

NOTRE DAME STUDY OF CATHOLIC PARISH LIFE

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PARISH LIFE IN TOWN AND COUNTRYSIDE

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***The Non-Metropolitan Catholic Church:
An Overlooked Giant***

Most people connect the Roman Catholic church in the United States with the big cities and, more recently, their suburbs. That is reasonable. Nearly 60% of Americans who identify themselves as Catholics on general population surveys live in cities of more than 50,000 people or their incorporated suburbs. Much of American Catholic history and sociology has portrayed the life of urban ethnic groups. When spokesmen for the church are quoted in the press, almost always they are archbishops from the great cities. And Rome is not in the habit of electing cardinals from the dioceses of New Ulm, Gallup, or Ogdensburg, no matter how qualified the bishop.

There is a less noticed segment of American Catholicism located in town and countryside. Based on general population surveys, somewhere between 25 % and 40% of all Catholics live outside the cities of greater than 50,000 or their incorporated suburbs. And based on data from the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life, between 40 and 50 percent of all parishes are located in these same areas. If we were pressed for a defensible figure, we would estimate that one-third of all Catholic parishioners reside in the towns, unincorporated places with a more rural than urban character, and the rural areas; 46% of the parishes are located there.

Thus, we argue that one can find more Catholics in non-urban areas than the total memberships of each of the largest Protestant bodies, the Southern Baptists and the United Methodists. Catholics of the small cities, towns, and countryside exceed even the combined memberships, urban and rural, of the Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and United Church of Christ.

Some have argued that the Catholic parish of town and countryside does not receive the time, resources, and attention that its numbers deserve. The purpose of this report is not to argue that question but to tell the story of these often overlooked parishes and parishioners. We will begin by tracing the demographics of urban deconcentration in contemporary America and the concomitant uneven growth in rural and town populations. We will, likewise, sketch out some of the history of rural and town parishes noting, in particular, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century decline in rural and town parishes and the ascendancy of the urban-immigrant parish and, later, the emergence of the suburban parish. These trends may have contributed to what some have called a "politics of neglect" with respect to the rural and town parish. We will, then, present an analysis of rural and town parishes, looking at their structures and leadership dynamics, and exploring the religious life of their parishioners.

At the outset we must stress that it is easier to generalize about urban and suburban Catholic parishes and parishioners than to generalize about their rural and town counterparts. Some parishes of town and countryside have always been isolated from the mainstream of American Catholic life and the cities. Others have been engulfed by urban waves and, though located as much as sixty miles from the central city, include many commuters within their membership. While many of the midwestern parishes of town and countryside revolve around the agrarian life, more parishes there and elsewhere contain refugees from the city, retirees and others in resort areas, miners, and the marginally employed. Some towns will never grow and change, but others have experienced a sudden infusion of new people as a large industry has built a plant there. In some places a Catholic ethnic group has predominated for years, but in others Catholics are still painfully aware that they are a small minority, and they are far distant from the Catholic economic achievers who are celebrated in so many reports nowadays. In some of the parishes the distinctiveness of being a Catholic is unclear. Many have become Catholic through marriage but the rates of mixed marriage remain high. The vision of a post-Vatican II church in the late 20th century is sometimes unclear because, in their minority milieu, to be a Catholic was to be caught up in praying the Rosary, not eating meat on Friday, and playing bingo at the Knights of Columbus hall, and these are no longer distinctive signs of Catholicism. Thus, we remind readers that each rural and town parish is especially unique because of the vastly different experiences of Catholics in these locales.

Finally, one should not categorize town and countryside churches as problem parishes. An air of triumphalism pervades some, they are doing so well. Some are blessed with good pastors of long duration who worked hard to translate the vision of Vatican II to that locale. Some are in locales where Catholics are the dominant social stratum. And some have emerged from lean years with troublesome pastors to becoming a community of faith led in every way by the laity. Just as rural and town do not mean agrarian, their parishes do not mean insuperable problems.

From Urban to Rural: Urban Deconcentration

If indeed rural and town parishes have suffered from official neglect, the irony is that many are located in the areas of the country that have been growing. The United States may be experiencing a long-term trend in which people are moving from cities and suburbs to towns and countrysides. This trend, observed to some extent in most post-industrial societies, involves a slowdown in the long-term movement toward more and more urbanization. Post-industrial communication and transportation technologies permit social and economic activities to take place in less densely settled regions. Rural areas and small towns are the recipients of this population dispersal.

Yet, the pattern is uneven. In some states, perhaps only 10% of the rural counties will show great growth. They may be “collar counties” to the cities, or they may be blessed with resort potential. In a few states, most counties will boom with new economic growth. Still others, however, will experience population replacement only by

economically marginal young people who are rejecting urban life. