

THE LIFE CYCLE IN CONGREGATIONS

A PROCESS OF
NATURAL CREATION
AND AN OPPORTUNITY
FOR NEW CREATION



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THE LIFE CYCLE STAGES

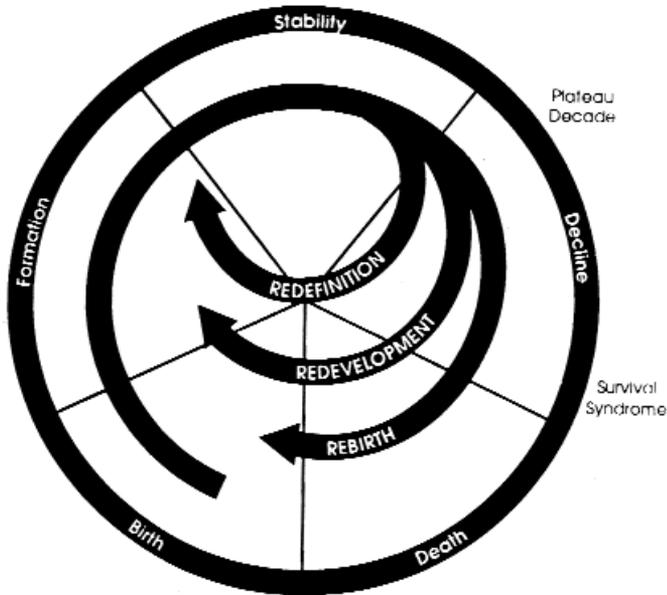


Figure 1. Life cycle Stages

Birth and Formation. A new congregation springs front nothing because someone believes in the possibility of it coming into being. “That person, or core of people, gathers others around the vision and begins to make transitions from one size to another. They form a particular history, traditions, and a distinct identity. If their resources permit, the congregation acquires property, buildings, and salaried staff.

Stability and Redefinition. The process of reshaping a congregation properly begins while it is strong and stable. If a congregation waits until obvious difficulties and decline press it to react, its chances of responding effectively have already been reduced significantly. Prevention is always better than cure. The process of reshaping functions more appropriately as the “blood flow” of a healthy congregation than as a “penicillin injection” for a sick one.

The type of reshaping required in stable congregations could be called “redefinition.” It represents neither a major intervention nor a recovery operation but a regular review and revision throughout the life of the congregation. Redefinition assumes and maintains vitality. This work requires a commitment to change, the ability to stand outside the situation and regard it with a critical eye, and grass roots participation in all evaluation and planning.

Programs and groups within the congregation also will exhibit the stages of the life cycle. Consequently, all stable programs need regular redefinition. Some should start over with major changes, and at the appropriate time others should be canceled to make way for new ones.

Decline and Redevelopment. A plateau in attendance, budget, or faith pilgrimage lasting for a decade signals danger for the health of a congregation. This kind of stability raises questions:

- Does the composition of the congregation reflect the social, economic, and ethnic profile of the surrounding community?
- Are the buildings well maintained and well used by both the congregation and the neighborhood?
- Do members know why newcomers are attracted to this congregation, and why they leave?
- Do members find their spiritual needs fulfilled and faith expanded by the worship, teaching, and fellowship of this congregation?

A plateau may furnish a desirable resting place unless the congregation grows too fond of rest. If its answer to a majority of the preceding questions is “no” or “maybe,” it is likely that it is resting its way to decline. A plateau remains helpful only for so long as it provides horizontal growth and stabilization, such as development in liturgy, stewardship, leadership, ministry, education, pastoral care, and spiritual life.

Numbers alone fail to indicate the beginning of decline. Membership and receipts provide only relative but not irrelevant information about the life cycle of a congregation. A large church with previous average adult attendance at around 500 will demonstrate the symptoms of decline after a loss of 150 active members. However, the family church suffers a setback when one active family moves away.

Some causes of plateau and decline might fall outside the congregation's control and might persist in spite of its best efforts. Such causes include the migration of local residents; a rapid turnover in employment or military assignment; the mass closure of industries; scandals, acute strain, and alienation in the leadership; incompatibility of clergy and members; or preoccupation with mortgage and debts. Such circumstances, however, do not preclude redevelopment although the gains might be diminished.

A redevelopment effort returns the congregation to the earlier stage of "formation." This starting over again necessitates letting go of pride, guilt, shame, deception, illusion, and fears about the congregation and about change. There is a certain logic to the process of beginning formation over again. The probable steps are as follows:

1. **Identity:** "Why are, we in business? What are our assets and strengths?" Members rediscover who they are and why they exist as a congregation in this place and time.
2. **Vision:** "Where do we want to go?" Members reaffirm their obligation to become more faithful to their congregation as it could be in the future.
3. **Strategy:** "How will we get the job done?" Leaders re-equip members and themselves with whatever it will take to reach for their new future. They plot and prepare for the step-by-step progress that will make the dream come true.

