Ethnic Homogeneity
1 (low)	2.06	.581	Medium	Town	French
2	2.10	.552	Small	Rural	-
3	2.22	.620	Medium	Town	-
4	2.23	.551	Medium	Town	-
5	2.23	.504	Small	Town	-
6	2.27	.593	Medium	Town	-
7	2.28	.595	Large	Suburban	-
8	2.32	.592	Large	Town	French
9	2.37	.520	Medium	City	-
10	2.41	.595	Small	Town	-
11	2.43	.555	Medium	Town	-
12	2.43	.580	Medium	Town	-
13	2.44	.557	Medium	Town	-

14	2.44	.642	Medium	City	French
15	2.45	.618	Large	Suburban	-
16	2.47	.528	Medium	Town	-
17	2.47	.577	Large	City	-
18	2.48	.571	Medium	Suburban	-
19	2.49	.600	Large	Rural	-
20	2.49	.546	Medium	Suburban	-
21	2.53	.593	Medium	City	Black
22	2.56	.501	Medium	City	Polish
23	2.56	.507	Small	Rural	-
24	2.59	.525	Large	City	-
25	2.63	.487	Medium	Town	Black
26	2.66	.515	Medium	Town	-
27	2.71	.545	Large	Suburban	Italian
28	2.72	.498	Large	Suburban	Irish
29	2.72	.498	Medium	City	Black
30	2.75	.500	Small	Rural	German
31	2.75	.497	Medium	City	Black
32	2.78	.481	Small	Rural	German
33	2.80	.454	Medium	City	-
34	2.83	.380	Medium	Town	-
35	2.83	.375	Large	City	Irish
36 (high)	2.88	.357	Large	Suburban	-

Parishioners' ratings are difficult to interpret. They may represent an objective reality, namely, that some parishes do have more of a sense of community. Or it may be that parishioners in the towns have more of a longing for community and set higher standards for their parish, while parishioners in suburban and city parishes have lower expectations and are more easily satisfied. Or it may be that those urban and suburban Catholics who respond to surveys like this have found a sense of community while the non-respondents have not. (Yet inspection of response rates by types of respondents across urban-rural locales does not suggest strong evidence for a response bias on this variable.) Regardless of one's interpretation, it is important to keep in mind that the *subjective* reality is the reality; even if town respondents set higher standards than suburban respondents, it will still affect their feelings toward their parish as a community.

A final suggestion may be drawn from visual inspection of the column dealing with ethnic homogeneity. With the strong exception of the French parishes, there is a relationship between the ethnic homogeneity of the parish and the sense of community its parishioners attribute to it. A sizable proportion of the higher ranked parishes are homogeneously Black, Irish, German, Italian, or Polish. But the important point is that the

relationship between ethnic homogeneity and sense of community is not exclusive: Of the top nine parishes, three are ethnically heterogeneous and they happen to be three of the four parishes with the highest rating on sense of community. Further, these heterogeneous parishes are located in a city, a suburb, and a

town, and they are medium and large in size. Two of them serve mobile populations in non-Catholic locales and the third serves a low-turnover population in a Catholic town.

The point is this: it is possible for a parish to develop a strong sense of community regardless of its social characteristics. We repeat an argument voiced in Reports 8 and 9: Parishes make their own destinies; with some exceptions, they are not straitjacketed by the social characteristics of their members. Parishes that recognize the great variations among their members, but who find ways to develop interdependence among them, will often be rewarded by a greater sense of community than parishes who serve very homogeneous populations.

Let us now turn to findings from more rigorous statistical tests than visual inspection. In addition to the data on sense of community displayed in Table 1, we have rank-ordered the 36 parishes several more times by the mean score of its parishioners on the following: (1) their sense of attachment to the parish, (2) the number of close friends they have in the parish, (3) the extent to which their parish meets their spiritual needs, (4) the extent to which their parish meets their social needs, (5) their frequency of conversations with their pastor, and (6) how upsetting they would find the prospect of moving from that parish. Each was treated as a contextual property of the parish. We then used four different types of *non-parametric statistical tests*. (These tests tell how much the parishioners' score and the parishes' rank-orderings on one variable coincide with the scores and rank-orderings on another variable.) We will discuss the general patterns that are confirmed across the four tests.

A parish's sense of community is most strongly related to (1) the sense of attachment its parishioners feel toward it and (2) how upsetting its parishioners would find a move to another parish. The extent to which the parish meets parishioners' social needs is a far more important component of sense of community than is the extent to which it meets their spiritual needs. Statistically, the former is a two-way relationship while the latter is one-way. That is, a parish may be *spiritually* satisfying and yet not have a strong sense of community, but a parish could not have a strong sense of community without being spiritually satisfying. A parish that is *socially* satisfying will have a strong sense of community, while a parish that is not socially satisfying is much less likely to have a strong sense of community. Interestingly, frequency of conversations with the pastor is a much more important component of sense of community than are the number of close friends who are fellow parishioners. Pastors must not underestimate the extent to which *their accessibility* contributes to the sense of community within the parish. In an era when we train pastors in methods of leadership, in parish management, in how to deliver effective homilies, and so forth, we must not forget how simple conversations that express empathy, supportiveness, courtesy, and compassion affect parishioners.

Other statistical tests confirm what visual inspection of Table 1 hinted. There is a very modest relationship between parish location and sense of community but it runs in the opposite direction from that posited by observers who fear the urbanization and suburbanization of the church: the rural and particularly the small-town parishioners attribute less sense of community to their parishes than do the suburban and urban parishioners. The relationship between parish size and sense of community is even more modest and again in the opposite direction from the expectations of many observers: the smaller the parish the less the sense of community. But both relationships are weak.

