WITNESS MAGAZINE

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MAY 2002

BUILDING COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

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on the cover

Painted people wall

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LETTERS

Remember the value of human life

In the context of the rapid escalation of conflict in Palestine and Israel, we at the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center remember the call of the prophet Micah to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. In the spirit of this call, we ask the global community to raise one voice together:

- To intervene and bring to an end the present deadly cycle of violence: the current Israeli invasion of the refugee camps and the terror it has created including the killing of Palestinian medical workers, the continuing bombardment of civilian areas under the Palestinian Authority by the Israeli forces, and the killing of civilians on both sides
- To protest Israel's brutal policy against the Palestinian people: the prolonged siege, collective punishment and humiliation of the whole population
- To support the protests against the Occupation voiced by Palestinians and those Israelis who stand for a just peace
- To lift up in prayer the multitude of nonviolent methods that people are using to resist
- To request once again for international protection for the Palestinian people
- To pray for the victims of violence, the wounded, and all of their families on both sides of the conflict
- To call on all the leaders of the region to come to the table with real offers for a just peace
- To implement the United Nations Resolutions 242, 194, and 338 and other related UN resolutions immediately
- To call for an end of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The Palestinian people are struggling for freedom and independence. Occupation is the source of this conflict. Until it ends, more suffering will take place. We appeal to the global community to bring about a just resolution to this long-standing conflict by enforcing the implementation of the UN resolutions and the Geneva Conventions.

Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation
Theology Center, March 12, 2002

'Justice, not revenge'

I write in appreciation for the January/ February 2002 issue of *The Witness* on the problem of "Resisting a Culture of Punishment."

When I went to work in the FBI in 1936, during the first week I met with other new employees and J. Edgar Hoover, who usually began such meetings this way: "You are now working in the Department of Justice ... *Justice*, not revenge." He went on to explain that "we seek to protect the public from evildoers, but also to be so just that evildoers can become constructive citizens again."

I suppose it is correct to say that in his later years (48 years as director), he was somewhat less gentle. But he did also oppose the internment of the Japanese in World War II.

Ward McCabe
San José, CA

Random acts of kindness

I appreciate *The Witness* very much. It helps keep me focused. I was facing the Death Penalty until December and now I am facing Life.

I have seen many random acts of kindness amongst my sisters here in this county prison these past two years as I await trial. I have seen sisters give up their trays, giving the food to someone new or "fresh" because she is hungrier than those of us who are able to buy commissary. I have done this many times myself. I learned mercy acts from the best! I have been on both the receiving end and the front line in answering a sister's littlest need to the greatest. I have been able to work in the law library and reading library, attend classes and tutor in the G.E.D. program. I am very thankful to offer help when I can. I have spent many hours listening to tragedies, counseling, praying with my sisters and suggesting spiritual direction behind these walls. We encourage one another and find hope in that. We live in a valley of tears and most days the only compassion we receive is from each other.

Please keep me in your prayers. My trial will be the week of May 6th. God bless all of you and your work.

Robyn Maloney-George
Philadelphia, PA ●

Beating new bounds

by Julie A. Wortman

Every day I receive about 50 email messages aimed at keeping me informed of the latest breaking national and global news. I dread each download. Persistent word of economic, social and political outrage on a global scale only seems to feed my sense of impotence over the injustices perpetrated by the world's powers-that-be. I long to "delete all" and occupy myself with some appealing, apolitical diversion.

And yet I'm suspicious of my own yearning for escape. Corporate capitalism seems too eager to reinforce the inclination. Fly away, drive away, seclude away, dream away. A recent (and reluctant) weekend stay at a climate-controlled luxury hotel (with all rooms overlooking the artificial environment of a vast interior atrium in an effort to downplay the bewildering, generic business/industrial suburban-sprawl environment outside) left me gasping for fresh air and confused as to where, specifically, on the planet this place might be. I hunger, I realize, not for escape, but magnetic North. A reliable, grounded, point of orientation.

Too often, congregations appear to forget this stabilizing — and energizing — need. So proud to be part of the church universal, they inadvertently eschew the church incarnational — the church local and specific. Their self-image betrays this. If there are any Episcopal congregations that still "beat the bounds" as part of annual rogation celebrations, the farthest most processions would venture, I'd bet, would be to the limits of the church's property or the block on which it stands.

In this issue, we ask for more. We ask that church people get more intentional about claiming a wider acreage as the proper grounds of parish life and ministry. We ask that congregations think of themselves less as communities and more as community members. The world's economic, social and political realities are playing out on all of our doorsteps, ready for blood-and-guts engagement. There is, in the end, no escape. But at least we can begin with knowing where we are.

Julie A. Wortman is The Witness' *editor/publisher.*

© Steven Rubin/The Image Works/West side volunteer clean-up, Baltimore, Md., April 1998

EDITORIAL NOTES

The church's call

by Richard Bower

IN EARLY JANUARY I received a news release from the Anglican Church of El Salvador and its bishop, Martin Barahona. It was the Salvadoran church's statement of concern about the January 1, 2002, layoff of 10,000 government workers. Under pressure from the IMF and the World Bank, and from other international lending banks who do business in Central America, the Salvadoran government has been following the neo-liberal economic policies so in vogue today among the wealthy nations of the West.

Who could be against more efficient, smaller, and less bureaucratic government? The problem lies in the fact that, for small, poor countries like El Salvador, those who benefit most from neo-liberal economic reform (read: free-market, unregulated, globalized capitalism) are not the masses of workers and the poor but the few rich families and large businesses who dominate El Salvador's politics and economics.

In the eyes of the Salvadoran Anglican church, the dismissal of over 10,000 workers in one month — without severance pay or follow-up training and re-employment programs — is a painful, unjust, and socially disruptive action. These lay-offs follow several years of government privatization and dismissal of workers, leading to over 27 percent unemployment in 2001.

The Salvadoran church sees its involvement in the social, political and economic life of its people as a primary mission. It believes its faith perspective needs to be part of the national dialogue. So it expresses concern publicly for the thoughtless, painful way these dismissals occurred. It expresses concern for the families of the dismissed workers, concern for the inevitable public protest and social upheaval that will occur and concern for the government's lack of willingness for public debate about these issues. And it promises concrete proposals on how to deal more honestly and justly with the women and men caught up in this crisis. This is the church doing what it ought to do in a difficult and complicated setting.

We in the U.S. also live in difficult times. In the months following September 11th a multi-billion-dollar U.S.-sponsored war has been waged in Afghanistan. According to the Associated Press, over $60 billion

in difficult times

had already been spent on "anti-terrorism" efforts in our country by the beginning of 2002. Despite a reported upturn, our economy is struggling, factories are closing, government social programs are being stalled and civil liberties jeopardized. A wave of uncritical patriotism and "government knows best" attitudes has emerged.

Where is the voice of our church these days? Where are the theological and social analyses, the proposals for alternatives to war-making, the public witness to peace? And why is our church raising so few questions over the rising nationalism of our time, a movement stifling questions and dissent in the major media? Where are people of faith challenging the simplistic, dualistic worldview of "good versus evil" or "civilization versus terrorism"?

I'm grateful that *The Witness* and our "A Globe of Witnesses" website project (www.thewitness.org/agw) are voices that seek to counter the privatization of religion and ethics and to foster the full and active participation of people of faith in the issues that challenge public life and the common good. This public theologizing and reflection is increasingly and urgently needed these days.

By "public theology," we mean the belief that God is as much concerned about the good of society as about religious activities and personal faith. As Archbishop William Temple expressed in *Christianity and the Social Order* (1940), it would be a great mistake to think that God is chiefly interested in religion.

Public theologizing is not simply the practice of reflection, but also the practice of analyzing our social/political/economic reality in the light of the biblical message and faith, with a commitment to action — which, in turn, calls us back to new analysis, prayer and renewed action.

Our sisters and brothers of the small and vulnerable Anglican church in El Salvador are taking the risk to do public theology. That, too, is our commitment here at *The Witness*. ●

Richard Bower is a member of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company board (publisher of The Witness*) and founder of Fundacion Cristosal, a network of people and parishes concerned about the Salvadoran people that sponsors people-to-people exchanges and projects for the benefit of the Salvadoran church and people (see www.cristosal.org).*

POETRY

Pentecost Psalm

by John Paul Davis

All Saint's Episcopal, Chicago, May 1999

It's raining; three plastic flamingos balance on wire legs in the parish yard, saluting us as we slip out of the wet into the sanctuary's sacred physics.

Yellow and orange crepe streamers are tongues of fire washing down like covenants from the rafters, are angels ascending and descending the molecules of our prayers like ladders to heaven.

The crucifer pokes his standard through the doorway; the processional begins. We come to You singing Lord, hearts popping and sparking like July 4th sparklers and singing.

The liturgy wraps itself around us, baptizes us and we're kissed by its rain, caught up in its firey chariot, drenched decent, short of breath.

When the service ends, so does the rain and we watch the children tumble over the shimmering lawn flying weathered, plastic "Jesus Loves Me" kites.

Set me alight Lord, pick me up like a tattered kite, hang me in the sky like a beacon, sing through me in a thousand languages, stand sentry over my beating heart like three flamingos — Father, Son and Holy Ghost all balanced and wet with spring rain.

Wash down from heaven Lord, light me like incense, like an angel, like the pop and flash of a sparkler, hang me like a beacon in the sky, set me tumbling over the grass, Lord, let me shine, let me shine.

John Paul Davis is a writer and teacher living in Oakland, Calif., where he is managing editor of Em Literary.

Photo courtesy All Saints, Hoboken

Newark bishop Jack Croneberger looks on as Geoffrey Curtiss gives an interview at the groundbreaking for Hoboken's Jubilee Family Center.

An interview with Geoffrey Curtiss

by Julie A. Wortman

GEOFFREY CURTISS, president of the Episcopal Network for Economic Justice, has since 1980 been rector of All Saints Episcopal Parish in Hoboken, N.J. Using the methodologies from the Urban Theology Unit (UTU) of the Sheffield Inner City Ecumenical Mission in Sheffield, England, his practice of urban ministry developed out of liberation and contextual theologies. His "UTU New Jersey" program offers individuals or teams of congregational leaders two years of training designed to promote radical Christian discipleship in city neighborhoods (contact UTU New Jersey c/o gcurtiss@allsaintshoboken.com).

JULIE WORTMAN: One of the questions I've heard you ask in the context of speaking about urban ministry is, "Should the local congregation have an interest in the people of its neighborhood?" Why is that an important question?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Over the last 30 or 40 years many urban neighborhoods have gone through an incredible dynamic of change, primarily as a result of our national immigration policies along with the federal resources provided to build suburban adjuncts to our cities. The question for the urban church is, how does the local

congregation construct a ministry that is contextual to the neighborhoods in which it is located? The church, by and large, has attempted to bring into a neighborhood a style of ministry or a style of congregation that it adapts from another situation and then tries to supplant into a neighborhood. The church hasn't been thinking about how the people of a given neighborhood can have an impact on the kinds of things that a local congregation might undertake, or on its liturgy and worship. As the neighborhood changes, new people should be coming into the life of the church. Their impact upon the local church should be as much and as significant as whatever that local church is bringing to the community. Unfortunately, most congregations desire to continue on with what was once successful in the past.

JULIE WORTMAN: So when you're talking about contextualizing or caring about the people of the neighborhood you're not thinking in the usual terms about "outreach"?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: No, not at all. "Outreach" means bringing something out of the congregation. I am more interested in "inreach," the way local people can reach into a congregation and change it. I'm really talking about making it a "we" by doing the work together and inviting "them" to become "us" and "us" to become "them." So we in the local congregation would be responding to the experience of the people of the local neighborhoods and how this experience should be changing us.

JULIE WORTMAN: This doesn't exactly sound like the normal idea of evangelism, either.

