STRENGTHENING OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Lowell Bolstad

Contents

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Foreward

Several years ago, while attending a workshop on rural and small town ministry at the Yokefellow Institute, Lyle Schaller suggested that, when rock collectors head for the beach to seek for rare and interesting stones for their collection, they do not pick up every rock on the beach. Schaller used that illustration to point out how important it is that when we read books for new insights or fresh ideas for our ministries, we best glean carefully through the material for the "unique and interesting" ideas and not try to adapt everything from the written page into our everyday work patterns. "The rare and interesting treasures are to be found if we take the time to do our gleaning," Schaller would say.

Among the books that I treasure are those written several years ago by Dr. Rockwell C.Smith. I have found several "rare and interesting stones" from reading **People, Land and Churches; The Church In Our Town;** and **Rural Ministry and the Changing Community** — all gems by Dr. Smith. But there have been precious few such books written over the past two decades that challenges one's thinking or provides new insights on the role of the church and rural community development.

It is so refreshing, then, to come across the writing and storytelling skill of Rev. Lowell Bolstad! Lowell's second book follows very closely on the heels of an excellent study of **Who Will Stand Up For the Family Farm?** Because of his commitment to meet and challenge people to be involved in ministry and to gain deeper insight on the importance of the community in a rural setting, Lowell offers an informed and common-sense approach to the concerns of people and issues of the countryside.

There are so many "rare and interesting stones" for pastors and laity to be found throughout **Strengthening Our Rural Communities.** Lowell moves from a historical base developed in Chapter One to a very thought provoking analysis of connections between rural areas here and in the Third World, an informed observation that comes from his recent trip to West Africa. Chapter 20 — *Living Out A Vision For Community* addresses the importance of connections for gaining greater insight and depth for who we are and whose we are in coming to grips with the importance of our understanding of interdependence in today's world. The brief articles from the **Hay River Review** newspaper, a community paper that Rev. Bolstad edits, brings forth fond memories of times past but also sets the stage for our rethinking as to what are the crucial ingredients for building and revitalizing rural communities.

In the two books that Rev. Bolstad has written so far, one need not seek long for a portrait of the richness of rural life in America. I look forward to the third, fourth, ... book from this author and friend.

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Introduction

In an irony of history, many people are becoming fascinated with small towns and rural neighborhoods at about the same time as many of these are disappearing from the social scene. The bad news is that there is still a crisis in rural America. Farmers are being forced off the land. Businesses are closing. Property tax delinquencies are increasing. Communities are suffering from an important loss of leadership, as otherwise capable individuals are overwhelmed by their personal struggle for survival.

The good news is that many people are waking up to the loss of rural community and are deciding to do something in response to this crisis. People of the land are showing determination to live and work on the family farms. Others are carrying out plans for economic development. The various structures of government are being addressed to make them more responsive to the citizens and their conditions. People are assuming leadership.

This is meant to be a *can do* book. In a time when many respond to the invitation to become involved in community life by saying, "I *can't do* that," **Strengthening Our Rural Communities** seeks to evoke a response of, "I *can do* that." You will be given an analysis of what is happening to rural communities, as well as a portrayal of how one area is seeking to build community. You will be challenged to raise your sights by meeting people, like yourself, who are seeking to shape life in community. You will be provided with a framework from which to operate, and hear an invitation to take part in an important work.

Three characteristics describe what is meant by a rural community. A rural community is a *natural area* where townspeople and farm people live together in a social watershed. It comprises a trade center surrounded by an agricultural expanse. This natural area can be of almost any size or shape depending on various factors, such as the location of other trade centers, rivers, and roads. For the most part, I have in mind those communities centered around trade centers of 2,500 population or less, although some of the examples come from larger communities and much of what is said can fit bigger population centers. Population, by itself, cannot define a rural community. A rural community also provides a *core of services* including those that are economic, educational, religious, and recreational. Government services would also be important in incorporated places. A rural community is characterized by *a sense of belonging,* where people are joined together in close personal relationships similar to that of family or friendship, although such ties may also be those of animosity. Emotional involvement builds upon bonds established through the church, school, business, and other activities.

The use of the term *crisis* in addressing the condition of rural communities speaks of both danger and opportunity. This book is written in the hope that people of good will may recognize, in the danger of the decline in a way of life, the opportunity to be catalysts for progressive social change in strengthening our rural communities.

This book is dedicated to the workers on the **Hay River Review,**
for these are people who know how to live and to work in community.

Lowell Bolstad
Prairie Farm, Wisconsin
September 9, 1988

Part I

Coming To Terms With the Loss Of Rural Community

"Years ago, farm families lived on either forty or eighty acres. Six or seven men would get together to fill silo. They would spend a day at each farm and inside of a week would have the silo filling completed. I really miss that now," Carl Espeseth of Prairie Farm recalled.

Espeseth also remembers the passing of the country schools. "Our school was less than two miles away. We would take the kids to school and then pick them up," Espeseth explained. Christmas programs and picnics at the end of the year were always important events. "With the country schools gone and many of the farms sold and families moved away, it seems lonesome in the countryside," Espeseth remarked.

The village of Prairie Farm is not quite the same as Espeseth remembers it when he was growing up. In 1925, Prairie Farm had a blacksmith shop, telephone office, post office, garage, barber shop, meat market, three restaurants, four stores, a creamery, a four-room school, one bank, one Methodist church, and two Norwegian churches. "Prairie Farm does not compare at all to what it used to be," Espeseth concluded.

—**Hay River Review,** November 1987

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The Day The Farmers Store Burned Down

On May 8, 1948, the Farmers Store in Prairie Farm, Wisconsin burned down. The community of Prairie Farm was never the same again.

When the store was built in 1906, it quickly became a landmark. The building looked like a California mansion. The builder was as remarkable as his store. George E. Scott came to Prairie Farm in 1886 to work at the Knapp, Stout, and Company Store as a clerk. He gradually gained the confidence of the people with his honesty. When the lumber of the area was depleted, Knapp, Stout, and Company pulled out of Prairie Farm. With the savings he had accumulated over the years, Scott bought the company store.

With the timber gone, the people turned to farming. The region prospered, and so did Scott. By the time he had reached his early forties, he had earned enough to retire. Scott did not retire; he felt he owed the community something special. Scott decided to build a store the community could be proud of to replace the old company store. Made of brick, in Mission style, it stood in the center of a three-acre park and looked like a public library.

Gertrude Kallenbach recounted, "Everybody thought Scott was crazy to build such a fancy store for such down-to-earth people as farmers, but he did well." She went on to say that Scott catered to farmers. He even helped them by making loans. "Scott took hold and got things organized; he had faith in people; he was a public man," Kallenbach said.

The Farmers Store became a place for social gatherings. On the second floor, Scott built a women's lounge. The reading room was furnished with magazines and books to read. The men were provided a big meeting room, with a long table and many chairs, where they could meet, discuss crops and the news, and transact business.The Farmers Store also housed the tent used for Memorial Day festivities. When the building burned down, the tent was destroyed, and the large Memorial Day celebration came to a halt.

Norman Pederstuen also remembers the Farmers Store. "They had everything from soup to nuts. It was far ahead of its time. I looked forward to Tuesday nights to shop at the store and then to watch free movies on the lawn," Pederstuen said. "There used to be a community spirit where customers and merchants depended upon each other," he added.

The Farmers Store served the community in three ways. The first was economically; when people did most of their shopping in the community, the money circulated in the local economy. Afterwards, with the increasing use of the automobile, people took their business to larger towns and cities. The second was socially; the Farmers Store provided a way for people to come together for shopping, visiting, entertainment, and for a big Memorial Day celebration. Afterwards the community suffered a loss of closeness. The third was community pride; Prairie Farm possessed a mark of distinction in claiming the Farmers Store as its own. The community could not boast of such a distinguishing characteristic.

Ever since I began serving as a parish pastor of two rural congregations near Prairie Farm, I heard the story of the Farmers Store. I came to realize that its burning was a watershed event. If it is the case that Prairie Farm never fully recovered from that loss, then what was Prairie Farm like before May 8, 1948? And how did Prairie Farm change after the fire? Allow me to briefly tell you the story of the rural community of Prairie Farm.

After the Farmers Store burned down, Prairie Farm was never the same again.

Loss Of Land For The Chippewa Indians

The White people of Prairie Farm were not the first to experience the threat to life in community. The treaty between the United States and the sovereign nation of the Ojibwa in 1854 set aside land for reservations. As a result the Chippewa Indians, who hunted, fished, and gathered in the area, were asked to choose either the St. Croix or the Lac Courte Oreilles for their new homeland.

The Chippewas, who lived in the vicinity when the White settlers arrived, were a friendly tribe. Several White people remembered their parents telling about their friendship with the Chippewas. They even helped some of the White people build their log cabins. The Indians brought venison and game to the pioneers. The pioneers, in turn, gave the Indians beef or pork, giving both races a variety in menu. In addition the Chippewas also shared their knowledge about herbs and their use, how to preserve them, and what illnesses they would cure. The nearest drug store and doctors, for many years, were thirty miles away, much too far for the average person. Some of the Prairie Farm residents continued to use the herbs recommended by the Indians to their parents.

During the 1850's and 1860's, the Chippewas moved out of the area. A few connections remained. Whites and Indians intermarried at one time. Some of the last names in Prairie Farm are the same as for certain people on the Lac Courte Oreilles Indian Reservation one hundred miles to the north. The history of the Indian people cannot be ignored, but is something with which White people are compelled to come to terms. In Chapter 11, *Two Racial Groups Retain Identity Through Community,* I will return to the Chippewas of Lac Courte Oreilles, where I will attempt to show how a people who have lost their land have something to teach those who are faced with the loss of community.

Prairie Farm Gets Its Name From the Lay Of The Land

The settlement of Prairie Farm began with Knapp, Stout, and Company's search for new headquarters. Their operations had expanded too far north from their Menomonie location. In 1847 Captain Wilson, with two other men, went on a trip in search of a proper setting, where they could pasture their horses, mules, oxen, and cattle and where they would have water power for a mill to saw the lumber needed for buildings. As Wilson reached the top of the two-hundred foot bluff, he saw an advantageous situation. A fast-

flowing river, into which emptied many small creeks, flowed through heavily wooded areas. A sufficient drop in the river would afford amply water power. Fertile land would make for good growing of grain, hay, and vegetables, as well as pasture for the animals. The gentle rolling hills to the northeast and east and the widening prairie to the south caused Wilson to exclaim, "Prairie Farm," and that has been the name ever since.

The area appealed to Norwegians because it reminded them of home with the stately pines, hills, and bluffs. As lumberjacks, they earned enough to buy farms. Many settlers, who came from Germany, also worked for Knapp, Stout, and Company in order to gain money to own a farm. Several Civil War veterans came to the area, because they were given a quarter section of land as a bonus for their service. Lumbering and farming provided the economic base for the community. When the lumber gave out in the early 1900's, the area became primarily dependent on farming.

Millers, Merchants, And Ministers

Millers, merchants, and ministers have provided essential services for farm people — the millers with their flour, the merchants with their general store, and the ministers with their spiritual and social life. All three have experienced dramatic changes over the years.

Prairie Farm has had a mill for almost as long as there has been a settlement. A dam was built across the Hay River in 1863. Hy Scott built the first saw mill and grist mill for the Knapp, Stout, and Company the same year that the dam was built. Jacob Hoffman served as the first miller. The mill was carried away by floods twice. Jacob Hoffman, T. T. Tibbets, and George E. Scott organized the Prairie Farm Milling Company in 1893 and converted the mill into a 60-barrel roller mill that served farmers in a 55-mile radius. A flood again washed away the mill. Scott, who later became the principal owner, replaced the roller mill with a buckwheat and oatmeal mill.

Again the mills were washed away by floods. They were then replaced with a large feed mill, that was subsequently destroyed by fire. In 1914, Scott erected another mill and added an electric light plant. The Lathe and Cheese Box Factory was also added. These businesses operated for several years until the Hay River again washed away the mill and dam. After the mill had been destroyed five times by floods and once by fire, Scott decided that the dam was no longer a safe place for mills and moved the mill into the village. A series of owners operated a feed mill until Austin Murray bought it in the early 1950's.

Goldeen Goodfellow discovered, through an oral history with Agnes Murray, how Agnes' late husband Austin had come to purchase the Prairie Farm Feed Mill. "I had some shopping to do, so I left Austin to baby-sit with our son Tom, who was about two. When I stopped at the grocery store, someone said to me, 'I hear you bought the feed mill.'" Agnes Murray said, "Not that I know anything about." She was told that Austin had just bought it at a public auction. She went home and asked Austin. He verified that he had, indeed, bought the mill. When asked why by his wife, he said, "It was there, nobody seemed to be bidding on it. It was going cheap, so I bought it."

Gary Guldvog, who worked for Murray and later bought the mill from him, said that Murray had told him the same story. Murray added that he had stopped at the bank on business and talked with Willard Mau, the bank president. Mau told Murray that he was going down the street to an auction and asked him to go along. Murray went with Mau and, as the bidding was in progress, Mau kept nudging Murray with his elbow, telling him to bid. He did and thus became the owner of the mill.

During the 1940's Prairie Farm's main street was at its peak. Pam Saunders, in an oral history with Palmer Lillevold, discovered that, in addition to the Farmers Store, merchants included a hardware store, a grocery, and a meat market, four restaurants and five gas stations, an implement dealership, blacksmith, harness shop, creamery, as well as two lumberyards. Two physicians, who made house calls, and a dentist provided health care. A midwife delivered hundreds of babies. Of the previously listed businesses or services, the number has narrowed down to a grocery store, a meat locker, one restaurant and two taverns, two gas stations, one lumberyard, and a medical clinic served by doctors from larger communities on a rotating basis. In addition there is a bank and a nursing home.

There were three churches and their ministers on main street in the 1940's. Two were Norwegian Lutheran, and another was Methodist. The Methodist church was converted to apartments, and one Lutheran church was moved to Ridgeland. The other Lutheran church burned and was rebuilt in a union with a country church that had closed.

As Farming Goes, So Goes Prairie Farm

As farming goes, so goes Prairie Farm. This has been the case since the early part of the century. This continues to be so in the late 1980's. When farmers did well in the early 1900's, the community of Prairie Farm grew to service the farm population. When farmers suffered during the dry years and through the depression, the community of Prairie Farm suffered as well. When farmers fared better from the late 1930's to the early 1950's, the community of Prairie Farm experienced its best days. The burning down of the Farmers Store in 1949 served as an indication of things to come. The financial livelihoods of farmers gradually declined from the 1950's onward. Starting in the early 1980's, the farm economy began to drop precipitously, and Prairie Farm felt the effect.

Clark and Cathy Nedland know the relationship of the farm economy to the business economy. When dairy farmers experienced a dramatic drop in milk prices in 1985, Nedland's noticed an appreciable decrease in the patronage of their cafe. At the end of 1986, Cathy began to see that the restaurant was not making a profit. In November of 1987, they closed the doors of Cathy's Kitchen. "You can drive through the countryside and see fewer farms. Where there used to be two farms with 30 cows apiece, now there is one farm with 60 cows. As a result, there is one less family," Clark pointed out. Cathy added, "When I first started in 1983, there were nine businesses on my side of main street. After I am gone there will only be three. Prairie Farm has lost a grocery store, a gas station, a used car lot that succeeded the gas station, a barber shop, an insurance office, and a fabrication shop."

A Rural Community Struggles To Keep Alive

With a population of 455 and a memory of seemingly more prosperous days, Prairie Farm lives on the edge. The community has reflected the character of its name. When farmers do well, Prairie Farm does well. When farmers are hurting, Prairie Farm is hurting. As such, Prairie Farm is like rural America. Rural America is hurting from the loss of community due to the rapidly deteriorating nature of the farm economy. But the loss of rural community is not and can not be the last word. Many people in Prairie Farm and in the rest of rural America have not given up hope. Hope, together with memory, propels people of good will to believe that life in community is worth struggling to keep alive.

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Rural America Is Becoming Like A Third World Country

Part of the problem in coming to terms with the loss of rural community is that of nearsightedness. A lack of depth perception prevents many from viewing the situation in perspective. Getting some distance from the immediate circumstances can help to bring the picture into sharper focus. Drawing a comparison of trends in rural America and in West Africa can produce some eye opening conclusions. Food, farming, and community provides the basis for this comparison.

Much of my material comes from personal experience. I have been involved in food, farming, and community in rural America as a parish pastor, as an editor of a volunteer-operated community newspaper, as a participant with farm people who are actively working to bring about progressive social change, and as one frequently in attendance at educational events pertaining to rural community life.

My understanding of food, farming, and community in West Africa comes from a travel seminar to Senegal, Mauritania, Niger, and Mali in January and February of 1988. This seminar was sponsored by Lutheran World Relief (LWR), an assistance and development arm of Lutheran church bodies in the United States, with headquarters in New York City. On the basis of these experiences I will compare rural America and West Africa, show the global connection, and suggest an example for the possibility of change.

Food, Farming, And Community In Rural America

The characteristics of food, farming, and community will be addressed with the use of interrogatives. By attempting to ask the right questions, rather than claiming to have all the right answers, I invite you to draw your own conclusions from the material presented.

Why Are So Many People Leaving The Countryside?

Thousands of farmers in rural America are being forced off the land. The expenses of farming — for land and machinery, seeds and feed, petroleum and chemicals — are considerable. Oftentimes, prices farmers receive for their products do not provide enough to cover their costs, let alone make for a decent living. Many farmers cannot pay their bills and must sell out or be foreclosed. An ever fewer number of farms, by drastically reducing the economic base, has introduced in many areas a self-perpetuating spiral of decreasing employment, rural-to-urban migration, and deteriorating community life.

When farmers suffer, the rural communites suffer. Main street businesses close down; small banks are taken over by bigger banks; the tax base needed to finance public institutions shrinks; some communities lose their schools when the enrollment drops too low; less people are present to support professional services and recreational facilities; human services are stretched to the limit to help those in crisis; fewer participate in social and civic groups. Numerous communities cannot attract doctors, dentists, or lawyers. Small communities also lose their leadership, as many of the best-educated people, the most talented, and especially the youth are forced to move elsewhere. Many towns, which once flourished as trade centers, bear little resemblance to the way they looked in previous years.

What Are The Forces That Are Shaping The Future?

In order to understand the forces shaping the future, a coming to terms with *historical settlement patterns* is important. At the turn of the 20th century the first settlement patterns had been established. The American Indians had been displaced with little concern about their future welfare. The land was broken up into small family farm units, a system of roads laid out, railroad lines built to haul farm products to market, and trade centers established. State, township, and village government bodies were set up.

As the end of the 20th century is drawing closer, farm units have increased in size, transportation has become much faster, highways have improved, and trucking has replaced the railroad as the major hauler of farm produce. Structures of government have become fewer but larger. People relate to a much wider geographical area. Population is no longer growing, but stable or declining. Interests and needs have become more specialized.

Together with this, *conscious public policy* has played a significant part in changing the character of rural communities. Federal and state government policies and legislation have favored urban interests over those of rural concerns. Since the 1950's, a public policy of cheap raw materials has driven down the prices paid to farmers in order to insure an abundance of food for the cities. Farm people have been made increasingly dependent upon finances, chemicals, and machinery, as credit has replaced a fair price.

This view of modern economic progress necessitated the migration of rural people into the larger population centers in order to transfer labor from the growing of crops and animals to the production of new goods and services. A surplus of labor eventually contributed to breaking the power of organized labor. The political strength of rural people — necessary to exert sufficient strength to win policies favorable to agriculture and to community life — has been greatly reduced. Many feel powerless in the face of a government they believe has done too much to them and not enough for them. Others are not sure that government can help them at all.

Two different views on rural values are being argued today. Earl Butz and Berkely Bedell represented opposite ends of the spectrum when they spoke at the **1988 National Conference on Rural Ministry** held at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. Earl Butz, Secretary of Agriculture from 1971 until 1975, stated his primary principle as "adapt or die." He viewed the decrease in the number of farmers as a positive trend. "I am glad I left the farm. I am glad my neighbors left the farm. Now one young man farms our land and the land of others for a total of 800 acres," Butz asserted. He praised the young farmer for making extensive use of science and technology.

The best farmers, in his mind, are those who use the least labor to produce the most amount of goods. Although Butz acknowledged that, at some point this country would reach an irreducible minimum, such a time has not arrived. Because this country does not need as many people in farming, more people can make the cars, televisions, and other comforts that Butz claimed constituted the good life. Cheap food makes these consumer goods available and affordable.

Earl Butz held up the industrialist Wendell Wilkie, who lost the 1940 presidential election to Franklin D. Roosevelt, by quoting Wilkie, "Only the strong can be free, and only the productive can be strong." Now is the time, Butz contended, to get back to production and efficiency. Butz ridiculed the policy proposal, which would place production controls on farm commodities in exchange for better prices, by suggesting that such an initiative would lead the country down the road to socialism. Profit is the fuel that makes the cap-

italistic system go, and the risk of failure is essential to that system. Butz would like to see the government get out of agriculture, because competition is the best regulator of all.

Berkely Bedell, a six-term congressional representative from Iowa, countered Butz's perspective by stating, "We have the opportunity to build whatever kind of society we want. We do not have to build the society we are told to." For Bedell, rural values can make for a rewarding future. Profits, on the other hand, are of no value if they do not serve a purpose. He pleaded with people to think of how they wanted to live out their lives. Then he took the conference participants through an exercise in decision making. He asked them to list the values they saw as important to rural life and then pick out the top four. The consensus of the group chose peace and justice in a global community, strong churches and rural communities, a good education, and a strong family. Bedell argued, "What is really important are values. It is up to us to carry out these values in our society."

Bedell defended his support of production controls on farm commodities in exchange for better prices by arguing that the need for American exports has decreased around the world. Whereas the U.S. used to export 2 billion bushels of corn, out of the total of 8 billion produced, now this country exports only 1 billion bushels. The boom of the 1970's has led to the bust of the 1980's. Opportunities for higher prices on the world market are unlikely. Many countries have the capacity to dramatically increase their production.

Rural communities are often organized in one of two ways — *compartmentalized* or *collaborative.* Traditionally rural communities have quite clearly defined lines of participation for men and women. Leaders are often called "town fathers" because, as the name implies, they are typically men. Most of the small businesses are owned and operated by men, while the women have tended the home and family.

Public life has typically followed the roles in the ideal of the traditional American family, in which the man gives authoritative leadership, and the woman emotional support. These role distinctions in home and community have compartmentalized men and women. Some rural communities are moving in the direction of greater collaboration. Women are taking a larger role in the decision-making responsibilities of the community. Men are becoming more service oriented. Working together often produces new ways of doing things.

What Is The Connection Between Soil And Culture?

This last question seeks to address the relationship between land and people in the loss of community. In his book, **The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture,** Wendell Berry draws upon his home area in Kentucky to provide this analysis:

> In the decades since World War II the farms of Henry County have become increasingly mechanized. Though they are still comparatively diversified, they are less diversified than they used to be. The holdings are larger, the owners are fewer. The land is falling more and more into the hands of speculators and professional people from the cities, who — in spite of all the scientific agricultural miracles—still have much more money than farmers. Because of big technology and big economics there is more abandoned land in the county than ever before. Many of the better farms are visibly deteriorating, for want of manpower and time and money to maintain them properly. The number of part-time farmers and ex-farmers increases every year. Our harvests depend more and more on the labor of old people and young children. The farm people live less and less from their own produce, more and more from what they buy. The best of them are more worried about money and more overworked than ever before.

> Among the people as a whole, the focus of interest has largely shifted from the household to the automobile; the ideals of workmanship and thrift have been replaced by the goals of leisure, comfort, and entertainment. For Henry County plays its full part in what Maurice Tellen calls "the world's first broad-based hedonism." The young people expect to leave as soon as they finish high school, and so they are without permanent interest; they are generally not interested in anything that cannot be reached by automobile on a good road. Few of the farmers' children will be able to afford to stay on the farm — perhaps even fewer will wish to do so, for it will cost too much, require too much work and worry, and it is hardly a fashionable ambition. (pages 40—41)

Berry believes that soil and culture are suffering from acute erosion that threatens to deplete their life-giving force.

Food, Farming, And Community In West Africa

Why Are So Many People Leaving The Countryside?

People are leaving the countryside in West Africa. This movement of people has been going on for centuries, as I discovered in a visit to the Isle of Goree off the coast of Dakar, Senegal. On this island stands an adobe structure built by the Dutch two hundred years ago. For millions of Africans, this is where freedom ended and slavery began. The Senegales curator, Joseph Ndiaye, and our guide, Aicha Sy, showed us the rooms where men, women, and children were housed separately before they were bought and sent on a long journey to their new masters. Ndiaye explained how men were chosen for their weight and muscles, women for their large, firm breasts, and children for their teeth. Many, who became sick while lying on floors covered with their own excrement, were thrown into the Atlantic Ocean where they were eaten by sharks.

Approximately 50 million people from the 11th to the 19th centuries were delivered by Arab traders, who obtained the captives from African chieftains and kings. The African captors gained their human cargo through wars and raids in exchange for cloth, beads, spirits, tobacco, and firearms. Buyers from Europe, the Middle East, America, Cuba, and Brazil purchased the slaves at port cities like Dakar. About 6 million died from cruelty and harsh treatment. Between 10 and 15 million Africans were transported to America, as the United States sought cheap labor to produce tobacco, sugar, and cotton.

In talking with Aicha Sy, I asked her to explain the profound effects the slave trade had on the countries of West Africa. She answered by saying:

> For generations they took the very best — the strongest, the most beautiful and handsome, the most intelligent, and those most skillful in farming, fishing, and smithery. Only the old people and women were left in some parts. We lost much of our culture and customs. Families were disrupted. The pure African race is now in America.

As most of the captives were male, Africa was robbed of its masculine strength. This insecurity, in the face of the white man, left Africa open to the onslaught of colonialism, which followed the abolition of slavery shortly after the U.S. Emancipation Proclamation.

If cheap labor was the reason many Africans were forcefully removed from the countryside before, cheap raw materials is the reason many Africans are being forced to move out of the countryside today. Farmers do not receive an adequate price for their crops and animals. Government policies have favored the urban populations by keeping food prices low. Farmers have been encouraged to grow food for export; huge food imports and long-term food aid undermine local food producers. Government prices cannot be enforced in

many of the remote areas where private traders buy the grain cheaply after the harvest and resell later at a profit. Many rural people see little future in farming.

Large numbers of rural people in Senegal have left their homes and moved to the city of Dakar and the surrounding Cap Vert peninsula. By the end of the century, this urban area is expected to contain 50% of the country's population. Many who move to the city cannot find work and so stay with a relative who has a job. The people are very industrious and willing to do almost anything to support themselves. Others go to Europe with the prospect of sending money to their families. A few adventurous Senegalese move to New York City where they peddle their jewelry on the streets in order to support people back home.

What Are The Forces That Are Shaping The Future?