4. **Experimental Action:** “What are we ready to try?” Members choose the highest priority and closest possibility in their plan and commit themselves to a metamorphosis, one small step at a time until the dream turns into a revised vision or a full reality.
5. **Reflection:** Finally, “How is it going, and what’s next? Where do we adjust our course?” The congregation should always pause for thanksgiving, absolution, offertory, and celebration. The insights and prayers of the membership guide the evaluation of how they are doing.

The logic of this process frequently gives way to a series of “leaps and switchbacks” in the actual situation. People overcome inertia by the power of an individual’s vision and leadership. Consequently, they leap into spirited action. In the midst of their enthusiasm and experience, they ask what is working, what is not, and why? This process switches them back to issues of strategy. Upon reflection they gain a new sense of identity as a congregation that has a destiny.

As one might expect, the advanced stages in the life cycle increase the magnitude of the reshaping task.

First, stability and redefinition require constant reflection and innovation. The questions remain relatively constant while the congregation searches for more effective responses. It asks, for example: How do we grow? What would improve our worship, organization, stewardship, outreach, and education? Do all of us feel included, valued, and cared for?

Second, decline and redevelopment entail, in addition to redefinition, the restatement of strategy and vision. More disturbing questions point the way forward when another frame of reference is needed. The congregation asks, for example: Why do we have this building and these traditions? Why do we have a pastor? Where is our neighborhood? Are we the same church that our founders envisioned-

Third, death and rebirth push the congregation back to contest even its identity and perception of reality. New members and outside consultants often provide the beginning point for such a radical turn around. The congregation asks bottom-line questions such as these: What does it mean to be a Christian in this situation? Is God here? What are the signs of God's presence? Why have a congregation here? Why should anyone join? Does this situation require a church or some other mission?

When a congregation decreases considerably in size, older members fight the temptation of remembering the peak in their history and trying to recapture the style of a congregation that no longer exists. It is best not to look back and chase after such phantoms. "Let the dead bury the dead." A reshaping process begins with the actual size at that moment and strives for excellence in that size first.

Death and Rebirth. When decline reaches the point that is called "the survival syndrome," a congregation loses its sense of mission and channels all remaining resources toward its own preservation. On occasion only a dignified "burial" remains for the dying congregation. It determines this critical termination point by the unwillingness, or the incapacity, of the members and the leadership to face the necessary changes.

In the natural life cycle of institutions, the death phase means the end. The faith stance of the Christian community, however, raises an option that goes beyond this natural sequence. A new future in the cycle emerges out of the "Easter mystery." The resurrection transcends us as the ultimate metaphor of what we believe about reality. That is to say, even in death we shall live. It is possible to survive death. Because our faith affirms transformation beyond the end, even death could become a transition to rebirth.

The doors of a church close sometimes for good reasons, such as the waste of resources, unusable buildings, unsuitable locations, membership demise, evacuation by the state, or natural disasters. We may close the doors, however, without

closing our mission. A wise closure should open up new opportunities with better strategies.

Christian history favors the “congregation” as the predominant form of Christian fellowship and outreach. The rebirthing process could expose and employ many other expressions that have not yet entered our imagination (see *Making Small Groups Effective: Notes on Fellowships, Home Cell Groups, and House Churches in the Episcopal Tradition*, Volume 4 of the Congregational Vitality Series.)

When reshaping efforts focus on recycling the congregational form, five conditions antedate successful projects:

1. The clergy have been prepared in theory and skills for redevelopment work before they enter the field. A support group provides an ongoing opportunity for reflection and further learning throughout the ministry.
2. The local community offers potential leaders so that the project will not depend totally on outside consultants and outside volunteers.
3. A mission strategy supports the effort and supplies funds, training, and help if the local resources prove inadequate at a critical point of recovery.
4. The target congregation perceives the need for change and participates in the planning for new options from the very first intervention.
5. The “window” is open. Timing is most critical. Opportunities come and go. The climate in the congregation either allows movement in new directions or closes off such initiatives. Searching for a new pastor or planning for a new building or renovation program can provide occasions when congregations open up to intervention and new possibilities. Otherwise, the right time is determined best, perhaps, by intuition and the unpredictable work of the Holy Spirit.