GEOFFREY CURTISS: That's correct. The usual evangelism is about making people into Episcopalians. We come with our set of doctrines and our style of liturgy and say, "This is what we're going to teach you to be and then you can participate in the life of the Episcopal Church." I'm not saying we just throw all that away, but I *am* saying that at the same time we can also allow the local community's identity into the dynamic. So if we're dealing with a lot of people who are of different ethnic backgrounds or of different social or economic stratas, that's going to have as much of an impact upon the style of the congregation as the church's tradition. For example, as gentrification grew in our city, families with children from all sorts of religious traditions inreached into our congregation. As a result we do a new liturgy at 9:10 A.M. on Sunday mornings in which the worship, while it may have the "rubrics" of looking like a Rite 3 Eucharist, in effect it uses little to nothing of the Prayer Book. The prayers, the scripture readings and the songs are coming from a variety of sources brought by the local community and its experience.

JULIE WORTMAN: What was Hoboken like when you first arrived at All Saints 22 years ago? How did you contextualize the church's ministry at that point?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: In the early 1980s it was the time of the "urban pioneers" in Hoboken. A lot of young people discovered Hoboken as an opportunity to purchase an old building, rehab it and establish a home. They literally were creating a place to live. One thing that was clear to these newcomers was that there were no local stores where they could buy fresh fruit, vegetables and cheeses. A couple of the young people who were becoming involved with the congregation approached me about whether the church was interested in starting a food cooperative. We joined together and rented a storefront and a relationship began with a group of people who inreached into the congregation, wanting to start a food cooperative that could share space with the church. And so on Saturday mornings and Wednesday nights, we were collectively running this food coop of fresh fruits and cheeses and the kinds of things that were not readily available yet. As a result, some of them said, "Hey, I'm interested in what you are trying to do here. Can we talk about it on Sunday mornings?"

Eventually, the Korean community moved in and opened several green groceries and they were followed by health food stores and a couple of eclectic stores. Our project had accomplished its work, so we closed up to move on to the next concern. We got into doing an interfaith sheltering ministry for the homeless and we got into exploring with other churches and the local synagogue the kinds of things that the changing nature of Hoboken was going to need. Eventually, that led us at All Saints to begin creation of an Episcopal day school that served a number of the younger families who had young kids and were getting involved in our community. We started as a nursery school and now, 15 years later, we're up to sixth grade. We've slowly built this day school out of a partnership between young families that are members of my congregation, along with a lot of other young families that are moving into the area.

JULIE WORTMAN: One thing I've heard you talk about before is the importance of mapping your neighborhood or mapping your community. What's that about?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: If you are going to be about the work of inreaching, then you must be able to see your neighborhood and its people for who they are rather than who you want them to be. God has placed them here for you to be among. The mapping opportunity gets me out walking the neighborhood with new eyes, the eyes of inreach rather than the eyes of outreach. Mapping has me asking not what can the church bring to this community, but what is this community asking the church to be? In my 22 years of mapping, I'm always amazed at the changes I notice even in neighborhoods where I walk daily. It is so easy for the local

Photo courtesy Diocese of Maryland

Teens and adults from Redeemer and Guardian Angel churches prepare a Thanksgiving Day meal together (2001).

Sharing resources to build a community-based church

by Robert W. Ihloff

Guardian Angel, Baltimore, is a small church in a once blue-collar neighborhood now punctuated with crack houses and cheap apartments. The church has a long tradition of ministering to and with its neighborhood. It sponsors a food pantry, provides clothing, houses a program to train persons to go on job interviews, and hosts a number of neighborhood ministries. On Sunday or other days one finds a drug addict worshipping side-by-side with a social worker, a mentally challenged adult, a mother on welfare, an elderly lifelong resident of this Remington neighborhood. The congregation is racially mixed and truly welcoming of everyone. At a visitation some years ago, I had been praising the vestry of Guardian Angel for its commitments to social justice. A vestrywoman politely interrupted, "Bishop, what you keep calling social justice ministries we just think of as being the church."

She was absolutely correct. At Guardian Angel, social justice is integral, not one aspect of being the church in that neighborhood.

Less than three miles away from Guardian Angel is Church of the Redeemer, the largest Episcopal Church in the city. Located in a posh neighborhood, Redeemer is an upper-middle-class, white congregation made up of professional and business people. At first glance, it might not seem that the members of these two congregations even live in the same world, let alone in the same city. In fact, they share a common commitment to the ministry of Guardian Angel, and a growing commitment to sharing resources.

When Alice Jellema accepted the call as rector to Guardian Angel, she left a full-time position in a suburban parish to accept this part-time cure in the city. It necessitated her taking a second job as a receptionist. Alice longed to devote her full attention to the demanding ministries of Guardian Angel, but the parish could not afford to pay her more money. In her previous ministry, she had come to know a number of members of Redeemer. They encouraged her to seek assistance from Redeemer's Outreach Committee. As she shared the story of Guardian Angel's ministry in the city, many people saw an opportunity not only to provide a quarter of Alice's full-time salary and benefits (the Diocese agreed to pay a quarter as well), but also an opportunity to share talents and time. Now members of Redeemer are enthusiastically involved as volunteers in a number of ministries at Guardian Angel, the clergy engage in pulpit exchanges and resources are being shared in ways that are cooperative more than paternalistic. *(continued on page 10)*

congregation to become blind or not pay attention to its surroundings or to only remember them the way they once were. The mapping helps you notice things like the cycles of change that local convenience stores go through, which indicates that different people have moved in. Or you become aware that industrial buildings that were warehouses or old garment-center kinds of factories have been redeveloped or replaced by a lot of new housing or divided up for artists and other small businesses.

Cities are usually made up of many layers of neighborhoods in which people move in and out with ease. The mapping exercise gets you into conversation about, "What did this neighborhood look like in the 1970s? What did it look like in the 1980s? In the 1990s? And what do the neighborhoods of Hoboken look like in the year 2002?" And so you ask, "Why have they changed, what is God up to in these changing neighborhoods?" This is a different theological perspective from always thinking, "I sit in my pew. I meditate and I have my personal relationship with God." This is an attitude that never thinks about God's work in the neighborhood, in the changing environment of the world and among the changing people outside the doors of the congregation.

JULIE WORTMAN: Can you give an example of seeing God this way?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Well, in the 1980s Hoboken was, by and large, heavily Puerto Rican, so we were focused in our congregation on how we related to the Puerto Rican community. Then, through the gentrification process, many of the Puerto Rican community were displaced. And so a whole new neighborhood came into being and we had to begin thinking about how to relate to this new neighborhood. At the same time, we saw what had happened to the Puerto Rican community, that they'd been pocketed into smaller neighborhoods on the west side of town rather than being spread out as they were before, so we began asking, "Well, how do we relate to that neighborhood?" And that has been the substance of a dialogue for the congregation and its leaders for many years.

As gentrification went forward, our church basically ended up on the main street of town. It's an excellent location, but it's in the part of

town where most of the gentrification has occurred. So the question that I posed to the congregation was, "How are we going to continue our relationship with the poor who now live in a neighborhood quite separate from ours? If we're going to have a relationship and work with people who remain in poverty — if we're going to have a relationship with where most of the children of Hoboken now live, then we need to figure out how we are going to be on the west side of town."

So we bought a piece of land on the west side and we're now in this project of building a 9,000-square-foot building, a Jubilee Family Life Center, so that we can be the Episcopal Church in that neighborhood and have a place where the people who are living there and in other neighborhoods of Hoboken can come and work together and be together and hopefully build something.

JULIE WORTMAN: So, in response to the question, "What is God up to?" you're not answering, "Well, God's gentrifying Hoboken."

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Right! It is not enough, because a congregation must serve a variety of neighborhoods and not just one. It is this mixture of people and issues that creates the dynamic that challenges us to ask, "What is God up to here?" I accept the liberation theology perspective that God has a preferential option for the poor. I think that every congregation must figure out their way to develop a relationship with the poor. For me, both liberation theology and contextual theology remind me that the church is not for those who attend it, but rather we who attend it are supposed to be sent out into the world for our neighborhoods and for the poor. That is God's purpose for creating the church, even though we are good at contriving other reasons for our existence.

JULIE WORTMAN: And are those from the other neighborhoods then showing up in your church?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Not yet. We have hopes that it may happen over a long haul. But the real work is about building and sustaining relationships. This takes time and is done in small groups who share their hopes and practice their faith with one another. Our hope is that building a new facility in a neighborhood will help us have a place to undertake this work. Our church is really a church that you walk to and that is why we seek to explore a style of congregational life that involves being located in several of the neighborhoods of our city, yet joined together in a common ministry.

I guess that is another dynamic of the city, that for our local projects to be self-sustaining, we can't make them too big. We recognize that in the city you develop, in effect, small gospel projects that are located in various parts of the neighborhood or the city. You don't have to have big projects, you just have to have a network of how these projects fit together. So we have a shelter for the homeless that is located at 3rd and Bloomfield. And then five blocks away is our worship center at 7th and Washington and then eight blocks away, on the west side, there's going to be this Jubilee Family Life Center. In Hoboken, we have probably eight or nine different neighborhoods that have different groupings of people in them and we must find different opportunities to be the church in different ways.

JULIE WORTMAN: How would you take what you know and what your experience has been and be in a suburban location?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: I would want the church first to come to know its neighborhood in a new way. Not what you bring to the neighborhood, but what does the neighborhood need from us? Second, I would want the congregation to undertake to have relationships with people who are different. There is not much economic stratification in most suburban communities so this challenge is a hard one. But if the church is created by God to address the needs of the oppressed, then we must figure out who they are and get about the work of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and binding up the broken.

JULIE WORTMAN: Does this idea come out of your training?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Yes. This comes out of my Urban Theology Unit (UTU) training with John Vincent at the Sheffield Inner City Ecumenical Mission. John Vincent is one of the great mentors of my life. His approach teaches us to reflect on the Gospel as it is unfolding in the neighborhoods and street corners around us in such a way that we are led into action. The action does not have to be any more than speaking or acting out a parable. The action can be the engagement of a couple of people in something that they feel is an "active parable." A new way of seeing the world or a window for others to see God's incarnational presence or activity in the local situation.

JULIE WORTMAN: That must require a fair amount of time spent in reflection with people in the congregation.

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Yes. Congregations get involved in doing a lot of "stuff" that institutional life generates and creates. If you sit with a group of people and have them make a list of all of the activities that the congregation is engaged in and then say, "Okay, now I want you to tell me a gospel story that interprets to others why you're doing this activity," what often happens is that for some of the activities they say, "I can't get you a gospel story." Which then forces them to ask, "Well, why are we doing this as a congregation?" You begin to become alive to the fact that there are some things churches really don't need to be doing because they are not things that have relevance to what we're supposed to be doing in light of the Gospel.

JULIE WORTMAN: And do you recommend this process primarily for groups?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: The UTU hermeneutical circle invites us to create and participate in disciple groups that are engaged in gospel actions. So it is for those who are working in situations that are ministry and mission and realise that the Gospel is an organizing tool for their work. Congregations gather around the places where the Gospel is not only proclaimed, but lived out. UTU helps those who are seeking to create and sustain gospel communities and actions.

Whether it's a food cooperative, a credit union, a sheltering ministry, a day school, a

(continued from page 8)

Moving from parochialism

All the resources we need to do all the exciting ministries we can imagine are right here in this diverse diocese of urban, suburban and rural areas, with pockets of dire poverty and of extraordinary affluence. However, they are not equally distributed, and some are not available in the places of greater need. More explicitly, all the talents and experience, all the time and energy and even all the money we need to accomplish the mission of God's Church are at our disposal. To effectively utilize them, acting morally and conscientiously, we need to move from parochialism into the sharing of resources across parish lines.

The diocese is the smallest unit for Christian mission and ministry! This flies in the face of the popular Protestant notion that the basic (and sadly for some, the only) unit is the parish church. No congregation, not even the largest, most active and dedicated, will be able to attend to all the ministries that need doing nor even to see and comprehend the full implications for mission. What too often happens is that large congregations with many resources simply multiply the ways they minister to their own constituents, thereby increasing their own comfort levels as they increase the gulf between themselves and the less well-endowed. In such parishes, little information comes from outside the congregation to inform leaders about other needs and possibilities for ministry. There are always some individual members who are dedicated to outreach, but, sadly, in most able congregations, outreach is not truly resource-sharing. Rather, it is a response from their largess, which enables members to feel that they are being generous while they continue to spend most of their resources on themselves.