The influence of the former French colonizers can still be felt. Like the rest of the European countries, France saw the chance to obtain raw materials and to make new markets for European goods. In the 1930's, France tried to use the Niger River basin to raise cotton and to grow food to feed Europe. The less fertile land was left for West Africans to grow maize, millet, and sorghum. The project never materialized, but the newly independent countries of West Africa inherited economies based on the export of peanuts and cotton. They had no industrial base and were subject to the wild price fluctuations of the world market. West Africa's reliance on these two export crops has made it a hostage to the changing climatic conditions of the Sahel region.

The French ruled the colonies in West Africa through direct administration and cultural imperialism. They trained a new class of African elite, had them use French, and educated them in Paris. French remains the official language in West Africa, the French franc undergirds the currency of most countries, and French-style bread even serves as a basic food course. When independence came in the 1960's, the West Africans kept the same centralized structures of government and stepped into the new positions. The bureaucracy looked like an extended family employment agency and ran up huge debts.

The people in the villages live so close to life and death that they do not preoccupy themselves with the government, as long as the government does not actively interfere in their efforts to feed and clothe themselves. Because they live so far away from the centers of power and remain so disorganized, the prospect of peasant political strength in the near future seems remote. I discovered dissatisfaction with the government, though, when our group visited a class studying Black American Literature at the Learning Institute in Bamako, Mali. They saw little hope. One student said, "The government is saying things on radio and television, but these are only slogans. They speak about helping the people, but do not carry through. We are trying to get more power over our lives in order to be leaders. Changes are necessary and will come." Some students and faculty had gone on strike earlier, when a report revealed that a high official had embezzled money, while the government claimed it did not have finances for student scholarships.

To understand West Africa is to acknowledge the powerful force of the *Muslim religion.* West Africans have a strong need to believe and have a faith. Their religion keeps them going, as Islam permeates every aspect of life. Early each morning I was awakened by the call to prayer at the local mosque and at night I heard the last call to prayer. Devout Muslims faced Mecca and knelt to pray five times a day. To be converted to Christianity is to become an outcast in society, and a shopkeeper would lose the business.

There is also no separation between church and state. In fact, one of the countries, Mauritania, is an Islamic Republic. Official rulers in Muslim countries must consult with the marabouts (religious leaders), who exercise considerable influence over the people. For

instance, in Senegal, which is supposedly a democracy, the chief marabout told the people that, if they did not vote for the reelection of President Abdou Diouf, they would be desecrating the name of one of the religious founders. Not surprisingly, Diouf won easily.

What I found problematic about the influence of the Muslim religion is the fatalistic attitude that it imbues. The Muslims have lived in the desert for ages without changing their habits. For them it is not the first time to have survived a severe drought. "One day Allah will be merciful and send us rain again," they say. A Peace Corps worker in Mauritania related how his encouragement for mothers to take their children in for physical checkups was often met with the response of "If Allah wills." When an American graduate student researching the outmigration of people from the countryside in Niger asked them how they ended up in the capital city of Niamey, she was told, "We simply started walking and landed here because it was along the road. This must be Allah's decision."

Two different approaches to development are being practiced. A governmental approach is being carried out by the U.S., as exemplified by the Agency for International Development (AID) and the Diplomatic Corps. A non-governmental approach is being carried out by private voluntary organizations, as done by Lutheran World Relief (LWR).

In Senegal, our group met Sarah Littlefield, the head of AID, and Art Bronstien, the Food for Peace Officer. Littlefield told of U.S. support for a large irrigation project on the Senegal River to grow rice. She also said that AID brings in contract teams from U.S. universities and seed companies for expert advice.The problem with this approach is that, in the first instance, the irrigation project would wipe out small farmers and make some land very valuable, thereby increasing the chances that only big farmers could afford it. In the second instance, her use of outside experts reveals a top-down approach that builds on outside resources and undermines the ability of people to solve their own problems.

Bronstien explained that, under Public Law 480, the U.S. exports rice, broken rice, and wheat to Senegal. This program provides a foreign market for surplus products in the U.S. He went on to say that the U.S. is selling these commodities on a thirty-year timetable, with the first ten years being on soft terms and the last twenty on hard terms. Senegal had to agree to sell the commodities at a higher price and use the profits to buy fertilizers. Bronstien revealed a strategy based on cheap raw materials that undermines both African and American farmers. Africans do not grow wheat; as a result, their well-established taste for white bread makes them dependent upon an imported grain. Americans grow a surplus of wheat; together with this, the dumping of surplus commodities in other nations keeps the prices low paid to producers.

After hearing from Littlefield and Bronstien, we went to see Landon Walker, the American Ambassador to Senegal. Walker told us how the U.S. is able to dictate internal economic reform to Senegal by using the leverage of debt owed to the World Bank and to the International Monetary Fund. The U.S. view of development holds that the government should get out of agriculture. Farmers are encouraged to increase production (for exports) by the use of improved seed, fertilizers, and pesticides. Markets are to be opened up to imports from other countries. Certain government programs are to be cut.

What self-interest is the U.S. trying to pursue by its new power in Senegal? Walker explained how the U.S. wants to hold up Senegal as a model for Third World countries of a democratic system that follows a western prescription of economic development. In addition, Walker told how the U.S. uses Senegal in the international community:

> Senegal sees their economy as fragile. They are always on the margin, even if it works. Senegal is also a Third World influential on the international stage; they have a history

> of getting along with the West; they are tight with the Islamic group, Muslim countries, International Socialist Movement, and the non-aligned movement; they keep their lines open with the East Bloc. They have a vision of playing a key role in the world scene. They are sophisticated diplomats who put a lot of effort into getting the key jobs.
>
> So how do you put these things together? I get a telegram from Washington that 'in Geneva there is an important vote on the Human Rights Commission, and we want to zap Cuba, and the Senegalese are the key. Go see President Diouf and get him to go along.' You know what? They pull it off for us. We are going to require their constant collaboration on everything that concerns us. All this pays off. They have the highest level of aid per capita. This is the only group that goes to the consultative group of the World Bank and puts down the number they want — $400 million a year for the next 5 years. They go home with that amount. The only problem is that Senegal produces too many intellectuals who sit around all day thinking of better ways to run the country.

Senegal has borrowed large sums of money to pay for short-term budget problems and for long-term development and, in so doing, has subjected itself to outside control. It no longer has the power to plan for its own future. The U.S. is willing to co-opt a newly independent country into performing its bidding; this makes for a new dependency relationship, the purpose of which is to gain power in the international community. Walker portrays a condescending attitude when he speaks about critics, who object to Senegal being a pawn; he would prefer the Senegalese to be blissfully compliant rather than assertively self-reliant.

After coming home, I received a letter from Pastor Jon Berg, a Lutheran missionary running a literacy center in Dakar, who told of conditions in Senegal following an election.

> Election day was February 29. President Abdou Diouf won the election, but many were not happy. Rioting took place in Dakar and a few other towns. Many, including the leaders of the opposition parties, were arrested. People accuse the government of corruption. They say most of the one billion dollars in foreign aid that Senegal receives each year never reaches the people. A few are very rich, while most are very poor. A list of the problems of Senegal becomes a litany of failure, disappointment, and growing anger. The same is true throughout much of Africa. It is a recipe for disaster.

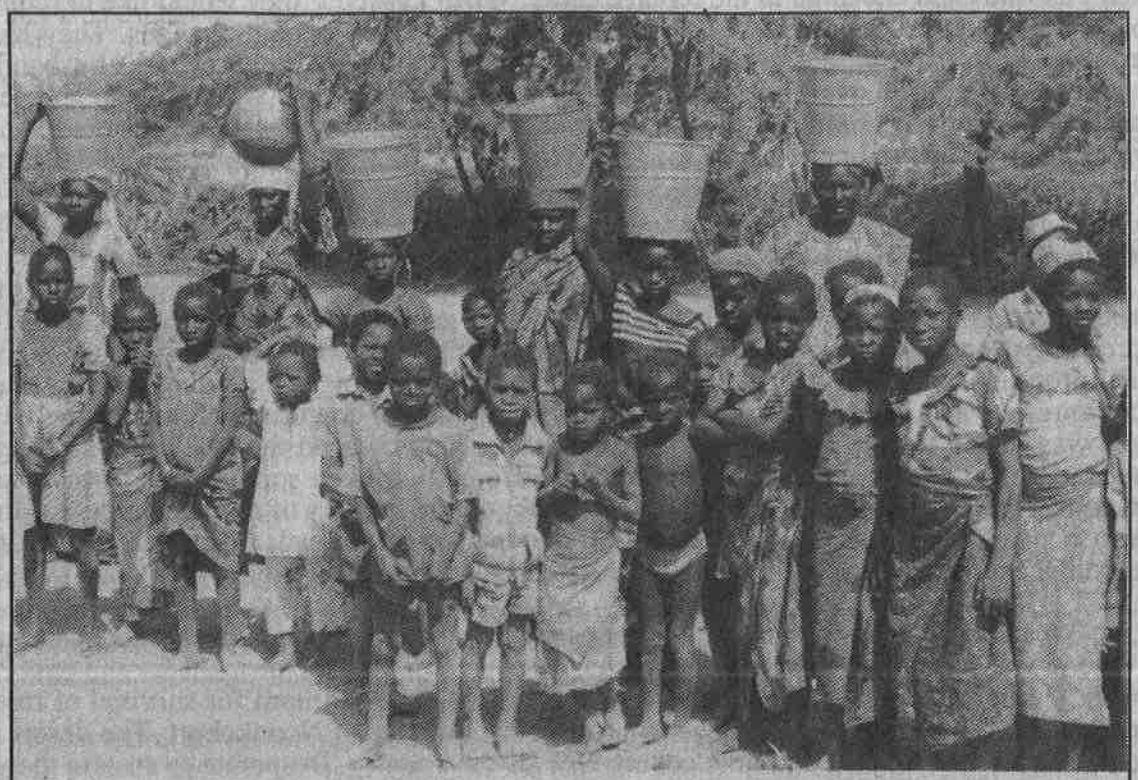
Such conditions following the election demonstrate a growing resentment towards a governmental approach to development that does not reach the masses of people.

In contrast to the governmental outlook on development, a non-governmental approach seeks to carry out a bottom-up approach based on the resources of the people. Kathryn Mintz, who works for LWR in Senegal, explained the objectives of her program:

> We want to encourage African solutions to problems in Senegal. In order to do this we seek to involve project people and villages in the decision-making process in order to increase their control over their lives during the course of the project. Evaluations of the projects will be done from the inside, instead of relying on outsiders to judge what has happened. It is important to establish a trusting relationship with the community so that they know that LWR's commitment is a long-term one that will survive negative criticism by the people. In the end we intend to reach the poorest of the poor.

Mintz believes that LWR must give a voice to the people so that they can make a lasting change. Popular participation is the key as to whether or not a project will succeed.

As West Africa moves into the future, the character of the *relationship between men and women* will determine the amount of human potential. At the present time the men rule as



Women in West Africa carry water, fetch firewood, cook meals, wash clothes, tend the crops, and raise the children.

absolute authorities in the home. In a Muslim society, men are permitted to marry up to four wives depending on their ability to support them. Traditionally, men marry women much younger, so that in the words of one man, "we can train them right." An African man can divorce his wife quite easily; some men simply abandon their wives.

To be born a woman in Africa, is to inherit a tremendous burden. African women do between 60 and 80 percent of agricultural work — twice as much as African men. In the traditional division of labor in agriculture, men clear fallow land, plow, and help with the harvest, while women do the more arduous and time-consuming work of weeding, transplanting, threshing, and winnowing. Women work a double day, in that, they also gather firewood, fetch water, cook meals, clean the house and clothes, and raise children. One of the poignant pictures in my mind, is that of a young woman carrying a baby on her back, a pail of water on her head, and a pail of water with her arm.

When men grow crops for sale or migrate to the cities to seek jobs, the burden is especially heavy. Around 30 percent of African families are headed by women. Most often governmental agricultural advice and investment is given only to the men. Women are also losing access to land: their traditional rights are being eroded by agrarian reform schemes which grant land ownership to men. With seeds, fertilizer, advice, and land ownership all going to men, and profits from selling whatever is harvested often also going to men, women are finding they reap fewer and fewer rewards for the inordinate amount of work.

A few instances show that conditions may be changing. In visiting a women's cooperative in Nouakchott, Mauritania, the members told of how they had been abandoned by

their husbands and ended up in the refugee camp. When I asked if they would like to return to their homeland, they responded that they would, but with certain changes. They had grown used to making their own decisions and would not agree to allow their husbands that degree of control over their lives again. If they went back, they would like to go back together so that they could continue to experience the solidarity they had discovered. And when Kathryn Mintz began her work for LWR in Senegal, she was told to seek out the women "because they know how to get the work done."

What Is The Connection Between Soil And Culture?

The barons of the desert have become the beggars of the towns in West Africa, as the drought forces the nomads to sell their herds and to give up their traditional lifestyles, and a spreading desert threatens to bury a way of life. A long history of land abuse began when the Europeans colonized Africa. They disrupted African farming and herding systems that, for centuries, had been adapted to changing environmental conditions. Some of the best land was seized for the production of export crops. This ravaged the soil, reducing large areas to desert and semi-desert. What today is drought-stricken southern Mali was once known as the breadbasket of Africa. To the north, on the borders of the Sahara desert, the farmers carefully husbanded the soil and offered land to the nomads for pasture in the dry season in exchange for milk, manure for the fields, and donkeys for plowing.

Now a combination of climatic and human factors has made for a serious deterioration of the physical environment. Mauritania has been affected by the drought for the past 20 years. During this period, the 5.9 inch rainfall line — the minimum for survival of trees and shrubs — has moved 62 miles south of the capitol city of Nouakchott. The desert is advancing 4 miles a year and now covers 75% of the country. Desperate to sustain themselves, the nomads stripped the land of its trees and vegetation for building and fuel. What was left was eaten by goats, sheep, and camels. The carrying capacity of the land has been exceeded. Some speculate as to whether the physical conditions are changing because of the climate, or the climate is changing because of the deteriorating physical environment. Whatever the answer, the consequences are the same — the erosion of soil and culture.

A young Mauritanian I met, Idoumou Abderrahmane, explained how his life and that of his family had been changed with the encroachment of the desert:

> The nomadic existence is a way of life. We have lived like that for centuries. We know how to find our way in the desert. I love my family. At times we lived on milk from cattle, goats, and camels for as much as 2 to 3 months, but now, that way of life is going. People have to become more aware of what is happening in the outside world. They can not just go on herding and praying to Allah. The government has to be more honest so that there is no more embezzling and giving of patronage jobs. People can not get jobs to earn money only for themselves; they have to think of their country.

Abderrahmane stated that changes are possible, as his family learned how to do dry season gardening and to eat fruits and vegetables.

The most dramatic effect of the drought can be seen in Nouakchott, the capitol of Mauritania. In 1960 it was a village of 5,000 people filled with trees, shrubs, flowers, and grass. Today sandstorms fill the air 200 days a year, dust far worse than a London fog, and the population exceeds 500,000. Our group visited a bidonville of recent arrivals that was called Shantytown because the dwellings, where people lived, were made of wood slabs, gunny sacks, and some sheet metal. It has been called the world's largest refugee camp, as the people basically live on international relief. The city is in danger of being swamped by sand dunes that sweep right to the nearby Atlantic Ocean.

Food, Farming, And Community: Making The Global Connection

The loss of rural community stands out as the central characteristic in the global connection between rural America and West Africa. This connection is marked by a mass exodus of people out of the countryside and into the urban areas, as farmers do not receive an adequate price for their crops and livestock. A deterioration of rural community follows, and the urban areas are subjected to added pressure from increased population. A number of factors — which are roughly parallel between rural America and West Africa, although not exactly similar — are shaping the future. In the broadest possible terms, both rural America and West Africa are suffering from an accelerating erosion of soil and culture.

Small-scale Agriculture In West Africa Shows Possibility Of Change

As ironic as it may seem, in such a vast region as West Africa, dry season gardening may mean the difference in providing sufficient food for the people. Working in an interdependent relationship, West Africans, together with private voluntary organizations, such as LWR, are exploring what it takes to sustain rural communities. This small-scale agriculture and the alternative view of development it represents demonstrates the possibility of social change. Two examples help to illustrate this point.

Mamadou Kone, who is the Director of the Coordinating Committee of the private voluntary organizations in Mali, told how the Malian people must maintain local control even when they receive outside help. The secret is to become self-sufficient as soon as possible. The method of organizing since the 1984 drought has been by village cooperatives in a way that is not alien to the people. The villages join together for their mutual benefit in order to plan for development. The private voluntary organizations are expected to work hand-in-hand with the local authorities. The key is local solutions to local problems with local maintenance. Kone stated that the people do not trust many of the classical institutions, such as banks, because they have not met the needs of the people on the local level. People do trust the private voluntary organizations.

Niger is unique among the governments of Africa in that, from the bottom up and the top down, they support dry season gardening. In fact, during the 1984 drought, former president Saiuni Kountchel told the U.S. that Niger was willing to accept emergency food aid, but Niger really needed seeds, tools, and wells for dry season gardening so that they would not need to depend on international relief over the long haul. Issoufou Nameissa, the commissioner of Tillaberi in Niger, explained that development begins with the village council so that people can participate directly. Decision making proceeds up to a local level, to a sub-regional level, and to a regional level. Although the degree of participation varies, the structure is in place for a grassroots approach to the development of rural communities based upon small-scale farming in order to produce food security.

Part II

Building Rural Community In The Hay River Valley

"All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts."

Aldo Leopold
Wisconsin Conservationist
Author of **A Sand County Almanac**

3

A Volunteer-Operated *Hay RiverReview* Is Started

This is the story of how a group of people started a volunteer-operated newspaper in an area that previously had no local publication. The recounting of this effort is told by the workers. Workers also tell the story of building community in the Hay River Valley in chapters 4, 5, and 6. Where a writer's name is not mentioned, I wrote the article.

Hay River Review Makes Its Debut

A story in the first issue introduced the readers to the 12-page 11" X 15" tabloid which had, as its title, a name based on the local watershed.

> Welcome to the **Hay River Review**. This is the first issue of a volunteer-operated, monthly, nonprofit, community newspaper for the Prairie Farm and Ridgeland area. Newspaper workers bring a variety of interests and abilities to the paper in order to review the month's activities and preview upcoming events.The paper will provide news, features, human interest stories, and opinions unique to this locale. The **Hay River Review** depends on advertising revenue to make possible an every-home distribution to the villages and rural areas of Prairie Farm and Ridgeland. Papers will also be dropped off in the villages of Wheeler, Dallas, Sand Creek, Reeve, and Connorsville.
>
> Robert and Gayle Albee, the production team, have a broad base of experience in community-based media projects. They spearheaded radio stations KFAI in Minneapolis, Minnesota and WOJB at the Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) Indian Reservation in Hayward, Wisconsin. In addition, they co-edited the **LCO Journal** and several other Indian publications in Wisconsin and Minnesota.
>
> Lori Roemhild, the advertising coordinator, has professional training in advertising. Most recently she worked in selling advertisements for radio station WMNE, WMEQ in Menomonie. Before that she worked on the **Chippewa Falls Herald-Telegram**. Lowell Bolstad, the editor, has experience in publishing. He served as a co-editor of his college newspaper and as a photographer on the college annual. Most recently he authored **Who Will Stand Up For The Family Farm?** Bolstad is the pastor of two rural congregations — West Akers Lutheran Church and First Lutheran Church of Arland.

The number of workers increased, and the extent of the coverage broadened. Occasionally, when ad sales and available copy allowed, a 16-page paper was printed.

Here's My Two Cents Worth — On Citizenship

One of the goals of the newspaper was to provide a forum for people to address certain issues in the community. Tom Saunders started a column entitled *Here's my two cents worth* and found people to speak their mind in the paper. Here he tells the rationale.

> Citizenship is not something most of us think a lot about. We take it for granted, or we focus on the rights and privileges granted to us. But what about the responsibilities? If a democracy is going to work, then the people who make up the citizenship have got to

participate by letting their voices be heard. In modern American society, we think that we have a democracy because everyone has the *right* to speak their piece. What we have is a democratic form of government because we are insured the right of free speech, but a less than democratic *society* because so few of us exercise that right.

I'm not sure why people feel so funny about expressing their opinions in public. Maybe it's because we're so used to the television people doing it for us. For many of us, we don't think that anybody will listen or that we have anything important to say. Or maybe we're out of practice. The other side of the problem is that, because most of us speak out so rarely, we don't listen to each other. The TV guys have our ear, but we can't hear our neighbor, besides our neighbor either "knows it all" or "doesn't know anything, anyway."

If we're going to strengthen our rural communities, we all ought to practice a speaking out, and listening, so that we can exercise our democracy and make it stronger. Maybe, if we realized that we were only practicing, we wouldn't be so hard on each other. Then, when it's game time, we could operate as a team.

Issues in the community were addressed by various people through writing a piece under *Here's my two cents worth.*

One Year Old ... Going On Thirteen

After a year in existence three articles by workers reflected on the experience. The first was written by Kate Hearth, the overall coordinator of the Publishing Board.

What is black and white and one year old? The **Hay River Review**! Hopefully it is read all over. A moment to reflect is in order. A moment to appreciate this community and the way in which the **Hay River Review** is helping to create a forum for its citizens. A moment to say thanks to all those who so graciously contributed memories, information, insight, and inspiration to the paper staff.

The memories of the last 12 months include moments of mirth interspersed among hours of hard work and intense discussion. The memories include long, late meetings at Cathy's Kitchen, making our first ad sale, the near panic state in which we wrote our first journalistic piece, watching the papers roll off the press at the publishers for the first time, hearing our first compliment on the street, dealing with organizational growth and change, hearing our first criticism on the street, realizing that the subscription list actually included people other than our parents, (the **Hay River Review** is mailed throughout Wisconsin and to 18 other states!), taking the occasional plunge to expand to a 16-page paper, watching the roster of workers increase, and constantly attempting to define the most healthy relationship a newspaper should have to its community.

So what is that relationship? All the news that's fit to print? All the news that fits? You cannot tell a book (read tabloid) by its cover? A stitch (read word) in time saves nine? Perhaps all of the above, to varying degrees, at different times. A people must express themselves in order to stay connected with the past, to define their values for the present, and to make themselves accessible for the future generations. We will do our best to inform and to enlighten. Our vision is to enhance the vision of all.

The newspaper allowed an avenue to reflect on what is important to strengthening rural communities and to give expression to that belief in such a way as to influence others.

Board Member Tells How Workers Are Important

In excerpts from an article by Nancy Drake, one of the Publishing Board members, the reader hears how workers are important to the publication of a newspaper.

> The jobs seem to be getting done with less effort, as more people have become involved and mastered specific jobs. We no longer worry about who will typeset the material (Cindy Theorin, Joanne Bergman, Rose Van Vreede), or proofread, (Alda Wicklund), or keep the growing subscription list in order, (Carol Purzner), or take the paper to be printed, (Al and Alda Wicklund). Working on the paper is just that at times: WORK. It is also challenging, fun, and a great way to be involved in the community.

The Publishing Board also included Rick Keilholtz, treasurer. Pam Saunders, who originally served as a volunteer coordinator on the Publishing Board, became the associate editor. Articles by these two writers appear in later chapters.

From The Advertising Coordinator

Kathy Yurista, who followed Lori Roemhild in the position of advertising coordinator, took the reader behind the scenes to meet the advertising staff.

> Three of us on the advertising staff sell ads. I cover the Prairie Farm area and outside-of-area businesses. Since I am fairly new to the Prairie Farm community, ad sales has helped me get to know many people. That makes me feel more at home here. Connie Bilse and John Samuelson sell ads in Ridgeland. Connie said, "It's been very enjoyable. I feel very welcomed by the businesses each month." She gets many good responses about the paper also as she talks with them. "It's been interesting," John commented. "I feel this is a good way to help within the community. It seems that the businesses look forward to my call with a readiness to support the paper."
>
> Two young folks from Glenwood City do the ad makeup and layout. Gretchen Metzler and Mike Olson are recent graduates from Minneapolis Technical Institute in advertising who heard about the **Hay River Review** and thought it was just what they wanted to do for their internship program. "It's been a valuable experience for us to actually work with a small newspaper," Gretchen remarked. Mike added, "I'm glad to see people from a small community take an idea, like this paper, and do it even though there's little or no experience with it. It's important for the community to help itself in this way."
>
> Janice Cox does the bookkeeping. With the initial help of Lori Roemhild and the additional help of Rick Keilholtz, she has developed an efficient system. "It's been interesting to learn the bookkeeping skills, even though it seemed difficult in the beginning. Mostly I'm glad to help keep the paper alive by taking a part in it," Janice said.

When each person contributed a specific interest and skill, the work of the newspaper was spread around, and a volunteer-operated community effort was made possible.

Conclusion

As editor of the **Hay River Review**, one question stood out as formative for me. The question of *balancing personal fulfillment with the common good* would pose a creative tension. This question runs like a thread through this book.

4

Citizens Address The Question Of Schools' Future

One of the biggest stories our **Hay River Review** covered during the first year involved the relationship of the schools at Ridgeland, (first, second, and third grades), and Dallas, (kindergarten, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades), to the Barron School District. The Barron School Board proposed a building project that met disapproval in the outlying areas. This chapter tells the unfolding events. Citizens were compelled to address the question of the future of the schools and their importance to the communities.

Taxpayers' Revolt Predicted If Additions Are Made

"In my opinion there would be a taxpayers' revolt if a new school was built up at Barron," stated Bill Link of Ridgeland. Link was a member of the Citizens' Advisory Committee that was charged with coming up with proposals to meet the space needs of the Barron School District. In backing up his contention, Link pointed to the fact that the Ridgeland-Dallas area contributes 17% of the tax base to the Barron School District, while making up less than 10% of the student population. Link said that Almena has a similar small student population and a relatively high tax base.

With the decline of farmland values, Link pointed to the increased tax burden for businesses, private residents, and non-farm real estate. Last year, taxes on Link's private residence in the Town of Wilson went up 30% to 40%. He fears a tremendous tax increase with a substantial building program. "Where a new school gets paid for will change in the not too distant future," Link claimed. If extensive building were done in Barron now, Link believes that the outlying schools would be at risk when the number of students decreases again in the future. Instead, he would like to see a better utilization of existing space and maybe add two to six classrooms, but not right away.

School Board Member: Ridgeland Must Look To Future

What does the building issue in the Barron School District mean for the community of Ridgeland? This is a question of concern for Pete Edstrom, the Ridgeland representative to the Barron School Board. He believes that this issue holds importance for the community of Ridgeland. He would like people to take an active interest in the future of the Ridgeland school and its relationship to the community. Edstrom does not want the outlying schools to be abandoned. He thinks rural people need an assurance that the district is committed to keeping the outlying schools open by doing the necessary maintenance."I just hope that this community does not roll over and play possum because of a lack of a sense of community pride, and commitment to a community that has its own elementary school. When we have lost that, then we have lost the chance of ever having a school remain here," Edstrom said.