Two of the reasons the larger suburban and urban parishes seem to develop slightly more of a sense of community have been suggested earlier: (1) they celebrate their main Masses more in the post-conciliar style — i.e., with greater awareness of the community of God's people and with greater expectations for participation, and (2) being more complex as human organizations, they offer a wider range of ministries and programs that appeal to small interest groups within the parish. To be sure, the more urban parishes do not do as much as the more rural parishes with coffee hours and socials, but they do much more with organized parish communications, renewal groups, prayer groups, adult religious education, survivors groups for those ill or bereaved, Marriage Encounter, Cursillo, Third Age Groups for retirees, social welfare and social justice groups, etc. These are the kinds of small interest group activities that both Murnion and Sweetser identify as modern-day surrogates for the common life of the earlier, more homogeneous neighborhood parish. Many of them also approximate the activities described by Rev. Avery Dulles in his sixth model of church — discipleship — where the church goes out to people in need. When parishioners join themselves to others outside their immediate community, they often bring back to their own community deeper insights into the faith that enrich the community.

Thus, while the heterogeneous characteristics of the urban and suburban parishioners might bode ill for a sense of community in their parishes, nevertheless, a rich organizational life led by accessible pastors, paid staff, and volunteers may go a long way toward restoring community in the midst of diversity.

Sense of Attachment: An Individual Property

We next look, not at the parish but at individual parishioners and ask: What kinds of people feel a strong sense of attachment to their parish? What draws them to the parish? How do they show their attachment through participation in parish activities, financial support, and positive feelings about the parish?

To answer these questions we will use what social scientists call *multiple* and *partial regression analysis*. The dependent variable is called "attachment" and is based on a question that asks: "How attached to this parish do you feel? — not attached at all (scored 1), somewhat attached (scored 2), and very attached (scored 3)." The average

attachment score for all parishioners is 2.45, which means that parishioners are about half-way between feeling *somewhat* attached and *very* attached to their parish.

The variables used to help explain attachment include personal characteristics such as age; sex; marital status (single, divorced or separated, widowed, currently married); stage in the family life-cycle (single, married and no children, small children, and grown children); parish liturgy characteristics such as the quality of the typical homily and the quality of the music; extent to which parish meets spiritual and social needs; social interactions within the parish such as the number of close friends who are fellow parishioners and the frequency of conversations with the pastor; the extent to which various religious practices make one feel close to God; and parish participation and support measures such as frequency of Mass attendance, number of non-liturgical parish activities regularly participated in, and financial contributions. Table 2 offers statistical coefficients (Betas) for parishioners' sense of attachment. To simplify its meaning, think of sense of attachment as being related to many characteristics of people and their parishes. Of the characteristics we have shown on the table, the coefficient gives us a way of assessing which are more and which are less important in understanding the sense of attachment. We can not say anything about which factors are "causes" of attachment and which are "effects" of attachment. For example, we can clearly see that those who are doers (i.e., participate in many parish activities) are those with a stronger sense of attachment (Beta between the two, .346); further we can say that participation in parish activities is the strongest "contributor" to sense of attachment. But we cannot say whether people participate because they are attached, or they are attached because they participate. It probably doesn't matter which is cause and which is effect. It is enough to know that they are important predictors of each other.

TABLE 2

ATTACHMENT TO THE PARISH,
RELATED TO PARISHIONERS'
CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEPTIONS

Parishioner Characteristic or Perception	Contribution to Sense of Attachment *
Number of activities parishioner participates in	.346
Sense that parish meets my social needs	.287
Frequency of conversations with pastor	.208
Sense that parish meets my spiritual needs	.207
Frequency of Sunday Mass attendance	.188
Feel close to God while praying and chanting the liturgy	.181
Age	.175
Number of my closest friends within the parish	.147
Quality of the music in the normal liturgy	.125

Quality of the homily in the normal liturgy	.110
Size of family financial contribution to parish	.095
Feel close to God in gathering with the congregation for Mass	.054
Marital status	-.029
Family life-cycle	.011
Sex	.001
Mult. R =	.633
R2 =	.401

The higher the score, the more that factor is related to the sense of attachment a parishioner feels toward her/his parish. Scores weaker than about 100 indicate relationships of little practical importance.

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Several observations about sense of attachment can be made from Table 2. First, personal characteristics such as sex, stage in the family life-cycle, and marital status are much less useful predictors of sense of attachment than are social interactions within the parish and feelings about it; of the personal characteristics, only age is a moderately important predictor, with older people feeling more attached (Beta, .175).

Secondly, those who participate in numerous activities are rewarded with a strong sense of attachment and, vice versa, those who have a strong sense of attachment participate a lot (Beta, .346). Next most important is the feeling that the parish meets their social needs (Beta, .287). Not far behind is the sense that the parish meets their spiritual needs (Beta, .207). Frequency of Mass attendance may be considered as similar to frequency of participation in other parish activities and it is also high (Beta, .187). What is interesting in both instances, however, is that a sense of attachment relates more closely to *social* activities and feelings than to *liturgical* activities and feelings; yet, liturgical participation and spiritual needs are not far behind. So also is the feeling of closeness to God while praying and chanting the liturgy (Beta, .181).

Thirdly, it is instructive to compare at the level of the individual parishioner what we noted at the level of the parish: a feeling that the *pastor* is accessible is more important (Beta, .208) than that one's closest friends are from the same parish (Beta, .147). Just as the pastor plays an important role in developing a sense of community, so he is contributing to the sense of parish attachment that his parishioners feel. A little conversation with the people goes a long way toward their sense of attachment.

Fourthly, in an era when church leadership is properly noting the importance of good homilies in the Mass and considerable time is devoted to training priests as preachers, two findings stand side-by-side: the quality of music in the Mass (Beta, .125) and the quality of the homily (Beta, .110). *Both* contribute significantly to parishioners' sense of attachment. Sometimes we pay so much attention to the role of the priest in

preaching and celebrating that we forget the amount of liturgical time that musicians are leading us and we fail to comprehend the impact their music is having on our sense of attachment to the parish. If we pay increasing attention to homiletic training for priests, we might do well to devote time to liturgical musical understanding for priests and appropriate liturgical musical training for parish musicians.