What is needed is a larger sphere in which persons of considerable diversity interface; this is where the diocese plays an essential role. When all of the needs and aspirations for ministry in a wider area can be shared out of a rich diversity of persons and places, and where conflicting needs and ideas can be weighed, persons of faith and goodwill respond through sharing their resources. In my experience, this sharing is not only an exercise in stewardship worthy of the name Christian; it also deepens the spirituality of the participants, bringing each person to greater wholeness and deeper happiness. I believe most people want to be generous. When persons blessed with many resources are brought into dialogue with brothers and sisters with obvious needs, a sense of community ensues in which there is a wonderful opportunity for generosity and meaningful sharing. Such dialogues are time-consuming, not infrequently heated, often difficult to maintain, and absolutely necessary for the mission of the church. It is a major moral imperative and responsibility of dioceses to foster and sponsor such dialogues in a variety of ways and to encourage sharing their vision and their resources.

The diocese as broker

The diocese should be a broker of talents and expertise, enabling persons to contribute these in places other than their own parish. Bishops and other members of diocesan staff should understand themselves as catalysts for this sharing. Diocesan budgets should reflect this by placing resources in areas of greater need. For example, our diocesan budget largely funds one of our inner-city parishes. This parish is not a mission but its work is integral to the mission of the diocese. Although there are few financial resources and insufficient persons with talents and time within that community, many volunteers from other parishes participate in a number of community ministries through this parish and we all contribute to its budget. This ministry is a priority even though it will never likely be self-sustaining. Our diocese similarly sponsors a number of city and rural parishes, providing some financial assistance and/or people. These augment the resources available locally. We do this without the stigma of calling churches missions or aided parishes; they are simply integral to our mission, which assumes the sharing of resources. Moreover, we encourage special relationships among parishes. Eight congregations in a region sponsor a program to house homeless families; none could do this alone. In another region, a school is being built through resource-sharing. It is, after all, one ministry — Christ's ministry, in which each of us has a part to play and resources to share.

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non-profit housing corporation or an after-school program, you start to see that these projects are really what keeps the congregation alive. And then growing congregations become, in effect, a network of a variety of gospel projects. So that small groups of people say, "Well, this is our project." You bring a variety of issues and a variety of people who are working on these issues together and you say, "We're going to support each other."

So some people are out there in relationship with Jesus working on a food pantry, while another group is saying,"Well, you know we want to start a church school for our kids, because we really think teaching the kids the Jesus story is very important," and yet another group is working on some social-justice campaign because Jesus is present in the national agenda of our nation. But all of these become gospel projects that three or four or five or a dozen or more people in the congregation get connected to. This is different from thinking that we are all one happy congregation doing one thing. Instead, many of us with a variety of gifts are engaged in the work of Jesus as he has become known to us.

JULIE WORTMAN: At one level a church that's doing this wouldn't necessarily look a lot different from another congregation that's got various things going. But it sounds like there's a significant difference in the process by which people arrive at what they're doing, a process that offers people something deeper than the doing of good works just because you should!

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Right. I feel I'm often caught between spending a lot of time to have Sunday mornings work in a way that the gathered congregation can function, versus spending time with the group of people who are going to meet on a Tuesday night or a Thursday night or a Wednesday noon to work on a specific project. I also find that many people who get engaged in a project are not as interested in "the Sunday morning" effort because they're feeling very much connected and alive to the project itself. What the UTU model then tries to do is to push to the place where that much smaller group of people understands itself to be related to the larger gathered community, but doesn't necessarily have to be incorporated into the gathered com-

munity. Some of that has happened inside our church. So a group of women that have these effective meetings on Thursday may not show up on Sunday because they would say, "Well, my church time is going to the noontime service on Thursday and then having lunch with these women and working on something together."And that is really good church. I mean, they don't have to show up on Sunday morning. Whether it's the day-school community or the Jubilee Ministry community or the shelter community, those groups of people are in themselves coming together as church and they don't have to necessarily show up on Sunday morning to be church together.

In England, John Vincent, who was a Methodist superintendent, developed an education and training component much like at Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C., where on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays he would offer classes much out of the Paulo Freire model of action and reflection. So the people would engage this relationship between the Gospel and their neighborhoods and talk about how to praxis the Gospel. It's been hard to figure out when we can gather people together to do that because of the hours people give to their work. Maybe the development of the permanent diaconate that seems to be occurring in our midst will be a means whereby some of this will start to happen. Of course, most people seeking to be in ordained ministry these days do not see urban ministry as an opportunity, but as a place that has no status.

JULIE WORTMAN: For many, the attraction of diaconal ministry is that the people involved act as a bridge between church and world. But isn't that simply Christian vocation?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Right. I think it also goes back to that issue of how does the local congregation see itself. Does it see itself as forming disciples or does it see itself as representing the Episcopal way? Is the congregation a network of gospel projects that a variety of people are working on together, but separately, or does the congregation keep buying into the idea of one congregation, one priest, with all congregations being basically the same so that clergy can be interchangeable? Contextualization means leadership and ministry that will be unique to the particular location. Liberation theology invites us to become transformed as we move down the ladder into the places of oppression. What would it be like if we could look at Episcopal congregations as, first, training centers for disciples, not Episcopalians, and second, as places concerned about the local neighborhood, not the maintenance of a common way? Third, what if they were places that were open to the challenges and changes brought by the people who ask something of them instead of places that say, "We only do it this way"? And finally, as we enter into interfaith partnerships, what if our churches were committed to the welfare of the whole community as a means to enable us to be one with one another?

JULIE WORTMAN: The Industrial Areas Foundation has also been significant for the work that you're doing?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Right. I worked with the Industrial Areas Foundation for 10 years and now with the Gamaliel Foundation for a couple of years. What they're onto is trying to figure out how to have a public life together as the community of faith. How can we together bring about change and transformation in a larger context than just simply a neighborhood and realize that we struggle against forces larger than simply neighborhoods and that we share the same problems, the same concerns? So to me it's real interfaith work, for we are working on how to be more effective in our faith witness in the public domain. Again, it's an alternative way of being church that recognizes that power is not something to be avoided, but power is something that is a tool for creating strong neighborhoods, for creating quality of life, for creating a place in which we can engage the world and be at it together without fighting over the fact that you're a Methodist and I'm an Episcopalian and you're a Lutheran. It doesn't matter that we worship Jesus differently from one another or that we see God differently from one another, because we're seeking to know the one who we all believe calls us to love and justice.

JULIE WORTMAN: Right. So you're not struggling for market share!

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Correct. It's not about market share. When you recognize that, as congregations coming together and raising up local leaders in our neighborhoods, we can go down and witness to the fact, say, that we need community-based police and then engage the mayor and the city council and other groups of people who can deliver that, we are, in effect, making our congregations stronger. People see that the value of this congregation in this public community is that this congregation is caring about the neighborhood that it's in.

JULIE WORTMAN: It strikes me that, in the process of claiming neighborhoods as the province of activity, you're saying that ecumenical activity is inevitable?

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Well, it is inevitable. But it's going to be about supporting and strengthening the various existing congregations in the neighborhood that want to take on a public role and understand that the betterment of the neighborhood is critical to their health and vitality. It's interfaith, too. Figuring out how to get synagogues and Muslim communities engaged is certainly a challenge for us. And it also involves working with unions. The whole relationship between religion and labor has certainly moved back into a very strong position.

JULIE WORTMAN: Yes. It seems like living-wage campaigns and other workers' struggles have become an important area of faith-based activism.

GEOFFREY CURTISS: Right. The living-wage campaign translates for urban congregations quite simply. If we don't have people attending our church who can participate in a stewardship program, then we're not going to have congregations in the city, just social-service kinds of churches that are responding to the needs of the desperate. ●

Julie A. Wortman is The Witness' *editor/publisher.*

Residents of a Mexican neighborhood in Detroit protest pollution from local factory.

Latinos of faith exercising collective power to improve daily life

by Timothy Matovina

DEACON CARLOS VALDÉZ was angry. Gang member intimidation of seventh and eighth graders on the school playground of his parish, Ascension Catholic Church on the north side of Minneapolis, was so intense that the school principal had begun to patrol the schoolyard with a baseball bat. Frustrated by the lack of police response to the principal's pleas for help, in 1996 Valdéz enlisted the support of the Joint Ministry Project (JMP), a local faith-based community organization that addresses urban issues. Armed with JMP training in community organizing and public action, Valdéz and other parish leaders joined with JMP to gather 600 people and demand that the police chief and mayor increase patrols to deter gang recruitment. While at first city officials refused to negotiate, the media coverage that local organizers fostered soon shamed them into action. The following week "Safe Teams" comprised of civilians and police patrolled the schoolyard and adjacent neighborhood every afternoon. Gang members fled. Elated at their success, Valdéz and his fellow parishioners concluded that these events represented far more than just winning back their schoolyard. More importantly, they had learned that they could exercise collective power for the good of their community. As Deacon Valdéz summed up his own transformation after the victory, "I feel alive, and I'm being called by God to organize in my community, the Latino community."

Subsequently Valdéz played a leading role in founding Sagrado Corazón parish; hundreds of Latino Catholics from this congregation have received leadership training in faith-based community organizing. Along with numerous other small victories stemming from this organizing effort, Latino leaders have created a Mercado Central business cooperative, raised $3 million for the cooperative's 40 small businesses, and compelled the Immigration and Naturalization Service to process immigrant applications in a more timely and humane manner (Valdez' story is chronicled in the 1999 annual report of Interfaith Funders, Jericho, N.Y.).

Changed face for civic landscapes

The Latino Catholics of Minneapolis are part of the long-standing and growing Latino Catholic presence in the U.S. With the addition of newcomers from such diverse locales as Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Argentina, along with ongoing Mexican immigration, to the ranks of an established Hispanic population comprised primarily of Mexican-descent Catholics, Hispanics are the largest

group of U.S. Catholics as well as the largest group of recent Catholic arrivals; they will comprise the majority of U.S. Catholics during the first decades of the new century. This demographic shift, which is also affecting other religious denominations, has changed the face of numerous Catholic parishes and U.S. Catholicism generally and, as the efforts of Deacon Valdéz and his collaborators illustrate, the civic landscape of cities and towns across the nation.

Participation in faith-based community organizations like JMP is the most consistent and extensive form of Latino Catholic political activism. Sociologist Richard Wood contends that faith-based community organizations, that is, organizations whose membership is comprised primarily of local congregations, "arguably represent the most widespread movement for social justice in America." Wood's recent study (with Mark Warren), *Faith-Based Community Organizing: The State of the Art* (Interfaith Funders, 2001), reveals that there are 133 such organizations in the U.S. with an office and at least one full-time staff person. Collectively, these organizations link 3,500 congregations plus 500 other institutions such as public schools and labor union locals; congregations engaged in faith-based community organizations encompass between 1.5 and 2.5 million members and are in nearly all major urban areas and many secondary cities across the nation. Latinos comprise a majority in about 21 percent of the aforementioned 3,500 congregations. This figure represents a level of Latino involvement that nearly doubles their population ratio, currently about 12.6 percent of the national total. In cities and regions with large Latino populations like Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Chicago, San Antonio, El Paso, and the Rio Grande Valley, Latino participation and leadership is even more conspicuous. For example, in Texas half of the member congregations in faith-based community organizations are Hispanic Catholic parishes. Not surprisingly, the five states with the largest number of faith-based community organizations are California, Texas, Illinois, New York, and Florida, the five states with the heaviest concentration of Hispanic population.

Four major organizing networks

Most of the 133 organizations are associated with one of four major organizing networks. The most famous of these is the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which Saul Alinsky founded in 1940. Like the IAF, the Gamaliel Foundation is also based in Chicago, while the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO) has its headquarters in Oakland and the Direct Action Research and Training Center (DART) is in Miami. The four networks contract with local organizations to provide professional organizers and leadership training. The Gamaliel Foundation, for example, supplied the organizer and training for Deacon Valdéz and others in Minneapolis. Although the local organizations remain autonomous, at times they work with other organizations on state and regional issues. Professional organizers often forge these collaborative links through their respective organizational networks. Latinos account for 16.3 percent of the professional organizers employed through the four networks and 21 percent of the board members in faith-based community organizations. Moreover, various Latinos are key leaders within the four organizational networks, such as Mary Gonzáles in the Gamaliel Foundation, Ernesto Cortés Jr. in the IAF and Denise Collazo and José Carrasco in PICO.