Now is the time for community spirit to gain momentum, according to Edstrom. "We need letters to the editor, calls to board members, and attendance at hearings," Edstrom said. For Edstrom, the issue extends beyond the Barron School District. "I think that people in the Ridgeland and Dallas area should be receptive to the idea that we may have to work with Prairie Farm and look at cooperative facilities within the next ten years. I think Prairie Farm should be receptive to that idea. Therefore, it is important that we dialog on this ahead of time, especially before Barron spends a lot of money building a large addition for the elementary and middle school up there," Edstrom stated.

Ridgeland Elementary School • A First Grade Portrait
What will the future hold for school children in Ridgeland and Dallas?

Parents' Club President Explores Joining With Prairie Farm

On September 10th, members of the Dallas-Ridgeland Parents' Club heard a presentation by Gary Borgen on the proposed project. Borgen of Dallas, who is president of the Barron School Board, shared information on the plan. Afterwards, Parents' Club president, Rita Shipley, of Ridgeland, said, "Everyone is pretty disgusted. We fear that, if they build up in Barron, they will close the outlying schools when the enrollment decreases." The presentation by Borgen was intended to clarify the board's proposal. But according to Shipley, "It did not ease our minds. What new family would want to locate in a village where there is no school, and children would have to be bused a long distance?"

President Shipley has talked to people in the Dallas-Ridgeland area, and believes there is a lot of interest in consolidating with Prairie Farm. She pointed out that the villages do business back and forth and that they have a lot in common. As it stands now, Dallas-Ridgeland are "getting the short end of the deal with Barron," Shipley said. She conceded that some people have reservations about joining Prairie Farm because of a previous attempt at merger in the 1950's that did not work. But she countered, "People must let bygones be bygones and be willing to make a fresh start at working together."

Ridgeland Residents Resoundingly Reject Referenda

Barron Area School District voters turned down two proposals for building and remodeling. By a 2 to 1 margin, they voted against referendum #1 asking for $2 million to build additions to Riverview Middle School and Woodland Elementary School, both in Barron, and to remodel the schools at Ridgeland, Dallas, and Almena. A similar ratio defeated referendum #2 asking for $800,000 to build an addition to the high school in Barron. Ridgeland residents voted against both referenda by a 20 to 1 margin.

Dallas 5th, 6th Graders To Be Bused To Barron

Reporter Nancy Drake wrote that the Barron School Board passed a proposal at their January 18th meeting for classroom distribution that would result in all the district's fifth

and sixth graders attending school in Barron. Children, who now go to the Dallas school, will be bused to Barron for fifth and sixth grades, and fourth graders from the rural area south of Barron will go to Dallas rather than Barron. Gary Borgen voted for the plan and said he felt he was voting for what would be best for the children's education and not what was politically popular. "Everybody knew that, if the referendum didn't pass, we had to bus children," Borgen said. "I think the board is sensitive to how people feel, and it hurts when people think we aren't." He went on to say that this plan was put into effect for two years, at which time enrollment and classroom distribution can be reevaluated.

Administrator Hanson Studies Small Schools

Ridgeland and Dallas people engaged in informal conversations with members of the Prairie Farm community about the possibility of consolidation, but no petitions were sent around or meetings set up. At the time this book was published, no further movement had been made. The subject will most likely continue to occupy the attention and energy of many people in the various communities. At this point, I think it would be helpful to look at the value of small schools by telling of the work of Prairie Farm School Administrator, Howard Hanson, as a member of the State Advisory Committee to study small schools. Kate Hearth, who covered school news, obtained information for this report.

Hanson found out the following generalizations hold true for small schools: low incident of vandalism and crime; higher cost per pupil; low incident of dropouts, fewer specialized services available; high percentage of graduates pursue further education; more difficulties in staffing some programs; more personalized approach to education; fewer courses offered in high school; graduates achieve above the median in college. Some of the challenges small schools face are: low enrollment in some classes; pressure on space and time for programs; teacher certification in specialized areas; problems with flexibility and inflexibility; meeting the state standards; age and condition of facilities; and financing of schools. Some of the suggestions and trends to look for in the next few years are: more sharing of services, staff, and programs; TV networking for low enrollment classes; altering schedules to meet requirements; satellite communications; modifications for teacher certification; and looking at financing through sources other than property taxes.

School Volunteers — Continuing Pleasure And Need

Kate Hearth also wrote about parental involvement in the schools. Those who volunteer their time at the Prairie Farm Elementary School know the pleasure it brings and the need it fills. Volunteers assist in the administration of the flouride mouth rinse program on a weekly basis, with the vision and hearing screenings once a year, and as chaperones on field trips. One of the most fulfilling ways to volunteer comes as part of the classroom activities in working with students who need tutoring, in listening to children give book reports, and in helping with the Companion Reading program.

Conclusion

Schools in rural areas are central to the life of the community. A sense of pride and identity are tied up in the schools. Schools not only educate the youth; they provide a social center for community people at programs, concerts, and athletic contests. Such gatherings are one of the few places where a cross section of the community comes together. Small schools in rural areas offer a greater chance for participation in extracurricular activities. Involvement develops leadership, responsibility, social skill, greater learning, and personality advancement. Taking part in such activities equips students with skills necessary to participate in their home communities and in continuing education. Only by coming to terms with the nature of the relationship of the schools to the communities can people expect to continue to exercise local control over the education of their children.

5

Neighboring And Cooperation Help People Live In Community

Whatever happened to neighboring? Where is the cooperative spirit? These are questions often asked about life in community. Small villages and rural neighborhoods are thought to be the places where neighboring and cooperation is being practiced, but this is not always the case. Cliquishness and resentments sometimes stand in the way of working for the common good. Such barriers belie the idyllic view many hold of country life. The needs of those about us exert a compelling call. In answering this call, risk and vulnerability can result in the adventure of warm, human relationships.

What Is A Neighbor?

Helene Rhodes starts out this chapter by asking, "What is a neighbor?" She draws upon her childhood to give a glimpse of how neighboring was practiced years ago.

> What is a neighbor? According to **Webster's Dictionary,** a neighbor is someone living close by. But a good neighbor is someone more than that. When we were growing up, a neighbor was someone who came to help rebuild your house or barn, if there had been a fire or windstorm. It was a man telling us to take off our overshoes, (now they call them boots), when we stopped at their house on the way to the Christmas program. His reason? So he could polish our shabby shoes and make them look like new.
>
> A neighbor was one of the women who came to help in the home when a new baby was born. A neighbor came as far as the porch step with chicken, and other good things, when we were quarantined with scarlet fever. Another time a woman came with two quarts of honey. She said honey in hot milk was very good for the whooping cough we had. A neighbor was also someone who took in the whole family for a week, because their bedding and mattresses had become soaked while moving from Ashland to Arland. The man who did the trucking failed to have a tarpaulin along, and it rained.
>
> Another good neighbor was a woman with two small boys. She did not have overshoes to put on when she needed to go to town in the winter. She also needed someone to stay with the boys, so my sister Mabel and I took turns baby-sitting. When it was my turn to go, I carried Mabel's overshoes along for Ida to wear, as mine were too small. She lived on a farm with her brother and sometimes gave us a pound of butter. To our mother that was a pound of real gold. A neighbor was also someone who cleaned out her fruit shelves and came up with a bushel basket full of jars of delicious jam for us.
>
> Neighbors helped each other with fall butchering. In the spring, there was maple syrup to cook. In the winter we would walk to Anderson's on Saturday night to listen to the Grand Ole Oprey. In the summer our parents visited, while we played games outside. Good neighbors are people for all seasons, and there are still a lot of them. One of them is a neighbor who comes when I call, saying, "There's something wrong with my car." He has come when it was below zero, and believe me that is a good neighbor.

An appreciation for how neighboring was practiced in the past can give new incentive for a cooperative spirit today.

Neighbors Help Neighbors

The next piece, taken from *A Hay River Notebook* by Char Radintz, is an example of how people have recovered neighboring on a spontaneous and informal basis.

> I dread summer holidays. While most folks plan family picnics or trips to the lake, I try to anticipate which piece of machinery will break just after the last implement dealer has closed for the Independence Day weekend. Still, these mishaps have brought help from the best neighbors anyone could want, so I think I'll celebrate my neighbors instead.
>
> One Fourth of July weekend, our unloading wagon self-destructed just before supper-time, sending debris through the blower and up into the silo. Our meal was gloomy as we pondered how to get all those mowed acres of hay into the silo before they got too dry or rained on. Later that evening, like angels of mercy, our neighbors, Jack and Judy, stopped on their way to a wedding dance. Learning of our plight, Jack asked to see the damaged wagon and blower.
>
> "Heck! I can fix that blower," he said. "Did the same thing to mine once. Just bring it over tomorrow morning." We gratefully accepted his offer, and, while Jack fixed the blower, Ray patched together the wagon. Within twenty-four hours, we were back in business. These same good neighbors once sent over, not only their chopper, but their big tractor, an unloading wagon, and their teen-age son to operate them. That time, our chopper was broken, with third crop hay on the ground, and a storm just hours away. With their help, we finished before a rainy spell that lasted three days.
>
> Jack and Judy aren't the only good neighbors. What would we do without eighty-seven-year-old Lester, who has mowed our lawn innumerable times when it got away from me during haying? He saved us many trips to town because he was "going anyway." He has also been known to drop off firewood if he sees our pile is getting low.
>
> There's Hank and Sandy, our next-door neighbors. Without Sandy nearby, I don't know how I'd ever manage two young children and the farm chores. Countless times, she cheerfully watched them, with little or no advance notice. Her hot coffee and cozy kitchen have always been my safe haven in troubled times. Her husband Hank always seems to have the right sized drill bit or wrench when we've just broken or misplaced our own. We nicknamed him Hardware Hank because of this.
>
> And there's Barb and Mike who live across the Hay River from us. Mike has given us the best first aid kit we've ever owned, ear protectors for those long deafening hours driving tractor, and a shelter for our combine. Barb is uncanny for knowing when we've been subsisting on hot dogs and frozen pizza for many days running. She then shows up with a loaf of freshly baked bread and homemade soup that she claims was left over. One night, when everything that could go wrong in the barn did, she came over to feed, bathe, and put our kids to bed.
>
> Some of our neighbors have lived here all of their lives. Others are transplants, like us, yet there is a genuine sense of community that binds us all. I don't envy the folks who can go to their lake cabins for the summer holidays. Let them celebrate their three-day weekends. I can celebrate my neighbors every day of the year.

When such neighborly spirit is present, it is worthy of being celebrated. This kind of cooperation builds up people and their relationships.

Support And Resource Group

Many times neighboring does not happen in such an unstructured and informal way, and so must be more structured and formalized. The following example illustrates how people can discover neighboring by being more intentional.

Austin Belschner, a Cumberland veterinarian, and his pastor, Paul Landstrom, of Augustana Lutheran Church, lead a Support and Resource Group that attracts twenty to twenty-five people, who meet every two weeks. A caring outreach puts Belschner and Landstrom in touch with people in need of support. They receive referrals and then personally invite the individuals to the group. Many are farmers in trouble. Other farmers, who are making it, come because they are concerned about their neighbors.

Belschner is also discovering that many business people are facing the same kind of threat to their livelihoods as are small farmers. For instance, Belschner became involved when he realized that he was losing his clientele. When farmers experience a cash flow crunch, veterinary service is one of the first things to go.

When business people come, they share some of the same fears and uncertainties as the farmers. The mayor started showing up and later told others that something special was happening with the group. Soon he was bringing other business people.

Belschner is quick to add that their gathering also functions as a resource group. According to Belshner, "Government policy is trying to force farmers off the land. We must learn to fight so that they can not get rid of us." Belschner went on to say, "We need to fight for the town of Cumberland. We need to buy locally rather than driving fifty miles away to the larger supermarket. We are losing our service base already. Support the town, or the town will die."

Learning how to neighbor is important to Belschner. "It used to be that people would go to church together and to socialize with each other. Now the neighbor is regarded as the problem. Get the neighbor off the land. Television has become our support. We have to learn all over again what it means to be a good neighbor," Belschner stated.

As a leader of the Support and Resource Group, Belschner approaches his involvement with a missionary zeal. He believes that, if people know someone else cares, they are willing to open up and to receive support. At the meetings, he looks into the eyes of each of the participants in order to find out what is going on. His experience has taught him the importance of addressing their needs as soon as possible. He is not afraid to ask, "You do not look good. What is happening?"

Belschner credits his pastor for seeing the need of such a group long before others became aware of the rural crisis. Pastor Landstrom has served in different capacities in the community and has achieved a high degree of credibility. Because of his wide range of experience, Landstrom is called upon to consult with the mental health clinic, social services, schools, and businesses. Landstrom and Belschner are helping people to support each other and to find the resources that will improve their community life.

Belschner and Landstrom show how individual initiative can be used in order to break down the reservations many have about being in a support and resource group. Once involved, people learn the social skills necessary for neighboring and cooperation.

Ambulance Serves Villages And Rural Areas

Volunteer services are an important part of the cooperative efforts for people to live in community. This story tells the dedicated effort by operators of a local ambulance service.

Arlene Guldvog of Prairie Farm became interested in being a volunteer on the ambulance force because of a personal incident. "My father died of a heart attack. When I got there, I did not know what to do. I wanted to go to school so that it would not happen again," Guldvog explained. Margaret Reichert of Dallas became involved because of a perceived need in the community. "About ten years ago, a few of us, together with Pastor Bruce Hanson, formerly of Prairie Farm, felt there was a need in our rural communities for an ambulance service. So we went to Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (WITC) in Rice Lake to take training," Reichert stated.

Guldvog and Reichert are among the volunteers who have been licensed as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). Other volunteer EMTs from Prairie Farm include Sherman Bygd, Terry Bygd, George Moskal, Doug Kurschner, and Wayne Bjurstrom. Bud Lindemer is a first responder. EMTs from Dallas include Mark Rausch, Don Langerud, Amos and Roselle Baldwin, Alan Berg, Harlow Berg, Garold Busick, Ronald Dodge, Steve and Steph Lee. There are no EMTs from Ridgeland. The ambulance serves the villages of Dallas, Ridgeland, and Prairie Farm as well as the townships of Sioux Creek, Wilson, Sheridan, Dallas, and Prairie Farm.

In addition to coordinating the ambulance service, Margaret Reichert works with Don Langerude of Dallas to make presentations on first aid care in the event of accidents. Their lecture, along with slides and film, are sponsored by the Farm Bureau. Reichert is always looking for new people to be EMTs. She is encouraged by the fact that four new students — Vickie Seeger, Brenda Wiseman, Nancy Hoover, and Al Schutts — are starting this fall at WITC. The class consists of 130 hours of instruction from September to May and three weeks of practical tests on 10 situations. "Being an EMT is not a job everyone can do. But we are always trying to get more people. We take pride in providing a needed service to the area," Reichert concluded.

Volunteer efforts on a cooperative basis often require a substantial investment of time and energy. Such creative and committed action makes an ambulance service possible where village and township budgets can not fully compensate people.

Community Practices Recycling Of Solid Waste

In the following story, Nancy Drake wrote how a community cooperated in a worthwhile project. The initiative of one man brought about a waste recycling effort.

Sound environmental practice and a desire for cost efficiency started the people of Glenwood City recycling solid waste on May 1, 1985. "When I ran for mayor in 1982, recycling solid waste was one of the things I said I wanted to start," said Clarence Luepke, Glenwood City mayor. All trash is now sorted at home and brought to the recycling center, much as most area residents now take their trash to a dump. Glass (sorted by color), aluminum, tin, newspaper, and cardboard are sold to Minneapolis, Minnesota firms. Compostables are recycled at a composting site at the old landfill. Free compost is available to residents.

Clear burnables, such as paper and brush, are burned at a burn site; non-burnable materials, such as building materials, old furniture and appliances, are buried in a

Department of Natural Resources licensed landfill. All other trash, such as plastics and metals, is compacted into ten-ton blocks or boxes at the waste management center and shipped to a landfill in Osceola.

"Since we were already compacting and shipping boxes, (at a current rate of $320 per box), it made sense to pull out what we could and ship less," Luepke said. The savings have been substantial. From May 1, 1985 to July 31, 1987, $20,211.75 has been saved by shipping less and selling the glass, paper, and metal. "We save on labor, too," Luepke added. "One road worker used to be paid overtime to work on Saturday. Now we have one employee who handles all the waste disposal."

Luepke admits that recycling was his pet project. "Nobody was interested, but I kept talking about it being the best way to handle waste. Pretty soon more people thought so, too." Luepke said he finally projected some figures of estimated savings. The city council then passed an ordinance mandating waste recycling. There was initial resistance to the change. People thought it would be too much work, that the trash would pile up, or it would be messy. "We had to fine a few folks for not complying with the new law, but now they're some of our best recyclers," Luepke reported.

Luepke estimates a new high compliance rate of 90% to 95%, that people bring in their trash, clean and presorted, and dispose of it correctly. "People like it and are proud that they do it." He added that, because the city does not collect trash at curbside, they have avoided many problems. The collection center is open three times a week. Initially open only to residents of Glenwood City, anyone can now bring in solid recyclables. As state and federal laws require safer waste disposal, forcing the closing of small open site landfills, Luepke finds himself in demand as a resource person. "Not a week goes by that another town doesn't call asking how we do it. We've shown it can be done."

After this article was published, citizens of the Prairie Farm and Ridgeland area began examining the possibility of waste recyling. Instead of garbage being seen only as a problem, solid waste can become a resource through recycling.

Cooperative Effort Makes Housing Possible

Part of the American dream is to own a home. Nancy Drake wrote this article to show how a dream becomes a reality through a cooperative effort.

Hard work and cooperation have paid off for families who have built homes through the Self-Help Housing Program in Barron, Polk, and St. Croix Counties. The Program is run by Northwest Homes in Turtle Lake and financed by grant money provided by the Farmers Home Administration. Eligible builders use loans from the FmHA to build modest, well-designed homes in groups of six to ten.

Over the last seven years, 160 homes have been built throughout the area including Rice Lake, Cameron, Barron, Chetek, Turtle Lake, Almena, Somerset, Osceola, New Richmond, and Amery. The community impact has been substantial. Aside from adding houses to the communities, over $6,000,000 has been added to the tax base and over $5,000,000 paid to contractors. The Carpet Shoppe of Prairie Farm has done all the flooring the past two years.

The program is self-help because the building family puts in approximately 1,000 hours of labor on their home and the others in the group. The builder and helper must work every weekend (except opening of deer hunting) and one night per week while the

house is under construction, usually June through January. Nobody moves in until all the houses are completed. The 1,000 hours of labor is considered the down payment on the loan. The interest rate varies from 1% to 10% depending on income.

Denise Rudeen, who built in Amery in 1985 after living in Clear Lake, related that the project is something she would do again. "It was a great start for a group of people. The whole neighborhood built together and became instant friends, because we all came in from the outside," Rudeen stated.

The self-help work, not only made homes available to these families; it also created neighborhoods where people could continue their cooperative efforts.

In Mennonite Tradition, People Come First

In closing out this chapter, a piece is included on how a community of Mennonites have as their guiding principle that *people come first.*

When Willard and Gwen Toews moved to Arland township in 1954, they wanted to establish a family farm. In their minds, dairying provided the best way to keep the family at home and occupied. Since that time, they have been joined by other families from Pennsylvainia, Michigan, Ohio, Mississippi, California, Canada, and Kansas. According to Willard, "The real basis for this settlement is that dairy farming involves the whole family. We wanted to find a place where we could live and work together."

Out of this sense of *people come first* has developed a commitment in providing help to others. As a rule, Mennonites go where the need is greatest. Recently many of the Mennonites helped to rebuild a house outside of Almena. The family had lost their home to a fire. These Mennonites, though, do not confine themselves to local need. A committee on Christian Disaster Relief hears of emergencies in different locations and then lines up people to help. "We have been to the Twin Cities numerous times after storms there, to Eau Claire four or five times in the last six years, and to Rapid City, South Dakota after the big flood, and as far away as Pennsylvainia," Toews explained.

Christian faith plays a formative motivation. "We try to give Christian love to whomever we come into contact. We realize we have much to be thankful for," Toews stated. The church and a private school are the center of the Mennonite community. How does Willard experience the neighboring people outside the Mennonite tradition? "It is a nice community with nice neighbors, a nice place to make a living," he said. Appreciation for the gift of life characterizes the faith of Toews as he summed up, "We do not always have all our *wants* met, but we do have all our *needs* met."

These Mennonites have experienced a sense of community among themselves and are able to extend their neighboring and cooperation to others in need.

Conclusion

A couple of questions guide the way in *neighboring and cooperation help people live in community.* How can we find ways to integrate individuals into positive relationships, rather than isolate people from each other? In what ways can the bonds of community be developed, rather than the sectors be divided from each other? Perhaps neighboring and cooperation can once again be made an integral part of strengthening rural communities.

6

Cooperative Efforts Keep Farmers On The Land

Preserve the family farm. Such a phrase is often bandied about as a handy slogan to express a concern for people living on the land. What can people do, beyond individual initiative and personal perseverance, to continue living and working as family units on their farms? How can this interest translate catchy words into concrete action? This chapter seeks to address these questions.

Farming As A Way Of Life

To live on the land carries with it dreams and aspirations, connections and commitments, as Char Radintz wrote in *A Hay River Notebook.*

> I was not born and raised on a farm. My roots lie in a Midwestern city, and like many urban dwellers, rural life was far-removed from my reality. In my ignorance and naivete, I thought myself, if not better, at least better off than farmers and other rural people. Remembering this helps me understand why my own family, and my city friends have trouble comprehending Ray's and my choice to farm. It is a question often left unspoken, although, sometimes, with my family, it has become a bone of contention. And when I am asked why it is that we farm, I often feel at a loss to explain.
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> It is not that there are no words, but rather that the language of my life on the farm comes from the heart. It is not sufficient to say that a family farm is a good place to raise our children, although I fervently believe this is so. Nor is it enough to say that farming brings deep feelings of accomplishment, even though this, too, is true. My reasons go deeper. I am married to a man who loves to farm. He is capable and talented in many other areas, and he has done other things, but farming is in his blood. It is what he does best, because it is what he is happiest doing. An old classmate of Ray's, living and working in San Francisco as a consultant, once said, "Well, I suppose it is honest work." Yes, I thought, it is honest, and it is real work as well.
>
> Working alongside my husband each day gives us a joint sense of purpose and commitment. Every marriage would benefit from the shared satisfaction that comes with the completion of some large task, whether it is getting up the year's hay crop, or helping deliver a newborn calf. We struggle daily to share the burdens, and although they cannot always be divided equally, the ongoing attempt to be fair, even generous, enhances our relationship.
>
> I think that the hardest thing for most non-farm people to understand is the lack of monetary rewards. In the eight years since we started farming, the struggle to make ends meet has been a constant reality. But even in this there is value. I have learned to adjust my expectations; to be grateful for all those things that money cannot buy. Things like good health, good neighbors, and the incredible beauty in all that surrounds me. It isn't simply that the air is fresher, the water cleaner, or the skies more expansive. It is the sense of being where one wants most to be, doing what one most enjoys doing, that compensates richly.

> Reality is a state we participate in creating for ourselves. It isn't always easy, but I love the reality that is our life on the farm. Each day provides new challenges. There is a balance between the repetitive daily chores and the variety of tasks that need to be done. Many times, we are stretched to our very limits; of time, of talent, and of patience. The lessons do not always come at a time when we are eager to learn, but learn we do, and in the process, we grow and change.
>
> I value what I am learning, and I like the changes that farming has wrought in me. I feel more alive, more fully human, for being in touch with the changing seasons. Living close to the land has made me more humble, more grateful, and considerably more patient. I am a different person for having become a farmer, and I like myself better. My life is rich because I can decide for myself what is of real value. And this is not measured in dollars and cents, but in an overall sense of well-being. It is a state that is hard to put into words, but when you're in it, you know it.

Farming is more than a business. It is a way of life that involves families living and working together on the land.

A Hay River Notebook Writer Suffers Loss Of Barn To Fire

The goal of operating a family farm is severely tested by misfortunes, though, as evidenced in the following story as a companion piece for the same issue.

> Char Radintz had submitted her column for *A Hay River Notebook* to be included in the December issue. She tied her piece in with the general theme of *Cooperative Efforts Keep Families On The Farm*. After that she was mulling over column ideas for the January issue with a central theme of *Neighboring And Cooperation Help People Live In Community*. Little did she realize at the time she would be experiencing the reality of those themes.
>
> On November 16th, the barn on the place of Ray and Char Radintz burned down. Shortly after the fire started, neighbors and community members came. Many worked long into the night to help clean up after the blaze was put under control by the Clear Lake and Amery fire departments. Others came in the morning to assist in moving the cattle to another barn and to get set up for milking. Throughout the rest of the week others came to help unload hay and to drop off food. "The labor that people have contributed has been something special," Char said.
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> Ralph Wilson of West Akers Lutheran Church ordered twenty tons of hay from Iowa. Members also planned a benefit spaghetti dinner at the church for December 6th at 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. after the 11:00 a.m. service. "The people of the congregation have been so good to us," Char said. "I am deeply touched." In addition a women's book club, to which Char belongs, planned a benefit square dance for December 19th at 7:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. at the Connorsville Elementary gym. Also contribution boxes were set up at the Reeve Grocery Store and the Clear Lake Bank. "The community really pulled together for us. It is very heartening," Char stated. "I believed in the good will of people, and now I have been able to experience it."
>
> What does the future hold for Ray and Char Radintz? "We are determined to stay and farm," Char responded. "Come to think of it," Char said, "I won't have any problems finding something to write in *A Hay River Notebook* for the January issue."

Char reflected on her experience to speak of how life in community provides renewed strength to meet difficulties and challenges. In the January issue, she shared those reflections.

A Hay River Notebook Writer Decides To Rebuild

Char Radintz credited the efforts of neighbors and community people in making it possible for her family to remain on the farm.

The fire that destroyed our barn last month was the most terrifying experience of our lives. How totally helpless; how utterly dismayed we felt, as we watched the eighty-five-year-old landmark that had been home to our herd of cows, gone in fifteen minutes. How quickly our life changed.

So many images from that night remain. Our eighty-seven-year-old neighbor, Lester Thatcher, whose father raised part of the barn nearly a century before, standing nearby, his eyes full of sadness. The momentary despair in my husband's voice when he said, "we're done for." The competence and compassion of the volunteer firefighters as they worked tirelessly to contain the fire and save what could still be saved. The friends and neighbors arriving; tears of relief that we were all safe, and our cows well. My daughter crying, thinking we had lost our livelihood, and would have to move. The numbing paralysis that set in, as I stood rooted to a spot, watching, but not really seeing.

Yet, out of the ashes, like the mythical figure of the phoenix, a miracle arose. It was the miracle of love and compassion; of the tender mercies of a caring community. Helping hands began reaching out to us that night, the next morning, and in the days that followed, throwing us lifelines that kept us afloat when despair threatened to engulf us.