Fifth, there is a modest relationship between attachment and the size of family financial contributions to the parish (Beta, .095). People who are attached give more and people who give more are attached. We suspect our Beta has substantially underestimated the relationship between financial contributions and attachment. The problem is that our measure is unable to standardize contributions by discretionary incomes. (Analysts have noted that the size of contribution is partly a function of the size of family income. People cannot give more money to the church if they do not have more money. But contributions also relate to the amount of discretionary income, i.e., in some households there is little freedom of choice over the spending of money. It is all committed. Further, discretionary income fluctuates from family to family, since each has different necessities. Where tithing is done, the problem is easily solved, because giving to the church is a fixed matter, not a discretionary matter. But relatively few Catholics practice tithing. Thus, we are still left with the analytical problem of trying to decide how much of income that *could* be contributed to the church is actually contributed. Readers would be well advised to await studies designed specifically to solve this analytical problem. Suffice it to say that there is some relationship between giving and attachment but we have not measured it well.)

Finally, all of these characteristics and perceptions of parishioners, taken together, go a long way toward understanding the sources and/or consequences of attachment to the parish. (In social science language, the R^2 of .401 means that 40% of the variance in attachment has been accounted for by these variables.)

We used one final technique to sort out the reasons why people feel attached to their parish. We presented parishioners with a list of eleven reasons "for being attracted to this parish" and asked them "to choose the most important one." Our list of reasons reflected the fact that parish "membership" in the United States is based partly on an involuntary system (geographical assignment) and partly on a voluntary system (parish shopping, the creation of magnet parishes, functionally-specialized parishes, etc.). Even when a person remains in the parish to which he or she is assigned, the decision *not* to participate elsewhere involves an element of choice. Thus "attraction" may refer not only to the initial connection with the parish but also to the current reason for remaining in the parish. Table 3 lists the relationship between parish attachment and the reason for being attracted to the parish.

TABLE 3

**REASON FOR ATTRACTION TO PARISH
RELATED TO SENSE OF ATTACHMENT,
2667 PARISHIONERS**

Reason for Attraction	Relationship to Attachment*
The opportunities for parishioners to participate in community service.	.420
Quality of friendliness and/or concern among members of the parish.	.401
Quality of pastoral care and concern provided by the parish priests.	.283
The opportunities for becoming a lay leader in our parish.	.179
The style of worship that is typical of the parish.	.075
The quality of preaching at Mass.	.031
The atmosphere of the church building itself.	-.014
The "status" of the parish in the local community.	-.047
The fact that my friends and/or relatives belong to this parish.	-.104
It's my parish; I live in this neighborhood.	-.184
The opportunity to get my children into the parish school (in parishes that have a school).	-.468

*The scores are based on a procedure called *logit analysis*. The higher the positive score, the more this reason for attraction to the parish is positively related to a strong sense of attachment. The closer the score comes to .000, the less this reason for attraction and attachment are related. The higher the negative score the greater the likelihood that this reason for attraction has a negative effect on attachment.

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When one considers factors that attract or keep a person in a parish, clearly the sense of attachment is strongly related to (1) the opportunity for parishioners to participate in community service, (2) the quality of friendliness and concern of people in the parish, (3) the quality of pastoral care and concern, and (4) the opportunity to become a lay leader. Of the eleven, no other factor comes near to these in explaining current attachment. *Opportunities for participation and service coupled especially to caring pastors and parishioners are the hallmarks of parish attraction and parishioner attachment*. Other factors appear less important to understanding the relationship between parish attraction and attachment. The style of worship and the quality of preaching contribute, but more modestly, to continued attachment to the parish. The atmosphere of the church building, the presence of friends or relatives in the parish, and the status of the parish in the community contribute next to nothing or negatively to attachment. Finally, the "attraction" of the parish based on (1) one being assigned to it by virtue of living in the neighborhood or (2) the opportunity to get one's children enrolled in the parish school appear here as negative factors, i.e., they are associated with *weaker* attachment. The reasons for these negative relationship are probably different. In a voluntary society with great opportunities for mobility, if one can come up with no other reason for attraction to a parish than "I live here," that person will probably have little attachment to the parish. If, on the other hand, the school is the *only* thing that attracts or keeps an adult within the

parish, "membership" in the parish may be seen only as a grudging necessity to get school opportunities for the child. Our data clearly indicate that neither forms a very solid basis *by itself* for attachment to the parish.

We must be very careful, however, not to misinterpret the relationships between parish attraction and parish attachment shown in Table 3, particularly when schools are concerned. Real estate agents often claim that the presence of a parish school attracts young Catholics families to the neighborhood. Many pastors and parish leaders in our Study confirm that the parents of parochial school children often revitalize the leadership of the parish, taking on increasing responsibilities as their children grow older. Thus, the parochial school can make an important contribution to the sense of attachment and community in the parish.

Our data show that parents who formerly had or currently have children in the parochial school show considerably higher levels of attachment than parents whose children have not attended the parish school. (In some parishes the figure is 20% higher.) Further, parents of parochial school children within parishes having schools show higher levels of attachment than either parents of school-aged children or parishioners, generally, do in parishes that lack schools. (The figure differs by parish but is usually 5 to 10% higher.)

Then why the strong negative relationship between attachment and the opportunity to get one's children into the parish school, as shown in Table 3? The answer, we think, is borne out in a variety of ways in Reports 3, 8, and 9. Parochial schools are a sign of health and vitality in many parishes. This is particularly true when the school leadership is integrated with the leadership of other parish organizations and the parish council. Parochial schools, however, are a source of division and conflict in some parishes. This is likely to occur in parishes where the parish leadership (pastor, council, other staff) are kept at considerable distance from the school leadership (principal, school committee).