LEADERSHIP IN THE LIFE CYCLE

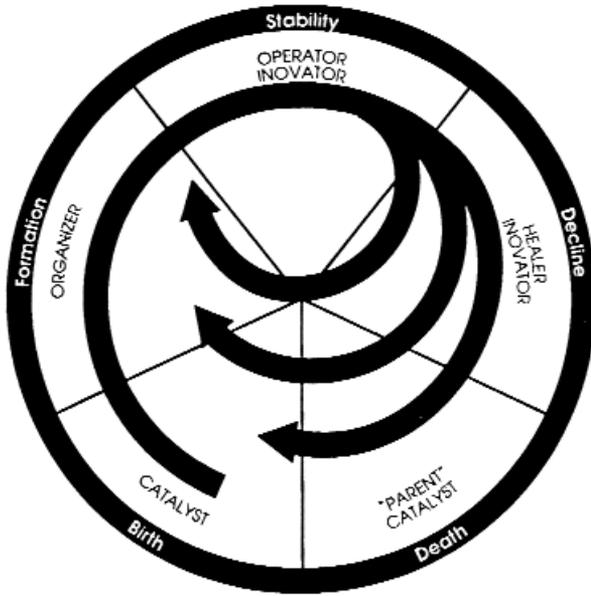


Figure 2. Leadership in the Life Cycle

The natural unfolding of the life cycle and the more extraordinary effort of reshaping our congregation requires a variety of leadership skills. Leaders tend to find themselves more gifted and suited for particular roles in the cycle.

Birth and the Catalyst. The leaders who initiate groups and congregations have a gift for vision and inspiring others to see the birth of new enterprises and new directions. The dreams and presence of the catalyst generate a high level of creativity and energy in those persons who follow in the ventures. The problems and blocks are countered with a tireless entrepreneurship.

Formation and the Organizer, The creative process requires also a sense of order within the potential morass of activity. The organizer works with the members, projects, ideas, hopes, and accountabilities that swirl out of the daring visions and wild ventures of the birthing period. These leaders offer

gifts in testing and regularizing the plans, forming and documenting organizational patterns, discovering and employing resources, establishing effective communication and public relations, and promoting an adequate fiscal base and physical facilities for the ongoing life of the congregation.

Stability and the Operator. At this point in the life cycle the high level of energy and creativity recedes to make way for a growing concern for maintenance. The need for wise administration of the organization and preservation of the traditions requires the type of leader who can operate complex systems. However, “stability” becomes the first period of reshaping-in order to maintain vitality as well as continuity. Consequently, the best “operator” also will be a clever innovator.

Decline and the Healer. When a group falls into decline, its sense of security gives way to a grief process. The behavior in the group reflects what happens in times of significant loss. Members might try to deny the difficulty, bargain with fate by reviving the past, focus too much anger on themselves, their leader, or outsiders as a cause for the hard times, and finally slip into depression, passivity, and resignation. In this grief reaction, the leader brings healing by understanding, absolution, encouragement, and innovation. The healer, like the operator, completes his or her role by bringing the group back to a level of higher energy and creativity through new vision and the birth of new directions. A grief process is healthy unless some pathological extreme emerges. The healer brings balance and discipline to the grief work.

Death and the “Parent.” When the group moves from the critical phase to the survival syndrome, the leader finds the members exhausted with grief and immobilized by a lack of self-confidence. It may be necessary for the leader to become temporarily a “parent,” allowing extradependency upon their strength and optimism. The “parent” teaches the group how to “talk” again, how to “walk” again, and how to “grow up” into being a different group. Out of the intense care by the

parent, a rebirth may come from the terminal situation. If not, the remaining members at least find the capacity to celebrate their past and accept the closure of the life cycle for their congregation.

THE FAITH JOURNEY IN THE LIFE CYCLE

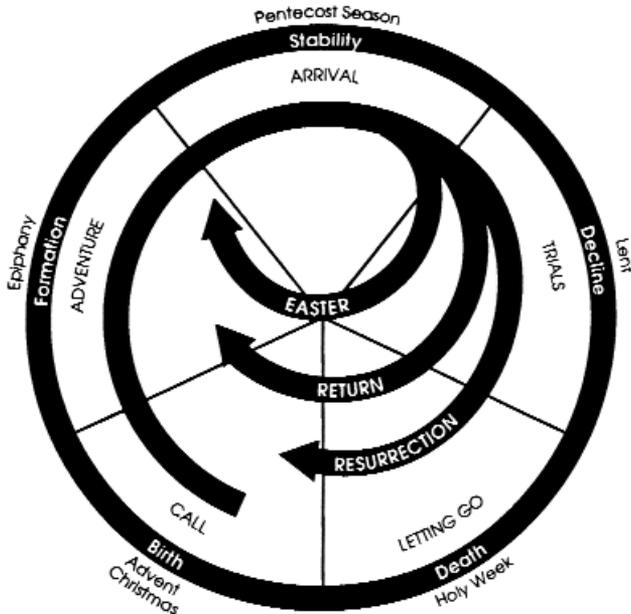


Figure 3. The Faith Journey in Life Cycle

Common themes from the life cycle appear repeatedly in the biblical literature that records for us the journeys of Israel, Jesus, his disciples, and the early Christians. The Church year gives liturgical and didactic expression to the same themes.

Birth and the Call. God gives birth to new movements in history by calling forth instruments for the divine cause. Noah was called to build an ark; Abraham was called to birth a nation; and Moses was called to lead that nation out of bondage. Mary was called to hear a son by the Spirit, and he was called “God in the flesh dwelling among us.” The apostles were called to declare the gospel to all nations. We stand in the lineage of God’s call to birth new ministries and new missions in the world.

We remember the way God calls his people and the miracle of birth at Advent and Christmas.

Formation and Adventure. God has never promised that following the call would be easy, but the call always produces adventure. We give form to our visions by taking risks, struggling with obstacles, and fearlessly persisting in our objectives. Sometimes we wander in a wilderness of confusion and setbacks. Other days the promised land seems close at hand. Along the way many lessons are learned by faith and surprising experiences.

During Epiphany we see in the journey of the wise men the adventure of every follower and congregation seeking to worship and serve Christ.

Stability and Arrival. In time the worn travelers do complete the adventure and arrive at the goal of their pilgrimage. Our arrival provides an opportunity for rest, satisfaction in completed tasks, thanksgiving for strength and health, and time to enjoy telling stories about our past adventures. Any congregation wants to achieve and linger in the stage of having all their buildings, full staff, an array of attractive programs, adequate budget support, solid reputation, effective outreach in the community, and a steady flow of, new members. How sweet to have arrived. If good fortune allows we may pass many days in this enchanted camp, but not so long that we forget how to strike out on new adventures.

Perhaps, the lengthy liturgical season following Pentecost represents the faith journey during tale stage of stability. In this season, we remember and relive the heritage and teachings that carry forward the mission of the church.

Decline and Trials. It is important to affirm at this point in our reflections on the faith journey that decline is not sin. Aging and gradual demise have been placed in the creation by God, and the scripture says that what God created is good. However, our response to decline falls short if we fail to seek regeneration and change.

Decline brings with it many painful trials. These tribulations come not as a punishment by God. The trials press us to respond to God with new dreams, other directions, and renewed devotion. Above all, our spirits are free to soar into a new transformed life. The cross means freedom.

The faithful service in a declining and dying congregation compares to the agony and disillusionment of the last journey to Jerusalem in the life of Jesus. We can admire the clergy and laity who bear such a burden and who walk in these footsteps of Christ.

The Lenten disciplines remind us that our Lord demands we pass through trials with Him in order to be ready for death and resurrection. Finally, the meaning of the cross is revealed in the freedom to experience new life.

Death and Resurrection. In graceful death we finally let go. Occasionally, in the life of any congregation, there comes a time to let go of memories, attitudes, behaviors, programs, and inadequate norms. Such passing serves a valuable purpose as the gateway to new horizons of experience. We are an Easter people. In our Holy Eucharist, we proclaim the resurrection and the return of our Lord Christ. God does raise the dead - including dead faith and dead congregations.

One might speculate about whether the resurrection was any less traumatic than the crucifixion. Christians know only that the resurrection was a transition that transformed the humiliation of Jesus into a new presence. In like manner, our ministry of resurrection bridges our sacrifices to a new future. Making congregations new again will require extraordinary imagination and tenacious commitment in the face of adversity. Ultimately, of course, we rely in faith upon the work of the Spirit of God, the Giver of all life.

THE LIFE CYCLE OF SETTLEMENT

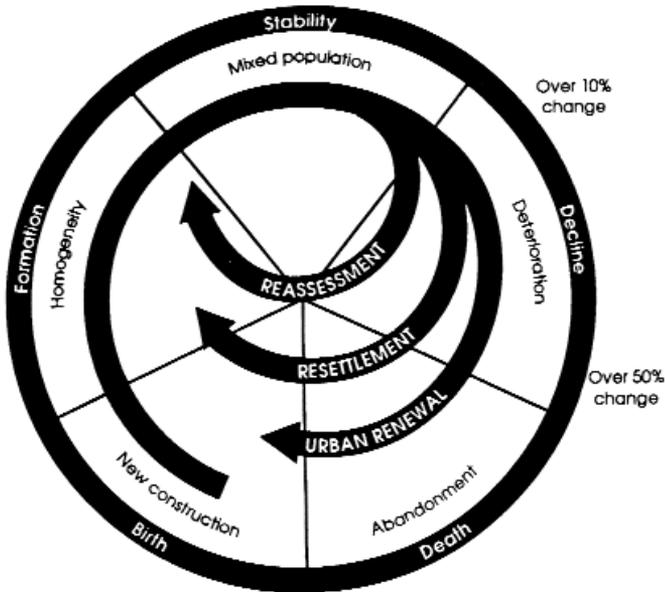


Figure 4. The Life Cycle of Settlement

The picture of a congregation in transition would not be complete without giving attention to its frame. The future of a congregation interlocks with changes in the context of the surrounding community and larger society. The most significant types of environmental change are the movements of different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups, and shifts in population density, land usage, economic base, age profile, and the life-style of the residents. The complexity of these changes is increased by adding the dynamic of the life cycle of a city and the countryside.