How quickly loving hearts transformed into helping hands that drove the trucks and trailers, moving our cows to a different farm to be milked the following day. Many strong hands cleaned and repaired the other barn, and helped push stubborn, bewildered cows through an unfamiliar milking routine. Other work worn hands delivered feed and bedding, while softer hands prepared countless meals to feed a family, too overwhelmed to think about eating. In the days that followed, the phone rang constantly. Offers of help poured in, expanding the boundaries of our neighborhood.

One farmer, who barely knew us, offered the use of his skid steer loader, when he learned ours had burned. Others helped with milking, feeding, and unloading the donated hay, that began appearing, as if by magic. So many kind people, working behind the scenes, lining up feed, giving us hope and precious time to work through our shock and grief. Only then could we begin to make sound decisions about what needed to be done. So many wise and generous people knew what to do; knew what we most needed, long before we did, and they simply set about doing it. Fund raisers were planned and carried out by loving women friends.

When family and friends called us in those early days after the fire, they expressed amazement at our good spirits. Yet how could we feel defeated? We were being buoyed up on a tide of human kindness and help. When I would tell them that it was the community that was keeping us going, they would ask, "What community is that?" It was then that I understood what community really means. It is not some arbitrary, geographic boundary with a name. Rather, it is people with many names; with generous, compassionate hearts; with different allegiances, perhaps, but with some common goals. In this case, to help people they knew, survive a disaster and go on.

> It is this community we fully and gladly embrace as our own. It may not have a mayor, or a football team. It may not have a civic center, or an official name on a map. What it does now have is a monument; a family farm that will survive, and hopefully, someday even thrive, because they cared enough to reach out and help, in a time of need. It is a triumph that everyone can feel proud of. It is an effort for which we are profoundly grateful. We will remember this all of our lives. I love this community of miracle workers. It is a privilege to be a part of it.

Through *A Hay River Notebook,* Char made it possible for the community to experience the struggle of her family and the cooperative efforts that helped them remain on the farm.

Local Construction Firm Hired To Build New Barn

Char and Ray Radintz were faced with a decision on how to rebuild. They decided to keep the business in the local community, as Char explained in her March column.

> Life is full of irony. After the barn fire and the community's overwhelmingly generous response, we were determined to stay and rebuild. The first question was whether or not our landlord would be willing to commit the insurance proceeds to do so. The good news came quickly. He was willing, if we wanted to stay.
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> The bad news was that the insurance he had carried on the barn was inadequate to replace it. In those first weeks, we experienced bouts of deep discouragement as the bids came in that were well beyond our limited resources. We began to think that, despite our determination to stay in this community, circumstances might dictate otherwise.
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> Not ready to give up, we approached a friend and member of our congregation who does construction work, in addition to his family farm. We explained to Lee that we wanted very much to rebuild, and we felt committed to keeping the insurance proceeds in the community, if possible. We were honest about our limited resources, knowing we would all have to be flexible and creative in our approach, if rebuilding were to be possible. Many well-intentioned folks had already told us that it simply couldn't be done for the amount of money we had at our disposal.
>
> An amazing thing happened. Lee did the rebuilding project at a price that was within the range of the possible. Our spirits soared. Not only did it look like we could rebuild, but in the process, we'd be helping support some local families and some local businesses, thus strengthening the community that had been so generous to us. We took time pouring over plans and figures together. It was an exciting process. Open minds on both sides invited creative thinking, and the more we talked, the better the plan became.
>
> The irony is that we were being very conscious about having local people get the work, even if it meant costing a little more than some big construction firm that could come in and be done in a few weeks. But as it turned out, the only way it became possible to rebuild was to hire small local contractors, whose charges were sometimes half what the big outfits wanted. So much for pouring out our gratitude on the community. We were the ones being blest once more!

Char concluded her article by saying that she looked forward to milking their cows in a barn built by such good friends.

Farmers Recover The Art Of Sharing

Practicing neighboring does not always come naturally. Some farmers, though, are making it a point of recovering this art, as associate editor Pam Saunders discovered.

"People don't help each other the way they used to. The sense of sharing is gone," claims LaVern Nedland, who farms in the Town of Arland. Often, Nedland can be found on someone else's place helping out with farm work or whatever needs to be done. Nedland does not expect to be paid for his efforts. There have been times when he could have used help and did not get it. "That's not what's important," he said. "What's important is to be there when someone needs help."

According to Nedland, "If you can't remember before World War II, then you do not know what neighboring really is, when it comes to sharing work. Neighbors shared freely of time and equipment, and you didn't keep tabs on it. Size didn't matter. Everybody just felt a responsibility to make sure that everyone's work got done." After World War II, farmers got more independent. Modern machinery created the situation in which neighbors did not think they needed each other as much. Threshing and silo-filling had required a crew for efficiency, but more modern methods do not depend so heavily on the physical labor which used to bring neighbors together.

But need is what continues to bring neighbors together to share work, even if it is not in just the same way as it used to be. Although farm families have definitely gone away from it, it is still possible to find neighbors sharing work. "Common sense tells you that you can't afford to have every piece of equipment," said Roger Klefstad, who farms near Ridgeland and shares work with neighbors. "It would be nice, but then again, it's not all work when we get together."

The neighbors have, at one time or another in recent years, helped each other with everything from haying, corn picking, filling silo, to making wood. "We started out having to share a bagger for silage and found out we could work together," Klefstad said. "It might not be just like the old days, since the sharing is often translated into dollars that are equated with time or crops, but it works well when no one is trying to take advantage or feels they are being taken advantage of. In fact sometimes we'll work ourselves into a hole just to try to keep ahead of the other guy."

Nedland and Klefstad agree that sharing work can be the most efficient way to go, especially in times like these for farmers. "Most farmers have enough equipment to farm a section of land, say, when they really only need to cover a couple hundred acres. That's ridiculous," Nedland observed. Said Klefstad, "It's a false thing to strive for such a degree of self-sufficiency." It need not take a tragedy or special hardship for folks to come together to share work, according to these two farmers. Added LaVern Nedland, "If you can't give a little, what's the worth in living?"

Memory helps to keep alive a practice such as sharing. This memory is being translated into action, as a compelling need draws farmers together to help each other out.

Bartering Is Back!

Related to sharing is another cooperative effort called bartering. Pete Edstrom writes that the trading of labor and goods can be mutually beneficial.

Did you ever want or need something but didn't have the cash? Do you enjoy haggling with someone over the value of things? Does the bidding at an auction sale put you into a trance? If your answer to questions like these is "yes," you probably enjoy trade and barter. Betting seems to be a key ingredient also. One party is betting that the offer will be accepted by the other party in exchange for something that person wants. Habitual traders do not have a lot of respect for money. It has intrinsic value only as a medium of exchange. Value is measured in terms of satisfying their needs. They know that what does not have real value to them may have value to someone else. In a rural economy, the opportunity for such trading abounds because needs go beyond household and personal desires, to include business and chattel property.

Recent exchanges by our family would suggest that very little bartering is needed in order to trade. Rather the simple suggestion, "Could you use something?" or "I need this or that, what do you need?" Examples of this are trading corn for hogs with Dan and Kathy Yurista, sap for syrup and tapping equipment with Jeff Nordby, straw to Ronnie Vergin for round baling, third crop hay for corn picking with Doc Howe, firewood for chisel plowing with Gene Bilse, hauling firewood for farm repair with Curt Bilse, and custom haying for shelled corn with Lentz Farms.

This brings up an important point. You may have to make more than one exchange to finally satisfy your needs. If you can do that, then you truly have trading and bartering in your blood! Perhaps community members could use this paper for trading and bartering with one rule — no cash involved! For starters, I've got a good beater, chain, and apron for a Forage King manure spreader. I need ... Any suggestions?

Deteriorating financial conditions may draw rural people closer together in rediscovering some practices used by those of earlier generations. A willingness to try bartering could help people to get by in certain instances without cash exchanges.

Amish Preserve Community By Sustainable Agriculture

The Amish understand the connection between a way of farming and keeping people on the land. Pete Edstrom is familiar with Amish people living close to the Hay River Valley and believes their practices have something to say to the rest of us.

Plain folks, as the Amish are often called, practice what is becoming popularized amongst the rest of us — sustainable agriculture. They also practice self-sufficiency in daily living. Why do the Amish thrive, while the rest of the world seems to be struggling with pollution, debt, and energy problems? The answer lies in a lack of dependency on the outside world as opposed to almost total dependency. The Amish shun the outside world for good reason. "If I have a rubber tired tractor, I don't need my neighbor anymore." The same goes for fertilizer, chemicals, electricity, and other equipment.

Their farming and living takes little from the outside, but leaves a legacy of hope. When the Amish need a harness, they purchase it from a neighbor. When they need a new barn, they cut the logs, saw the lumber, and raise the building. For the cost of materials, they have created wealth of thousands of dollars. They pay their neighbors back with exchange labor. The bondage of debt is replaced with the obligations of cooperation.

Years ago, our communities and farms were self-sufficient and independent. They depended on very few inputs from the outside. Modern technology and borrowed money have created a whole new realm of dependencies on the outside world. We are

no longer as close to or in need of our neighbor. Can we continue to farm the way we are currently doing it for the next 200 years? I believe the answer is no! We will run out of soil, water, energy, or purchased fertility. We can keep a larger share of locally produced wealth in our community if we become less dependent upon the outside.

For the Amish, the end goal is to keep farmers on the land. The means they have chosen are designed to encourage cooperative efforts.

Farmers Show Interest In Sustainable Agriculture

Interest in sustainable agriculture has increased in the Hay River Valley. Rick Keilholtz filed this report of a meeting with farmers and a sustainable agriculture project coordinator.

Area farmers and innovators in sustainable agriculture have a chance to submit projects for possible funding by a project of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture. This involves the state administering funds which oil companies were ordered to give states because of oil product overcharges in the past, according to Ken Rineer, who coordinated this process last fall. Rineer was Sustainable Agriculture Project Coordinator in 1987, when $840,000 was given to thirty-five projects in the state.

On February 29 he met in Barron with some of the people who had submitted their projects last fall and not been funded. Also at the meeting was Margaret Krome, of the Wisconsin Rural Development Center in Black Earth, who helped Rineer's work in evaluating the 184 proposals submitted. The process used in this first year for choosing among the proposals was explained. Many have complained that few northern Wisconsin projects were funded. The only local projects funded were a Chippewa Falls city project and a manure composting system submitted by Pete Edstrom of Ridgeland.

Rineer acknowledged that it does look bad when most of the 1987 proposals accepted went to Madison area professors and researchers, although all had to undergo evaluations in three areas: environmental considerations and potential for wide use, profitability, and energy efficiencies. Rineer says that another $80,000 is to be distributed in 1988. Suggestions were made for funding a wider range of projects this year and better publicizing good ideas for sustainable agriculture. Rineer looks for more small projects in the next year, over a wider range geographically and materially.

Efforts, like these sustainable agriculture projects, may point the way to a new direction in farming where people of the land cooperate more closely with each other and the earth.

Land Conservancy Planning A Pilot Project

Tom Saunders wrote how farmers work together to establish a community land trust. This effort seeks to keep people on the land and money in the community.

A new state organization, the Wisconsin Farmland Conservancy (WFC), is planning a pilot project for the Hay River area. According to Cindy Theorin, treasurer of the WFC, "The goal of the Conservancy is to provide new options for limited-resource farm families. Because WFC is incorporated as a charitable, not-for-profit organization capable of receiving tax-deductible gifts from individuals and foundations, we are hoping to be able to reduce the cost of land for participating farm families.

The WFC also plans to assist farmers in obtaining operating capital, provide technical assistance, help develop and maintain equipment-sharing pools, and develop new mar-

kets and local processing for farm products. In a new twist, though, the participating families will not own their farms, but will lease the land from a Community Land Trust while holding title to improvements to the land, such as buildings. The leases on the land will be for 99 years, and farmers will be able to pass them on to their children.

"A Community Land Trust is not a new idea. There are quite a few in existence around the country, but many of them are in urban areas," Theorin said. "In many of these situations, people who normally would never be able to obtain financing to purchase a home are able to make the switch from paying rent to being leaseholders." Because the farms purchased by the WFC and held by the Community Land Trust, will be *in perpetuity,* these farms will be preserved as family farms forever. The organizers of the WFC feel that this ability to *reserve* farms for family farmers and focusing on low-income and limited-resource farmers, will enable them to attract low interest or zero-interest loans and even outright grants for the purchase of farms.

"There are people and foundations with money who understand what is happening in rural America," said Craig Adams, WFC board member from Glenwood City, "and they would give if they knew where it would do some good. We think that this project can attract their support." Adams emphasized that farms connected with the land trust must pull their own weight and be viable farm operations in their own right. The money from outside sources is only intended to help farm families through the difficult start-up period. In addition, farm families on land trust farms will be required to farm in a way that conserves the soil and water for the next generations.

The WFC has been organized with the help and support of Wisconsin Farm Unity Alliance, and several local people are on the board. According to the board, the WFC has been able to attract enough financial support to initiate a modest start-up project. Two farms were purchased this spring, and more purchases are planned. "The next phase," Theorin said, "is to begin the outreach to people who might be interested in participating in the project. We need to develop a pool of people who are interested in becoming leaseholders." She also pointed out that farmers who are currently farming, but are highly leveraged, should give the land trust a close look.

Prospects look promising for this Community Land Trust to be an effective cooperative effort to keep farmers on the land.

Conclusion

All of these actions, by themselves, probably will not solve the farm crisis. But they demonstrate that people can and do rise to the occasion in order to preserve the family farm.

Part III

In Search Of A Vision

Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community. In our teaching the human person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society — in economics and politics, in law and policy — directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The obligation to *love our neighbor* has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment to the common good. We have many partial ways to measure and debate the health of our economy: Gross National Product, per capita income, stock market prices, and so forth. The Christian vision of economic life looks beyond them all and asks, Does economic life enhance or threaten our life together as a community?

—Building Economic Justice: The Bishops' Pastoral Letter and Tools for Action (page 2)

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Exploring The Biblical Witness

Where does one begin in search of a vision for strengthening our rural communities? For me, it is important to start from a faith perspective. The biblical witness offers an account of how a gracious God leads the community of faith into an unfolding drama. I invite you to explore with me the dialectic of the biblical witness in the forms of *The Church Called Together By The Word* and *The Church Called Out Into The World.*

The Church Called Together By The Word

In his presentation on *Peacemaking As A Virtue Of Community* during a 1987 seminar on **The Nature And Meaning Of Community** at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Dr. Stanley Hauerwas contended that those who know they are forgiven can no longer regard their lives as their own. The promise of forgiveness made in baptism has made them part of a faith community. Basing his remarks on Matthew 18:15-20, Hauerwas asserted that peacemaking obligates a person of faith to confront those who have done wrong and to make the situation right. In accepting God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ, the community of faith is called to practice forgiveness. *Forgiveness* is one of the characteristics of *The Church Called Together By The Word.* Two additional characteristics, which will be addressed, are *unity* and *compassion.*

Forgive One Another

Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons and, as a sign of his affection, gave him a coat of many colors. His brothers became jealous of Joseph, sold him into slavery in Egypt, took the coat to Jacob, and told him that a wild beast had killed his son. The hand of the Lord stayed with Joseph, though, and he became a trusted leader in Pharoh's court. As the writer of Genesis tells the story in chapters 37 to 50, Jacob and his family experienced a famine in Canaan, and he sent his sons down into Egypt to find grain.

Unknowingly they encountered Joseph. When they realized they were dealing with their long lost brother, they pleaded for mercy and asked for forgiveness. Joseph responded, "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." (Genesis 50:19-21a)

Joseph models the creative power of *forgiveness.* He could have easily retaliated for the cruel act of his brothers. Instead be broke the cycle of retribution by pronouncing absolution and by inviting his brothers into a restored relationship. With this profound transaction, Joseph enacts the drama God carries out with his people. As such, Joseph portrays the answer to the problem of grievances that cause resentments. Not to forgive is to be locked into a past of unresolved wrongs and to yield to a scenario of outrage and revenge. Forgiveness frees the forgiver and the forgiven.

All Baptized Into One Body

The young church at Corinth had become deeply divided. The apostle Paul had established the congregation on his first missionary journey, but after he left, the members claimed to follow different leaders. Their divisiveness had become scandalous. In his letter, Paul pleaded for *unity* by reminding them, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves, or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit." (1

Corinthians 12:13) Paul promoted wholeness in the midst of diversity by stating, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27) At the same time he honored the distinctive gifts of all persons and groups by affirming, "For the body does not consist of one member but of many." (1 Corinthians 12:14)

The person of faith is called towards a corporate sense of self and vision where the common good is held up as the main concern. This is different from a voluntary association in which individuals come together primarily for the purpose of personal enhancement. When a person of faith truly experiences *The Church Called Together By The Word*, that person does not seek only to be associated with others for the singular purpose of giving and receiving support; the mature person of faith begins to conceive of being embraced by a larger entity. Deep, authentic existence comes in drawing life from that larger body.

And Jesus Had Compassion On Them

The ministry of Jesus is demonstrated by a caring attentiveness. Several times in the New Testament, the Gospel writers recounted, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, for they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36; cf. Mark 6:34 and Luke 10:2) The King James Version of the Bible describes his response more graphically as *bowels of mercy* in which Jesus hurts inside when he encounters suffering people. Through his words and actions, Jesus touches people with the grace of God and invites a response of faith. The fruits of the Spirit that burst forth are new, fresh, and surprising.

In his book, **The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible,** Paul Hanson tells how *compassion* describes *The Church Called Together By The Word.*

> ... compassion describes the way of life that seeks to imitate the mercy of God who delivers and sustains those in need not because of any worthiness of their own, but rather because it is simply of the divine nature to love and care for all creatures. Compassion therefore describes the empathy that the faithful feel for those who are excluded from the normal protections offered by a society to the in group. It describes their openness to fellowship with all people, regardless of race or social class.
>
> It draws on the example of the God who, in the events of biblical history, was recognized as reaching out especially to the most vulnerable and weak to free them from their bondage and to restore them and empower them to live a full and productive life. Compassion is rare in a society filled with fear and distrust, and within which many people feel that another's well-being decreases their own chances of success. The community patterning its life after the example of the God whom it acknowledges as the sources of its every need should not be plagued by such anxiety. It is able to give because it has already received abundantly from God. (page 510)

Jesus gave the friendly command for the community of faith in the form of "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

The Church Called Out Into The World

In his presentation on *The Church And The World* during the seminar on **The Nature And Meaning Of Community,** Dr. Robert Bellah asked the biblical question, "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (Matthew 16:26a) Bellah responded to the question by asserting that the church has a word to speak against the social darwinism that places primary emphasis on competition and survival only to lose the dignity and value of the person. Bellah made a case for participation and

solidarity as necessary for the common good. He argued that the church is called to work for *justice* in its preferential option for the poor and to expose the poverty of affluence in which the rich harden themselves with self-sufficiency. *Justice* is one of the characteristics to be addressed in *The Church Called Out Into The World.* Two additional characteristics are *reconciliation* and *hope.*

A Ministry Of Reconciliation

Jacob and Esau feuded with each other since they were young. The two brothers had different personalities. Esau was an outdoors person known for his hunting ability, while Jacob, a quiet person, desired to dwell in the tents. The loyalties of their parents were divided, in that Isaac loved Esau, while Rebekkah loved Jacob.

When Isaac became old, he prepared to give a blessing to his older son, Esau. But Rebekkah plotted with Jacob to cheat Esau out of the birthright. Esau became furious when he realized that he had lost the rightful ownership to the leadership of the family and a double share of the inheritance. Rebekkah then told Jacob to flee for his life.

After many years, both brothers had become quite successful in accumulating herds of cattle and many servants. Jacob was still fearful of Esau's wrath and sent messengers ahead in order to appease his anger, but the messengers returned with the word that Esau was approaching with a large army. Jacob became even more afraid.

That night a messenger of the Lord wrestled with Jacob. This wrestling match changed him from a conniving person looking out for himself into a trusting person looking to God. He was then prepared to meet Esau. God had evidently worked on Esua, as well, for the older brother embraced Jacob and kissed him. The two brothers became reconciled to each other. (Genesis 25—33)

Can the families of Jacob and Esau in our rural communities be reconciled today? A ministry of reconciliation can be a wrestling match in doing battle with stubborn pride, long-standing grudges, and open hostility. A person of faith must be prepared to go to the turf in order to carry out the ministry of reconciliation.

Without A Vision The People Perish

Since the time of the Exodus, the journey of God's people into the future has been a reluctant one. During the wilderness wanderings the chosen people looked back to the leeks and cucumbers of Egypt, for they represented security, even if they did not symbolize freedom. A settled people demanded a king, in order to be like all the rest of the nations, even though the prophet Samuel sounded the warning that a king would treat them like the pharoh's of Egypt. The disciples were afraid to follow Jesus to Jerusalem. In spite of their unwillingness, Jesus set his face towards the cross. With the resurrection, the fearful disciples were transformed into powerful witnesses of the crucified and risen Christ. They were given new eyes to see all of life as capable of being transformed by God's grace.

An alternative consciousness for God's people is best depicted in Jesus' inaugural address: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19) *The Church Called Out Into The World* is invited to live with boldness in the midst of the dominant culture. *Hope* propels God's people into the future to be free to envision how people living in community can experience new life.

To Do Justice And To Love Kindness

The prophet Micah asked the question, "What does the Lord require of you?" (Micah 6:8a) He answered by stating, "To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 8:6b) This prophet, who came from the common people, being a citizen of the small village of Moresheth in the Judean foothills southwest of Jerusalem, showed a preference for the poor and disadvantaged. (Micah 4:6-7)

He called attention to the societal structures affecting the fair distribution of goods and opportunities. (Micah 3:9-11) He insisted on a faithfulness to true worship that showed forth in a commitment to social justice. (Micah 4:1-2) In the end Micah held forth a vision of justice of how "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Micah 4:3b)

The Church Called Out Into The World witnesses to a different kind of justice from that of popular conception. In *The Primacy of Justice in Moral Theology*, (**Horizons,** October 1, 1983, pages 72—85), Dr. Daniel Maguire contrasts the civil concept to the biblical sense.

United States Justice	***Biblical Justice***
Avowedly impartial	Biased in favor of the poor
Abstract (blindfolded)	Earthy and sin conscious
Reactive	Proactive
Punitive	Benevolent
Individualistic	Social
Stressing merit	Stressing need
Private property rights	Redistributive empowerment
Egalitarian (arithmetic)	Uneven (geometric)
Conservative	Revolutionizing
Nationalistic	Universalistic
Minimalistic	Effusive
Seeks end of litigation	Seeks peace
Avowedly dispassionate	Candidly passionate
Macho masculine	Feminine

The community of faith can make its witness felt in the world, which is the sphere of concrete responsibility, by envisioning and living out a biblical sense of *justice*. This biblical message emphasizes the relation between a deep commitment to God and a deep commitment to social justice. Each person is entitled to the protection of the community, and no one is exempt from taking responsibility for others, especially those who are weak and vulnerable. An urgent sense of God's gracious rule in this world leads the person of faith to believe that unjust structures are not meant to be tolerated as inevitable. Rather, God's alternative order of peace and justice is to be prayed for and worked for.

Conclusion

The person of faith is called to live in *both* the Christian community and in the civic community, for God exercises his gracious rule over both. The Christian community is called into being by the dynamic Word of God that creates forgiveness, unity, and compassion. The Christian's first loyalty is to the community of faith which is brought into being by the grace of God in Christ. The civic community is part of God's creation into which the person of faith is called to work. As a part of the civic community, the person of faith is compelled to carry out a ministry of reconciliation, to speak a word of hope, and to strive for justice. In the midst of the civic community, the person of faith lives out the

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The Church At Work In Building Rural Community

In his presentation, *Moving From Myth To Ministry,* at a 1987 conference on **The Beauty of the Multi-Point Parish** at Stevens Point, Wisconsin, Douglas Walrath pointed out three myths under which many people operate. One myth is that conditions will naturally get better; he refuted that myth by stating that the economy may not improve, and people will have to learn to live with that scenario. A second myth is that, in the midst of the rural crisis, people have to deal with the whole problem or they can not deal with any of it; according to Walrath, this attitude paralyzes people from doing anything. People can do something, even if they can not do everything. A third myth is that small, rural congregations are indequate; Walrath countered this opinion by asserting that the small, rural congregations possess unique strengths.

"What would happen," Walrath asked, "if we dropped these myths and acted out a vision of hope and faith?" Walrath moved from myth to ministry by demonstrating how rural congregations can meet the challenge he raised. The following example by Walrath of Mission at the Eastward, to which he belongs as a member, illustrates how congregations working together can address the needs of the community at large.

Mission At The Eastward

Mission at the Eastward (MATE) is an association of twelve small, rural congregations in an economically depressed area of central Maine. Nine churches are Presbyterian, one is Methodist, one is Congregational, and one is Universalist. The churches are served by six full-time pastors who make up the staff of MATE. This association was established in the late 1940's at the invitation of the Maine Interdenominational Commission which had found many communities to be without churches.

"The clergy have always believed that their calling was to the entire community," Walrath said. "The charter was to provide full-time ministry in communities without churches. In other words MATE was established as a mission." Walrath's pastor, Scott Planting, serves Fairbanks Union Church, New Portland Community Church, and North New Portland Community Church. In addition Planting is the Executive Coordinator of MATE that sponsors programs to benefit the churches and the communities they serve.

The Rural Community Action Ministry (RCAM) is an ecumenical, private, nonprofit organization that is supported by sixteen churches in eleven communities in the southern section of Mission at the Eastward. The RCAM cooperates with area social service agencies to provide a wide range of community services including mental health counseling and crisis intervention, a preschool enrichment program, and housing rehabilitation.

The Economic Ministry, located in Salem, Maine, is a cooperative economic assistance program sponsored by the United Methodist Chuirch with assistance from MATE. The Economic Ministry operates a thrift shop, a furniture repair, and small crafts business. The Economic Ministry also has helped to start many small wood-working businesses, train people in wood-related skills, and provide part-time employment for area people.

"Such extensive community building would be difficult for individual congregations to do alone. A board is needed to carry out coordinated efforts; pastors need a support system for resources and planning. Biblically this is a disciple model. Jesus did not go to the Sanhedrin; he challenged, supported, and equipped people. In MATE, because of multiple church parishes, it is necessary to educate lay leaders who are responsible for directing the life of the parish. The Mission is ecumenical in nature using the resources of denominations in creative ways to provide a wide range of social and spiritual experiences in the communities served," Walrath explained.

Walrath pointed out that MATE took a long time to reach its present standing. He related that the joint venture started when a visionary person, Pastor Bill Berger, said to others, "Let's do it!", and an ecumenical effort began. In the same way, other actions call for people to see a need, to take the initiative, and to pool resources. The next article shows how the actions of a few individuals can create momentum for community change.

Managing Change In Willmar, Minnesota*

The creative response of a few members at Vinje Lutheran Church is bringing the Willmar, Minnesota community to discover that they do not have different problems, but different perspectives of the same problem: managing the changes created by the rural crisis. It took a long time to get to that point, however. When Perry Nelson looked at the meager audience gathered for an adult forum on the rural crisis, he wondered if other church members would ever understand that "the farm crisis is not in a box by itself."