What is reflected in our data, we feel, is that in the parishes where the school is a source of vitality and community, it is one of *many* sources of vitality and community, and people are likely to respond positively either to the opportunity to serve or to the quality of care and concern offered by the pastor and fellow parishioners. While the school may have been an important attraction at one stage of life, it is the quality of parish life as measured by these other factors that keeps them attached to the parish now.

On the other hand, where the other positive qualities of parish life are lacking or where the family is not yet fully integrated into the parish community, the school may be the sole attraction and it is not (or not yet) accompanied by a high level of attachment.

Thus, data that at first glance appear puzzling and contrary to common experience in the parishes, may actually attest how the school that is well integrated into parish life becomes an avenue for lay leadership and strengthened bonds of attachment.

Regardless of the ways sense of community and attachment are studied, a constellation of (1) participatory and voluntary characteristics of parishioners, (2) personal and post-conciliar orientations of pastors, and (3) organizational opportunities within the parish stand out. The fact that they are confirmed in a variety of ways, some independent of each other, some interlocked, lends credence to their significance in the life of the contemporary parish.

Alienation: Who Are the Isolates from the Community?

Not every Catholic gets attached and *stays* attached to a parish. The sense of belonging is sometimes lost — perhaps through events in one's own life, perhaps because of events or people in the parish. Parishioners become alienated and are either isolated or isolate themselves from the parish community.

We asked the three leadership samples — pastors, paid staff, and volunteer leaders — whether there were any alienated groups of people within their parish. Since the sampling designs differ, we will not compare numbers across each type of leadership, but we will use the leaders' response as a perception of the parish. Within the same parish, pastors were more likely to report alienation than were paid staff, and both were far more likely to report alienation than were volunteer leaders. In over two-thirds of the parishes, there is good reason to believe that alienated groups exist.

By declining frequency of mention, seven categories are reported: alienation is perceived among "traditionalists" (in about one-fourth of the parishes), as well as among singles, newcomers, cliques who formerly dominated parish life or want to dominate it, those alienated by the church's handling of divorce, and ethnic or racial minorities. A few pastors mentioned "progressives," although few staff or volunteers did. Staff and volunteer leaders in a few parishes mentioned youth, although only one pastor did. There were a few parishes also where charismatics were thought to be alienated.

With the massive changes Catholic parishes have undergone in the last two decades, one would be surprised if traditionalists were not mentioned most frequently as an alienated group. In most instances traditionalists' hurt and isolation appear to be rooted in local concerns, but in a handful of our sampled parishes it was given shape and mobilized by national protest movements such as CUF and Opus Dei. One would also be surprised, given our observations in earlier reports about the perceived problems of divorced Catholics in their parishes, if parish leaders had failed to perceive a large group of parishioners alienated by the church's handling of divorce. If marginal comments on parishioners' questionnaires or hand-written letters in lieu of completed questionnaires are any indication, traditionalists and those upset by the handling of divorce are vocal parishioners. It is no surprise to us that parish leaders acknowledge their alienation.

Singles, however, seem to suffer in silence. Surrounded by a church that constantly uses family metaphors in both theology and parish life, located in parishes that often list membership by family units, worshipping in liturgies whose hymns, responses, and homilies reinforce family images, and observing the great disproportion in parish programs and activities directed to people in some stage of family life rather than to singles — perhaps singles have good reason to believe that the parish isolates them further. Parish leadership are beginning to notice the isolation of singles. Unfortunately, not a large proportion of family-oriented parishes can report programs of successful ministry to singles; the ones with the success stories are often in the "trendy singles" areas of cities where young, educated professionals begin their careers. But singles are in all parishes. And Catholic singles have few if any action organizations, such as the traditionalists and those affected by divorce have, who advocate their concerns to the bishops.

Curiously, the youth are the only group to be identified by the staff and volunteers more frequently than by the pastors. We suspect this difference in perception results from specialization of responsibilities: the programs directed by staff and volunteers bring them into greater contact with youth, but pastors often have less contact with youth and are not in a good position to judge their degree of alienation.

Some might think of alienation as the reverse of attachment and sense of community. Are the leaders in parishes that have a strong sense of community those less likely to perceive alienated groups within the parish? To examine this question we have divided Table 1 into quartiles and compared the nine parishes having the least sense of community with the nine parishes having the most sense of community. We find very little difference in the perception of pastors that some groups are alienated. Pastors of five of nine parishes showing the least sense of community reported alienated groups, and pastors of five of nine parishes showing the most sense of community also reported alienated groups. On the other hand, the majority of staff and volunteer leaders in six of the former reported alienated groups, while the majority of staff and volunteer leaders in only one of the latter reported alienated groups.

Thus, in the parishes showing less sense of community, the staff and volunteers are slightly more likely than the pastor to sense the presence of alienated groups. Inspecting our data further, we find that they are far more likely to be served by a pastor who is disliked by the parishioners, and he is identified as a source of alienation. Parishes with less sense of community are also ones where the leadership identifies the elderly and traditionalists as the groups most likely to be alienated.

Parishes with the strongest sense of community are ones where the pastor is more likely to sense alienation than are the volunteers and staff. The groups most likely to be singled out are singles, the people who only attend Mass but will not participate in other activities, and the youth (the last by staff and volunteers rather than by pastors).

The contrast between these two sets of parishes is striking indeed, and bears out many of the characteristics of those who become attached to the contemporary parish. The

parishes with low sense of community worry about the church of the past and are often served by pastors believed to be ineffective. The parishes with a high sense of community generally worry about the church of the future and why some people don't participate *more*, and are served for the most part by effective pastors.

There is one other significant difference that is borne out by the leadership structures of the two sets of parishes. *The nine parishes with the most sense of community have nearly twice as many staff and nearly twice as many lay volunteers in their leadership structures as the nine parishes with the least sense of community*. Their resources bases differ somewhat: although the former have only one more large parish than the latter do, their parishes are somewhat more likely to be located in suburbs and cities than in towns. But size, as a component of the resource base, is itself often a function of parish vitality, orientation toward the nature of the church, and pastoral effectiveness. *Many of the parishes with the least sense of community have simply not found a way to get staff and laity involved in parish leadership*. And as we have established earlier, leadership, service, attachment, and community are all part of the same orientation to parish life.

Is the Sense of Community Related to Consensus about Community?

Let us return to Table 1 and examine the parish consensus scores (standard deviation). Contrasting the nine parishes with the least sense of community with the nine parishes with the most sense of community, we find that the former have consensus scores ranging from .620 to .504, but the latter have consensus scores ranging from .500 to .357. (The lower the score the greater the consensus.) Thus, the parishes with a strong sense of community also show a high agreement among parishioners that they do indeed share that sense of community. And the parishes with lower senses of community have more disagreement among parishioners about their sense of community; individuals within the parish are more likely to disagree about whether they have a strong sense of community or a weak sense of community. They have not yet taken shape as a parish community.

Pastors in those parishes that have a high sense of community also more accurately perceive how their parishioners feel about the parish as a community . In four of the nine parishes with a low sense of community, the pastor considerably overestimated it. In none of the nine parishes with a high sense of community did the pastor overestimate it, and only one underestimated it. The consensus of the staff and volunteers about their parishioners' sense of community in all eighteen parishes was almost always accurate; the only exception was one of the nine parishes with weaker sense of community where staff and volunteers somewhat overestimated it. We cannot say whether these pastors who overestimate are just out of touch, or they are trying "to believe the best" of their parish. There does seem to be some correspondence, in these few cases, between an overestimate of sense of community and the parishioners' strong dislike of their pastor. We take that as a clue that the pastor may be out of touch with the parishioners.

When we contrast the nine parishes that are weakest in sense of community with the nine strongest, we find no consistent differences in their degree of consensus about what their pastor ought to be doing. We asked parishioners to rank seven possible responsibilities of a pastor — preaching, celebrating Mass and Sacraments, counseling the troubled, visiting the sick and bereaved, administering parish organizations and finances, directing parish social justice programs, and teaching religious education programs. The level of consensus was usually about the same, sometimes higher for one, sometimes higher for the other, but differing in no predictable way according to the role the pastor was to perform. When we examine the accuracy of the pastor's perception of what his people want him to do, the pastor's perception is slightly more accurate about most roles within the parishes that have a high sense of community. Yet on the matter of his role in social justice programs, pastors in high-community parishes tended to underestimate the importance parishioners attach to his involvement.

Given this last finding, we suspected that high-community parishes might be different ideologically from low-community parishes. We, therefore, re-examined the Church policy and position questions originally discussed in Report 7. We wanted to see whether the high-community parishes were more likely to seek a more lay-influenced church, to want further implementation of Vatican II objectives, and to seek changes in positions ranging from ordination of married men and women, to greater ecumenism, to a change in birth control provisions. The data frankly do not offer general trends, and that is their significance. The parishes with least sense of community differ little from the parishes with most sense of community in the degree of consensus surrounding each policy or position. The degree of consensus is an individual parish matter. Furthermore, although the high community parishes, as a group, are more likely to favor greater lay influence and position changes, there are often individual parishes less supportive of some changes than are parishes experiencing the least sense of community.

Summary: What Produces Community?

There are some important lessons in these data. It is not the *clarity* of an ideological position alone that forms a community. It is people interacting with each other. Community is a way of living together, an outlook toward each other. Our data clearly indicate that opportunities for participation and service must be present, that the pastor must be approachable for conversation, and that fellow parishioners must be supportive. Our data do not indicate, beyond these characteristics, that every parish must follow a single consensual line — whether "conservative" or "progressive" on church issues — if it hopes to build community. Nor is even the presence of this or that alienated group a serious danger signal about the health of the parish. Parish community can thrive among diverse peoples; it does not *require* ethnic homogeneity, or similar social class, occupation, or political views. Perhaps Jesus said it with greatest clarity when he used this metaphor: "My Father's house has many mansions (or wings)." The parish that builds community, builds on many communities.

<center>*   *   *</center>

Our next report will address the other side of the community question: how do Catholics who draw meaning, nurture, and empowerment from within their Catholic parishes deal with the responsibilities of the civic order and political life? We have seen that they take on many responsibilities *within* their parishes. Do they, then, withdraw to that haven, or are they also taking on civic responsibilities in the outside community? What political and social attitudes do they carry into public life? Are they receptive to the church leadership's efforts at "social teaching" or do they consign papal encyclicals and bishops' pastoral letters to the scrapheap of mere "politics?" These are some of the questions we will address when we examine "Politics, Parishioners, and the Civic Community."

[NOTE to Webmaster: The following articles were inserted within sections with corresponding topic. These should be linked when set up for the Webpages.]

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Revolving-Door Pastors, Parish Purposes,
and Parish Community

St. Stephen's is the last surviving Catholic parish in Fortnum county. Located in desolate country, with no remaining mines, no industry, St. Stephen's people are mainly ranchers and farmers. But Catholics have lived there for years and are generally better off then those affiliated with the little mainline Protestant churches or the thriving evangelical meetings.

In many ways the people of St. Stephen's are like the people at St. John's, Blessed Sacrament, and Holy Redeemer, all small parishes described in Report 9. Though conditioned by a harsh life to be self-reliant, they cooperate with each other, enjoy coffee and donuts together, and are always ready to serve as civic volunteers. But they differ in a significant way: although they have a deep sense of community, their parish is not at the center of it. In fact, they get one of the lowest ratings of the 36 parishes on the parish-as-community index.

Like the other three, St. Stephen's rectory has also had a revolving door, most recently with four pastors in four years. Each man seems to have brought a different liturgical style and a different interpretation of what is "truly Catholic" teaching.

The present pastor is felt by most to be a kind and dedicated man but his notions of spirituality do not link liturgy, community and daily life. On Sunday mornings, for example, two events occur that have only a tangential relationship: (1) the Mass is

directed to God by the priest with, at best, a privativistic involvement of the people, and (2) a coffee hour is celebrated by the people in much the same way they gather at local cafes during the week.

Early in the post-conciliar period, a parish council was put into place and, on paper, there are still quite a few programs. But if a group does not meet on Sunday, it probably won't convene. Not many meet on Sunday. Although people drive into town for other meetings during the week, generally they avoid scheduling activities at the parish church.

Even if programs exist on paper only, most parishes we have observed will still have a vigorous underlife. Groups will get together informally for prayer meetings, Bible study, corporate acts of charity, or whatever. Although that was beginning to happen early in the post-conciliar period at St. Stephen's, there seems to be little enthusiasm for it now.

Persons who, on paper, hold leadership positions at St. Stephen's all rate the parish as modest in its sense of community. None of them senses any alienated groups in the parish; rather, it seems that little happens in the parish and, therefore, no one gets upset.

Recent pastors haven't stayed long enough to shape the community. But more important, the development of a community has not been within the definition of a Catholic parish that they have applied to their work. "The problem," the present pastor argues, "is that about 40% of the people are completely lapsed. They have not been well instructed in Catholic teaching and that is why they don't care about the parish."

He aims to change that. Even in matters of parish practice and finances, people say, he never offers advice but "renders decrees." He admits privately that the Mass should be celebrated facing the altar; he celebrates facing the people only because the bishops say he must. He will obey the bishops and the pope. And in his homilies, he will make sure the people know where the pope stands on every *spiritual* issue. He will not talk about matters like social justice and social ethics. His job is to nurture the spirit, offer the sacraments, protect the faith, and run the parish.

Some parishioners are skeptical about his decrees. Mass attendance is not very good. Some younger families have started to go to the evangelical meetings, since the evangelicals are said to have strong programs for children's and adult religious education. Other parishioners say their agricultural work is a seven-day-a-week thing. For them, the church is to be avoided both during the week, when there is no reason to go there anyway, and on Sundays. They might come back, they allow.

Some of the leaders have expressed concern. Some time back they even petitioned the bishop, arguing they would be better off without a priest; since then, however, other pastors have been assigned. A few of St. Stephen's leaders were leaders elsewhere and moved here. They think you don't build a parish with pristine doctrine, "especially when a lot of those things that he claims were ordered by the pope are only his own opinions or

they came out of those magazines he reads. You build the parish with lots of involvement by the people." But as one said, "Always before I was blessed with a pastor who had exciting or at least 'friendly' liturgies and who *wanted* parish activities at the center of people's lives. But not here."

Most of the leaders, however, say they will do "whatever Father wants us to do for the parish." Few of the recent pastors, it seems, have encouraged them to think of themselves as the church, and so they take no initiatives.

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Parish as the Celebration of Pluralism

St. Philip's parish began as a "mission to the coloured" during the Depression, but now celebrates its diversity by ministering to Catholics of several ethnic and racial backgrounds and of various orientations to the church and world. St. Philip's has one of the highest sense-of-community scores of the 36 parishes.

It was not always so. In its earlier years, the parish was largely dependent for its support on Catholics from other parts of the country who were "liberal" on race relations. Its pastors often had personal problems to work out, and there was frequent turnover. As one of St. Philip's leaders put it: "For a while, the people needed to believe their investments in the church would be worthwhile; too many priests shone brightly for a season, then 'poof,' they vanished from whence they came."

The parishioners appealed to the bishop for a priest who was native to the diocese (not an outsider on a "liberal" mission), one who wanted to remain a priest (two had recently married), and one who would remain emotionally close to the parishioners. They expected a kindly, older, experienced priest, but instead got an enthusiastic young man. They were dubious. Yet within a couple of years they felt a "healing and quickening" process take hold. They were undertaking projects they never would have dared do.

Parishioners describe Father Pete as a motivator. "When he says, 'I would like . . .' you just have to do it." Father Pete places himself at the center of the decision-making network. He admits that he has to rein himself in to keep from being too demanding. But to a person, the leaders feel he was much more domineering in his first two years than he is now. He wanted to make the parish over, they say, and now it runs itself much more through a partnership of parish council, clubs and committees, and the pastor. St. Philip's still gets help with physical plant renovations, youth activities, and parish visitation from idealistic Catholic youth from other parts of the country.

The leaders of the parish think of it as three congregations, not divided along racial or ethnic lines but according to liturgical and devotional styles. There is considerable fluidity in organizational memberships, so that the many parish programs do not reinforce

cleavages among liturgical styles. In fact, one could describe the leadership as a coalition of inter-locking directorates of various interest sectors of the parish. A dominant group of white liberals, called "the clique," is careful to assure that others in the coalition are represented "far out of proportion" to their numbers in the parish.

The Philippians tolerate some "quirks" in their pastor. He has introduced some devotions and pieties that make little sense to them in post-conciliar worship but "if that helps him, it is worth it." He is reputed to have a one-on-one relationship with most parishioners and tries to make sure his parish serves each with "the grace of God and the good graces of the community." Many remark about their rapport with him and there is a lot of good-natured gift-giving.

Some groups have some reservations about the "flamboyance" of others, but no leader could identify alienated groups. The level of consensus about community was high. The nearest the leaders came to expressing concern about "alienated groups" was in reference to people, primarily from the Saturday night congregation, who met their Mass obligation but did not join in the organizational life of the parish.

The strong sense of community at St. Philip's may stem partly from the enabling ministry of Father Pete and the vitality his parishioners derive from parish responsibilities. It may also stem from self-selection processes. People who do not like this type of parish are free to go to the other Catholic parish in town, and some have.

Often parishes with a strong sense of community will devote attention to "social questions" and will mobilize social action groups. St. Philip's parishioners say they were "turned off" by earlier priests who made "justice" the sole focus of their ministry. Under Father Pete, acts of personal charity and corporate concern are encouraged (e.g., an infant who needs adoption, a leukemia victim who needs blood, a family that is hungry), but prophetic ministries toward social problems are not very evident. While the response to individual need is always good, the main focus of community life for now is internal. Its essential feature is that very different kinds of people can care for each other if they *work* together.

Social Change and Community Lost

A boulevard proudly courses through the heart of an affluent neighborhood. And the imposing buildings of St. Malachy's church, school, rectory, and convent proudly stand as modern landmarks along the boulevard. They served the Catholics who had done well in the city.

Newer social forces have, however, engulfed St. Malachy's. The neighborhood "began to change" fifteen years ago. Affluent Catholics moved out to "better addresses."

The clubs and the organizations started dropping off, then Mass attendance, and now financial contributions. Few parishioners still live in the neighborhood.

St. Malachy's elderly parishioners speak fondly of the '50s. The parish was in its hey-day — large school, active men's and ladies' organizations, successful fund drive after successful fund drive.

The remaining parishioners don't talk much in the present tense. They don't have a good handle on what to do about the present. St. Malachy's is not blessed with much of a sense of community. When the leaders talk about fellow parishioners nowadays, one word stands out — "uninvolved." It is not that people have been alienated by parish life at St. Malachy's. Rather, it is simply-they are not there.

The school continues to have a large enrollment but it is different from the '50s: 70% of the children are Black, 65% are non-Catholic, 80% are not members of St. Malachy's. Many parents of these Black children teach in the public school system and "are personally aware of the problems of public schools in this state and this city."

Virtually all parish functions are held on Sunday. Parishioners say "it is too difficult to get out at night." (Leaders suspect that is a codeword for racial fears.) The parish council meets monthly at Sunday noon. The choir rehearses before the liturgy; often the liturgical music does not jell, there is so little time. The pastor considers liturgy the heart of parish experience and is disappointed when it goes poorly.

The liturgical practices and devotions of the church and especially the school strike observers as pre-conciliar. In any case, they are not well attended by parishioners.

From time to time young members of religious orders will join the staff, sensing a real opportunity to rejuvenate the old or to reach out to the new. But then complaints pile up, they get discouraged, and leave.

The pastor, who has been at St. Malachy's for several years, is strengthening ties with a black Catholic parish nearby and with a cluster of neighborhood churches. He continues to minister attentively to the individual needs of the long-time parishioners. They appreciate him. But they will not follow him into directions that would redefine the historic ministries of the parish. He is quick to embrace others' suggestions. The half-dozen or so leaders who remain active give him high marks for sensitivity and encouragement. But he doesn't have a game plan for the parish. Diocesan officials are not very familiar with situations like his, and he feels he gets little help.

There is a lot of hand-wringing and head-scratching. If "uninvolved" describes the parishioners, perhaps "help!" describes the remaining leaders. Many of each have already said "helpless," and have moved on.

St. Malachy's has lost its sense of community and doesn't know where to find it. It is a proud set of buildings.

Parish Is Community: Two Cases

In heavily Catholic locales it is sometimes difficult to separate the life of the religious parish from the life of the civil community. The Catholic parish church becomes a local landmark orienting people to the community, much as the Congregational church on the town square once oriented New England communities. The collective memory of a people — the meaning of the community — is caught up in the parish. In many of the Catholic centers of contemporary America, that vision of community may be little more than nostalgia for a past that may or may not have been. For St. Genevieve in a bustling small town and for Holy Name in a settled village now become a suburb, it is a vivid present. The parish is the community.

Though separated by thousands of miles, St. Genevieve and Holy Name are similar in many ways: (1) they celebrate the past as the way to give confidence to the present; (2) they are inclusive, seeking to minister to people in all stations of life; (3) they are served by clergy and staffs who have sufficient self-esteem to give direction to the parish, while giving ownership and responsibility to the people, and (4) their leadership exudes an optimism and "givenness" such that all people in the community *expect* community life to be rooted in the parish.

St. Genevieve, the small-town parish, is well into its third century. It is one of ten Catholic churches in the locale, but no one doubts that it is the central one. The church building was renovated in a post-conciliar style, but with a reverence for its original architectural style.

Recognizing that changes in American life and changes in understanding of the Church would mandate many new forms of parish participation, St. Genevieve recently built a church hall. But the past is richly commemorated in the new, through collections of pictures and parish memorabilia tastefully displayed in the hall. The rectory has a gracious parlor with parish archives. In the foyer of the rectory is displayed a scrapbook of current activities.

A large school, with enrollment of 1000 children from six local parishes, is down the street. Everyone thinks of it as St. Genevieve's school and even the parents from other parishes ask that their children be confirmed at St. Genevieve. A new and well-appointed convent serves as a residence for sisters on the parish ministry staff and in the school leadership.

Not only are the people reminded daily of the physical plant and the parish's history, but both approaches to town have large billboards that trumpet the parish's annual theme and current activities.

Much effort goes into a church bulletin. The bulletin not only announces events and reports activities, but also used to teach people about faith and ritual, particularly when changes are introduced. The hand of the pastor IS behind the bulletin, but people from all age and interest groups have articles in it. The bulletin celebrates their life together.