Archaeologists have discovered that ancient cities rest on a foundation of many layers from past eras. History writes itself also on the landscape of the city. Although American cities have not existed too long, their accumulative patterns reveal identifiable cycles and evolution.

In the American setting, harbor sites first acquired new construction and commerce. Immigrants settled in communities formed by people with whom they shared a common heritage. Consequently, a homogeneous population appeared by their own choice and self-selection. In the United States, the offer of liberty (with the exception of the indigenous people and the black community), and opportunity for all people throughout the world, produced a steady flow of new immigrants and new cultural mixes at the periphery of society.

In most cities the rise of a mixed population occurred concurrently with the aging buildings and the deterioration of public services. Those families with the means reassessed their situation and moved away. Consequently, there was a gradual resettlement in response to the decay of the surrounding community. For the people left behind, the reassessment produced tragic results, such as devaluation, racial tension, anger, and the movement of real estate into the hands of fewer and fewer landlords.

Most citizens of European extraction resettled in new neighborhoods that were, again, predominantly homogeneous communities. Such population shifts were often characterized as “white flight.” When more than 50 percent of the original urban areas had been abandoned by earlier, predominantly European residents, the reduced quality of ‘life and poor care of property there subsequently gave rise to rather unpleasant conditions. Both city governments and private enterprise tended to abandon these areas, except for purposes of exploitation. The resulting neighborhoods, showing severe signs of decay, stirred both compassion and alarm. The city’s answer to inner-city decay usually came in the form of urban renewal, which often, ironically, benefited populations other than the people who lived in the most blighted of the areas. Nevertheless, the core of many larger cities acquired a new look and often new functions with the construction of office buildings, luxury condominiums, elaborate traffic interchanges, and hotel and convention centers.

THE LAYERS OF URBAN SETTLEMENT



In the evolution of the cities, many experienced the cycle more than once as new waves of construction and occupation added one layer after another to their boundaries. Like the strata in an archaeological dig, each layer told a story about the culture and period of history that gave it birth. The role of the church and the nature of its ministry varied considerably from one layer to the next.

Today, American cities present no fewer than four different zones, or one might say, four different stories and ministry situations. Each congregation must ask itself where it fits in this pattern and what changes the future holds.

Zone One: Financial Center. The original town square might have included a city hall, fire station, park with a bronze horse and rider, and a church or cathedral. Shops and town houses grew up along the streets that ran off the town square. If the town was large enough, it could support a “church row” on which major denominations were represented. Today, such an “old downtown church” still enjoys its history and prestige, but the congregation no longer lives around its doors.

Executives walk the streets by day and vagrants by night. A few members drive in on Sunday for a “cathedral experience,” but the church turns into an urban mission to the poor and elderly during the week. At the other extreme, there exists the opportunity of ministry to commuters in the office buildings.

Zone Two: Old Town. At present, considerable money has gone to the restoration of grand old houses, town houses, and quaint shops in the new “old town.” This central city area now shelters a mix of young urban professionals and upper middle-class retired people, who enjoy a sophisticated style of living. The churches that were built there about seventy-five years ago have traditional decor and fine pipe organs but very high maintenance and heating costs. Offering people a place of public worship counts as an important ministry. The greater call at present, however, is for apartment evangelization; pastoral care to young adults, singles, and professional couples; and finding a productive weekday use for old church facilities.

Zone Three: Old Neighborhoods. Residential areas grew up outside the original town along the access routes of city transit systems: trolleys, subways, and commuter trains. The neighborhoods around the waterways and railroads served industrial development. Many neighborhood churches sprang up, and the congregation normally reflected the particular ethnic and socio-economic constituency of the local community. These neighborhoods have changed dramatically in many cities as the urban life cycle brought deterioration and resettlement.

Many churches remained indifferent to the transition, steadily declining as more and more members moved out of the area. If the newcomers in the neighborhood faced a closed fellowship, the congregation by its own exclusion turned into an “ex-neighborhood” church. In this type of congregation, the leaders and most active members lived outside the immediate area. A “faithful remnant” returned on Sunday out of loyalty to roots in the past. Today, the remaining opportunity for new ministry lingers in becoming more inclusive and open to new members who differ in class and color.

Many churches in zones one through three closed. They were unwilling, or unable, to reshape their congregations in

accordance with the transition in their community context, Very large churches declined to half their original strength, and many pastoral-size churches could no longer maintain a staff and their large stone buildings. Today a new future for such congregations rests with reshaping their attitudes, image, and style of operation. Central-city coalitions will make possible mutual support if provincial attitudes give way to a new sense of interdependence and collaboration.

Identification with the surrounding community will entail sharing prerogatives and property with those neighbors who have become “strangers at the door.” (see *All Doors Open*, Volume 5 of the *Congregational Vitality Series*)

Some ex-neighborhood churches and old downtown churches reshaped their future into two other types of congregation, the “special purpose” church and the “metro-regional” church. Both types survive by drawing sufficient numbers from an area much wider than their local neighborhoods. The metro-regional church normally was built, or relocated, on a major highway between zones three and four; consequently members drive from both suburban and central-city areas. This church usually provided the programs and amenities of large program and corporation churches. The special-purpose church featured one particular attribute with excellence, such as a style of spirituality, a mission to the poor, or a political bias. The congregation might have remained pastoral sized, but its special appeal and reputation sometimes resulted in a surprising growth pattern.

In the present clay, these churches might be drawn into the heated debate over whether it is right for churches to leave the central city and resettle closer to the new suburban developments. The debate also questions whether it is right for any congregation to be homogenous in its interests, class and color particularly if that congregation remains isolated and insulated from the transitions and needs of the local community. The debate is still open and still hot.

Zone Four: Suburbia. The postwar boom in housing and

automobile ownership created miles and miles of suburbia, where many new congregations flourished. The suburban church and the shopping mall represented a new prosperity. All mainline denominations competed for locations in the new residential areas in order to take advantage of the initial growth potential, and the new members frequently crossed over denominational lines. The churches that arrived with the first residents often grew rapidly in a few years to the level of a program-size church. Of course, acquiring too many members too quickly caused some “dizziness” and a few headaches. At present, new housing developments still present an opportunity for mission. Without early land-banking, we strain under the heavy cost of land and high interest rates. A new site and a building may cost a million or more dollars in some cities. The future will require more innovative ways to finance new construction. New congregations cannot be left to struggle like orphans.

THE LEGACY OF THE COUNTRYSIDE



When the new world opened up to Europe, and eventually the whole globe, the new settlement opportunities promised wide open spaces. All people, ordinary people, could dream of owning land and establishing their own home. Over two centuries, millions have come to the shores of the United States with such a vision. A new nation was born out of the legacy of the early colonies, the first movement into what became known as the Midwest, and finally the wagon trains took dreamers to populate the far western frontiers. We may mistakenly overlook; in this grand epic, that the land was already occupied by native peoples. And unfortunately, scant attention is often given to the early settlement of the West by Spanish-speaking peoples, and the emergence of a new African-American culture resulting from the slave trade of the colonial settlements. With every wave of settlement, there arose new small congregations. These small country missions played an important role in defining Christianity in the new world.

Pioneers. However the story is told, we must picture a new society and a new church rising out of new settlements of a countryside. Farms, ranches, villages, small towns, and local industries sprang up from coast to coast. The early story of every American denomination contributes fascinating episodes to this drama. During the pioneer period, the Episcopal Church grew rapidly.

From 1840 to 1900 membership increased from approximately 50,000 to 700,000¹. The new congregations on the expanding frontiers included both the ones serving the indigenous populations and the ones created for the more recent immigrants from other continents. New denominations arose having a particular American flavor. With few exceptions, these new expressions of faith had their origins in the Christian history of Europe. Normally the congregations were small and shared in the rough adventures of the pioneers. The small clusters of Christians were served usually by clergy from “log cabin colleges” or laity who assumed leadership in spiritual and ecclesiastical matters.

This industry and spirituality of the countryside became a critical strength in the fabric of American religion. Even up to the latter decades of this century, most new clergy came from the countryside. The revival movements found major roots in the culture of the countryside. The majority of congregations in the mainline denominations were in the countryside, which remains true even today. Two-thirds of Episcopal congregations are family-sized and small pastoral-sized churches with their origins in the agrarian culture. Our historians may find it significant that in the latter half of this century, the small congregations of the countryside have remained the source of innovation and a courageous pioneering spirit in the Episcopal Church. These small congregations have been the first to experiment with changes stimulated by declining members and decreasing numbers of available clergy, youth, and financial resources. These small congregations have been the first to create new options, such as regional clusters of congregations to share and conserve resources, team ministries of clergy and laity, the limited ordination of clergy for local sacramental services, the rediscovery of baptism as the commissioning of everyone to ministry, and ecumenical congregations (more than one denomination represented by the clergy and membership of one congregation).

Rural life in the United States suffered a drain of human resources during the mass transition from agrarian to urban life-styles in the early and mid-twentieth century. As the 1990s began, fewer Americans lived on farms than a decade earlier, the Bureau of the Census reported. About 4.6 million Americans were farm residents in 1990, essentially unchanged from 1989, but down 1.5 million from 1980 and 25.9 million from 1940, when the nation had 30.5 million farm residents². Most Americans now live in metropolitan areas: 50.2% live in one of 30 metropolitan areas with populations over 1 million, and in total, 77.5% live in metropolitan areas³.

No congregation in this zone has escaped some repercussion from this massive change. Small family churches in the open countryside survived only as their ministry was reshaped for a new future with more involvement and direction by the laity and less dependency on help from city churches. Some small congregations found a new dignity and new destiny in the experiments that necessity and new visions forced upon them. Many others, of course, simply and appropriately closed. It must be emphasized, however, that the role of the family-sized church has not died. In the future this congregational style may return to the ethnic neighborhoods of the city. Above all, we need our small missions to revive and reshape in order to serve the isolated communities in the open country.

Small Towns. Most small towns originated as the self-contained centers of a limited population that was sustained by small farms, small industries, and commercial routes. This familiar pattern has passed away in many areas. Small towns have served increasingly as satellites of larger cities and greater metropolitan areas, offering to these urban centers seasonal resorts, recreational facilities, military bases and installations, retirement developments, and affordable housing for ethnic groups. They also provide a labor force by commuting, rural customers for urban goods and services, and an aging constituency who might depend on city hospitals for specialized medical care. Under these conditions some small

towns. have prospered, but others have slipped slowly into greater decline and have witnessed closures of shops, cafes, schools, banks, and motels. The present circumstances in declining towns demand a conservative, realistic expectation about the level of numerical growth. Nevertheless, congregations in small towns still find worthy opportunities for ministry among the older residents, the ethnic newcomers, vacationers, military personnel, and commuters. Often stability marks an achievement and all small towns need thoughtful, positive leadership.

Exurbia. The flow of population from rural areas to the city reversed in a counter movement of urban families going back to the countryside. In some urban areas, new housing ranged from condominiums to ten-acre estates. When the new residents went to the local village and the local small family-sized church, it became evident that different cultures had converged. If the number of city folk increased rapidly enough, questions arose about the identity of the local congregation and the provision of adequate space for worship and programs. This new opportunity for mission may suggest a reshaping of the small-town congregations or perhaps starting a new congregation. As yet, experience has not proven one option preferable over the other.

CONCLUSION

“Life Cycle in Settlement” opened with a reference to the context of the community as the frame of the picture. Context imposes upon a congregation some restraints and limits. Upon reflection, however, it appears that “context” exists not only as a congregation’s surroundings but as the people themselves. We are the context, or the context is in us. Context is the way we feel about our neighbors, the places that we prefer to live in, the kind of stores we like to shop in, the school environment we want for our children, and the heritage we hold dear. Context is our color, our class, our values. Therefore, we are never really isolated from our context, and we always have choices to make about our context. Perhaps, it is this subjective quality of our environment that gives religious communities the right to take context so seriously. On the basis of our faith, we can mold and change our community. In fact, much of our mission and ministry should focus on the future for our society and our local community. In the end, the gospel challenges us to shape a new future for all humanity.

NOTES

1. Wayne Williamson, *Growth and Decline in the Episcopal Church*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979.
2. *1993 Information Please Almanac*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 824.
3. *The World Almanac*, 1992, New York, Pharos Books, 1992, p.73.

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APPENDIX (charts)

The Life Cycle of a Congregation *(Martin F. Saarinen)*

ASCENT SCALE

DESCENT SCALE

PRIME

EPAI

1. Wisdom culture. 2. Interaction between inner/outer, intentionality/inclusion, programmatic/visionary. 3. Creative conflict. Pastoral & corporate responsibility. 4. Lack of solutions. Vulnerability. 5. Dominance of one or another polarity. Loss of sense of (nearness). 6. Develop conflict utilization skills among members, maintain flow between intra- & extra-dependency.

ePAI

MATURITY

1. Status Quo culture. 2. Well established fellowship structures, administrative procedures, staff, programs & support. 3. Stability, sense of self worth, continuity. 4. Energetic but unenthusiastic. 5. Unresponsiveness to new opportunities and changed conditions. 6. Analyze congregation's history & current context. Restate its mission.

ADOLESCENCE

EPai

1. Busy Bee culture. High energy level focused on development of programs & services. 3. Program development, adaptiveness, doingness. 4. Unrealistic idealism, leader burnout, program proliferation. 5. Conflict over purposes & mission, founder's dilemma. 6. Broaden member assimilation & participation in leadership; develop integrated approach to variety of ministries.

ePAI

ARISTOCRACY

1. Plantation culture. 2. Good ol' boys' club. Busy but unenergetic. 3. Efficiency. Strong fellowship among insiders. 4. Guardedness. Status consciousness. Exclusiveness. 5. Dwindling base of support. Loss of mission. 6. Restore sense of God's presence in congregation's history and generate awareness of congregation's vocation.

INFANCY

EpaI

1. Process culture. 2. Quality of relationships correlate with levels of energy & enthusiasm. 3. Open & unrestricted inclusiveness, contagious enthusiasm. 4. Undeveloped programs, conditional inclusiveness. 5. Disillusionment. Erosion of membership & potential. 6. Generate sense of community & mission, develop specific ministries.

ePAI

BUREAUCRACY

1. Disillusioned Macho culture. 2. The Golden Age no longer sought. Maintaining one's turf personally & corporately. 3. Strong sense of boundaries. 4. Rigidity. Muteness. Defensiveness. Hostility. Suspicion. 5. Unregenerateness. Ultimacy of institutional structures. Personalizing systemic problems. 6. Generate a new identity. Empower the powerless.

BIRTH

EpaI

1. Star culture. 2. Integrated around vision & charisma of founder. 3. High levels of energy & enthusiasm. 4. Insufficient membership base to support ministries. 5. Spurious enthusiasm. Unresponsiveness. 6. Broaden & maintain personal contacts.

DEATH

1. Artifact culture. 2. Complete disintegration. 3. Absorption into another ecclesial entity. 4. Despair. Anomie. Complete loss of memory, identity, hope. 5. No new life beyond. Ultimate power given to death. 6. Construct a completely new ecclesial fellowship.

KEY TO DESCRIPTIONS

1. Culture Type. 2. Major characteristic. 3. Major strengths. 4. Major weaknesses. 5. Dangers. 6. Developmental Intervention.
E-Energy. P-Program. A-Administration. I-Inclusion. CAPITAL-high level. Lower Case-low level.

Five stages in the Life-Cycle of Churches (*Win Am*)

	1. Initial Structuring	2. Formal Organization	3. Maximum Efficiency	4. Institutionalization	5. Disintegration
Commitment to Mission and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive, supportive attitude • Uncertainty of future demands visionary leader with high commitment level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong sense of mission and purpose among every member • High level of goal "ownership" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High visibility and understanding of purpose and mission • Common purpose throughout ministries of the church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowering of members' understanding of purpose • New members do not sense church's purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose is lost • Mission not understood
Involvement of Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual dependency requires everyone to be involved, or leave • All members willing to work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High percentage of individuals' time and identity committed to the church • Volunteers easily found 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New members quickly find a place to become involved • High level of enthusiasm among membership for participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members assume there are enough others to do the job • More paid staff to "enhance" ministries • Original members feel "we have done our part" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs eliminated for lack of participation • Difficult to find volunteers • 10% of members do 90% of the work
Programs, Structures, and Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal organization • Spontaneity in decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Function of ministry determines form • Structure created in response to needs • Traditions begin to form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New programs created to respond to new needs • Delegation begins • New roles and responsibilities created 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few, if any, new programs added • Forms of ministries begin to determine function • Structure creates needs rather than responds to needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs deleted for lack of funds • Primary goal is preservation/survival
Attitude Toward Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members are receptive • Quickly accomplished • Ownership is unanimous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes easily adopted and integrated • Suggested from all levels of membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New proposals given serious consideration • Church leaders responsible for initiating and implementing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few changes proposed • No changes considered that radically depart from status quo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We've never done it that way before" • Rationalizations often done for why it can't be done
Morale and Self-Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morale is high • Self-esteem is in the process of being formulated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morale is higher • Self-esteem easily affected by circumstances and short term successes/failures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morale is highest • Self-esteem at its highest level • Confidence is contagious that goals can be reached 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morale polarizes into groups of high and low • Self-esteem develops uncertainties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few have high morale • Frustration and/or despair by leaders in not knowing how to stop decline • Self-esteem lowers

A MEDITATION ON THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Our congregation had gathered inside the church when we heard a procession outside coming toward us.

“Listen! What are they saying? I hear the wailing of mourners. Do they think that this church is a tomb and we in here are dead?”

Now, they have stopped right outside our front door. A woman’s voice protests. “No, we cannot open the grave because the body will already smell with decay.”

A man weeps, but with a commanding voice he calls to us, “Lazarus, come forth!”

It is our Lord. He does not accept our demise, and he gives us resurrection. We must go to him and follow him in the fields and through the streets of our community.

“Take off the grave wrapping,” our Lord commands, “for my people live again.

A.J.R.