Nelson, who owns a large hog farm, took his concern to one of his pastors at Vinje, Glenn Taibl. Taibl agreed that townspeople were not very aware of the situation. "Vinje has about 800 families," he said. "Maybe a dozen of them farm, yet we all live in a community surrounded by — and ultimately affected by — the farming industry." They agreed that something had to be done. Vinje's social concerns committee became involved. The rural issue seemed to be an opportunity to expand their ministry. They voted to use $1,000 of their discretionary fund as seed money for a community event.

From the beginning Taibl and Nelson wanted to involve a variety of people in planning: professionals, educators, farmers, main street entrepreneurs, and laborers. Vinje's congregation included many people in each of these groups, but they decided to invite people from outside. As Taibl said, "It needed to represent more than Vinje or it wouldn't go." The committee met for 16 weeks. It was hard work. "It took six to eight weeks just to define the problem," Nelson said. But it was a good group because, as Carol Vennerstrom, director of the Chamber of Commerce, explained, "We had to break through our preconceptions. The planners agree that they identified the terrain together."

What finally emerged was an ongoing process that would involve the entire community. It began with a one-day event in April called *Managing Change: The Pain and the Challenge of Rural America* attended by 115 people. The event was, according to County Extension Agent Kent Gustafson, "not like other events happening with a political or economic focus. Since it was neither of these, it filled the gap."

The event focused on values, the conscious choice many Willmar residents had made to live in a rural area. While previous events tended to polarize the segments of the community, *Managing Change* brought a wide variety of people together. As Nelson said, "By the end of the day, everyone was talking values." Not everyone came to agreement, of course, but Vennerstrom felt, "Incredible things were happening at the tables." At the end of the day participants discussed next steps. Thirty wanted to continue working with the

original committee. As Taibl said, "It was exciting to have that kind of response. We've got the right people in the group to make things happen."

They agree that the process is ongoing. The three steps which guided the planners — building awareness, conversation, and proactive movement — will continue. Some ideas involved plans for increasing the agricultural income of the area by processing raw materials in Willmar, specialized training in crisis ministry, coalitions of mental health providers, and economic development. Vennerstrom said, "This plan didn't die. And it won't now." What began with a meager attendance at an adult forum has led to "a broadening of a sense of community and a mobilization of resources," according to Vennerstrom. Perhaps most exciting is that a church responded to a need for ministry by involving the community in an ongoing process. *(An edited version of *Managing Change in Rural America*, by Myrna Sheie in the Fall 1986 **Seeds of Fire,** pages 6—8, published by the American Lutheran Church; Minneapolis, Minnesota.)

In the next piece two pastors saw a need for farmers in distress to come together for mutual support. The following network has a quite specialized focus.

Neighbor To Neighbor Support Network

David Luepke of Stratford, Wisconsin gets a lot of satisfaction when he can help farmers win the bankruptcy game. When he cannot help, because of limited time or energy, he says it "tears him apart inside." Luepke and his partner, Laura Koenig, are living the personal experience of financial crisis with 160 farm families as leaders of a Central Wisconsin Neighbor to Neighbor Support Network. Actually the project started when two ministers from Edgar, Pastor Roger Moldenhauer and Pastor Tim Diemer, formed a support group for farmers in serious trouble. Luepke serves as an elder in Moldenhauer's church.

At small meetings in their homes, farmers share experiences and pool problem solving knowledge. Although he says his purpose is to "beat" the lenders in the bankruptcy process, Luepke says he is on good terms with creditors. "I'm probably the lender's best friend. I'm helping people to stay on the farm. No one can afford one more farm standing idle, especially that lender," Luepke said. Meetings are not advertised, but are organized over the telephone among friends and neighbors. All those involved in the private meetings are at or near bankruptcy, and in some cases through. Onlookers are not really welcome. Luepke believes that these intimate meetings are key to their success. "Everyone told us that the stigma of bankruptcy would prevent people from coming and talking," Luepke said. Indeed at the first support meeting he ever attended, at a local church, "someone said *bankruptcy* and it was as though they'd sworn in church. Yet a survey showed that most in attendance were near bankruptcy. They just didn't feel that comfortable."

Luepke, his wife Doreen, and their four children are dairy farmers. Now Luepke and Koenig are overwhelmed with requests to help start groups in more neighborhoods. They are facing their limits. "That's the basic flaw in a volunteer organization: people burn out. It just costs too much from your family and from your pocket," Luepke said. A grant from a Lutheran church group, together with other financial aids, helps Luepke and Koenig. Luepke sees leadership development as important so that they can reach out to others. Luepke is also interested in encouraging more community oriented support groups that involve clergy, merchants, bankers, and farmers. "It seems like a logical step for our *down-and-out* people to *graduate* into such a group," Luepke said.

In the following section, community members experienced the stress when the mines closed down. Here again the church had an important role to play.

The Church Was There When The Mines Closed Down

Wallace is located in a valley of the Coeur-d'alene Mountains of Idaho. For years the community had depended upon the silver, lead, and zinc mines for its economic base. Then, suddenly and with no warning, the Bunker Hill Mining Company shut down the mines and the metal refineries. Out of 8,500 workers, 3,000 were laid off. Governor John Evans appointed a task force to find a buyer for the mines, but the group quickly realized that no company would purchase the mines. The task force then went out of existence, but Pastor Howard Schroeder of Kellogg American Lutheran Church, who had been on the Human Services Subcommittee, volunteered to keep on working to mobilize the community. Governor Evans appointed Schroeder to chair a new task force. Schroeder got the task force to advocate for programs that would help the unemployed workers.

Schroeder and the task force were able to secure federal funds for job retraining and worker relocations. They also provided a forum for people to talk to each other. The workers could know that they were listened to and affirmed. Schroeder explained that he was able to help make celebrations happen. People were recognized for who they were and what they were doing even though they were not the kind who would be written up in the papers. "We got the politicians to come, not to make speeches, but simply to mingle and tell them how special they were," Schroeder said.

He believes that he exercised leadership in the midst of the recovery because he was seen as apolitical. He brought people in various governmental agencies together and helped them to overcome some of their differences. For instance, he got the school district and the city to exchange services; the city removed snow for the school, and the school taught adult education to the city employees.

Like Howard Schroeder, Mary Farwell learned how to move among various sectors in order to get people together. Schroeder did it as a pastor, and Farwell as a layperson.

A Farmer's Outreach

Mary Farwell sees *stewardship of each other in community* as a key focus in her work as a coordinator of a Farmer's Outreach in Clinton, Iowa. Her role is one of a creative mission outreach to suffering people in the rural community. The position is funded by Lutheran and Episcopalian groups, and her effort is supported by the Lutheran Pastors of Clinton and both Episcopalian congregations.

While the overall goal of Farmer's Outreach is to help suffering farm families, the project also lends its support to a wide variety of community activities. These include educational programs, workshops for adults, rural benefits, and peer helping. In this way Farwell makes a linkage of town and rural people. Farwell has given thought to how the church can best make its presence felt in the community. "I am not an agency. I am an agent of the people I serve. I try to be a role model. As a lay person, I can take risks that a pastor can not. I start something, get it going, and then step back. I do not want people to be dependent upon me. I do not want to solve other peoples' problems. I want to help others to solve their own problems," Farwell stated.

Conclusion

The church at work in building rural community can do some of its best work in three ways: motivate, mobilize, and minister. To motivate is to inspire and to encourage people to believe in themselves. To mobilize is to energize and to empower people to work together for the common good. To minister is to meet the various needs of the community.

9

An Intentional Community Demonstrates Interdependence

All of us live in communities of one kind or another. Even large urban areas have neighborhoods that are drawn together by a common ethnic background, a similar type of people, or a unifying concern. Generally, though, as towns become larger, the sense of knowing others and being known becomes harder to maintain. In an age when many believe life is becoming more impersonal, some individuals have taken steps to create neighborhoods of like-minded persons. This is not a new concept; the Pilgrims tried the idea. Many of the early American communities were successful and flourished; others were ineffective and died quickly. In the last two decades, some people have attempted to recapture the spirit of the early Americans with the practice of the *intentional community*.

Dorea: Gift Or Bounty From God

One such group is the Dorea Peace Community situated on eighty-nine acres of partly wooded rolling land near Turtle Lake, Wisconsin. Dick and Naomi Breusehoff and their two sons, Nathan and Peter, have been at the community since its beginning in June of 1980 when they came to live with the founders, Max and Nancy Rice, and their two children, Amy and Micah. In June of 1983 they were joined by Sharyl and Larry Boatman and their two children, Maija and Paul. A few weeks later, Larry and Lois Dodge and their son, Josh, arrived. Finally in April of 1984, Joyce and Tom Kessler and their daughters, Laura and Annette, became a part of this intentional community. In the summer of 1985, the Rice's and the Boatman's left, leaving the group with three families.

The name of the community, *Dorea*, is taken from the Greek word which means *gift or bounty from God*. Each Tuesday evening the families come together for a common meal. Before eating, the people link hands around the large dining table to express thanks for those gifts with which they have been blessed. In a concrete way the name Dorea informs a community lived out in gratefulness to a gracious God. Following this common meal, members take part in a biblical study and discussion.

As I visited one Tuesday evening I wanted to know in what specific ways a Christian vision helps them as an intentional community to demonstrate interdependence. Dick Breusehoff, an ordained Lutheran pastor, was the first to address this question. He believes that biblical study has helped them to move beyond lip service to action. For instance, the group sent a tape and a letter to a Base Christian Community in Nicaragua in order to carry on a dialogue with people of faith in the Third World.

Breusehoff went on to explain, "One of the decisions we made in the last couple of years is that we are not an inward focused group. We are together in order to support each other for the work we do outside of the community. In this way, the jobs we do can exercise Christian vocation in the best sense of the word. This is one of the greatest gifts we can give to each other."

Lois Dodge, a worker at a center for abused women, illustrated this interdependence by relating that her husband Larry was going to Mexico for a month of intensive language study. "It is much easier for him to go knowing that I am secure in the bosom of my neighbors. I feel very comfortable about that. There is a lot of freedom," Lois said. She

went on to say that the biblical studies are helping her to understand the others in the group, because everyone came from different backgrounds.

Dick and Naomi Breusehoff came out of the Lutheran mold, while Larry and Lois Dodge came out of a liberal Catholic tradition. Tom Kessler was a Franciscan novice master friar in Huntington, Indiana, living the celibate, cloistered lifestyle of a monk when he met his wife-to-be while she was attending mass at the friary. The members of this community have found that, when people speak from the heart, the communication breaks through the various belief systems.

Larry Dodge believes that in a lot of ways their potential is still coming. "The kind of support Lois is describing is one of love, very good friends, very good neighbors, a lot of acceptance and trust, and a knowledge that others will pitch in and help out if something happens to one person. It is almost a given," Larry said. He pointed out that the Dorea Community differs from many other intentional communities. Dorea holds to an emphasis on peace and justice inspired by the biblical witness, whereas others have an inner focus on exploring personal consciousness.

Naomi recounted that the search for a vision had been a struggle. There were times in the past where there was disillusionment because of some strong differences that resulted in two families leaving. But she believes that the time has come to put those things behind them and to focus on what they want. She wants to be what neighbors used to be, much more concerned for each other. "We are beyond what society determines as a neighbor. Dick and I used to live in an apartment in Appleton, Wisconsin and we did not even know who lived next to us, let alone care. Now our families are intertwined in such a way that, when we make a decision, we know it will affect the other families," Naomi said.

Decision Making In An Intentional Community

This led me to ask how the Dorea group makes decisions. I knew that decision making in intentional communities varies from highly restrictive behavior with a strong leader to a loose-knit make-up with collective participation. Discovering how this intentional community has developed a workable system could give a key for effective community building.

I discovered a difference of opinion within the group about how intentional the community should be. "We are not that intentional in the sense that we are planned in our activities. We do have plans to eat together, but we do not have a plan for taking on some big cause," Larry said. Lois rejoined, "But that does not mean that the potential is not there."

Dick went on to explain that the six adults in the community are all strong people with different ideas. Larry stood alone in his desire for the community to be more structured in its outside unified social actions, while the others felt more comfortable with each person pursuing individual concerns through their jobs and political involvement. They understood Larry's desires and laughed together about their differences, but the majority consensus agreed to set up only as much structure as was needed for carrying out the various responsibilities.

Naomi summed up the prevailing perspective by saying, "The symbol I like to use for community is that of a wheel. Community is the hub where the members get greased and oiled, but the spokes go out from that. There is also a rim that binds us together with a larger community, and we are trying to push that to be more global in our thoughts." Lois added that she believes the members are all engaged in working for nonviolence — Dick in

his work with farmers, Naomi in working at a cooperative dental clinic, Larry with his global thinking, and herself in working with battered women.

One big project that the group had to decide on was in setting up a land trust. The two goals were to establish a connection with the land and to develop a sense of land stewardship. To do this they placed eigthy out of their eighty-nine acres in a nonprofit, tax-exempt trust named *Aki Apanemoh*, Ojibwa words for *land trust*. Each home site had one acre. Then four or five acres made up a commons that were doubly owned.

The process took six months of studying the law, discussing with each other, and trying to come to terms on a workable solution. Eventually they arrived at a consensus in which the houses would be individually owned, but that the land would be leased from the trust. If a member family decided to move away, the moving family would seek a buyer for the house and would be paid $84 a month by the community in the interim between moving and actually selling the house.

On a more mundane level of everyday decision making, the group at first was so afraid of centralized authority that they had difficulty determining who was responsible for getting certain jobs done. Later on the community experimented with *nurturers*. They discovered by a process of trial and error who was good at doing what. Dick was good at machinery; Tom was good at correspondence; Naomi liked accounting; Lois enjoyed canning, preserving, and gardening; Larry liked being the idea person.

The commonalty of certain equipment and special funds was decided by common agreement. Other decision making remained decentralized. In effect, the Dorea Community employed only as much structure as needed to get the work done. This structure was decided by what worked, rather than by some superimposed idea of what should work.

Resolution Of Conflict

Closely related to decision making is conflict resolution. When families, made up of strong people, live and work together, there are bound to be conflicts. When conflict is resolved, people can grow. Unresolved conflict, on the other hand, can paralyze people.

The Dorea Community has discovered the importance of building a base of trust. When people trust each other, they can risk confrontation over their disagreements. They have learned from past experience that, if members felt intimidated, they would not be able to state what they thought at group meetings. Then one person would reluctantly agree to a position only to go home and complain to the spouse about what had been decided.

Another learning experience came in the form of practicing active listening. Larry recounted the incident of when his son, Josh, and Peter Breusehoff wanted to drive an old car around the land. They gained permission from Larry. Josh was the youngest of eight children for Larry. Larry had been through this before and was not too worried.

Naomi was afraid of what the older of her two sons would do in racing around in a junker and confronted Larry with her fears. Larry *heard* her. Larry in turn explained how he had originally let the boys drive the car, because he considered the activity something of a rite of passage. Naomi *heard* him. Out of that conflict they were able to resolve the conflict. Larry took the battery out of the car, and the boys were not allowed to drive the car around the farm. Larry and Naomi made the connection to small town life in that people who have to face each other day in and day out have an easier time doing so if the conflicts are resolved.

Relating To Rural Communities

To conclude my visit with the Dorea Peace Community, I asked the members what they had learned that could speak to the question of strengthening our rural communities. The first response came in the form of practicing neighboring. For instance, Tom Kessler had been suffering from health problems, and he and Joyce were not present at the time because they had gone to the doctor. The other members viewed his illness as an opportunity to pick up the load in order to make it possible for them to continue living in community. Dorea is a place where the people practice bearing one another's burdens. The Kessler's were carried along by the others. In the same way rural communities can be strengthened by this mutual caring.

Naomi expressed a number of reflections based upon her involvement, together with her husband Dick, in addressing the rural crisis.

> I feel a real connectedness to the land, a sense of life blood beating in this land. I also understand being a caretaker, because the land is a trust that goes beyond us. I think of what being good neighbors were — that sense of caring for one another. If you don't see smoke coming out of their chimney, you go over and see what is the matter.
>
> Also our sense of sharing things. When I look at the cost of machinery, I think this is going to have to happen for farmers. Maybe several farmers are going to have to go together to use one combine, just like we use one tractor. We are doing more trading and bartering. We have done that with neighbors in exchanging labor for wood. In some ways we are looking back at the ways things were. And that is maybe not as easy for people who always grew up in the rural areas where those were not necessarily the good old days.

What may have come naturally to people living in rural communities in the past will have to come intentionally now.

Conclusion

The Dorea Peace Community demonstrates the importance of interdependence. In a day when independence has become so highly valued, this group of people, living and working together, witness to the need for cooperation. Interdependence does not promise to be easy. Owning a piece of machinery in common, for instance, can bring conflict, as they discovered, but with the declining rural economy, people are forced to consider alternatives. Being intentional about practicing interdependence can be an important way of strengthening our rural communities.

10

Christians In Central America Put Faith Into Action

Christians in Central America put faith into action. I discovered this reality from a travel seminar to Mexico, El Salvador, and Nicaragua in January and February of 1985. This seminar was sponsored by the Center for Global Service and Education, a program of Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In this chapter I would like you to meet Christians in three different settings who demonstrate how their faith informs their work.

Children In Cuernevaca, Mexico Learn To Work Together

Cuernavaca, Mexico is not exactly a rural community. As a city of 150,000, it is the capital of the state of Morelos. Many of the people there have been forced to migrate from the rural areas where there are few jobs. They face many of the problems common to an urban center in a Third World country. But the teaching of a Catholic nun, Sister Delores, to the children of Cuernevaca offers an example of how people can learn to work together.

Sister Delores looks like a bundle of energy that has not diminished in her twenty-three years of teaching in some of the poorest sections of the city. During that time she has found what makes children interested and willing to cooperate. She possesses an infectious enthusiasm for working with children. Her teaching is not the traditional form; in fact she has some tough things to say about the way teaching has normally been carried out.

Sister Delores defined ineffective education. "Some Christians," she stated, "are filled with ideas in their head, but they know only truths and can not act them out. Charismatics are happy, but they do not change the world. Dwarf Christians are those who do do not grow. Other Christians are satisfied with home and family but they do not change the world." She called them "Good Christians — good for nothing." "Too much education," she argued, "simply amounts to funneling information into the head making children who are good for the system and who blissfully ask, 'Coca Cola, please. Twinkies, please.'" As a result of this kind of education, people are learning to climb the system. Sister Delores believes the Church is guilty of this pyramid also.

In contrast to that kind of ineffective education, Sister Delores showed how Jesus was at the bottom with the people. Jesus broke down the pyramid and made a circle of Christians linking hands and with himself in the middle. "Do not call anyone else your Father, for only God is your Father. Call no one Master, only God," she challenged. "We need to have a big heart — the size of the world. Then the center circles get larger. Thoughts and actions go to the end of the world."

Starting only with ideas makes for actions that are very short. Sister Delores explained that children then would constantly be asking, "Help me, please." Children can be helped to form little groups. Little leaders then become servants; they can begin to transform life in their own neighborhoods. Games, themselves, become a political and apostolic instrument. Sister Delores pointed out that television is a terrible political instrument against youth. When children watch TV, commercials make them very good consumers. They do not learn how to think for themselves.

Sister Delores demonstrated a workable plan for teaching children. First she met with leaders for evaluation, formation, and preparation. She wanted good group facilitators and not oppressors. Next, Sister Delores sent out the leaders to work with small groups. She did not teach the groups, but visited them for consultation. Afterwards, Sister Delores called the groups into a plenary session. She shared her suggestions with them, after which the children went to the homes and neighborhoods.

An example of how children learned to work together came after some of them indicated a desire to have a playground. Sister Delores asked them what they thought they could do in order to call attention to this compelling need. They responded by saying that they thought they could make posters. With the posters they took their message around the barrio. The children even stopped traffic to tell people of the need to clean up garbage in the vacant lots in order to make for playground space. A local newspaper article about this project had as its headline, *Children Organize Better Than Adults.*

Sister Delores possessed a heart that reached out, not only to the children of Cuernevaca, but also to her North American visitors.

> You are in the same boat. If the boat goes down, everybody sinks. You need to change things in the U.S. You may be discouraged, but you have the Bible and faith. You can be the little stone that chips away at the feet of the statue. If you begin actions of conscience, maybe you will be among the first martyrs in the U.S. Be strong in the faith. Do not let yourselves be eaten by the system. Thanks for everything you will do.

This Roman Catholic nun demonstrated how people of faith witness to the dynamic power of social change in building community from the bottom up.

Faith And Hope Refugee Camp In El Salvador

Faith and Hope is the name of a refugee camp near San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. The camp began with a bare ten-acre piece of land. The Lutheran Synod of El Salvador bought the site with money from Lutheran World Relief, and the camp is home for 750 displaced Salvadorans. The displaced people of El Salvador are living the most perilous life imaginable. Caught in the crossfire of war, many have had to flee for their lives, often hiding for a time in the hills and eventually reaching an urban area where there may be some hope for survival. In the urban areas, they find little reason for hope — no jobs, no housing, and often not enough food or basic necessities to keep them alive.

With the assistance of Lutheran World Relief and the Lutherans of El Salvador, the refugees at Faith and Hope are doing much for themselves. They run their own camp — one group doing food preparation, another producing food on the plot of land around the buildings by planting vegetables and corn, another in charge of cleanliness and health. They have a school, a wood working shop, and a place to make clothes.

I heard the depth of the pathos of the camp expressed by a woman who was a spokesperson for the rest of the refugees:

> We welcome you to our community as a sign of international solidarity and brothers and sisters in Christ. Most of the people here are women and children and a few old men. The men are either fighting or are killed. A lot of the people come from the conflicted zones. We do not know where the men are. Until our lives are guaranteed, we cannot go back. People here do not have identification papers. Without them people disappear. If we leave the camp, we would be deciding we do not want to live.

Children at Faith and Hope Refugee Camp in El Salvador face an uncertain future.

> Our hope is that you visitors will see the injustice in our country. You see the problems close at hand because of the war. You see what we are suffering. Peace and democracy does not exist here. We need food, clothing, and medicine. We do not need planes and war materials from your government. We want humanitarian help. We do not want cemeteries. Please deliver this message to the people of your country.

During her talk and throughout my visit to Faith and Hope, I was deeply moved as I realized that their very lives depended on the ability to live in community.

Omar Torijos Rice Cooperative Near Esteli, Nicaragua

The theme of Nicaragua's agrarian reform is *idle land to working hands*. The goal is to provide land for everyone who wants to farm. Government policy has not favored the state farms that were formed from the large estates the dictator Somoza abandoned in 1979. Many state farms have been given to individual peasant families and to cooperatives.

While in Nicaragua, I visited the Omar Torijos Rice Cooperative near Esteli. This cooperative was part of a voluntary effort in the country to live and work together. Some of the reasons for the cooperative were idealistic: to protect against selfishness and exploitation and to prevent the class conflicts that come about from growing differences of wealth. Other reasons were more practical: to make for a better social life when so many might otherwise be isolated; to obtain credit and technical help; and to purchase agricultural machines that could only be justified if used on large holdings.

We were told by the members that they are a deeply religious people and that one of the leaders had served as a *delegate of the word* — a lay leader in the church. Our knowledge of Nicaragua led us to realize that the Base Christian Community movement had provided a

moral justification for calling into question the repressive Anastasio Somoza dictatorship and for replacing it with a government that gives priority to the poor.

One of the women told of the dramatic improvement in their lives. "Before the revolution, the men had to go away to work on the huge haciendas. Now we can live and work together. As a result, we have to learn to organize ourselves," she said. The organization took the form of a governing board with a director, a chief of production, and coordinators of education, finance, and defense. The assembly met every two weeks and gave directives for the governing board. At the harvest time, they would figure out all the finances, take the profits, and distribute the earnings to each family depending on the work done.

Everything is collective at Omar Torijos. While living in the cooperative they have a right to use their individual houses, the communal house, and the televisions. If a member family leaves, they leave everything. They can only take the earned cash plus interest.

In their book, **What Difference Could A Revolution Make?: Food And Farming In the New Nicaragua**, Joseph Collins with Frances Moore Lappe and Nick Allen assess the cooperative experiment:

> In sum, the Sandinistas are promoting cooperative work by making credit available on more favorable terms to small producers organized in some form of cooperative. And, wherever they can, they are making cooperative work a condition for the landless seasonal workers getting land. Campesinos and rural workers are generally responding, for they can see the benefits to themselves. But the government has been much less successful in getting small landowners to pool their land, because unless cooperatives are lent machinery by the ministry or a private farm, it is very difficult to explain the advantages of collective work.
>
> The capacity of a cooperative to accumulate the surplus needed for capital investments and community projects (schools, roads, clinics, etc.) probably seems too ambitious and thus too distant to be an effective incentive. The moral or social benefits of "learning to work together" are likely too vague to attract many poor peasants who have coped with a hostile environment for so long by minimizing their risks.
>
> The Sandinistas' forms of persuasion have been positive, not punitive. They adhere strictly to their view that cooperatives must come about voluntarily. They seem willing to take the time for a gradual transition, experimenting with varying forms of organization. The Sandinistas see cooperatives as only one part of the rural economy, operating alongside individually owned private farms as well as state farms. The Sandinistas thus set themselves apart from revolutionary leaders in several other agrarian societies, who, with the same high ideals, have sought a more uniform and rapid transformation by using force when necessary. (page 106)

The Nicaraguan land reform has adopted a pragmatic approach to bringing about progressive social change so that people may farm the land and live in community.

Conclusion

Life is a constant struggle for the people of Central America. In the midst of difficult economic, political, social, and agricultural conditions, Christians in Central America act with boldness in putting their faith into action. In so doing, these Christians are demonstrating a new appreciation for the strength of community.

11

Two Racial Groups Retain Identity Through Community

American Indians and Black Americans have suffered much in this land. American Indians were displaced from their homelands and resettled on reservations, as the White people settled this country. Blacks were taken from their homelands in Africa and forced into slavery in the United States. The prosperity America has enjoyed has come at the expense of American Indians and Black Americans. In the midst of their suffering, these two racial groups have sought to retain their identity through community.

Indian Radio Station Amplifies The Drum Beat

The sound of the drum greeted the 5,000 people who gathered for the Honor the Earth Homecoming Pow Wow at the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Reservation. This sound signified the rhythm of the heartbeat. Above all, it sounded the heartbeat of Mother Earth that brought people together, united them to each other and to the earth. It is the Voice of the People. When the drum spoke, people were reminded of the Path of Balance and the relationship to the surrounding life.

Within a half mile a different kind of pulse sounded across the airwaves. Radio station WOJB amplified the drum beat so that it could be heard by the listeners on the reservation and ninety miles in every direction. This 100,000 watt, volunteer-operated, community radio station put new technology to work in order to transmit the old traditions of an Indian culture. As such, two mediums of communication are employed for the Chippewa Indians of northwestern Wisconsin to retain their identity through community.