The hand of the pastor is behind much that happens at St. Genevieve. Like so many mother churches, St. Genevieve had started to disintegrate in the last two decades. But Father Bill, who came to town a half-dozen years ago, sensed that there was a leadership waiting to be enabled. He gave them projects, helped them build programs, and recalled their collective past. He surrounded himself with an energetic associate, deacon, and sisters in educational and ministerial roles. A particularly talented sister, who had been present during the decline and had left, was lured back.

The school, which had become quite distinct from St. Genevieve, was brought closer. Parents who served on its PTA and committees were also encouraged to serve on parish committees. The pastor, associate, deacon, and religious of St. Genevieve all became deeply involved in the liturgical life of the school.

Ministry to all ages thrives — from a sister's art lessons for the elderly, to the pastor's monthly meetings with college students. Everyone works. Parishioners don't just receive ministry, but they are given encouragement to take on ministries. And no job is below the station of the staff. Father Bill even drives the CCD bus on some Saturday mornings.

Not only are organizations inter-linked, but people learn each other's needs. After Father Bill took forty-five people through an evangelization program during Lent, twenty volunteered to form a prayer chain that finds out the special needs of parishioners and daily prays for them.

The pastor, staff, leaders, and many parishioners are noticing an interesting metamorphosis in their parish. A few years back they were responding to Father Bill's "I think you should do this." But when they did it, they noticed they were saying "*We* accomplished . . . " Then, Father Bill started sending them to workshops and conferences and holding informal leadership training sessions with them. Some are now starting to say "I think we should consider . . . " before Father Bill puts the bug in their ear. And Father Bill, who admits to being too dynamic for the parish's own good, is beginning to feel his ministry is working. They always were faithful with the sacraments, but now they are studying the Bible, praying, volunteering, leading, and all the time recalling who they are because they know who they were. He thinks they are becoming what Vatican-II envisioned and that is what the American church needs.

Not all is in place yet. While many groups know the meaning of St. Genevieve's community, the pastor and leaders do not yet feel Blacks understand that the parish can be theirs too. Charismatics would like to have greater acceptance, and divorcees want to feel the community around them. The liturgies still need to draw a larger proportion of the congregation into full participation in the common parts. But the people's roots in the privativistic Mass dominated by the celebrant are very deep.

In the local business community, even though the town and the county both have different names than the parish, many merchants and professionals use the parish name in their business name. After all, St. Genevieve is the community — a community with a past and one that may well have a future.

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Holy Name parish is the community in the village turned suburb many miles away. Its roots date back three centuries and its buildings dominate the Main Street of the village. It has always been *the* parish, serving the rich and the poor, countryhouse dwellers and immigrant shop-sweepers. Like St. Genevieve's, its buildings and parlors and archives and picture galleries celebrate its past. Some of its people work in the village but many now commute to the nearby city.

Because its membership has ethnic pasts tied more closely to devotional symbols, however, Holy Name took a different approach to renovation. The main church has been gracefully redecorated in the post-conciliar style. The lower church has been given over more to the pieties of the parishioners themselves. Neatly tucked here and there are the devotional symbols of the past. The lower church is typically used to celebrate pre-conciliar liturgies and devotions. Holy Name continues to offer some opportunities to do things the old ways.

But its life goes on. The parish is presided over by a gracious and hospitable pastor whose conversation twinkles with humor. Father McDevitt knows virtually every parishioner by name, and they obviously enjoy conversations with him. He delights in driving about town, rolling the window down for a friendly word with parishioners.

Behind that personal touch, in the estimate of parish leaders, is a man of enormous organizational talent. No one doubts that this large and pluralistic parish is operating according to his game plan. Yet it all seems to mesh. The parish council is vigorous and the committees are active. Discussion seldom becomes rancorous because, in the words of several parishioners, "This parish is really ours." "Fr. McDevitt has an ability to see gifts and call them forth." "In the end, we are truly responsible for what happens here."

Holy Name has a large leadership corps drawn from over 200 parishioners who regularly participated in the renewal week-ends.

The main Mass is celebrated with both dignity and vitality. Homilies are carefully crafted. Music is supportive of the community's participation and well chosen; the choir is exceptional without sounding professional. The secondary Masses, while different in style, still reflect post-conciliar goals; careful preparation is evident.

The pastor is assisted by two priests, three deacons, and a sister who is not only school principal but an important part of the parish staff. Each has clearly delineated functions. One has the sense that both the pastor and the council are attentive to staff performance, yet work in a collaborative manner. In a parish of this size and heterogeneity, there are many groups identified as having the *potential* for alienation, but for now they seem to find room within Holy Name's inclusive community. These include Opus Dei, CUF, the divorced, singles, a charismatic prayer group, and an ecumenical group. People at Holy Name, however, are more concerned about those who only meet their Mass obligation and fail to involve themselves further in community life.

Holy Name has a complex range of programs ministering to nearly every human need. The experience with the parochial school is instructive about the way activities integrate, rather than isolate, the community. The entire village prides itself in the education of the young. Some years ago there had been talk about the cost of keeping the school open. The pastor and parishioners, however, resolved to continue it, and they recruited a very enthusiastic principal. Together, they reintegrated the school into the organizational structure of the parish. Its faculty are underpaid but highly professional lay women of the parish. Its parent-activists are also leaders in the parish. The priests are deeply involved in school liturgies and religious instruction; respect for the welfare of all parishioners is deeply embedded in the religious life of the school. The school has become a parish symbol not only for excellence but also of service and concern. At Holy Name community involves sacrifice.

The village is tidy and, in places, affluent. But it knows all of the human tragedies of pain, lingering illnesses, and unexpected deaths. Father McDevitt can recite many litanies of family life at the parish churchyard. Ministry to the mourners, crisis counseling to avert suicide, piecing together broken families — all are the daily stuff of parish life, even in tidy villages.

Life goes on at Holy Name as it goes on in the suburban village. Their sense of community is very human. It respects differences. It expects tragedy. It celebrates vigorously. It compels responsibility. It joins past to present and future.

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