Religious leaders like the U.S. Catholic bishops have offered strong support for faith-based community organizations. In November 1969 Catholic bishops launched the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD, formerly the Campaign for Human Development) to address "the problems of poverty, racism and minority tensions" made painfully evident through the Civil Rights Movement and the rage and despair of poor urban Black Americans. In founding the CCHD, the bishops articulated two explicit goals: educating Catholics and other interested persons about contemporary social ills to promote "a greater spirit of solidarity," and funding support for "organized groups of white and minority poor to develop economic strength and political power." The latter goal has led CCHD to consistently support faith-based community organizations. Warren and Wood's study showed that the CCHD provides more funding for faith-based community organizations than all other religious givers combined; CCHD support totals nearly one-fifth of all income for faith-based community organizations nationwide.

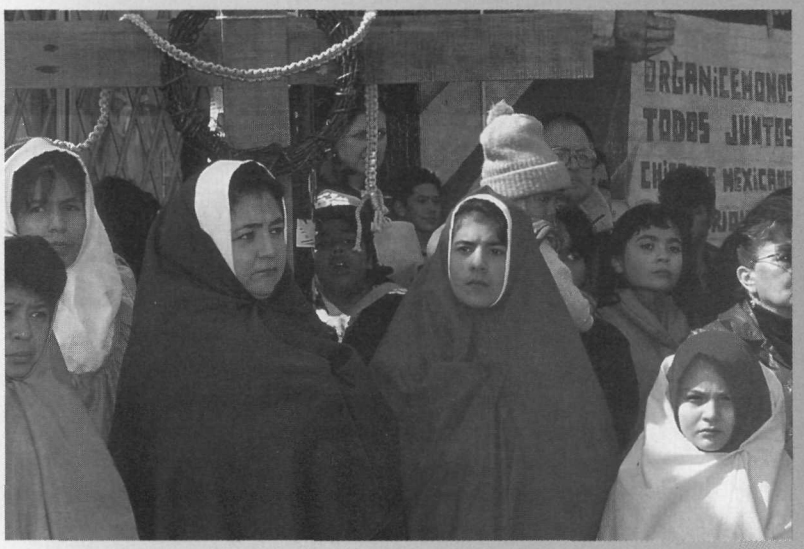
Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS)

The most renowned faith-based community organization that is overwhelmingly Latino is the Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) in San Antonio. IAF organizer Ernie Cortés worked with lay leaders and priests like Edmundo Rodríguez, Albert Benavides, Charles Herzig, Patricio Flores, Hector Rodríguez, Bill Davis, and David García in the 1974 effort to found COPS among six Mexican Catholic parishes on San Antonio's west side. By the first organizational meeting that summer COPS had expanded to 27 churches, each of which agreed to provide leaders and annual dues to support the organization. Parish dele-

'The important thing is to relate the stations to what is happening in the community.'

Perhaps the most overlooked dimension of the Latino public presence in the U.S. is their ritual and devotional traditions, faith expressions that often spill out into streets and plazas of U.S. cities and towns. While such public ritual has been a long-standing tradition at San Antonio's San Fernando Cathedral, the oldest cathedral sanctuary in the country (and a member of COPS), similar faith traditions are increasingly evident in the streets of U.S. towns and cities. Like European Catholic immigrants from previous generations, more recent arrivals from Latin America and the Caribbean bring treasured expressions of faith with them, such as the Puerto Rican devotion to their patron San Juan, the Cuban veneration of their patroness Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre (Our Lady of Charity), Guatemalan faith in El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas (the Black Christ), and El Salvadoran dedication to Oscar Romero, the slain archbishop of San Salvador who is popularly acclaimed as a martyr and saint. In New York, Miami, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and other locales with significant Latino populations across the nation, Latinos celebrate their feasts and religious traditions with processions through city streets, outdoor Masses and prayer services, televised worship, and other public manifestations of devotion that alter the sacred landscape of numerous U.S. communities. One of the most widespread traditions among all Latino groups is the extensive devotion to the crucified Jesus and his suffering mother on Good Friday. As at San Fernando, in many Hispanic parishes this devotion encompasses a public reenactment of Jesus' trial, way of the cross, and crucifixion or some other procession through the streets. Parishes like St. Bridget's on Manhattan's lower east side, St. Stephen's in South Bend, Ind., St. Anthony's in Milwaukee, St. Clement's in Santa Monica, Calif., and eight Catholic congregations along 18th Street in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood are just a few of the many predominantly Latino parishes that annually observe this public ritual tradition.

Along with commentary on the ethno-religious origins and significance of Good Friday and other public rituals, media coverage often focuses on messages of political protest against injustice and violence that these rituals embody. *Chicago Tribune* reports of the Good Friday Way of the Cross in the Pilsen neighborhood, for example, have made links between the suffering of Jesus and the suffering of contemporary Latino communities (see, e.g., 3/26/91,



Good Friday Stations of the Cross, Pilsen neighborhood, Chicago

gates at the inaugural meeting decided that the organization would initially focus on a single goal: improving the horrendous storm drainage on the west side. For decades the frequent flooding in west-side neighborhoods had caused school closings, accidents, stalled cars, damaged homes, potholes, impassable roads, bridge collapses, a dearth of business establishments, even deaths. Amazingly, when COPS leaders researched past efforts to address flood problems they discovered that many drainage projects had actually been authorized in bond issues passed as far back as 1945. Outraged, they sought meetings with the city public works director and the city manager, but with no satisfactory results. Then, after a period of heavy flooding, COPS members filled city hall during a council meeting and related their horror stories of flooding catastrophes, as well as their findings on the city's failure to fulfill authorized drainage projects. Mayor Charles Becker, stunned by the crowd and the overwhelming evidence presented, ordered the city manager to devise a drainage project implementation plan. In November 1974, COPS took the lead in passing a $46.8 million bond issue for 15 west-side drainage projects.

This initial major victory was only the beginning of COPS' long series of successful efforts at development and revitalization in neighborhoods on San Antonio's west and subsequently east and south sides. COPS has achieved more than $1 billion in infrastructure improvements for these primarily low-income and working-class neighborhoods. These improvements include new streets, sidewalks, libraries, parks, streetlights, clinics, affordable housing and drainage systems, as well as significant advances in educational reform, job training, economic development, living wages, voter registration and active citizenship campaigns, after-school enrichment classes, college scholarships and adult literacy. The organization's Project QUEST (Quality Employment through Skills Training) won the 1995 Innovation in American Government Award from Harvard University and the Ford Foundation. More importantly, COPS has transformed its members and the wider civil society of San Antonio. In the words of former San Antonio mayor and HUD secretary Henry Cisneros, "COPS has fundamentally altered the moral tone and the political and physical face of San Antonio. It has also confirmed ... that one way to overcome poverty is to empower the poor to participate more fully in decisions that affect their lives." Grassroots COPS leaders agree, like parishioners from Our Lady of the Angels who attested on the occasion of COPS' 25th anniversary that "many positive changes have come about in our community [because of COPS], but the most positive change has been in the attitude of our people. Twenty-five years ago, we couldn't imagine that a city council member would attend our meetings,

now we know that with the power of educated, organized people, anything is possible."

'No permanent enemies and no permanent allies'

Beyond San Antonio, COPS set the tone for the establishment of other faith-based, multi-issue community organizations by transforming Saul Alinsky's model for organizing religious congregations. Under the innovative guidance of Ernie Cortés and COPS clerical and lay leaders, the organization adapted Alinsky's highly confrontational style of organizing to the cultural and religious sensibilities of Hispanic Catholics on San Antonio's west side. To be sure, COPS was necessarily confrontational, particularly in its early years, as an entrenched political and business establishment sought first to thwart and then to limit the organization's influence. But over time COPS leaders also worked collaboratively with elected officials and business executives, living out the dictum, common in faith-based organizing, to have "no permanent enemies and no permanent allies" but instead remain focused on the issue at hand. COPS also transcended the initial issue of drainage improvements to focus on a wider agenda, and ultimately on the primary agenda of creating a power organization that could address any number of issues and concerns that might arise. Moreover, like most faith-based organizing efforts, COPS' effectiveness and longevity are further enhanced by having an ongoing contractual relationship with one of the networks for leadership training and the services of professional organizers.

Scholars, reporters, and other observers often overlook yet another of the key innovations that Cortés and COPS leaders introduced into Alinsky-style organizing: the importance of integrating politics and faith. As sociologist Mark R. Warren, author of *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton, 2001), has observed, "while Alinsky took a rather utilitarian view of churches as repositories of money and people to be mobilized, the modern IAF developed a close collaboration with people of faith, fusing religious traditions and power politics into a theology of organizing." For example, the figure of Moses, whom faith-based organizers often deem "the first organizer," is regularly engaged as a model for the vision, courage, relationship-building and public action of organizational leaders. Similar parallels are drawn with Jesus, Paul and other significant biblical figures. Moreover, unlike efforts that IAF organizers initiated during the Alinsky era, the primary leaders in COPS are not activists committed to the cause, nor even clergy with social reform sympathies, but parishioners who perceive their activism as an extension of their commitment to family, church and neighborhood. All but one of COPS' seven presidents has been an Hispanic woman, most of them middle-aged mothers with strong familial and parish ties. COPS leader Inez Ramírez summarizes the sentiments of many organizational members

Marchers in Toledo, Ohio, last September carried crosses to remember Mexicans who have died trying to cross the U.S. border since 1995.

4/14/95). In fact, as *Tribune* reporters have noted, it was the suffering of the community that led Mexican Catholics and parish priests in Pilsen to initiate this annual public ritual. On Christmas eve in 1976, 10 children and two mothers died in a fire that swept through an apartment building two blocks from St. Vitus parish. Because they did not understand Spanish, Chicago firefighters who responded to this emergency were unaware that these victims were trapped inside the burning building. In a public meeting following this tragedy, parishioners from St. Vitus and other Pilsen parishes argued that these deaths resulted from a lack of Spanish-speaking firefighters, as well as absentee landlords, overcrowded housing, and city neglect of public services. The following Good Friday they began their annual Way of the Cross as an expression of faith intended to draw the community together in a collective act of solidarity, remember their lost loved ones, and connect their deaths and the plight of the Pilsen neighborhood with the unjust crucifixion of Jesus. Subsequently the annual procession links the Stations of the Cross (the events that comprise Jesus' painful walk on the road to Calvary) with "community problems such as housing, crowded schools, immigration and gang violence." In the words of Father James Colleran, pastor of St. Vitus the year of the first Pilsen Way of the Cross, "the important thing is to relate the stations to what is happening in the community" (*Chicago Tribune* 3/26/91).

Another significant but frequently overlooked element of the story is the practitioners' notion that their rituals embody a religious experience that transcends time and space. Anthropologist KarenMary Davalos' outstanding study of Pilsen's Way of the Cross encompassed numerous conversations with leaders in the Good Friday ritual like Patricia, who summed up the intersection of yesterday and today: "Christ suffered way back 2,000 years ago, but he's still suffering now. His people are suffering. We're lamenting and wailing. And also we are a joyful people at the same time. ... So this is not a story, this is not a fairy tale. It happened, and it's happening now."

In a society that focuses more and more on individual spiritual quests and frequently neglects the human need for collective ritual, Latino traditions and congregations offer a significant model of one way the church can fulfill its public role and provide a religious experience that transcends cultural and denominational boundaries. — *T.M.*

in Mary Rogers' *Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics* (U. of North Texas Press, 1990): "This is not merely politics we are engaged in, but correcting injustice, which is God's work and the mission of the church. There is more to our spirituality than just going to Mass on Sundays. Our spirituality embodies a deep concern for the physical well-being of every individual."

So strong is COPS' interest in vital congregations that the organization has even taken on the role of parish development, a process that encompasses identifying and training new leaders, collective learning based on Scripture and church teachings, building congregational unity around common goals and needs, expanding church outreach and ministries, and even the enhancement of stewardship and church finances. Leaders at Sacred Heart parish reported during COPS' 25th anniversary that "parish development has been key in our growth and success as a COPS parish." With Catholic parishes closing in the core of many U.S. cities, IAF organizer Sister Mary Beth Larkin offered perhaps the most blunt praise for the role of COPS in congregational life: "Not one parish on the west side of San Antonio died after COPS started."