At the Pow Wow, I talked with Walter Bresette, an Ojibwa, while the drum beat and the singers sang in the background. Bresette served on the board of directors when the radio station first began and later worked as news director. A vision propelled him and others to establish the station as a community force for maintaining an Indian consciousness.

Treaty rights quickly became a central issue. Bresette explained, "We had to deal with the Voigt decision in 1983. So we decided to use the radio in order to background people on some of the looming legal and social battles we were going to have to fight. I think it helped to prepare our listenership to understand the discussion over treaty rights." Through the National Public Radio system, WOJB funneled stories to a much wider audience.

Bresette saw how the battle over treaty rights helped to bring various tribal entities closer together. "The Lac Courte Oreilles has been a leading force on the treaty rights battle. But the real benefit of the Voigt decision has been that it has forced the other Chippewa tribal entities in northern Wisconsin to think of themselves as part of the Lake Superior Chippewa and not as separate reservations," Bresette said. Treaty rights are important to the identity of the Chippewa Indians in that the agreements have to do with those rights that were not transferred to the federal government in the 1854 treaty. That treaty established the Ojibwa reservations in Wisconsin. At the time the U.S. wanted to have access to the timber and the minerals. Therefore, the Chippewa Indians retained the right to hunt, fish, and gather, because those rights were not seen to be in conflict with U.S. interests.

Also at the Pow Wow was a friend of Bresette, Robert Albee, who had spearheaded the effort to establish WOJB. Albee had previously started radio station KFAI in south Minneapolis. He had been asked to come to the reservation to start a station. Albee, who is White, and Bresette, a full-blooded Chippewa, joined forces to build the station into a broadcast medium that won many journalism awards for its coverage on Indian issues.

Albee explained the uniqueness of the station. "Indians had always been dependent upon forms of communication. Now was the time for Indians to speak to non-Indians. The more time I spent on the reservation, the more I realized that the value system of the elders was something that should be known by more than Indians. There were very articulate people who had a right to be heard beyond the reservation," Albee said. Indians could communicate their own identity, rather than being dependent upon White people.

Operating the station proved to be quite a challenge. According to Bresette, there never seemed to be enough money or volunteers, but somehow the staff managed to broadcast nineteen hours a day. "In the process the station helped to redefine the identity of a lot of people in northwestern Wisconsin who are struggling within their communities and families, not only for their security, but also their sanity in an insane world," Bresette said.

I asked both individuals what each saw as identifying characteristics of the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa that could speak to non-Indian people. Albee responded by saying, "I found a lot of laughter, good feeling, and joking, even though some of it may have been gallows humor considering the historical situation. The spirit of the Anishanabe was not crushed. Indian people live in the present. Somehow, even though the past was bad, and the future may be bleak, they are going to have a good time while they can." Albee found that many White people, by contrast, often take their situation too seriously, as they tend to dwell on either the past or the future. Bressette answered my question by saying, "Chippewa Indians have to be the most optimistic crowd of folks I ever met. Despite the lengthy history of tragedy, attack, movement, and damnation against one's culture and religion, look around and see the thousands of Indians here at the Pow Wow dancing, talking, making babies, and having a good time." He believes that this kind of community can be a living example of remembering origins in order to adapt to the modern necessities.

Spiritual traditions are important to Bressette. "Spiritual strengths are being viewed increasingly as essential tools for having healthy, vital communities, stable economies, and a balanced ecological system. As a Chippewa people, we are evolving back to a time in which we lived in balance with our environment. The current options available to us are so limited that there is a gnawing search to find that balance within ourselves, our families, and our communities," Bresette stated. He believes in the importance of getting back to some of the older traditions such as sweat lodges, fasting, and using the Ojibwa language.

Bressette sees beyond the identity of the Chippewas to a larger community of communities. "There is something tremendously exciting to think of in the next decade the Chippewas sitting down with the farmers, and the farmers with the loggers, and the loggers with the resort owners, and men with women," Walter Bresette concluded.

Black Farmers Stand Up For Human Rights

"Come on in here with me. I want you to meet some people." With that invitation repeated many times, Shadrach Davis introduced me to citizens of Tchula, Mississippi. Shadrach is a big, Black man with a booming voice. His heart is as large as his stature, as I discovered in visiting with him around town and in the countryside. Shadrach is a biblical name taken from the story of Daniel. Daniel's three friends — Shadrach, Meshack, and

Abednego — refused to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzer in his command to worship a foreign god. For that civil disobedience they were thrown in the fiery furnace, but they were not consumed. Shadrach Davis, like his biblical counterpart, has been through the fiery furnace, but his integrity remains intact and his courage unquestioned.

"In the 1960's White people came down and helped us to register," said Shadrach, as he related some history of the Black struggle for justice. "The only way to break this system down was for Whites from the North to go with Blacks from the South to gain the right to vote. The voting commissioner made us fill out long forms and stand in lines, but we had a rule that no one should ever go alone. Always go together. And we won the right to vote. The Civil Rights Movement started with landowners who had independence. They could not be forced out of a job like hotel maids and plantation workers. Sometimes we would get others to help us in the fields so that we could go to rallies or attend meetings," Shadrach said. Davis, a cotton farmer, exudes a confidence that has been continually tested in the struggle for human rights. "You got to be a man and stand up. I don't fear anybody or anything," said Shadrach, as he explained how he has kept up the fight.

Black people have always had to struggle to retain their identity. "The White folks came to this country and drove the Indians away. Then they brought us over from Africa to work on the plantations," Davis said. The plantation owners never lost their supremacy in the South. In Mississippi, Reconstruction was ended with a reign of terror. In county after county in 1875, local *Democratic Clubs* mounted their horses and roamed the countryside killing key Black leaders. This *Mississippi Plan* disenfranchised the former slaves and drove them back onto the plantations. In fifteen years, all the gains of the Reconstruction had been wiped out, and, through the constitutional convention in Mississippi in 1890, a one-party, White-male dominated electoral system was formalized.

Economic conditions for Blacks in rural Mississippi range from pitiful to modest, with most falling below the national poverty line. Plantations still thriving in the area employ Blacks as farm workers. Many of the workers, however, are not free to leave because of debts to White owners. Keeping Black tenant farmers in perpetual debt is one tactic used by the large landowners to try to maintain a source of cheap labor. The powerful Whites use the political system, which they control, by electing Whites who will cater to interests of the landowners, and Blacks who can be bought off.

Shadrach Davis introduced me to a friend of his by the name of Eddie Carthan. The story of this man depicts how difficult building community can be. Carthan, who had grown up in the civil rights movement, was elected mayor of Tchula in 1977 after serving five years on its Board of Education. Carthan was the first Black mayor since Reconstruction in a sleepy Southern town where the Ku Klux Klan still exists. Under his administration, over $3 million in federal and private monies were channeled into Tchula. Carthan began by paving the dirt roads in the Black neighborhoods. He also started a day care center, health clinic, new library, and home weatherization program. He expanded the town work force from three people to two hundred, but did not give jobs to ruling families.

Carthan realized how the White power structure felt threatened. Many surrounding municipalities had Black majority populations. They thought that what was happening in Tchula would spread and that other cities would elect Black mayors. Every town in the county could elect a Black mayor. Davis was one of those who came to the defense of Carthan. "Eddie was doing things for the people. He was educated and knew how to get things done. The folks did not want things to come undone. They wanted to put him in the gas chamber on trumped-up charges, so when Eddie was charged, I got others together to come to his defense," Davis stated.

The election of independent Black politicians like Eddie Carthan threatened the long-standing economic and political control of the Deep South by its White power structure. Carthan's refusal to accept a $10,000 bribe from Delta businessmen to "do things the way they have always been done" signalled the start of a campaign to destroy him. The Delta planters and their political allies employed rumor, negative press, court suits, physical threats, economic reprisals, and brute force to prevent the Mayor from carrying out his duties. When these failed to deter him, they initiated a series of political frame-ups. On May 1, 1981 Carthan was convicted of simple assault for having disarmed a White man who was taking over city hall from the Black chief of police. Carthan became the first man in state's history to be denied bail and sentenced to three years in prison for simple assault. He served eighteen months and was eventually given a suspended sentence.

Carthan continued to face discriminatory practices from lending agencies that refused to grant him the loans he needed to maintain his family farm, a widespread problem for Black farmers. Eddie and his wife Shirley have assumed full responsibility for running the farm following his father's death. Various stalling tactics had been used to discourage Eddie in his attempt to obtain a loan. At the time of my visit, Carthan was happy because he had finally received a FmHA loan.

Shadrach Davis and his friend Eddie Carthan have been standing up for human rights in Tchula, Mississippi. After visiting a feed store operated by a White man, Shadrach said, "Things have come a long ways. Five years ago White folk would not have shaken your hand. Now they have to respect us. We do business with them. They are dependent on us." Davis and Carthan acted without bitterness or resentment and displayed forgiveness.

Davis and Carthan also realized the importance of an organized network for community building. During my visit, Davis asked Carthan to go to an upcoming annual meeting of The Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund. Davis sits on the Board of Directors, while Carthan belongs as a member. Building on the work of the Civil Rights Movement, the Federation over the past two decades has organized a community based cooperative economic development movement among 30,000 low income families working in over 100 rural communities in 11 southern states. The Federation is a nonprofit, tax-exempt association established to provide services, resources, technical assistance, and advocacy to its membership of cooperatives and credit unions and their individual member families. The Federation has an operations and fund raising office in Atlanta, Georgia, as well as an operations office and The Rural Training and Research Center in Epes, Alabama.

Conclusion

In my visits with American Indians and Black Americans, I was most impressed by the wide scope of their vision. They envisioned a future that would mean greater dignity and freedom for Indians and Blacks, but they also dared to imagine a liberation for White people that would provide release from the need to practice prejudice and discrimination. The extent to which Indians and Blacks are willing to work — to bring about greater respect and equality among the races — holds one of the keys to living in community.

12

Learning From Village Life In West Africa

After seeing Black farmers and townspeople in Mississippi, I visited West African peasants and villagers in Senegal, Mauritania, Niger, and Mali. In both cases I discovered that these people, who have suffered much, have much to offer for a vision of rural communities. Survival depends on finding ways to live and work together.

Under the section of *Food, Farming, And Community In West Africa* as a part of Chapter 2, I posed three questions. I intend to follow up on those questions in this chapter. *Why Are So Many People Leaving The Countryside?* leads to *Villagers Practice Hospitality. What Are The Factors Shaping The Future?* leads to *Dry Season Gardening Helps People Stay On The Land. What Is The Connection Between Soil And Culture?* leads to *Stabilizing The Sand Dunes Protects Nouakchott.*

Villagers Practice Hospitality

A key word in West Africa is *hospitality*. Wherever our Lutheran World Relief (LWR) study tour went throughout the countryside, we were shown hospitality. In West Africa the people regard it as an honor to host their guests. At many villages, seemingly the entire population turned out to greet us. Oftentimes, we were invited to take part in an elaborate tea ceremony. At the garden sites, Africans would give carrots and tomatoes to us.

Other times, we were guests at a meal where the host would kill a sheep or goat and barbecue the animal to be served in its entirety. Once, when we told the villagers we could not stay for a meal, they insisted we have a goat anyway and tied up the feet of an animal and hoisted it on top of our land cruiser. Ironically at the next village that same afternoon, the people did the same thing. The generosity of such gifts can be seen in that each animal was worth $40, while the average per capita income was $112.

Another time we visited a women's cooperative. As we were about to leave, the members asked us to stay for soft drinks. Our guide wanted us to be going, but the women insisted. Tim Manders of England, who works for the European-sponsored Lutheran World Federation (LWF), translated their demand in typically British understatement, "We have a bit of a problem here. These women insist that, if we do not stay, it will be a breach of hospitality, and they will feel obligated to give us two live chickens. I do not know what we would do with two chickens, so I suggest we stay." We stayed and had soft drinks.

Normal greetings can take up to five minutes. Africans have a practice of shaking hands and inquiring about the welfare of the other person, the family, the household, the health, the relatives, and the crops. Unfortunately I knew only a simple French greeting of *Ca va* which is a catchall phrase to be used for "How are you?" and "I am good," but it seemed to get me through. Sometimes a large group went through all the personal greetings, only to have one person come fifteen minutes later, whereupon the meeting was stopped and everyone greeted the newcomer. I came to realize you cannot be in a hurry in West Africa.

West African people, poor as they may be, practice a rich hospitality. They were not simply putting their best foot forward, though, for a visiting group of Americans from a donor agency. Hospitality provides the fabric for village life. At the heart of West African life is the extended family. Africans have many children, because they represent security.

Children have a strong obligation to care for their parents. With the extended family the relationship lines are not always clear to outsiders, as cousins often refer to each other as brothers and sisters, and aunts and uncles are looked upon as mothers and fathers.

Those who are better off are expected to help those who have less. People often move in with a relative who has a job and money; the relative can not refuse them. For instance, one couple with good jobs provided for eighteen people in their compound. When the woman was asked if she had her relatives help in the garden project, she responded that she did not. Her husband had taken on an additional business venture in order to support the household. In another case, an African man returned from a job in another country where he had saved a sum of money. When he came back, his relatives came with requests for funds. Because he did not believe he could refuse them, he eventually gave away most of his savings. Some of the younger people, though, object to this tradition because they do not see how it is possible to get ahead, if one is always expected to share.

The village network extends to the cities so that newcomers can almost always find someone from their home village and ethnic group to welcome and house them until they find work. This can be a hardship on urban people who are struggling to make it. Many of the people forced to migrate to the urban areas would prefer to return, but they become more independent in the city and find the village life constrictive and traditional.

West Africans have learned to be hospitable in an inhospitable environment. The desert is harsh and unforgiving; desert hospitality is warm and open. They believe that they must practice hospitality to others, in order for others to show hospitality towards them when they experience difficulty. Connected with this is a magnanimity towards White people that is surprising considering the history of slave trade and colonialism. I discovered the personality of people in West Africa to be colorful and distinctive with much hearty laughing and joking. I kept having to pinch myself to remember that I was traveling in some of the poorest countries in the world. Patience and buoyancy have made it possible for them to laugh in the face of adversity. This strength of character provides a foundation for the rural poor to rebuild their communities. The hope of West Africa lies with its people.

Dry Season Gardening Helps People Stay On The Land

Niger is a land of endless sand, unrelenting winds, and uncertain rainfall. Like the rest of West Africa, Niger has experienced seventeen years of below normal rainfall. Families are on the move in search of new locations where they will not be hungry. Many farmers have planted the parched fields with millet, but have received no crops to harvest. In the midst of such conditions, I traveled to various development sites where LWR was helping the people of Niger combat the disastrous effects of drought — hunger, disease, and death. At each village we would usually gather at a simple, reinforced concrete well, pioneered and tested by LWR. The well taps the abundant water that ironically lies just below the dry surface of the land. Gaining access to water enables farmers to plant gardens year round. During the past decade, LWR has helped in the construction of 3,000 wells.

Gardening is the best way to help families stay together on their land and produce enough food to feed themselves. Dry season gardening techniques teach the necessary skills to raise new crops. Gravitational irrigation, a canal system, and an animal powered water-lifting device helps increase food production. Larger fields yield greater amounts of food. Improved wood stoves preserve precious firewood. Animal fattening projects cut down on vegetation eaten by grazing. Cooperatives to market the surplus produce and adult education classes in such basic skills as reading, writing, and doing math assist the people gain a harvest which is helping to break the cycle of hunger and crisis-to-crisis relief.

West Africans have turned to dry season gardening to provide an alternative food source in the midst of drought conditions.

As I toured the various projects, I wanted to learn the strategy of development that makes such work possible. So I listened to the people explain their efforts and asked questions of various LWR and LWF workers. The first key has to do with achieving *food self-sufficiency through sustainable agriculture*. In a landscape, part of which had turned to desert and part of which looked like the surface of the moon, this was a challenging task. The delicate balance of nature has to be respected in order for the land to yield its food products. When people do not take more from the earth than the earth can replenish, they can gain enough to eat and stay on the land.

Another key has to do with *local ownership by individuals who participate physically and financially*. Development cannot be done *for* people; it must be done *by* the people. Projects should not engender excessive recurrent costs. LWR worker, Didier Allely, told how he was approached by villagers asking him to continue to buy seeds and materials for them. He replied that the villagers should use their rolling fund in order to save money for ongoing expenses. He would show them how, but they would have to do the work.

Seeing is believing promotes the most appropriate technology used already or proven to work elsewhere. When the change from drawing water with goat skins to using a hand pump is a major technological innovation, then the question of appropriateness must always be asked. The technology has to be locally produced and locally maintained. For instance, if parts are not available and no one is trained for repair, the implement is useless.

Development is a process, and development workers must be prepared to accompany the people for the time it takes to create a meaningful, sustainable change in their lives. The work must be constantly evaluated and reoriented by the participants themselves. This work in arriving at a consensus in a way that involves the people can be painstaking and laborious, but is necessary for the ongoing effectiveness. One of the biggest stumbling blocks comes when one faction supports a project and another faction opposes it.

A LWF worker in Mauritania, Julie O'Haver, shared some clues as to which villages work together. Does the village have a strong leader who offers a good working relationship? Do the people have a cooperative herd or individual ones? Are there tribal factions or harmonious relationships? If the villagers have three factions, they may need three projects. Do they delegate responsibilities? Have they been through a crisis that united them?

In his *Strategy Statement 1988-1993 for Africa*, former LWR program director for Africa, Bob Cottingham, called for a total reassessment of women's role in agriculture: "Lip service to women farmers in Africa will have to be exchanged for some concrete dialog with them as the major food producers. This is no small task, given the culture." Cottingham concluded that projects that exclude those (the women) who provide the bulk of the labor often fail.

Stabilizing The Sand Dunes Protects Nouakchott

Nouakchott, Mauritania, with a population of 5,000 in 1960 and over 500,000 in 1988, is like a village grown large. It is in danger of being buried alive under the sand that blows in from the desert. In 1974 the government asked the Lutheran World Federation for help in planting trees. While visiting the project, in which trees were planted in wind rows, one of the drivers recounted bringing out the first tree to be planted at the time. Such an act was certainly one of faith in the long-range hope that the spread of the desert could be slowed down enough to save the city. Starting in 1980 a newly discovered shrub called *Euphorbia* has been planted. Since it needs no water, it is a miracle shrub for the desert.

Mohammed Abby Ould Boulabatt has been the director of the reafforestation program called The Greenbelt of Nouakchott since 1980. He completed his studies in agronomy and forestry in France and returned to teach at the Agricultural College in Kaedi. He has attended several international conferences on desertification in Nairobi, Dakar, Mexico, and Paris. He is an enthusiastic, dynamic person dedicated to his work. Under his management the Greenbelt Project has become a matter of national pride. In addition to being able to tell the technical aspects of the program, he speaks of the relationship of people and trees:

> The Greenbelt has contributed to the awareness building of the nomadic population for whom a tree had been a fodder crop and firewood up to now. The project has established a new relationship between people and trees. It is a miracle to see a Mauritanian planting a tree instead of cutting it down as was done before. The Greenbelt has become a starting point for further reafforestation programs. The struggle goes on!

This valiant struggle to hold the soil in place so that a culture can be preserved will require the long-term commitment and vigilance of the people of Mauritania.

Conclusion

In studying the village life of West Africa, I learned that food, farming, and community are inextricably bound to each other. None of the three can be examined in isolation from the others. What affects one, affects all. In order for the people to have food to eat, farming must be done in such a way as to be sustainable for the carrying capacity of the soil. If farming is not carried out in a way that is sustainable, food will be in short supply, people will be forced to migrate in search of food, and a way of life will be lost.

Part IV

Developing Ways To Live In Rural Community

A culture is not a collection of relics or ornaments, but a practical necessity, and its corruption invokes calamity. A healthy culture is a communal order of memory, insight, value, work, conviviality, reverence, aspiration. It reveals the human necessities and the human limits. It clarifies our inescapable bonds to the earth and to each other. It assures that the necessary restraints are observed, that the necessary work is done, and that it is done well. A healthy *farm* culture can be based only upon familiarity and can grow only among a people soundly established upon the land; it nourishes and safeguards a human intelligence of the earth that no amount of technology can satisfactorily replace. The growth of such a culture was once a strong possibility in the farm communities of this country. We now have only the sad remnants of those communities. If we allow another generation to pass without doing what is necessary to enhance and embolden the possibility now perishing with them, we will lose it altogether. And then we will not only invoke calamity — we will deserve it.

—The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture by Wendell Berry (pages 43—44)

13

Examining The Dynamics Of Community Life

In order to develop ways to live in community, an awareness of social dynamics is essential. This chapter seeks to examine four dilemmas that result from the conflict between what is image and what is reality. Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman make these observations in their classic book, **Small Town In Mass Society: Class, Power, And Religion In a Rural Community.** These dilemmas are not equally apparent and applicable to all individuals and classes in rural communities. Nonetheless, they serve to unmask various illusions in order to gain a more accurate picture of rural community life.

Why Are Some Included, While Others Are Excluded?

Vidich and Bensman describe the first dilemma as an appearance of friendliness and a actuality of competition.

> The small-town resident assumes the role of the warm, friendly, sociable, helpful good neighbor and friend. However, the social competition and the struggle for individual success cause each man to examine his neighbor's successes, so that by comparison he does not stand in invidious contrast, and to emphasize his own virtures in order the better to absorb his own defeats. In the light of these contrasting behavior complexes, the individual has the psychological problem of resolving the self-image of the warm community member with the image of himself as a relatively successful member of the community in its various forms of social and economic competition. (pages 285—286)

This dilemma can be characterized by an amiability in public and a disharmony in private. Rural communities have difficulty in engaging in public disputes. Gossip provides the primary avenue for carrying out private animosity.

Sandra Simonson, who works for Lutheran Social Services to set up farm support groups in northwestern Wisconsin, has learned how communities can become divided. Simonson recounted how one particular farm couple had filed for bankruptcy. They felt labeled as failures by others in the community, who could not understand their situation.

Other people — acting out of their own fear of failure — blamed the couple as being bad managers, who had made some unwise business decisions and who deserved to go out of business. The woman could tell that people were talking *about* her, but not *to* her. Needless to say, the farm couple felt isolated. Simonson believes that there are many people in rural communities who have experienced losses of finances, jobs, farms, marriages, and health and who feel like failures as a result.

Simonson also identified what she calls *A Home Town Syndrome.* In her work of starting support groups, she is accorded respect fifty miles from home. In her own community, she is met with silence. Likewise, she observed that people have a difficult time accepting that there are problems in their home community. The problems are fifty miles away from home. Sometimes she finds that urban people are more sympathetic to the plight of farmers in distress than are fellow farmers in the neighborhood.

What Constitutes Success?

The second dilemma described by Vidich and Bensman is closely related to the first. The success, for which many rural people vigorously strive, is limited by circumstances.

> The goal of success as a major value and meaning in life stands in contrast to the inaccessibility of the means of achieving success. The institutional means to achieving success are limited and are not equally available to all groups. The life career represents a succession of adjustments of success aspirations to immediate realities. (page 286)

An official optimism often pervades individual and social life in rural communities and prevents many from coming to terms with this dilemma.

Two different views constitute the thinking of many rural people on what makes for success. At the **1988 National Conference on Rural Ministry** (mentioned in Chapter 2), Professor Durwood Buckheim offered some observations on the differences between Representative Berkely Bedell, and former Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz. Buckheim suggested that many like to think of themselves as being like Bedell, in that they live in community with a concern for the well-being of each other. The reality, though, according to Buckheim, is probably closer to Earl Butz, in that people consider the accumulation of material goods to constitute the good life.

Buckheim told how listening to Earl Butz reminded him of the pilot who was flying a plane through turbulence. The pilot acknowledged the rough ride, but assured the passengers that they had passed through the worst of the weather. Then the pilot announced that the storm had knocked out the communications network, and that the plane was lost. The pilot tried to console the people, though, by saying that the plane was making good time.

Buckheim warned of the danger of "unbridled optimism." The kind of paranoid feelings of being small that says, "If we amounted to anything, we would be big," runs counter to the Christian message. He urged those in attendance to be "realistic optimists." Buckheim argued that people of faith should not be seduced by the world's measure of success, in which results determine the bottom line. Christian maturity defines success as building a generous spirit. "Faithfulness is not incompetence. We can not judge by just numbers. Fear of failure and the need for affirmation make us vulnerable," Buckheim said.

Who Makes Things Happen Around Here?

The third dilemma analyzed by Vidich and Bensman attempts to get at the issue of power in the rural community.

> The illusion of democratic control over his own affairs given the formal structure of government stands in sharp contrast to the actual basis of local politics which is controlled by external agencies. Even if the individual is the favored group within the village, town, or school politics — that is, an active participant in the decision making process — his personal activity accounts less for his success than the collective activity of his group. The dynamics of political victory result more from the operation of the system rather than the activities of the individual. This, of course, holds only for the more favored groups which control informal government. Other groups have little or no basis for making a link between the illusion of democratic control and reality of small-town political dependency. (page 286)

In many cases, power is not shared broadly in the community. Because of this, popular control over local affairs remains more of an illusion than a reality.

In doing an assessment of a rural community, four statements can be made. (Adapted from **A Power Analysis of A Congregation** by Roy Oswald of the Alban Institutie, Washington, D.C.) *Power has to do with you are.* A person's reputation determines credibility. A person with power based on reputation is usually a solid citizen who is able to state a position with clarity and forcefulness. A person with reputational power does not have to come to meetings, because others often talk over a proposed change with such a person in order to gain permissional power. *Power has to do with who you know.* People, who agree on a similar set of interests and on a willingness to collaborate, act in a coalition. An agent for social change needs to figure out the various coalitions, the members of each, where they are united, and where they are divided.

Power has to do with who you talk to. The ability to communicate a clear plan for addressing certain issues brings power. Those with access to the various formal and informal communication systems are able to exert influence. Here an agent of change wants to determine who operates the channels of communication and how they function. People without reputational power can become part of a communications network or a coalition. *Power has to do with what part you play in the structure.* People who possess power in the structure occupy important roles or positions of authority in the community. Some people have power based on more than one of these currencies of power. The more sources of power, the more ability a person can employ to make for social change.

Does Washington, D.C. Care About Prairie Farm?

The fourth dilemma in the book by Vidich and Bensman speaks of the illusion of local independence and the reality of outside forces at work.

> The belief and illusion of local independence and self-determination prevent a recognition of the central place of national and state institutions in local affairs. The reality of outside institutional dominance to which the town must respond is given only subliminal, pragmatic recognition. The community simply adjusts to mechanisms which are only dimly understood. Even the successful are successful primarily in accomodating to these factors rather than in initiating independent action. (pages 286—287)

This illusion compels the student of rural community to reflect on the relationship to the external power structures.

Austin Belschner of Cumberland, Wisconsin sees through the illusions. "Washington, D.C. does not care about us in the rural areas. Madison doesn't have any money. We can start all the support groups we want to, but in the end they are simply a holding action until farmers receive a fair price for their farm products. Changes in public policy in Washington, D.C. and Madison have to be made in order for farmers to make it," Belschner stated.