COPS has provided an organizing model that numerous other community organizations have emulated. IAF organizers in Texas, many of whom initially served an apprenticeship with COPS, helped establish organizations in locales like Houston, El Paso, the Rio Grande Valley, West Texas, Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, the Gulf Coast region around Beaumont and Port Arthur, Fort Bend County south of Houston and the Eagle Pass–Del Rio border region. At COPS' 10th anniversary assembly in 1983, Ernie Cortés announced the formation of the Texas IAF Network, which he then served as director. That same year this statewide network of local community organizations won its first major victory on the issue of school finance equalization and reform. Subsequently the network lobbied successfully to gain critical funding for indigent health care and infrastructure improvements in the *colonias*, poor, unincorporated communities along the Texas-Mexico border which were completely bereft of potable water, sewage systems and other basic amenities before the Texas IAF Network. The Network's Alliance Schools educational initiative, an effort to build strong schools in low-income neighborhoods through the mutual collaboration of parents, teachers, administrators and community leaders has received national acclaim from school reformers. In 1999, organization leaders pronounced COPS' 25th anniversary assembly as an occasion to celebrate "25 Years of Organizing in the Southwest." Representatives from IAF-affiliated organizations across the Southwest had delegates present; these organizations now include groups from various locales in California, New Mexico and Arizona. Cortés, who is now based in Los Angeles, heads this new effort to link IAF-affiliated organizations on a regional basis.

The faith-based perspective: construct a just and more vigorous democracy

Significantly, faith-based community organizations like those affiliated with the Southwest IAF provide an alternative model for people of faith to engage in politics. As sociologist Warren has noted, the IAF and similar networks attempt to build local power organizations from the ground up, enabling working-class and other congregational members to participate more actively and effectively in our democratic society. Unlike most food banks, clothing drives, rental assistance programs and other "charitable" social service efforts, faith-based community organizations do not focus on temporary assistance but on constructing a more just and vigorous democracy. Unlike the Christian Coalition and any number of groups who in large part attempt to lobby policy decisions at the national level, faith-based community organizations focus on building mediating institutions that provide the "missing middle" in American politics. Rather than propose a fixed moral agenda that they promote in public policy debates, faith-based community organizations are efforts to build institutions that primarily address the need of reestablishing a more participatory democracy.

Not surprisingly, community organizers like Ernie Cortés frequently bemoan the widespread (and often unconscious) presupposition that voting is the sole means for ordinary U.S. citizens to participate in our democracy. While not diminishing the importance of voting, they stress that "what you do after the election" most clearly reveals how active you are as a citizen. Building strong community organizations is their way of enabling congregations and their members to engage meaningfully in public discourse and decision-making processes that affect their lives. This organizing model presumes people from diverse backgrounds and religious traditions engender values and perspectives that can enliven and enrich this public discourse and the decisions that flow from it. In other words, faith-based community organizing offers an inherent critique of a political culture with limited alternatives and thus represents a vital contribution to the revitalization of American democracy.

Challenges and obstacles

While accentuating the promise for rejuvenating democracy that faith-based community organizations offer, Mark R. Warren and others have noted several challenges and obstacles that still lie ahead for community organizations like those in the IAF network. One of these challenges is the difficult transition from organizations focused explicitly on local needs and concerns to regional and even national coalitions that are a force for a wider political transformation. This challenge and its potential for effecting policy decisions and social change will make the recent emergence of the Southwest IAF, as well as other statewide and regional organizing efforts like the PICO California Project, even more fascinating to observe over the coming months and years. Additionally, while organizations like COPS and the wider Texas IAF network have been highly successful at attracting

member congregations among Catholic, historically African-American, and mainline Protestant churches, they have few Jewish, Islamic, or other non-Christian congregations and a similar dearth of evangelical or Pentecostal churches. In Texas IAF-affiliated organizations, for example, the lack of Anglo-American Southern Baptist congregations — the predominant denomination throughout the northern half of the state — poses a significant challenge for these organizations to achieve their objective of building within their ranks as broad a base of support as possible. Among Latinos, who abandon Catholicism for evangelical and Pentecostal congregations at an annual rate of some 60,000, these churches' lack of participation in community organizations drastically curtails the possibility that their Latino members will engage in organizing activities. The recent establishment of Christians Supporting Community Organizing (CSCO) in Boulder, Colo., is an attempt to address this concern; CSCO's initial project is to link evangelical and Pentecostal congregations to faith-based community organizations in Philadelphia, Boston, Rochester, Chicago and Spokane. The success of this effort is another emerging story in the ongoing development of faith-based community organizing among Latinos and other groups in the U.S. ●

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ENTITLED NEIGHBORS

A biblical perspective on living wage

by Walter Brueggemann

From the commandments:

If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them. If you take your neighbor's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; for it may be your neighbor's only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate. (Ex. 22:25-27)

From the prophets:

Like fowlers they set a trap;
they catch human beings.
Like a cage full of birds, their houses are full of treachery;
Therefore they have become great and rich,
they have grown fat and sleek.
They know no limits in deeds of wickedness;
they do not judge with justice
the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper,
and they do not defend the rights of the needy.
Shall I not punish them for these things? (Jer. 5:26-29)

From the Psalms:

Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;
they lurk in secret like a lion in its covert;
they lurk that they may seize the poor;
they seize the poor and drag them off in their net.
they stoop, they crouch,
and the helpless fall by their might.
They think in their heart, "God has forgotten,
he has hidden his face, he will never see it."
Rise up, O Lord: O God, lift up your hand;
do not forget the oppressed.
Why do the wicked renounce God,
and say in their hearts,
"You will not call us to account"? (Psalm 10:8-13)

From wisdom:

Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,
but those who are kind to the needy honor him. (Prov.14:31)

Conclusion:

Every strand of biblical faith shows God to be deeply engaged in and passionately concerned for economic issues. It does seem that the God of the Bible — contrary to much popular religion — cares a great deal about debts, mortgages, wages and interest, and is preoccupied with the well-being of the poor.

THE CENTRAL and defining narrative memory of biblical faith is the story of the Exodus. While popular religion is preoccupied with the great divide of water in the Exodus story, in fact this defining memory is not about water; it is about rescue from unbearable poverty and abuse in debt slavery.

It is clear that the slaves in the book of Exodus did not just "happen" to be slaves as "the less fortunate." According to the drama of Genesis 47, they got into slavery because the great food monopoly of Pharaoh charged them for life support until they lost their marginal "means of production." They ended in slavery because they had no capital except their bodies that were eventually placed in hock to the power of the food monopoly with its concentration of wealth in the hands of a few.

The wonder of the biblical story is that God paid special attention to these poor in their wretchedness:

God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them (Ex. 2:24-25). God intervened decisively in the distorted economy of Egypt on behalf of the poor who were being ruthlessly exploited in their helplessness.

That rescue, however, was not by an easy, heavenly miracle. It was accomplished through tedious, nerve-wracking negotiations led by Moses, supported and authorized by God. In some part, this emancipation of the helpless poor who became Israel is accomplished by human agency that refused to accept degrading poverty and economic injustice as a permanent or legitimate social condition.

Ethan Flad

Members of the Episcopal Urban Caucus (EUC) join in a living-wage action during the EUC's February 2002 Assembly in Los Angeles.

THE EXODUS is a defining tale of rescue from economic disaster. It makes a grand religious narrative that feeds our imagination on the wonder of God's powerful love. The Bible, however, always intends that religious sentiment should have practical expression in policy formation and concrete public action. Thus in the book of Deuteronomy Moses ponders how the Exodus narrative is to be transposed into economic policy and practice.

The outcome of that pondering is the remarkable policy statement of Deuteronomy 15:1-18, wherein Moses, at the behest of God, commands that the people reduced to debt slavery by their inability to pay their debts must be held in debt only as a short-term affair. This teaching provides that no matter how great the debt, it must be cancelled and forgiven after six years, so that the poor person is freed to reenter the economy. (This is rather like a bankruptcy procedure, except that it pertains to resourceless poor people, not to those with smart lawyers).

This command of God via Moses is a remarkable cornerstone of a vision for a covenantal, neighborly economics. It is concerned a) that there should be no permanent underclass and b) that the will of the Exodus God pertains precisely to economic matters.

Moses says: That there will always be poor people, and so this procedure must be scrupulously followed in all times and in all circumstances (v. 11).

Moses says: That if this practice of debt release is practiced, you can eradicate poverty: the "poor will cease in the land" (v. 4).

Moses says: Not only must you cancel debts and let the debtor free; you must "provide liberally" extra resources to the poor so that the poor can be economically viable (v. 8-10). (This provision sounds strangely like economic "reparations.")

Moses says: You, the monied and the propertied and the privileged, shall do this, because you were debt slaves in Egypt, freed from your debt bondage. You must do what God has done for you (v. 15).

LONG AFTER MOSES, the prophets, the great advocates of an Exodus-economy, considered a) positively the possibility of an Exodus economy and b) negatively the consequence of an exploitative economy whereby the rich get richer and the poor become even more hopeless. Amos, among the prophets, speaks of the consequences of unrestrained acquisitiveness at the expense of the neighbor, greed exhibited as self-indulgence:

Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,
and lounge on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall;
who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,
and like David improvise on instruments of music;
who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!

The practice of immense satiation that does not take into account the deep social destructiveness that it produces with its dire results:

"Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away" (v. 7).

Amos anticipated that an economy that is not restrained enough to share with the poor will end in disaster ... as indeed it did in ancient Israel!

NOW these are very old texts, quite remote from the issues facing us in a complex urban, post-industrial, technological society. Except that the fundamental economic issues remain constant. It is not very difficult to get rich in our society, if that is what one wants. The hard part is self-congratulatory acquisitiveness while we are keenly aware of neighbors (fellow citizens and members of the same economy) who lose out and suffer from unequal arrangements of education, housing, and health care — not to mention the stacking of the cards on mortgages, credit, interest and taxes.

The Exodus narrative, the Mosaic legislation, and the prophetic poetry are all agreed. The rich are not autonomous, but are under divine mandate to act in solidarity with the poor. It is the bottom line of this biblical, theological tradition. If solidarity with the poor is not to be welfare (that offends and is currently out of style among us) and is not to be charity (that never fully touches the big systemic issues), then a fair, living wage is precisely the vehicle through which a) we express a deep theological conviction about God's will for the neighbor, b) we enact neighborly solidarity that cannot be denied, c) the advantaged are sheltered from the destructive consequences of acquisitiveness.

It requires a little imagination — but not much! — to transpose this ancient teaching from a peasant economy into a post-industrial, technological economy. The bottom line in either arrangement is that every member of the economy is valued by God and therefore entitled (!) to a share of the communal economy, in terms of social power, social goods and social access. This theological tradition, rooted in the character of God, has no patience with an unrestrained acquisitiveness that imagines one can disregard the neighbor. The theological word for such economic disregard of the neighbor is sin; the certain outcome of such disregard is the collapse of the social infrastructure.

Conclusion:

Moses taught: "You shall not withhold the wages of the poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens [illegal immigrants] who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt" (Deut. 24:14-15).

Moses understood about the flow of money, the practice of monopoly, and the sharp practices that the powerful can perpetrate (by remote control) upon the poor. He would have none of it! Moses, moreover, is echoed by this strange wisdom teaching that may haunt us:

"Those who mock the poor insult their Maker;
those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished" (Prov. 17:5).

We mock the poor when we imagine that they are not present to us and we make them invisible. We mock the poor when we imagine they are not entitled (simply because they are among us). We mock the poor if we blame them for their status which is created by hidden power arrangements and unacknowledged social advantage. We mock the poor when we resist viable ways through which to share the well-being of society. We mock the poor, and they are helpless to retaliate (except, of course, in random acts of violence). We mock the poor ... and God is unsettled ... and the stakes are upped severely.

The counter to mocking the poor is to take the poor with economic seriousness as entitled neighbors, as legitimate members of the community who are not going to go away. It is God's practice to notice the poor. It is God's delight when God's powerful and blessed also notice ... and act accordingly. ●

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A 'winnable issue'

by Ethan Flad

People of faith are among those participating in an emerging nationwide grassroots movement of living-wage campaigns. Most of the initiatives to date have focused on pressing large employers or local governments to raise the minimum wage by several dollars above the federal standard ($5.15 per hour) to a rate between $9 to $13 per hour. According to James Lawson, longtime civil rights activist and theologian, the living-wage movement comes out of a deep, healthy commitment to social justice. As Lawson declared during the 2002 Assembly of the Episcopal Urban Caucus held in Los Angeles earlier this year, "Racism will not be dismantled unless we dismantle the economics that systematize it."

Living-wage legislation has now been passed in more than 80 communities around the country. The first victory occurred in Baltimore, Md., in 1994. New laws passed in early 2002 in New Orleans, La., and Marin County, Calif., herald good tidings for campaigns in an additional 75 cities this year. [Visit www.livingwagecampaign.org for an updated listing.]

Santa Monica: SMART

Vivian Rothstein works with SMART (Santa Monicans Allied for Responsible Tourism). "We see a real synergy between the most progressive unions, which are working to organize the lowest wage workers, together with emerging Latino leadership and activist clergy," she reports. "We've all been on the defensive for so many years, and now we're actually winning."

Santa Monica's campaign dates back to the city's prescient decision a quarter-century ago to center its economic development strategy on tourism. The tourist economy grew quickly in this coastal community of 90,000 residents, but legislation passed in the 1980s froze new hotel development. The handful of luxury hotels in the city benefited from this law and became among the most profitable in the state. Yet, as they

Ethan Flad

Episcopal bishops join in Los Angeles living-wage action during Episcopal Urban Caucus Assembly, February 2002.

charged upwards of $400 per night for a room, their workers didn't make that in a week — and were paid some of the lowest wages statewide.

According to Rothstein, new union leadership in the mid-1990s faced a "last stand" when the only remaining union hotel tried to decertify its union. Using pressuring tactics that included the firing of a Salvadoran woman union leader, the hotel forced a vote over the Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) — and won. In response, a community coalition created a "Truth Commission" and held a "safe election" at another place in which the union prevailed.

That fight energized the coalition to begin a living-wage campaign. But the hotel and its big-business allies were quick to detect the changing momentum. Sensing growing community support for living-wage legislation, they authored their own law. In November 2000, Proposition KK, which Rothstein calls the "Fake Living Wage Ordinance," was put to a vote in the city. "They took our name," complains Rothstein. "The proposition would have prevented any living-wage ordinance from EVER getting passed to regulate the hotels." However, hard work by living-wage organizers dealt a decisive defeat to Prop. KK — by a 79–21 percentage margin.

Just as importantly, in that same November 2000 election, the coalition had worked to elect a supportive city council, which passed a living-wage ordinance on July 24, 2001. The ordinance called for employers that make over $5 million per year to pay their employees $10.50 per hour (if health benefits were included, or $12.15 per hour, if not).

It didn't take long for the wealthy business community to respond. "On July 25th the opposition hit the streets with a petition to suspend the new living-wage ordinance," reports Rothstein. "They spent $438,000 in just a few weeks!" The referendum was successful, placing the new living-wage ordinance in a state of limbo. The issue will come to a vote again this November.

Rothstein remains optimistic, and credits her church allies for being integral to the campaign through thick and thin.

"The Episcopal clergy — from the bishop [first Fred Borsch, and now Jon Bruno] on down — are angels. They have gotten arrested with us in civil disobedience. They have door-knocked with us. They've held press conferences."

With recent victories under their belt, she believes the living-wage coalition can win again.

San Francisco: 'full-time working homeless'

Living-wage activist Barry Hermanson in San Francisco concurs with Rothstein's assessment of the "winnability" of living-wage as an issue.

"I think every person understands the basic premise of a living wage, which is that every person who works full-time should be able to pay for the basic aspects of life: food, clothing, health care."

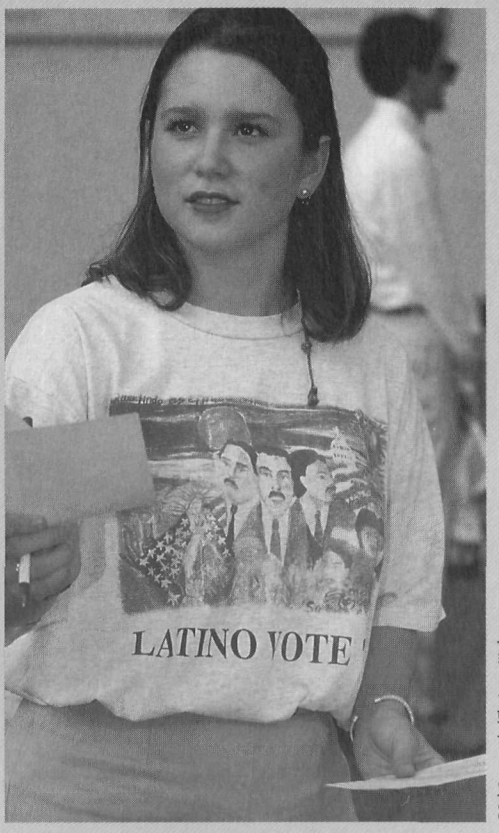
But, despite a politically liberal populace, the living-wage fight in his city has been difficult.

The campaign began in the late 1990s when labor and religious activists began reporting a significant increase in San Francisco's homeless population. While many factors led to this rise, Hermanson notes that numerous stories were emerging of "full-time working homeless" — people who held down 40-hour-per-week jobs, yet still couldn't make enough to pay rent in one of the nation's most expensive regions. It wasn't that big a surprise, he says, since the California Budget Project had issued a study called "Making Ends Meet" that showed it was impossible to live on the federal minimum wage *anywhere* in the state — even in the rural Central Valley. When a study by the Association of Bay Area Governments — which Hermanson calls "hardly a liberal think tank" — came out indicating it would cost $14.50 per hour for a single parent to live in San Francisco, the campaign took off.

Focusing on local jobs that were being funded through taxpayer money — via companies from whom the city was purchasing goods and services — they originally intended to shoot for $14.50 an hour, based on the study. Soon afterward the campaign dropped the figure down to a less intimidating $11 per hour if the employer provided benefits or $12 per hour if not.

"We were faced with a mayor [Willie Brown] and a board of supervisors [the city council] that were opposed to this legislation," says Hermanson. "But in less than two weeks we got 15–20,000 signatures to put this legislation up to a vote."

At that point, as in Santa Monica, the powers changed their tactics, and decided to negotiate. Mayor Brown met with the campaign and a compromise was struck — low-wage workers would be paid $9 per hour plus benefits, or $10 per hour without. Hermanson notes that this victory was just the beginning. "We came back with a health-care accountability ordinance the following year, and now we are going back to enact a citywide minimum wage."



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Hermanson, who himself is the CEO of a temporary employment agency, faults fellow members of the business community for this debate.

"I believe that we have a certain number of employers who take advantage of the public subsidy system." They know that the government will have to cover the extra costs of people's lives, he says. "If people had enough to provide for their basic needs — if they were paid enough to begin with — I probably wouldn't have to spend so much time working on these issues." ●

Ethan Flad is editor/producer of The Witness' *web site, including A Globe of Witnesses. Visit A Globe of Witnesses at www.thewitness.org/agw/ for a new article discussing what "living wage" really means, authored by Dick Gillett, an Episcopal priest involved with Los Angeles' CLUE (Clergy & Laity United for Economic Justice) coalition. Volunteers willing to work for the living-wage vote in Santa Monica November 1–5 should contact SMART at smart@laane.org or call 310-451-9703.*

Photo courtesy of WOJB 88.9 FM

Blessing of eagle staff pole intended to keep Wisconsin community radio station WOJB, which serves five Native reservations, out of harm's way.

Community radio making a difference

by Charlie Bernstein

JOE STEINBERGER of Rockland, Me., recently performed a minor miracle. He started a 24-hour, full-service radio station for less than $10,000. Taking to the air on Valentine's Day 2002, WRFR-LP is, as of this writing, the newest member of the community radio family, a phenomenon that, in the U.S., spans more than 50 years.

"I saw an article somewhere about the FCC offering this new type of license and went to their website. They decided they'd go forward with these new licenses, and Maine was one of the first states they were doing it in."

The new licenses, for low-power radio stations which reach no more than seven miles, were, at least for a short while, easy to acquire. Steinberger talked to other people, drummed up some interest — and some donations — and got one.

Early on, he heard it called "micro-radio." "I thought: This isn't micro. It's local. We don't think of it as a micro-station or Rockland as a micro-city. And it's really not alternative radio. We're simply local — both a physical and a radio neighborhood. Most people who receive the station are in walking distance."

Micro or not, the "LP" ("low power") in its call letters identifes the station's special radio niche — a niche that enables it to serve exactly one community, and well. By charter, WRFR is not designed to be alternative or cutting-edge or politically positioned. It's a place where any local citizen who has something to say can say it. As such, its weak signal is, paradoxically, its strength.

At WRFR, Sunday morning starts with gospel, with local singers and pastors. Steinberger co-hosts a weekday local news/discussion/call-in show with regular visits by local legislators. And Friday nights feature a punk program put together by a high-school student, followed by a hip-hop show. WRFR's music programming, in fact — and this is typical of community radio — is wildly eclectic. "The modern trend is all-the-same," Steinberg explains. "But we're finding that what people actually like is that they're listening to Bob Dylan one minute and African music the next."

But is the station meeting a need?

"There's a [commercial] station here doing an all-sports thing," Steinberg says. "It's almost entirely nationally programmed. But back in the 1950s and 1960s it was a very local station. So now a lot of the old-timers are saying WRFR is great, it's what radio was, a center of the community. You're talking about neighborhood. It's a way to be part of a community, and we're really losing that."

Just two weeks into operation, the station had received over 100 volunteer applications (there are no paid staff positions), and 30 people were already on-air.

KPFA-FM: volunteers with political motivation

Broadcasting a continent away, KPFA Berkeley, Calif., is the opposite of WRFR in almost every way. The oldest community radio station in the U.S., KPFA was founded by pacifist writer Lewis Hill in 1949. True to those roots, it has a proudly radical tradition, quite unlike to WRFR's determined apoliticalism. The station is located in a fast-paced big city, not a chatty small town, and is part of a larger network, Pacifica Radio. It has a paid staff of about 20. And most listeners do not live in walking distance. The station is big, reaching the entire Bay Area, with much of its content filtering out to a third of California via other stations.

What the two stations have in common is their strong community roots.

Hali Hammer is one of the volunteers who help out at KPFA, especially during pledge drives. A singer-songwriter, she started volunteering during the Gulf War, "basically because the only thing keeping my sanity was the radio station. I decided to come down and help out, and I've been here ever since."

For Hammer, the in-depth news and information KPFA supplies seems vital to her community's well-being. "Volunteers here have political motivation," she says. "We want to make sure the world doesn't deteriorate into a worse state than it's in now. We care about the community, and want to be informed and make sure that other people are, as well. I've traveled all over the world and anywhere else you go you can get news about other countries, but here in the U.S. you get nothing but pap. KPFA gives you things you just don't hear on mainstream radio."

Mary Berg is what many community stations call "unpaid staff." An audio tech and book editor in her work life, she hosts a music program and a news show each week, and is on the station's program council and local board. Berg has been active in the station's struggle to maintain its local integrity in the face of Pacifica's efforts to "dumb down" the station's sound to give it more mass appeal as a way to increase the number of listeners and revenues.

Over the past 10 years, Pacifica imposed what Berg calls a gag rule on its five stations from Los Angeles to New York. Stations were asked to eliminate unprofessional-sounding volunteers and to double audience, revenues, or both. The stations resisted. At KPFA the conflict came to a head in 1999, when Pacifica locked the station's doors and fired the staff.

"The firing was a really stupid move to make," Berg says. "The lockout galvanized people."

Thousands of community members of every description marched to save the station. "Housewives would come down from the Berkeley hills to camp out," Berg recalls. "You'd see people huddling to come to consensus about what to do when the police came."

The lockout lasted three weeks. Pacifica backed down there, as it has elsewhere. Staff have been reinstated and sweeping changes have been made. There is a new optimism and a new cooperation — but there is also a $4.8 million debt to deal with.

Berg's talk is rapid-fire, a verbal barrage of ideas, data, opinions, history and asides. Her music program, however, is anything but. She goes on the air Sunday at 5 A.M. with one of the rare community radio programs to offer classical music.

"I play music and don't talk very much. Some people who don't like organized religion say it's their church. I think we need to show our communion, our commonality. If we don't, we're done for. We're dependent on one another, so in music I tend to play Jewish and Arabic music, or African and Irish. I do it without saying anything. The music relates. It's a musical statement, not a verbal statement."

Positive signs for independent radio journalism?

These days, the freedom to broadcast statements of either sort is considerably at risk. *The New York Times* reports that the federal courts are aggressively dismantling existing broadcast media regulations, with the support of the FCC, White House and much of Congress. Scott Harris, executive producer of the weekly independent radio news show, "Between the Lines," has serious concerns. "Voices of activists, from labor to environmental groups worldwide, are eliminated from corporate journalism. And when they are there, they're reduced to soundbite journalism. Commercial radio doesn't have the time to explain things. Noam Chomsky telling you in 20 seconds why the U.S. war against terrorism is misguided just doesn't make it."

Harris, who has been in community radio since college in the 1970s, produces and distributes his in-depth news and analysis program for free to about 20 stations around the country — and online as well. He also sees positive signs for independent radio journalism. The World Trade Organization demonstrations in Seattle, he says, proved to be a watershed for the field.

"And because there's so much more activism on campuses these days," he says, "it swells the ranks of interest in independent radio programming among younger people. Refugees from the 1960s probably always liked that stuff, but now there's a new phase of activism."

He even sees corporate consolidation as fueling independent media, in the sense that by removing probing journalism from its programming, corporate media is creating a need for it.

The challenge is in keeping air space where independent voices can be heard. According to National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB) director Carolyn Pierson, deregulation has crowded the dial in urban areas to the point where no more community stations can be licensed. New community stations are going on the air only in rural areas, especially Latino and Native American communities. That means that low-power stations are the future of community radio. Six licenses have been issued so far and Pierson expects about 1,000 to be issued in all.

In the 1920s, many American radio stations were run by unions, civic groups, colleges, and churches. But by 1930, the Federal Radio Commission (now the FCC) had, in "the public interest," reallocated most of those frequencies to for-profit companies. Against widespread citizen outcry, the commercial radio lobby defended and solidified those gains, winning passage of the Communications Act of 1934. That law had been the basis for most broadcast regulation until passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which dismantled most of the ownership controls under the old law. An enduring Newt Gingrich legacy (but ultimately embraced by leaders of both major parties), it allows, among other things, almost unlimited ownership of radio stations by one company. A result has been the airwaves ascendance of Clear Channel Communications, which now owns nearly 1,200 U.S. stations — about a tenth of them — including over half the nation's most-listened-to Top 40 and rock stations. It produces such programs as The Doctor Laura Program and The Rush Limbaugh Show and owns about 100 concert venues — the cause of recent anti-trust action.

Clear Channel's stated mission is "to broadcast the best programming to the broadest audience providing the best value to advertisers." This programming has included, among other things, on-air animal killings and a "Push for Rush and Bush." Miami University broadcasting professor Bruce Daschel calls Clear Channel "the company that made radio unlistenable."

WOJB-FM: making a difference for the good

WOJB-FM, Hayward, Wis., doesn't bring in that kind of money. But if Clear Channel is an effective advertising vehicle, WOJB is effective at something that matters to its volunteers and listeners more: serving its community.

More than a decade ago, then-program director David Keller wrote: "WOJB is a lot like other community radio stations — broke. We are among the working poor. So why are we smiling? Maybe because sometimes we actually do something here that makes a difference, for the good."

The community in question is the home of the Lac Courte Oreilles (la-coot-o-RAY) band of Ojibwe people. The general manager, Camille Lacapa, started there as a temporary secretary soon after the station went on the air in April of 1982 with a mission to provide a Native perspective on community issues.

When Lacapa arrived, a major controversy was raging around a pair of Obijwe brothers who had begun spear hunting, a Native tradition. They were in violation of state laws, but existing treaties exempted traditional practices.

Many local non-Natives, however, incensed at the activities of what they called "timber niggers," had begun using the hunting furor as a pretext for agitating against the Ojibwe.

"So we started having panel discussions with Native and non-Native people, and educated people on the treaties," says Lacapa. "We provided opportunities for anti-Indian organizations to be part of a panel discussion and let listeners form their own conclusions. We just let people speak their minds."

According to Lacapa, listeners appreciated being able to hear both sides speak for themselves. Most decided not to support hate-preaching groups, and the tension was defused.

WOJB serves five reservations, reaching between them and far beyond as well. Its signal covers the northern part of the state and large parts of rural Michigan and Minnesota. As a result, it has more white listeners and volunteers than Indian.

Don't expect a lot of Native American songs, chants and drumming if you tune in. (And if you have internet access, you can.) Says Lacapa: "We play everything except

classical music: Bluegrass, Native American, rock, classic country, jazz, blues. People like our music mix and coverage of local events. We do the strangest things. This week we have the Berkabiner ski race. It's 25 K. We're there at the start and stay until the last person finishes."

The Berkabiner is the only major cross-country ski race in the country. And WOJB covers other kinds of marathons, as well. When power transmission lines cutting through the reservation were proposed to serve towns farther south, the station carried the public hearings in their entirety — sometimes for 16-hour stretches. Lacapa knows of instances when, upon hearing the broadcasts, drivers actually detoured to the hearings to testify.

Another purpose of the station is to revive the Ojibwe language. "Over the years we've had people come in who would play music and tell stories. Now we're starting out with the Ojibwe phrase of the day, with English translation," Lacapa says.

It's another way of maintaining focus on the station's original purpose. "The station is important because we've helped erase stereotyping. Some people have called the station to ask if it's safe to bring their kids to the reservation, like for pow-wows. I want to laugh, but they're sincere and they want to know. It's a great place to bring people. I've had people come and thank me afterward for telling them it was okay."

Behind the 'Cotton Curtain'

If you live around Atlanta, Ga., WRFG-FM (Radio Free Georgia) is "Your Station for Progressive Information." Like WOJB, it acts as a sort of station-of-record on important current events — it was, for instance, one of the few radio stations to air the Iran-Contra hearings in their entirety.

The station went on the air in 1973 as an intentional alternative to the mass media. Ebon Dooley, who manages the station, has been there from the start.

Photos by Rick Winslow, WRFR-LP FM 93.3

Community radio vs. public radio

The freedom community radio stations have to address the programming needs of their listeners comes partly from their non-commercial status. Briefly, there are five types of non-commercial radio:

- College radio is licensed and primarily funded by a sponsoring college. Students get on-air experience and have a large say in programming. The results — the sound — range from the sublimely sophomoric to the unconditionally world-class.
- Community radio is locally based, volunteer-driven, and of widely varying geographic reach. It is funded by underwriters, listeners, and often the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). Its music mix is highly eclectic and frequently features local artists. Its talk programming airs views and voices of the community served, as well as nationally produced programs.
- Pirate radio is low-power, unlicensed, illegal and aggressively traced and prosecuted by the FCC. Pirate operators are the graffiti artists of the airwaves, using their own resources to broadcast individualistic brands of music and commentary. (KFPA's Mary Berg feels the word pirate would be better applied to commercial radio, which she feels steals the air from its real owners, the people.)
- Public radio reaches large geographic areas, airing mainly talk and classical music, though other forms of music, especially jazz, folk and blues, have crept in as listener tastes have evolved. Its listeners are briefed on stock market activities continually and in depth. National Public Radio (NPR) and its many affiliates are funded by the CPB, listeners and corporate underwriters.
- Religious radio is essentially a listener-funded airwaves pulpit with varying proportions of music and talk.

The differences between college, pirate and religious radio are obvious. But the differences between public and community radio, though seemingly nuanced, are of critical importance to community radio supporters.

WOJB-FM in Hayward, Wis. airs NPR programming, and station manager Camille Lacapa appreciates having access to it. But she acknowledges limitations. "As a Native person, I don't think public radio is public enough," she says. "They're geared to a certain audience, the classical listeners who give lots of money. It has nothing to do with rural communities, Native communities, minority communities. I don't think any NPR people came to the reservation to ask people what they thought about September 11. But I can tell you, here on the reservation, people have a lot to say."

Research by Fairness & Accuracy In Media (FAIR), a media watch-dog group, supports her perception, citing an NPR "Beltway bias" that treats heads of government, major parties and generally conservative Washington think-tanks as primary news sources while giving scant air time to citizen groups and ordinary people.

Rockland, Maine's Joe Steinberger, manager of the town's new low-power station, is more critical. Low-power broadcasting got a big boost when President Clinton's FCC appointee authorized low-power licenses for nonprofits wishing to fill very local gaps on the radio dial. Commercial radio lobbyists fought the new low-power licensing hard, of course, smelling loss of listeners, thus ratings, thus ad dollars. Clear Channel led the assault. "They argued that it would cause [airwave] interference," says Steinberger. "But interference with their market, that's what they were talking about."

More unexpectedly, Steinberger says, NPR joined Clear Channel in decrying low-power licensing, possibly also fearing audience loss. "NPR became a leader in their fight. They took contributors' money and used it to limit the amount of choices their listeners had. They've had a virtual monopoly and they won't give it up." As a result of the lobbying, he says the FCC's new leadership has reduced the number of available low-power licenses by about 75 percent. — *C.B.*

Today, with about 50,000 listeners, WRFG is an established hub of community activity.

In Atlanta, says Dooley, "We were first to do jazz, reggae, bluegrass, underground, hiphop." But not the last. The station's music mix seems to have infected the region. "Stations can imitate us as far as music is concerned," Dooley shrugs, "but they have a hard time matching our public-affairs programming."

In this category fall the station's top-of-the-hour news broadcasts, topical call-in shows and continuous news from 4 to 7 P.M.

The station is even a citizen-lobbying vehicle. "We do a poor people's day," says Dooley. "Low-income people gather from around the state to lobby the legislature, and we act as the media outlet for that whole thing. We do a day of education and a day of covering the lobbying. We have several organizations that take part. It's led by the Georgia Coalition on Hunger. We also have a very large coalition working for a local liveable wage."

WRFG's roots are in Atlanta's African-American community. Today's listeners represent a broader spectrum of identities, but Dooley notes a common characteristic: a thirst for information beyond regular sources. "When people want to know something, they call the station. The other thing is our emphasis on multicultural music and entertainment. The old style was thinking in terms of black and white. Atlanta has transcended that, and the immigrant community has adopted our station. We broadcast regularly in English and Spanish. We'll have some French, Swahili."

As the economy tightens, as our sense of security becomes less absolute, as media consolidate and as our ability to experience our communities diminishes, we increasingly value connectedness. As mainstream radio withdraws further from where we live, people are creating their own airwave neighborhoods — independent sources of news, opinion and entertainment.

And they're not just creating them. When push comes to shove, they're standing up for them.

The challenges are enormous, but so is the payoff. And people from all walks of life, from tradition-steeped Rockland, Me., to counter-cultural Berkeley, Calif., are using radio to fashion communication in their own communities' image. ●

Freelance writer and community radio fan ***Charlie Bernstein*** *lives and listens in Augusta, Me.*

TRULY PUBLIC

Noncommercial television should address itself to the ideal of excellence, not the idea of acceptability. — E.B. White, 1967

WHETHER YOU KNOW it or not, your local cable television franchise is waiting for you to come to their offices and make a TV show expressing your opinion.

Now that your attention is snagged, we could talk about the caveats and broken promises. But the fact is that many more cable systems are offering public access broadcast time — including free production facilities and training — than people in communities are using them. According to the Global Village CAT (www.openchannel.se/cat/index.htm), a Sweden-based web site, some 2,000 PEG channels (public, education and government) are currently in existence, and many people reading this article could quickly take advantage of this media opportunity successfully.

This is an optimal time to get to know the possibilities in your community, because a significant change in technology is about to change the television landscape: digital television. Once the transmission format issues are resolved, video is going to be all digits all the time, meaning that you and your consumer videocam and your Mac-based editing software (or those of your local school or library) are going to be shooting and editing shows from tabletops — perhaps even sending the signal from your house. This represents a significant reduction in technical barriers (see "Hire a teenager" below) and a significant increase in shooting flexibility.

Part of success is finding out everything you need to know, and that's the easy part. The Internet is full of resources:

www.alliancecm.org The Alliance for Community Media is a well-established, well-connected source of information, contacts and strategies for local communication activity.

//world.std.com/~rghm/ This special-interest group has a comprehensive list of stations currently offering PATV by city or locale. Check them out to find the opportunity near you.

Dir.webring.com/rw From the home page, search for the Public Access Television Producers webring, and you'll find a wide range of links and contacts to people who are out there doing it and eager to share.

www.publicaccess.org Resources, references to legal issues and links to stations.

The other part of success — pulling it off — is the real work. Some of the stories these web sites tell are either of intransigent cable franchisees who put up logistical barriers to community members, often in the name of lawsuit protection, or of local politics that have created a kind of electronic redlining to keep some in and some out. Good old-fashioned community mobilizing can be brought to bear to take care of these hurdles.

Then the only remaining part is the show-making aspect. The websites listed above are thorough and point to references that give a complete rundown of the planning, production and promotion processes. On the strategy side, here are a few considerations:

TELEVISION *by Bruce Campbell*

Think "unique"

The best use of PATV happens when the programming achieves something that can't be done in other ways such as public rallies, sermons, door-to-door campaigns, or online chat rooms. Can you show pictures of living conditions, cross-cultural activities, sewer drainage or performances? Can you get people to speak who are articulate or vivid but who don't usually get a chance? Better your production values suffer a little if it means getting out of a studio and showing something in a unique way. Sometimes just putting the production means into the hands of people who have never used it before is not only empowering, but fascinating television.

Involvement = viewership

Given that your show will go unlisted in even the local paper, unpromoted on-air and probably unseen except by people who push the wrong buttons on the remote, your best strategy to attract an audience is to involve the potential audience in the production. You could put your parish outreach committee on the air, but why not the whole local church council or coalition, in one form or another? If you must air a discussion by three-people-and-a-potted-plant in a studio, at least make a live audience out of your friends and neighbors. Can your programming idea or issue be co-produced with local partners — high-school classes, community college classes, senior centers, libraries or clubs? Partners also bring access to their publicity vehicles — not to mention much-needed assistance in scrounging up a continuous feed of content ideas.

Hire a teenager

Natural technophiles are an important ally for you, as are high energy levels. An important side benefit is putting media access into young hands at an impressionable age; in addition to empowerment, this goes a long way toward interrupting the creation of patterns of passive media consumption.

Be realistic

You are not going to draw Oprah's numbers. But that shouldn't be a goal. E.B. White was speaking specifically about public television in the quote above, but his point obtains for public access as well. Excellence in this case means demonstrating the kind of diverse and complex ideas that make up the fabric of any community, so that the process of "manufactured consent" is interrupted the next time that tough questions are raised. Do it well, and let your neighbors know when you're on, and you may have a small audience but high impact.

One side note: If your community is small enough, you may have a crack at commercial television. During 15 years as rector of Trinity Church in Alpena, Mich., and with no background in television, the Rev. J. Thomas Downs ran a half-hour news and discussion program on Sunday mornings and succeeded in garnering Nielsen numbers. Partnering with a Congregational church nearby, he purchased time at a "not wildly prohibitive" rate from the local CBS affiliate. "We didn't see any point in public access," says Downs. "Where we live, no one would have seen us." In larger markets, of course, public access may be more widely used and visible. Public or commercial, if you'd like to learn more about the challenges and opportunities of planning a weekly program, Downs is happy to field inquiries: tdowns@eastmich.org. ●

Bruce Campbell is a media editor for The Witness *who lives in Tarrytown, N.Y.*

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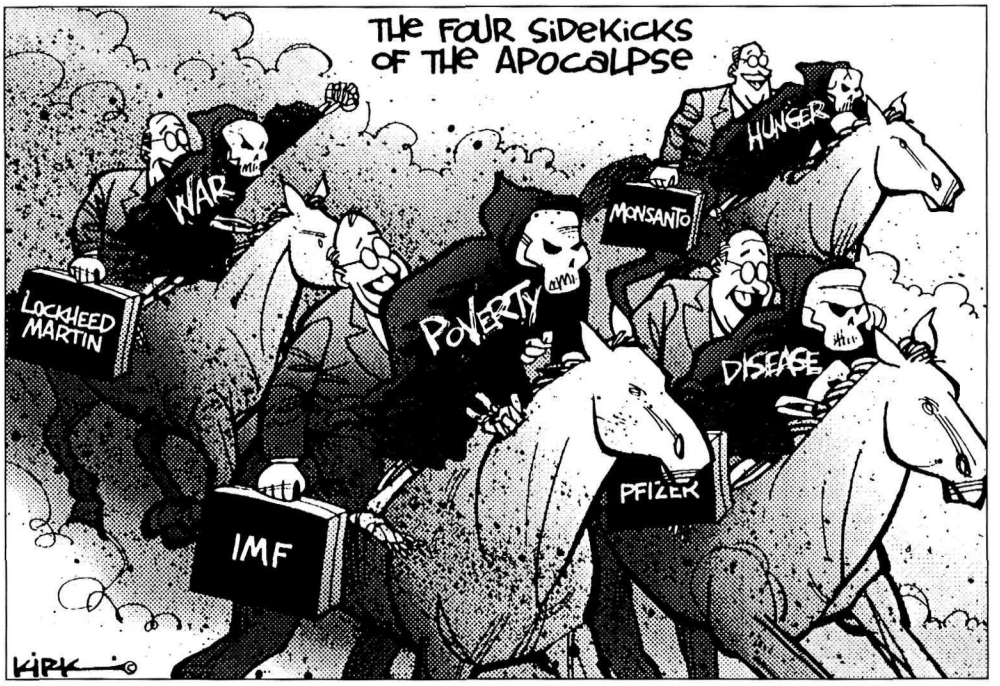

Reframing war on terrorism debate

Public debate of the war on terrorism can be reframed through attention to effective communications strategies, Hunter Cutting writes in *ColorLines* (Spring 2002). "It is extremely difficult to persuade an audience by starting your communication from a place of disagreement. Right now, the initiatives and public policies that the peace and social justice movement would propose as a response to the suicide plane bombings and the war in Afghanistan are at odds with the thinking of the vast majority of the general public. ... Therefore, we must first lay the groundwork to argue for these policies and initiatives by speaking an agenda that the majority of the American public can support. Right now, many people in the U.S. do not feel safe. They feel that the country is weak, that there has been disrespect for human life, and that justice must be obtained. Because of these factors, there is an opening to have public debate that speaks to the questions of how to build safety, strength, respect for human life and justice. ... When secret military tribunals are discussed, we can push for open international civilian trials with verdicts that honor the families of the victims. Such trials will do far more to strengthen our international prestige and quell calls to violence against citizens of the U.S.

"Expanding the war in Afghanistan to Iraq and other countries is a dangerous invitation to accelerate and amplify the cycle of violence which grips the U.S. and the Middle East. Our ability to force other countries into submission is vast, but our ability to translate that submission into a peace that guarantees the safety and lives of U.S. citizens is questionable at best.

"We must present a vision of strength in which power is not measured by our ability to retaliate and kill enemies, but by our stature as a country that does not find itself engaged in war after war, decade after decade. ... The trillions of dollars spent on defense and the tens of thousands of U.S. lives lost in the last 40 years signal a fundamental weakness that is paid for in blood, sweat and tears."

Sanctions are "a wound that will never heal"

"When it comes to relations with the Middle East, it is no secret that the United States has a poor track record," Karima Diane Alavvi of Islamic World Educational Services writes in *America* magazine (3/4/02). "U.S. support for Israel obviously continues to exacerbate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While America's ties with Israel have received media attention during the war in Afghanistan, the effect of U.N. sanctions on Iraqi civilians seems to be a 'non-event' in the eyes of the American public. In the Middle East, however, these sanctions are like a wound that will never heal. I cannot imagine any American who has not shed tears over the loss of innocent lives in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania because of the terrorist attacks. This loss of approximately 3,000 lives was agonizingly painful for all of us. Iraq experiences a similar loss every month. According to recent Unicef statistics, the American-led sanctions are causing 4,500 deaths in Iraq every month.

"The majority of those victims are children, who are dying from diseases that could easily be cured by basic health care or avoided by access to safe drinking water. American citizens must insist that our nation no longer kill innocent children in pursuit of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. A three-year-old dying of dysentery is not the enemy of the United States. The current situation only foments further resentment toward the United States and does a great service to those who are recruiting future Osama bin Ladens for their ranks. Therein lies our greatest danger.

"Imagine a future Osama bin Laden trying to drum up support against the United States, if we were to help the Palestinians achieve a small state of their own. Imagine trying to rally hatred against a nation that not only stops the sanctions against Iraq, but sends in technicians and supplies to repair the infrastructure that it destroyed during the Persian Gulf War. Imagine a world in which the powerful ones use their might to help the less fortunate, and you will be imagining a world in which terrorists would have a hard time drumming up support."

Pricing bananas

Workers on banana plantations in Belize complain of chest pain from aerial pesticides sprayed while they work, according to a story by Elizabeth Swain in gristmagazine.com

(3/11/02). Mothers bathe infants in the same tubs used to rinse the pesticide-coated bananas.

"At the store where I shop, organic bananas cost 79 cents per pound," Swain writes. "Non-organic bananas cost 40 cents per pound. Otherwise, the fruits look identical: bright yellow, cheerful, innocent.

"But somewhere between Central America and the U.S. almost the whole story of these bananas has been stripped away. Did the person who picked them earn a fair wage? What chemicals were used? How were they used? All that complexity is reduced to a sticker that says 'organic' or 'conventional' — and a price tag. ... None of us can act on information we do not have. The organic label doesn't guarantee that the pickers were paid enough to feed their children. The conventional label doesn't mean that pesticides were used irresponsibly. And 39 cents extra per pound doesn't mean anything except 39 cents extra per pound. ...

"The missing information is vital, because a system that makes decisions based on a single variable can only fulfill a single goal. You wouldn't expect a healthy garden if you only optimized the phosphorous content of your soil. You wouldn't expect a healthy family if you made all choices based on the needs of only one of your two children.

"And yet the reigning assumption in our world is that an economy that takes only price into account can still somehow deliver the goods. Under this assumption, if children are in poverty we must have a 'child-poverty crisis.' If ecosystems are struggling we must have an 'environmental crisis.' But these are not distinct problems. They are symptoms of a single deep crisis — the crisis of an economy operating with insufficient information and a fundamental inability to pursue any goal beyond that of price.

"If Fed-Ex can track the exact location of any package anywhere in the world, why can't we know the history of a bunch of bananas? We can handle countless reviews of books and movies without clogging up the entertainment industry, so why can't we have reviews of the social and environmental impacts of wedges of cheese, bottles of wine, and bouquets of flowers? Why can't we estimate the true costs of products and make sure that cost shows up in the final price?"

Environmental web action center

The Union of Concerned Scientists has set up a Web Action Center at http://www.ucs-action.org, to facilitate contact with legislators on issues of ecological concern. The web site encourages visitors to set up profiles, so that "after your first action, sending a letter will be as easy as entering your email address or replying to an email. Your message will automatically be sent to the appropriate decision-maker or your member of Congress. Periodically through the year, we will send you email alerts on critical issues to encourage you to take action. You will be able to choose between visiting the Action Center to personalize your message and simply clicking 'reply' to communicate with key policymakers."

Episcopal elders

Episcopalians are among the four U.S. religious groups with the greatest concentration of adults age 65 and older, according to statistics gathered by the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (Sojonet, 3/6/02). Twenty-eight percent of Episcopalians surveyed in 2001 were over 65. The other groups were Congregational/UCC (35 percent over 65), Presbyterian (29 percent over 65) and Jewish (28 percent over 65).

The survey also reported the groups with the greatest concentration of adults 18–29 years old: Muslim/Islamic (58 percent), Buddhist (56 percent), Evangelical Christian (35 percent) and Mormon (29 percent). Thirty-five percent of respondents who identified with "no religion" were between the ages of 18–29. ●

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