Conclusion

If this chapter examined the dynamics of community life, the next chapter will follow up to address what it means to enable participatory democracy. *Why Are Some Included, And Others Excluded?* leads to *Dreamers, Ingniters, And Builders. What Constitutes Success?* leads to *Balancing Personal Fulfillment And The Common Good. Who Makes Things Happen Around Here?* leads to *Cooperation, Competition, And Conflict. Does Washington, D.C. Care About Prairie Farm?* leads to *Looking Beyond the Horizon.*

14

Enabling Participatory Democracy

Having examined the dynamics of rural communities, the task now becomes one of taking a look at democratic practices that will flourish in the atmosphere of community life based on responsible participation by individuals working toward common causes. How can communities serve and empower both included and excluded people; celebrate diversity; and awaken independence, creativity, and dialogue? What can be done to empower people, institutions, and communities to be more self-reliant and to promote cooperative processes that weaken those of dominance and control? This chapter responds to these questions with four dynamics of participatory democracy.

Dreamers, Igniters, And Builders

Many different kinds of people are needed in group efforts and in community ventures. I believe there is a special need for dreamers, igniters, and builders to rise to the occasion. *Dreamers* promote appealing new visions, shifting attention from the problem to goals that would correct the situation. Dreamers raise new questions and promote critical thinking. Dreamers make use of imagination to promote a future focus and the common good over short-range self-interest. Dreamers create a sense of the possible and give a sense of direction. Dreamers see the larger picture and communicate to others their perspective and how people fit into the broader context. Dreamers are willing to think and act in a bold fashion and to inspire others to do likewise. Dreamers possess a commitment to participatory democracy in helping others to see and to use their own abilities.

Igniters are high energy people who inspire others by their example of dedication and hard work. Igniters stimulate creativity and motivate people from what seems impossible to what seems possible. Igniters appeal to both the personal stake individuals have in a group effort and to the common good people have in a community venture. Igniters spot talents and abilities in others and help people believe in themselves. Igniters build trust easily and show integrity by being sensitive to human dynamics. Igniters discover those who are peak performers and put them in contact with others so that together they can create a fire.

Builders create a sense of who the group is and what the group is about. Builders recognize the importance of both power sharing and empowering others. Builders expect leaders to take care of the participants, but builders also expect the participants to take care of their leaders. Builders hold up a high standard of accountability in order to maintain an excellence in both leaders and participants. Builders recognize the difference between positive and destructive conflict and handle it appropriately. Builders deal with difficult people by recognizing the dignity of the person, but not permitting the behavior to become disruptive. Builders confront antagonists and prevent them from sabotaging a group effort.

Balancing Personal Fulfillment And The Common Good

In Chapter 3, **A Volunteer-Operated *Hay River Review* Newspaper Is Started**, I stated how a central focus to be addressed in that effort and in this book was to balance personal fulfillment and the common good. In order to carry out both endeavors with integrity, I had to wrestle personally with the matter. I had to assure myself that my desire for personal fulfillment and my commitment to the common good were compatible.

A number of reasons for personal fulfillment informed my decision to accept the position as editor of the **Hay River Review.** A chance to interact with a number of different people on the venture excited me; being part of a network brought hopes of lasting acquaintances and friendships. Such a project also posed a challenge; I did not know whether my leadership skills and journalistic abilities would be a match for such an undertaking, but the prospect of an adventure inspired me to agree to the editorship.

The opportunity to engage in an effort that would provide the basis for speaking to a larger audience became another important factor. I saw a need for calling attention to community building in the rural areas. Being an editor of a volunteer-operated newspaper became a way to influence community life in rural Wisconsin. If the project proved to be effective, it would give legitimacy to the writing I might do for a more general readership.

A number of reasons in working for the common good also motivated me. I knew the value a newspaper could have, and since the area had been without a local publication for some time, I thought the effort might be productive. If the newspaper stood the test of time, it could serve as an example of community involvement. Also, those who worked on the paper could grow as individual participants and as community members.

As an editor, I was committed to the principle of inclusiveness. I wanted those who worked on the paper to be committed to a *community* publication. The paper could not be allowed to be a vehicle for pleading *special interests*. Together with this, I saw the importance of making sure the workers knew that their contributions were needed and appreciated and that their abilities would be given individual expression. Some of the best compliments to the workers came from readers, who took note of how the quality of individual pieces and of the whole paper improved with each issue. Along these same lines, I learned that good leaders achieve a balance between what the organization needs from them and the other demands in their lives. Leaders are reliable, but are also able to avoid the over commitment of work, time, and emotion. Leaders are too valuable to lose to overload.

Cooperation, Competition, And Conflict

In his book, **Community Organization: Conflict and Reconciliation,** Lyle Schaller addresses the matter of power. (Nashville: Abingdon Press: 1966, pages 36—39.) Power is the capability to make an impact upon other people and group decision making; anyone who desires to be involved in the making of decisions must have power. Cooperation, competition, and conflict are three main ways, he outlines, of empowering people and making sure the power is shared. The value of this framework can be seen in an adaption from an urban example, he gives, to an occurrence in rural communities.

A village board proposes to relocate a library from the main street to the outskirts. The library, they argue, is too old and too small. By constructing a new building on a larger site, more people would be attracted to the library, they reason. Board officials make plans to unveil their plans at informal meetings in order to solicit comments and suggestions.

Townspeople could respond to this move with *cooperation.* Leaders of various community groups gather together. They are not surprised by the proposal and are in basic agreement with the need for a new library in a different location. These leaders have some reservations, though, about the specific plans. Therefore, they meet with the board in order to discuss their differences. In the past they have encountered a responsive attitude on the part of the board and have good reason to believe that their various points of view can be worked out. The board agrees to make the requested changes in exchange for the ability to

prove to the funding agency that they have citizen backing. The group of leaders, in turn, agrees to talk with those who oppose the library in an effort to minimize the resistance.

Concerned citizens could also respond to this proposal with *competition*. Some of the community leaders have experienced difficulties with the village board in the past. They are opposed to relocating the library for fear that it will take business away from main street. Also, this group of people are concerned that tax rates will go up to pay for the new building. Because of these reasons, they decide to push a plan that would call for the remodeling of the old library. A week before the board is to reveal its plans for the new library, this competing group announces a proposal for restoration and insists that it be included on a referendum in the fall election.

Faced with this opposition, the board could propose an alternative plan of making an addition to the old library and tearing down some nearby vacant buildings in order to create more parking space. If the concerned citizens agreed to this plan, then both would be acting in cooperation. On the other hand, if the board remained resolute with its building proposal, the group opposed to the project could respond with *conflict*. This response might manifest itself in the mounting of a vigorous campaign to defeat the proposed new library and to elect members to the board more in line with their views on spending public money.

Looking Beyond The Horizon

People who live out a practice of participatory democracy need the ability to look beyond the horizon in order to see how the local community is related to the larger geographical, social, and political areas. The Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program, located in Madison, sees the challenge as creatively managing the many changes in rural life and shaping the future. They view rural Wisconsin's greatest resource as its young men and women. Rural leaders must be educated in national and international affairs and familiar with the needs of society. They must be able to view change in a broad perspective and be prepared to provide the leadership that tomorrow's challenges will demand.

The Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program is primarily designed for men and women in the early stages of their leadership careers so that they are old enough to have demonstrated their leadership ability and young enough to be able to make a significant future leadership contribution. Participants are those who are involved in rural issues by virtue of occupations or demonstrated interest in agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, recreation, or other businesses serving rural Wisconsin and who are committed to improving rural Wisconsin, the state, and the nation.

Three types of seminars are conducted and each is a mixture of classroom and field activity. A series of eight three-day seminars held in Wisconsin explores such topics as natural resource policy, state government, public education, business and economic development, quality of life, agriculture in transition, the health care system, and international trade. Six-day travel seminars are held in Washington, D.C. and in a state different from Wisconsin. Topics parallel those in Wisconsin seminars.

A two-week seminar is conducted in another country to expose participants to their economic, social, political, and educational systems. The participants increase their ability to make analytically sound decisions in their leadership positions, now and in the future. They are also encouraged to develop an individual project by working on an issue or problem that is of significant concern to both the participant and society.

15

Inspiring Farm Activism On The Local Level

Rural communities need a healthy and prosperous agriculture in order to maintain a decent quality of life. Farmers and ranchers must be able to stay on the land; that takes fair farm prices. For the last thirty-five years, farm prices have been dropping, and the number of people on the land decreasing. As a result, much of rural America belies the original intent of the Homestead Act of 1862 established so that the land would be held by the many and not by the few. Many immigrants of yesterday escaped a concentrated system of land ownership, only for their ancestors of today to be forced off the land.

How can this destructive trend in rural America be turned around? The only hope lies with rural people who refuse to accept the inevitability of such human displacement and to take the initiative of making for social change. This is easier said than done, because many country people feel beat down by the assault on their livelihood and way of life. In the midst of such difficult circumstances, the social involvement of farm people in other parts of the world, especially the poor of the Third World, offers an inspiring witness of farm activism. I will offer examples of such involvement in other countries and suggest actions that can be taken in this country for the purpose of strengthening our rural communities.

Working For Social Change In The Public Arena

Filipino farmers know what it means to work on the land within an unfair system. In a visit to Glenwood City, Wisconsin, Pancho Lara and Memong Patayan told how the United States Agency for International Development (AID) trained rural people in the Philipines to do upland farming. AID wanted to move people off the more fertile lowlands in order to make room for foreign corporations to produce export crops. Cargill planted corn on the vacated land with the stated intention of helping the country to compete in the world market. The real purpose was to flood the market and keep prices down.

Filipinos carried out a resistance by organizing peasants and agricultural workers into a nationally coordinated campaign strike. They did not withhold production of food crops, but sold them directly to the industrial workers, so that the middle marketers could not reap the profits. The movement drew its strength from a foundation that reached down to the barrio, municipal, and district level chapters, and finally to the provincial and regional alliances. Together with this action, they called for an equitable distribution of land.

Such an effort speaks of courage and perseverance in the face of almost overwhelming odds. A similar combination of determination and cohesiveness will be required to bring about social change in this country. Following are suggestions for work in the public arena:

- Experiencing a sense of solidarity with farm people throughout the world gives confidence in knowing that individuals in rural America are not alone in the struggle. This ongoing work is shared by people of the land around the globe.
- A vision of people living in dependence upon the land and in relation to each other as community enables participants to see the purposefulness of farm activism. Each person is caught up in an effort that goes beyond personal survival.

• Clarity on the goals of farm activism provides a sense of direction.
— Farmers deserve a *fair price* for their farm products. Whereas, in Third World countries, fair prices are needed as an incentive to increase production, in rural America, fair prices are needed as an incentive to control production.
— Farmers need *farm debt adjustment* in order to remain on the land. In the Third World and in rural America, debt has been used as one way to take the land out of the hands of small- to moderate-sized farmers.
— Farmers share with all people the responsibility of caring for the earth, in order that the earth may care for all people. Policies and programs of *land conservation* are necessary in order to sustain the life-giving ability of the soil, water, and air.
— Farmers help to maintain participatory democracy when they are allowed to practice a dispersed form of land ownership. A social priority for the *small- to moderated-sized family farm* acts as a deterrent to the concentration of wealth and land ownership.

• Dynamic leadership enables people to discover the capacity to bring about social change. This transforming ability empowers others at the grassroots level to connect with the larger movement. Women are the untapped reservoir of leadership ability.

Farmers Extending Personal Support To Each Other

One woman active in the Dutch Farm Women's Movement spent a year on the farm of Craig Adams and Lucy Altemus near Glenwood City, Wisconsin. Antoinette Van Wijk told how farmers in the Netherlands lifted up the plight of individual farmers. The Dutch government, in response to the demands of the Farm Women's Movement, enacted a measure to establish a supply of farm labor in order to ease the workload of dairy farmers. This concern for the personal support of family farmers became a national effort.

Many farmers in rural America are also extending personal support to each other. Such organized efforts show how people still care about their community and its future. During a visit to the Hay River Chapter of Wisconsin Farm Unity Alliance, Linda Lewis, who works with Roger Williams on the Neighbor to Neighbor program, shared the following needs, which can be met through farm support groups.

• *Education:* Outside speakers, newsletters and booklets, videos and films, structured exercises and group discussions can all be helpful in sorting out farm family options.

• *Emotional support:* When people are experiencing distress, or pain or anger, it can be therapeutic to share their stories with other people. One of the functions of a support group is to encourage people to listen, accept, nurture, and affirm each other.

• *Physical support*: Support groups can encourage people to share equipment and labor, to assist each other at harvest time, to help with special projects, to provide labor so that neighbors can get away on vacation, or to provide child or elder care when needed.

• *Spiritual support*: Many support groups are organized under the auspices of rural churches. When sponsored by churches, support groups can help people feel like they are a part of a spiritual community that is bound together by faith.

• *Advocacy*: For some people, healing comes from taking stands on policy issues or becoming actively involved in political action. Others may find that healing comes from reaching out and advocating for others who are less fortunate than they.

• *Basic needs*: Support groups can help link farm families into community-based resources: food pantries, special funds organized by churches, general relief, food stamps provided by a social services office, or emergency fuel funds.

• *Financial counseling*: This can be of assistance to those who are examining all of their options in an effort to remain on the farm. Adding an independent third party to the farmer and the lender can improve the situation by offering advice and counsel.

• *Legal counseling*: Support groups can invite bankruptcy lawyers to come and discuss legal options; they can also have copies of bankruptcy or foreclosure manuals on hand so that farm families are familiar with their legal rights.

• *Emotional counseling*: Emotional counseling can assist people to identify and sort out their options, offer hope, and help initiate a plan of action to deal with their problems.

• *Job Training*: If it is clear that the farm family will need some off-farm income to supplement the farm income or that the family will need to get out of farming, a support group can help the family to seek job training.

Building Community — The Next Step

Wilfredo Castellanos from Honduras believes that making changes in the public arena must begin on the local level. When he visited the Ridgeland, Wisconsin area, Castellanos told how his Association of Honduran Producers of Coffee has banded together to serve their local farmers. The Association's membership of 33,000 covered every region of the country. This was in contrast to the producers of the other major commodities, such as sugar, bananas, and grains, who were individually stacked up against wholesalers and exporters. The coffee producers were providing emergency food for the peasants displaced by the Contra presence and pressing for American aid to those needing to relocate.

Castellanos demonstrates how a grassroots approach is the only way to make lasting social change. Even though such work is difficult, the benefits of a grounded effort are irreplaceable. Following are two ways farm activism can be carried out on the local level:

• The usurping of authority by management in the operation of many cooperatives is particularly problematic. The philosophy is changing so that more of the decision making is being done by those who administer the cooperatives, rather than those who are the members. The interests of the large farmers then take precedence. Small- to moderate-sized farmers will have to assert their rightful power before it is too late.

• Building up local efforts is a key ingredient to make for strong farm organizations. The real action does not happen only from the leadership of a group. Good leaders will recognize that the strength of an organization lies in its membership and will do everything possible to build up local efforts.

16

Practicing An Agriculture For Sustainable Communities

After visiting West Africa, and seeing the physical deterioration of the environment and how the carrying capacity of the land has been exceeded, I came back to rural America convinced that sustainable agriculture is no longer an option, but an imperative. People of the land must live in a balance with the reproductive ability of the soil. Also, after seeing the deterioration of living conditions in West Africa and how a way of life is being lost, I came back convinced that agriculture needs to be practiced in such a way as to make for sustainable communities. People of the land must take efforts to sustain a healthy soil and a healthy culture. The following sections seek to propose ways in which this can happen.

Taking A New Look At Technology And People

Industrial agriculture and sustainable agriculture are two different models of farming. The first perspective holds up mechanized efficiency as the ideal in which the best of all possible farms uses the least labor to produce the most amount of goods. Capital, in the form of technology, replaces human labor. The removal of farmers from the land is one of its chief characteristics; people and community are sacrificed for technology.

In speaking at the **1988 National Conference of Rural Ministry** (mentioned in Chapter 2), former Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz made a telling remark about the nature of industrial agriculture when he spoke glowingly of the Japanese system. "There they just move workers from here to there wherever they are needed," Butz asserted. In his framework, workers are like so many parts in a machine that can be interchanged or disposed of. A closer look at the highly competitive Japanese system reveals that workers are docile, rationally educated in technology, and compelled to work long hours. Unions do not allow resistance or complaining. There is violence in the home and school because of intense pressure. For Butz, farmers are expendable in the same way as workers in the Japanese factories. Likewise farmers suffer from the same assault on their dignity.

Practicing an agriculture that makes for sustainable communities, on the other hand, holds that technology must serve people, and not the other way around. The dignity of people, as individuals and as members of a community, must be preserved. In essence, sustainable agriculture is a willingness to live within limits. Therefore, technology must be appropriate to the people, the locale, and the situation. Good farming respects the carrying capacity of the land and of its people and only takes as much as can be replaced.

To suggest, as I have done in chapters 2 and 12, that the small-scale agriculture of West Africa shows the possibility for social change seems to propose a quantum leap in mental gymnastics. After all, gardening is not the same as farming, but gardening demonstrates a recognition of limits. Industrial agriculture refuses to believe that its days of dependence on capital and energy are numbered. West Africa has seen the ravages of a European industrial agriculture that sought to turn the countryside into a mass producer of export crops for Europe. The careful attentiveness to building up the soil, the constant awareness that technology must be appropriate, and the ongoing search for self-reliance — all required in intensive gardening — speaks of the lessons that industrial agriculture has ignored.

Farmers hear how sustainable agriculture works at the Pulveracher farm.

Carl and Cathy Pulveracher of Lone Rock, Wisconsin practice sustainable agriculture. Nearly 200 people came to their farm for a Rural Development Center Field Day in November 1987. Carl told how 12 years earlier he had worked as a management trainee for a nationwide agricultural-chemical co-op trying to convince farmers that the answers to their pest and yield problems came with the increased use of chemicals and fertilizers.

Now Pulveracher grows 160-bushel corn per acre without purchased nitrogen, phosphate, and potash, at a cost of $1.08 a bushel. "The average 50-cow dairy farmer doesn't need to spend $5,000 to $10,000 a year on inputs. My yields are as good as my neighbors, but at the end of the year, I have that money that they do not," Pulveracher stated. He asserted that he can grow corn without herbicides by relying upon crop rotations, and the use of a John Deere 400 rotary hoe and a four-row International Harvester cultivator equipped with a used set of disk hillers.

Carl Pulveracher shared his philosophy with homespun wisdom. "You can see the whole cycle in the top of a pail of milk. You feed the cows, put the manure on the fields, plant and harvest the crops, feed the cows, milk them, and the circle continues," Pulveracher said. When asked, if a farmer can afford to go the route of sustainable agriculture, he responded, "How can you afford not to? It is like sustaining a marriage. Sometimes, you take your wife out for Friday night fish fry even if the corn is ready to pick. You do it, because it is the right thing to do."

Diversifying Crops And Livestock

An old proverb states, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." Industrial agriculture has ignored this piece of wisdom. The common rule of thumb under Earl Butz was for an ambitious farmer to be 80% leveraged and 20% liquid. Under his urging to plant fencerow to fencerow, many farmers abandoned a combination of livestock and crops and planted only corn and soybeans, or wheat and barley. Now the house of cards has come tumbling down, as those who were highly dependent upon finance and technology are now either bankrupt or approaching it. Industrial agriculture is too expensive to be sustainable.

Dr. Richard Rodefeld, Economist in the Marketing Division, at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, made a case for agricultural diversification and specialty crops while speaking during the **1987 Gaining Ground in the Rural Heartland Conference** at Wisconsin Dells. Rodefeld pointed out that Wisconsin has 60% of all gross income from dairying, 15% from cash crops, 15% from livestock, and 10% from everything else. Wisconsin is one of the most specialized agricultural states, in that dairying is so dominant. "I think we are vulnerable in being so closely tied to one commodity. We could benefit from diversification," Rodefeld contended.

In addition Rodefeld cited other reasons for diversification including the following: reduce agricultural imports now used for food and industrial purposes; reduce surplus acres of federally supported feed grains by diverting crop acreage or by utilizing grains for alternative livestock; provide additional income and profit opportunities; take advantage of high growth rates expected for specialty foods; and to strengthen rural economies. The report he helped to draw up, *Specialty Crops and the Diversification of Wisconsin Agriculture,* gave detailed profiles — as well as major constraints — on more than 40 alternatives, including blueberries, canola, crambe, organic grains, loganberries, lupins, sotkes aster, aquaculture, goats, horses, poultry, rabbits, sheep, turtles, Asian vegetables, flowers, maple syrup, shiitake mushrooms, tree farming, wildlife, and wood lots.

Growing Food For Local And Regional Markets

Another problem with industrial agriculture is its dependence upon extensive transportation. For instance, the Northeast currently imports three-fourths of what it eats. Most of the fruits and vegetables are produced in Florida, California, or the Southwest. To illustrate the vulnerability of this system, imagine what would happen if a truckers' strike shut down the shipment of food products, or if terrorists blew up a handful of bridges on the Mississippi River. Even if these events seem unlikely, they still demonstrate how the food production system is not as strong as it seems. A scenario with a greater possibility is an escalation of gas prices to the point of making food products increasingly expensive.

Small entrepreneurs are growing food for local and regional markets. The Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool (CROPP) was set up in Viroqua, Wisconsin to assist local farmers in developing coordinated marketing, production, and processing of premium market produce. CROPP focuses on marketing of fresh produce — which are grown according to certified organic standards — to LaCrosse, Milwaukee, and Chicago. CROPP also started up a kind of limited processing facility so that the marketing season and the potential market can be expanded. Reggie Pityer, an organizer of the project, explained, "Communities and banks get excited. A project like this gets the money coming back into the community and stabilizes land values. Also it is a way to keep farmers on the land."

Conclusion

In his address at the **1987 Statewide Conference on Sustainable Agriculture,** at Stevens Point, Lowell Klessig identified the following benefits of sustainable agriculture: less soil compaction and more land conservation, less rain runoff and more rain saturation, less stream sedimentation, less pesticide residue in stream waters, protection from groundwater contamination, reduced pesticide drift and wind erosion, more food and cover for wildlife, and improved farmland aesthetics. Sustainable agriculture also encourages less absentee ownership, more family operations, lower debt loads, and better health for farmers. Sustainable agriculture improves the communities by keeping farmers on the land so that they can support businesses, schools, churches, clubs, and stronger rural democracy. Strong rural communities contribute to important traditions and values, including land stewardship, pride in producing a quality product, and community involvement.

17

Bringing About Community Economic Development

The survival of strong local economies is crucial to the continued viability of our rural communities. Without strong community economies, people do not have close access to goods and services. When people conduct their economic affairs at home, the money is turned over in the local economy; when people do the bulk of their business outside of the local area, the money is drawn out of the circle of exchange.

In the midst of the rural crisis, family businesses are facing the same threat to their survival as are family farms. Cheap raw materials as a public policy has contributed to the loss of small- to moderate-sized farms. Without a fair price for their products, farmers are experiencing an increasingly difficult time to meet the cost of production and to earn a decent living. Cheap raw materials as a personal and social policy is now contributing to the decline of family businesses. When price and quantity become the sole factors in the choice of where to shop, the small- to moderate-sized businesses of the area often lose out.

Consistently taking business outside of the area is being penny wise and pound foolish. Consider what happens when there are no longer the same variety of local businesses to provide goods and services. Think of what rural communities are like when independent business people can no longer earn a living and make valuable contributions to the community. Look at the larger social costs of people being displaced from the rural areas.

We do not want our rural areas to be sucked dry by the outward flow of capital. We want our communities to be enhanced with a constant exchange of local money. A renewed sense of civic pride and loyalty can turn this financial and human drain around and revitalize our local economies. Following are three cases of people who are bringing about community development.

Revitalization Is Goal Of Community Economics

What is community economic development? First of all, the goal has to do with people — who share a common history, values, hopes and dreams — living and working in *community*. People in community are given a responsibility for making a place to live and work characterized by decency and respect. This management of resources for the benefit of all can be called *economics*. The best kind of economics orders the relationships in such a way so that people maintain a sense of dignity in the midst of peace and justice. With this understanding of community and economics, *development* takes on a different perspective from the normal definition. A new bottom line measures success in more than dollars and cents, and returns on investments. People and their values become equally important. Revitalization has to do as much with the human spirit as with material resources.

At a **1987 Gaining Ground In The Heartland Conference** at Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, Steve Webster spoke of community economic development in his presentation on *Harvesting Hometown Jobs*. He brought a background as a business development coordinator for the Wisconsin Community Development Finance Authority. On the one hand, Webster asserted that community economic development (CED) can be defined by what it is *not*. CED is not chasing after smokestacks. Rather than trying to lure industries away from other communities, CED starts at home with the local resources in order to pre-

vent plant closings and retain the industrial base. CED seeks to have a community become more self-reliant in order not to be as vulnerable to the movement of industry.

CED is not bringing in franchises. Chain stores export an average of 70% of the dollars earned from the local community. CED is not pet rocks in which only one person gets rich. CED, on the other hand, seeks to strengthen the whole economy by creating jobs, training workers, and circulating the money in the community. CED is not chasing out the poor and elderly and removing older houses. Bringing in people with money is one way to improve neighborhoods, but not necessarily the best. CED seeks to improve communities of a mixed population without displacing people.

Webster offered what community economic development *is*. CED is creating more and better jobs with a special priority for low-income people, unemployed, and underemployed. CED is strengthening communities by developing consensus building in the form of community-based organizations, credit unions, congregations, and cultural institutions. CED is providing opportunities for participation in worker ownership, democratic management of new businesses, community institutions, and political and planning processes. CED is increasing available goods and services in order to improve both the business environment and the quality of life. CED is turning dependency into independence so that welfare and unemployment can be changed into ventures that invest and create new opportunities for low-income people. CED is analyzing issues, making long-term plans, and developing leaders.

Steve Webster cited Barneveld, Wisconsin as an example of this kind of community economic development. In 1984, much of the community was destroyed by a tornado. Afterwards, the people had a choice to make. They could try the quick fix by persuading a big firm to move in and offer jobs to the residents, or they could build upon their local resources. They decided against the first approach when they realized that not many firms are looking to relocate, and the firms which are looking to move would be dislocated from another community. Instead, they decided to work on retaining local firms. All except two decided to rebuild; those two were owned by outside interests. Residents also helped to expand local firms and develop new businesses. A place, which started out with emergency feeding of people after the tornado, became Betsy's Kitchen and now employs 45 people.

Employing A Strategy For Development

Bryce Luchterhand believes that leadership training is essential to community economic development. A farmer who works part-time as the Northern Wisconsin Field Organizer for the Wisconsin Rural Development Center, Luchterhand takes a grassroots approach to his work. He employs the following principles on rural development:

- Base development on local values.
- Involve the entire community in the development process.
- Initiate and lead development process, rather than simply react to outside forces.
- Shape new development to complement existing development.
- Work for a high degree of local control where possible.
- Do not foster a dependency on outside capital.
- Find ways to keep earnings in the local area.
- Place a priority on the diversification of the economy.

Goal setting is also a key ingredient in carrying out economic development. In his Northwestern Wisconsin Revitalization Project, he offered the first-year potential goals:

- Build a vision for the area's economic revitalization.

Step one — Identify values that people want to see reflected in their local economy.

Step two — Think of ways to involve the overall community in the process.
- Start a network of people committed to the vision.

Step one — Interview a broad diversity of local people.
Step two — Form an initial sponsoring committee.
Step three — Begin process to broaden leadership base.
- Develop initial strategies and resources to implement the vision.

Step one — Identify internal sources (congregations, businesses, utilities, and others) and external sources (foundations and church bodies) to fund the project.
Step two — Interview and build relationships with state, regional, and local institutions that can provide different kinds of assistance.
Step three — Based on all of the above, choose the initial directions, progress, and projects to move overall project ahead.

Church Has Role In Community Economic Development

Church people are coming to see how they have a role to play in revitalization. Sandra Simonson discovered this when she received a call from people at Caroline, Wisconsin. Simonson, who works for Lutheran Social Services in setting up support groups, realized early on that this was a different type of request. In the small town of 300, the cheese factory had just closed, the implement dealer had moved out of town into another area, and the feed mill looked like it would not stay open much longer. The town was in shock. Simonson was called and asked to come and help them out. She approached the initial community meeting with the idea of assisting the people in coming to terms with the losses they had suffered and of enabling them to address the issues of community survival.

Simonson also arranged for resource people to be there, because, in her experience, she found that rural people often are unaware of the helping agencies that are available. At the meeting, a good cross section of community people came. She shared her life situation and the difficulties she had overcome. This self-disclosure permitted people to open up and discuss their own circumstances. Later Simonson handed out a survey of interests and responsibilities. Some decided to start a support group.

A resource person agreed to meet with some of the unemployed and to help them look for work. Those people formed another support group. A group of eight people volunteered to plan for future meetings and to take a look at community development. People signed up for forty-two items on the responsibility list. One idea was to find someone to take over an electrical business from a man about to retire; in this way they could keep the business in the community. "We planted the seeds so that people could think of ideas and take responsibility for implementing them," Simonson stated.

The church can be involved in a number of other ways. Local congregations are often the institutions best suited to focus community organizing efforts and to furnish continuity. The congregations can be community catalysts in establishing broad-based coalitions as well as sources of volunteers in order to fill community leadership roles and to contribute technical and administrative counsel. Congregations can draw on the resources of the larger church family in the quest for grant funds to undergird organizing and planning by community groups. Congregations can also seek loans from national agencies, while larger church bodies can be benevolent investors in pursuit of democratic development goals.

18

Carrying Out The Church's Ministry Of Social Conscience

To conclude Part IV, *Developing Ways To Live In Community,* I would like to ask, "What role does the church have to play?" This chapter suggests ten ways in which the church can do some of its best work by carrying out a ministry of social conscience.

Balancing Personal Fulfillment And The Common Good (Mark 8:34-37)

The problem of changing aimless transition in the countryside into purposeful development cannot be solved without a commitment to the common good. In an article, entitled *A New Human Settlement Pattern* (CENCOAD, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, S.D., April 1971), Dr. E. W. Mueller, a long-time Lutheran leader in the Town and Country Movement, asserted that the self-interest of individuals and groups has prevented more progress in this direction.

> What hinders people in the heartland from achieving quality of life is not a lack of know-how in economic development but the absence of a value system that balances self-interest with group concern. Citizens can identify their individual goals but few can articulate the goals they have for their town, county, area, or state. (page 25)

Dr. Mueller stated that the economic forces have pitted individuals against each other to such an extent that group goals have gone unexpressed. Competition has prevented community development. The church is called to a ministry of holding up the common good, persuading citizens to consider the well-being of the community, and working for goals that benefit the many rather than the few.

Towards An Appropriate Use of Power (Matthew 20:20-28)

Power is the ability or capability to act or perform effectively. To use power appropriately is to empower others to employ their personal abilities in order to contribute to the common good. To use power appropriately is also to share power for decision making and in assuming responsibilities. At times an appropriate use may require a person or group to relinquish power gracefully in order that others might share in the power. One person who understood an appropriate use of power was Pastor Andrew Boe. Boe served at Concordia Lutheran Church in Superior, Wisconsin from 1924 to 1957. His son Pastor Paul Boe recounted how the elder Boe was heavily involved in the community, because he believed that the congregation had a significant role to play. Andrew Boe helped to promote the building of a hospital as well as low-income housing. During the time of the Depression, he worked with the unions and the cooperative movement, even though that was not a popular thing to do at the time. When Andrew Boe died in 1957, it was amazing who came to the funeral. Paul Boe recalls how in the midst of all the people in attendance, a street person in shabby attire paid his last respects by saying, "He was an old friend of mine." Andrew Boe exerted a tremendous influence in the church and community during his tenure, but his ministry demonstrated that he never abused that power.

Grassroots Decision Making (Luke 22:24-27)

A church's ministry of social conscience can also witness to a grassroots decision making, which tends to serve rather than govern, favoring non-bureaucratic, community-based interests and processes. An effective modeling of this happened when Pastor Paul Tobiason of Strum, Wisconsin served a previous parish in Iowa. Tobiason recounted how

some of the people in the community came to him with grievances against the local school system. He volunteered to approach school officials and to ask for an open hearing in order to allow both sides to speak their piece to each other. In the process, Tobiason served as a mediator in setting up the meeting and in chairing the event. When the two sides were making good progress, he was able to pull back and to allow them to carry on their dialog. Such a leadership style revealed the importance of assuming power, when needed, and relinquishing power, when needed. The church is often in a key place in rural communities to mediate such differences and to enable effective decision making.

Effective Communication (2 Corinthians 15:16-6:6)

Everyone faces crises and struggles in their lives at one time or another. People often know God is with them. Sometimes they are less aware that one of the ways God is with them is through other people, congregations, and communities. A listening-skills workshop in Eastern North Dakota trains people in depth listening so that they can minister to each other. With the rural crisis profoundly affecting so many in that area, the listening workshop *Caring Ministries With Rural People In Transition,* has been adapted to address rural issues, communicating to people that there is still hope. The workshop allows people to practice listening in an active, rather than a passive, way. When people learn to listen to each other, together they can go beyond their problems and pain to healing and to new life.

A Place For People To Best Use Their Talents (Romans 12:1-21)

One of the greatest wastes has to do with human resources not being used to their full potential. On the other side of the coin, one of the greatest challenges comes in creatively liberating people so that they can think and act for themselves in a critical dialog with others. In this way a new community setting can be created in which it is easier to trust, laugh, and love. As an editor of a volunteer-operated community newspaper, I was conscious of trying to bring out the best in people. Many of our writers and photographers dramatically improved their skills from issue to issue. I was also aware of enabling people to find a niche in order to work within their limits. Some workers did not want to write articles or to take pictures, but took a great deal of personal satisfaction out of selling advertising, doing layout, drawing, typesetting, and bookkeeping. Part of my job was to help the workers know that they were making a valuable contribution to an important community effort.

Relationship Building (Galations 3:28)

In what ways can the church combine the tradition of the past and the wisdom of the present in a collaborative way in order to make for healing of relationships? Robbi Rudiger of Prairie Farm, Wisconsin combines her background as a Lutheran parish pastor and her work as a marriage therapist to point out that communities, like families, need to be viewed as networks of people, rather than as collections of individuals. Progress is made when people relate to each other in more healthy ways within a system. She also suggests that now is the time to recover the concept of the *parish.* In this way the congregation looks beyond its own individual membership and takes responsibility for a surrounding area and its people. Such a framework could help the congregation to better define its life and mission. The church is called to live out the spirit of inclusiveness that promotes wholeness in the midst of diversity and honors the distinctive gifts of all persons and groups.

Christ And Culture (Matthew 22:15-22)

In rural communities two important institutions are the church and the school. How should the church relate to public institutions like the school? One Lutheran statement describes the tension as "institutional separation and functional interaction." The church and the school maintain distinct identities, while they relate to each other in certain areas. The relationship of church and school ranges from accomodating to adversarial.

In many communities, the influence of the school is becoming more dominant, while the importance of the church, as well as the home, is diminishing. Two examples show how this is the case. In the area of social skills development, the school is expected to deal with areas of personal decision making that have normally been reserved for the church and home. The argument goes like this: "These kids are not learning adequate social skills at the home or church, so somebody should do it. Why not have the schools take on that job?" In the extracurricular area, participation in an increasing number of activities consumes more of the students' time and energy, leaving less for the home and the church. While each new subject matter and extracurricular offering may be good in itself, the net effect of such expansion can be that the spheres of the church and home are undermined.

Two avenues can be used to carry on the necessary dialog on these and other matters. A ministerial association shares concerns with school officials and discusses ways to work together. A parents-and-teachers organization provides a way for the school to be working in conjunction with the home, rather than at cross purposes.

Clarifying Norms And Values (Matthew 5:1-12)

The theological task of clarifying norms and values is an ongoing responsibility. The dilemmas faced by farmers, for instance, need to be addressed. Farmers live with a number of double messages. The person on the next farm is seen as a competitor, not a neighbor. The land is seen as real estate and an investment, not as a gift from God or a place. What farmers produce — food and fiber to feed and clothe God's people — are seen as commodities. Farmers themselves are business people needing to survive and make a profit but are also to be stewards of God's gifts and caretakers of the earth.

An Option For The Poor (Luke 18:18-25)

In his commentary on **Building Economic Justice: The Bishop's Pastoral and Tools for Action** at the 1988 Luther Northwestern Seminary Pastors' Convocation, Archbishop Robert Weakland of Milwaukee, Wisconsin asserted that one cannot talk about community without speaking of justice and the common good. Weakland, who headed up the project to write the pastoral letter, pointed out how the Bible declares that the widows, orphans, sojourners, and those who have no rights must be cared for. This is the basis of the option for the poor. Weakland told how the Roman Catholic Church is becoming more conscious of its catholicity because of the witness of Third World people. "Hearing from the bishops in Africa made us aware that we live in a global village," Weakland said. In addition, Weakland called attention to the discrepancy between the rich and the poor and asserted that the greatest challenge of today is the responsible use of wealth.

The First Will Be Last, And The Last First (Matthew 19:30)

A ministry of social conscience may seem unwanted and unappreciated. Later the test of time may vindicate the one who has persevered. This happened for Pastor Ron Nordin of Edgar, Wisconsin. A member of his congregation confessed to Pastor Terry Peterson, a staff member of the Northern Wisconsin District of the American Lutheran Church, that some years earlier she was offended when Nordin brought up all the problems farmers were experiencing. She thought that the church had no business in those matters; now she was glad that her pastor had the foresight to call attention to a rural crisis that affects everybody. There is assurance in knowing that God does not necessarily call the church to be successful, but he does call his people to be faithful.

Part V

An Invitation To People Of Conscience

Perhaps life is not a race whose only goal is being foremost. Perhaps true felicity does not lie in continually outgoing the next before. Perhaps the truth lies in what most of the world outside the modern West has always believed, namely that there are practices of life, good in themselves, that are inherently fulfilling. Perhaps work that is intrinsically rewarding is better for human beings than work that is only extrinsically rewarded. Perhaps enduring commitment to those we love and civic friendship toward our fellow citizens are preferable to restless competition and anxious self-defense. Perhaps common worship, in which we express our gratitude and wonder in the face of the mystery of being itself, is the most important thing of all. If so, we will have to change our lives and begin to remember what we have been happier to forget.

—**Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life** by Robert Bellah, et. al. (page 295)

19

A Case For Community In An Age Of Individualism

Rural people live in the midst of one of the major moral dilemmas of our society: a conflict between rugged individualism and a pressing need for community. The kinds of responses made to this question will determine the character of social life. I would like to make a case for community in an age of individualism by urging movement along two spectrums: *From Competition Towards Cooperation* and *From Contract Towards Covenant.*

Moving From Competition Towards Cooperation

What does it profit a person to gain the whole world but lose one's soul? This challenge by Jesus of Nazareth speaks precisely to the allegiance of competition as the dogma of life. An official optimism, inherent in the competition perspective, maintains that people are motivated by self-interest and not accountable to a higher power. This economic and social ideology purports to allow individuals to run their course. In the end, an invisible hand is supposed to make for a benevolent good. Those who work hard and exert discipline will succeed, while those who do not make it are thought to lack ability and initiative. The problem with the official optimism of competition is its blindness to the harsh realities. Suffering and pain are ignored or minimized. Bonds that hold people together are stretched to their breaking point. The fiercely independent are isolated. Personal and communal life loses its dignity. As the teacher from Galilee states, those who try to save their lives will in the end lose them, and those who lose their lives for others will save them.

This separation can be seen most clearly in the role differences between men and women. The rugged individualism — which seeks to break free of the confines of obligations and responsibilities within the physical and social environment in order to reach the higher orbit of independent success and achievement — is unattractively masculine. Men have often abdicated to women the task of caring for others and binding together. Women are assumed to do this without being given an equal share in the decision-making power. Men and women are then separate and unequal. Some women have sought equality by playing the masculine contest in the battle of survival. How much better it would be if men would consider compassion and solidarity as what it means to be genuinely human, and women would insist upon greater collaboration in shaping the character of community life.

Moving from competition towards cooperation — by breaking down the separation between men and women and by making for a shared participation in community life — can unleash a power hereto not realized nor imagined possible. Cooperation requires a risking of energies and emotions in a concern for the common good, a giving of personal interest to the community welfare, and a working together with people who have accepted the invitation to social involvement.

In losing one's life in the lives of others, the true meaning and purpose of life is found. Then brothers and sisters can demonstrate that the dignity of the soul comes when individuals live out their lives in such a way that the people of the whole world experience a sense of community.

Moving From Contract Towards Covenant

What can a person give in exchange for the soul? This question by Jesus of Nazareth challenges the prevalent view of communal life as nothing more than a social contract. In this contractual way of relating, the members of a group join ranks to attain certain goals. The relationships that are established are regarded as means to an end, rather than as ends in themselves. The individual is of primary importance. The community is considered to be an artificial construct. Community arises from a contract into which individuals enter for the purpose of advancing their personal concerns. Human life is viewed as an effort by individuals to maximize their self-interest. In a gathering of like-minded individuals, the union depends entirely on their spontaneous needs and desires.

An example of how this would work in motivating community involvement is in appealing to the immediate interests of people. People show enterprise and commitment in proportion to the positive impact that the group effort has on the quality of their lives. When they can see that they benefit from the effort, then they are enthusiastic, and enthusiasm enables continued involvement. Conversely, when people see no benefit for themselves, they are naturally lukewarm and even hostile to the group leaders.

I cannot dispute the fact that, to a certain extent, this approach has been an effective way of generating interest in group efforts. But the problem comes in building the long-term commitment that will overcome the inevitable frustrations, conflicts, and defeats when people work together. When each action must constantly be analyzed in terms of its cost/benefit ratio for the individual participants, then the risk and hope, so necessary for living out a vision of community, are severely undermined. Purely contractual arrangements lack the moral content that gives people the certainty and confidence they need to count on each other in tough times.

The teacher from Galilee states that people are called to live under a moral imperative, in which individuals are grasped by an interconnection bigger than themselves. Cohesiveness depends upon people who will accept the responsibility to watch out for each other, because that is necessary for the good life. The person who responds to such an invitation sees all of life as a vocation. Through that life's work, a person's identity is secured. An individual becomes fulfilled by living in community, rather than over against it. A responsibility to society is not a burden to be avoided, but a challenge to be accepted.

Only such a covenant of dedication can make for a continuity of generations in which people living in community honor the memory of those who have gone before and respect the inheritance of those who will come after. This common bond unites people of the past, present, and future. In these practices of commitment, life in community can be sustained.

Conclusion

The highly personal outlook of life is so deeply ingrained in the North American experience that I have no illusions about individualism being replaced by altruism, nor am I arguing for such a dramatic reversal in the social fabric. I am arguing that, if rural communities are to be strengthened, its members will have to learn to balance personal agendas with the common good. I have tried to show throughout this book that such growth is possible. Many people are discovering that, in becoming concerned for the whole, the various parts are given meaning and significance.

20

Living Out A Vision For Community

In their book, **Defining America: A Christian Critique of the American Dream**, Robert Benne and Philip Hefner tell how a statement, common to the traditional Sioux prayer garden, speaks of two roads. One road starts in the South where the power to grow lives, goes straight North across the Hoop of the World to the region of white hairs and the cold of death; this is the good red road of spiritual understanding. Another road starts in the East where the days of humanity begin, crosses the Hoop, and finishes in the West where the days of humanity end; this is the hard black road of worldly difficulties.

At the point where the good red road of spiritual understanding crosses the hard black road of worldly difficulties, that place is called holy; those who come to that place meet the Holy. Such a vision, as expressed in the Sioux prayer, is, in many ways, commensurate with the Christian vision of community, Benne and Hefner claim. They assert that America is at the intersection of these two roads. For America to realize its best vision of itself, they believe, America must travel the good red road of spiritual understanding with *A Sense Of Belonging* and the hard black road of worldly difficulties with *A Mutuality Of Caring*.

A Sense Of Belonging

In this chapter I would like to speak of rural America at the intersection of these two roads. To live in community, with a sense of belonging, is to engage in close personal relationships. People meet each other face to face. They might not always like what they see, but they can not be indifferent. Rural communities are often like families. Families are bound together by blood, while communities are bound together by belonging. The relationships may be characterized by affection and devotion, or by animosity and distrust. Either way, people in rural communities are involved in each other's lives. Like the primary family group at its best, the small rural community offers intimacy and security.

A sense of belonging provides a natural vehicle for carrying culture. The small rural community has a territorial identity with a town or village. The awareness of place pervades the territory; oftentimes, buildings and tracts of land are referred to by the names of the first settlers, even though the original owners may have died years ago. Elders recount the history with a richness of accumulated stories. In this way rural people look ahead to the future most effectively when the memories of the past have kept alive a sense of belonging.

In a rural community, at its best, homegrowns and transplants live and work together. Like a family that knows how to welcome members into its midst, not only by birth, but also by adoption and marriage, a healthy rural community extends hospitality to transplants who can bring diversity to a collection of homegrowns. This solidarity of social friendship and civic commitment makes moral and economic life possible. Homegrowns and transplants are enriched, not in isolation from each other, but in interaction with each other.

A Mutuality Of Caring

A mutuality of caring is demonstrated by a sensitivity to human dynamics and a toughness in the midst of difficult circumstances. The network of caring people is the strength of small rural communities. It is not only personally satisfying; it encourages participation. Caring is not always gentle, but it is genuine. People sense a responsibility to each other

based upon the fact that many have known each other for a lifetime — some families for generations. Relationships are loaded with feelings and filtered by experiences.

In the midst of the rural crisis, many people live with pain and anguish. People who have their survival threatened often live in fear. Desperate people sometimes take desperate actions. One cannot always predict what people motivated by fear will do. Oftentimes rural communities adopt a code of silence in which, like a band of thieves, they have the goods on each other, so that everybody shuts up. A sensitivity to human dynamics believes that healing comes by penetrating the despair in the search for greater understanding and empathy. A toughness in the midst of difficult circumstances calls for a willingness to risk being misunderstood and rejected as a part of the work.

A mutuality of caring is characterized by people taking control over their own lives. People who are affected by the decision making are those who ought to be making the decisions. A collective vision of what is best for the community propels people of good will to take responsibility and leadership. This proactive thinking and behavior gets away from the reactive posture of complaining and rebelling. A mutuality of caring aims to carry out a decentralized process of social change.

Hope provides the buoyancy in a mutuality of caring. A sense of urgency is matched by humor and playfulness. A common habit in community building is to be quite demanding of each other in the name of a noble cause. Such high expectations need to be accompanied by affirmation and encouragement, lightheartedness and laughter. People cannot use each other up. When people delight in each other's company and take joy in collaborative efforts, the ongoing work proves to be sustaining.

Much of society today is consumed with personal actualization. Many today accentuate individuality, perhaps out of the belief that the person makes no difference. With this sense of social impotence, the needs of self have become easier to define and address. The energy of many is directed towards the pursuit of individual reward. Aggressive materialism of today is unusual in the degree to which it has turned to conspicuous consumption.

To live out a vision of community in the midst of this milieu is to witness to an alternative view of reality. The dignity of the individual comes in community. To ignite a social conscience is certainly a formidable challenge. This is the challenge to which people of good will are invited to give themselves in the interests of others. Confidence and anticipation carry on a mutuality of caring even when it does not seem the thing to do.

Conclusion

Perseverance is as important as vision for living in community. Strengthening our rural communities is an effort for the long haul. When times get tough, people living in community can remind each other of the dream and renew a collective sense of being on the way in pursuit of such a vision. The Old Testament prophet Habakuk speaks an ancient word for a modern day, "For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end — it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay." (Habakuk 2:3). Participants in community building derive energy and support from involvement, and this energy is transferred to others. By taking action, people of good will intensify, not only commitment to strengthening our rural communities, but also the possibilities of bringing it about.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 1 The Day The Farmers Store Burned Down

1.) Interview older citizens to find out important events in the life of your community.
2.) Research the history of the American Indians in your area.
3.) What is the importance of hope and memory as catalysts for community?

Chapter 2 Rural America Is Becoming Like A Third World Country

1.) The author makes connections between rural America and West Africa. Do you believe such assertions are valid? Why or why not?
2.) With whom do you most closely identify — Berkely Bedell or Earl Butz? Explain.
3.) In this chapter and throughout the book, the relationship of men and women is addressed as a key factor in community building. What has been your experience?

Chapter 3 A Volunteer-Operated *Hay River Review* Is Started

1.) What key ingredients do you see as essential in taking on a new venture?
2.) What are the benefits in community building? What are some of the problems?

Chapter 4 Citizens Address The Question Of Schools' Future

1.) The residents of Ridgeland and Dallas voted against a proposed new building. If such an issue had come up in your school district, how would you have voted?
2.) How important is the school to the life of a rural community?
3.) Attend a school board meeting in order to understand the decision-making process.

Chapter 5 Neighboring And Cooperation Help People Live In Community

1.) How would you answer the question, "What is a neighbor?" How does your answer compare to that given by Helene Rhodes?
2.) Invite a speaker from a local support and resource group to tell about the work.
3.) Discuss how your community could set up a waste recycling project.

Chapter 6 Cooperative Efforts Keep Farmers On The Land

1.) This chapter tells how a community rallied around the family of Char Radintz when her family's barn burned down. What does this say about cooperative efforts?
2.) Pam Saunders, in her article on *Farmers Recover The Art Of Sharing,* quotes LaVern Nedland as saying, "Before World War II everyone just felt a responsibility to make sure that everyone's work got done." Saunders also states, "It need not take a tragedy or special hardship for folks to come together to share work, according to these two farmers." Give some thought as to how neighboring and cooperation can be improved in your community.

Chapter 7 Exploring The Biblical Witness

1.) Explore further each of the biblical passages cited in the chapter. How do they witness to forgiveness, unity, and compassion; reconciliation, vision, and justice?
2.) What additional biblical themes speak to the subject of building community?
3.) Discuss the relationship between *The Church Called Together By The Word* and *The Church Called Out Into The World.*

Chapter 8 The Church At Work In Building Rural Community

1.) List some of the myths you see as standing in the way of the church being more effectively involved in the community.
2.) What unique strengths does the rural church possess in building community?
3.) Start an adult forum at your church; plan and carry out a community project.

Chapter 9 An Intentional Community Demonstrates Interdependence

1.) How much group structure do you think is necessary for good decision making?
2.) What did you learn from this intentional community about resolution of conflict?

Chapter 10 Christians In Central America Put Faith Into Action

1.) Sister Delores takes issue with much of traditional education. Do you agree or disagree? What do you think of her *learning is doing* approach?
2.) What unique experiences do Christians in Central America have to offer?
3.) How could you form a cooperative in your community?

Chapter 11 Two Racial Groups Retain Identity Through Community

1.) How does suffering draw people together?
2.) What responsibilities do White people have to Indians and Black Americans?
3.) Invite a person of color to speak to your group about living in community.

Chapter 12 Learning From Village Life In West Africa

1.) Why do you think villagers of West Africa are so generous with their hospitality?
2.) Order the videotape, *When the Harvest Comes,* on dry season gardening and other development efforts in Niger, and discuss this example of interdependence.
3.) How can principles of development in West Africa be applied to rural America?

Chapter 13 Examining The Dynamics Of Community Life

1.) The author suggests that many communities can be characterized by public amiability and private disharmony. Is this true of your community? Explain.
2.) Do an analysis of the power structure in your community by asking, "Who makes things happen around here?" What are the various sources of power at work?

Chapter 14 Enabling Participatory Democracy

1.) Who are some people you would say are Dreamers, Igniters, and Builders? How are they effective in building community? Where do your strengths lie?
2.) The author suggests that the answer to *What Constitutes Success*? comes in the form of *Balancing Personal Fulfillment And The Common Good*? Do you agree or disagree? How would you define personal fulfillment? The common good?
3.) Discuss a recent issue in your community. How were cooperation, competition, and conflict at work? What do you see as appropriate ways to gain and use power?
4.) In what ways can you look beyond the horizon to address larger social concerns?

Chapter 15 Inspiring Farm Activism On The Local Level

1.) The author contends that clarity of goals in the public arena are needed for farm activism. The areas addressed are price, credit, land stewardship, and the family farm. What goals do you see as important? How would you carry them out?
2.) Why are support groups for farmers increasing in number? How would you go about starting one in your area? What kinds of activities would your group do?
3.) In what ways can you and others assume greater decision-making power and responsibility in agriculture cooperatives and farm organizations?

Chapter 16 Practicing An Agriculture For Sustainable Communities

1.) How does the practice of agriculture affect the character of communities? Do farm people have a responsibility beyond their own operation?
2.) Look at the food in your refrigerator. Make a list of the food you ate in the last week. Where did your food come from originally? Do you think diversified farming and direct marketing should be encouraged?

Chapter 17 Bringing About Community Economic Development

1.) What resources does your group have that could be put to use for development?
2.) Brainstorm about possible community economic development efforts in the areas of housing and land use; job preservation and creation; service-linked development; recycling, energy, and exchange; investment and purchasing; food and farming.

Chapter 18 Carrying Out The Church's Ministry of Social Conscience

1.) Study the biblical passages cited in the chapter and do a study on how the various texts speak to carrying out the church's ministry of social conscience.
2.) In what ways can the church be a mediator in the midst of various factions in order to bring about greater understanding and more effective decision making?

Chapter 19 A Case For Community In An Age Of Individualism

1.) The author contends that the dignity of the individual is realized in community. Do you agree or disagree? How can you make for greater cooperation?
2.) What do you see as the difference between contract and covenant?

Chapter 20 Living Out A Vision For Community

1.) In what ways do you experience a sense of belonging in your community?
2.) How do you intend to live out your vision for community by a mutuality of caring?

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Strengthening Our Rural Communities

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Northwest Synod Of Wisconsin
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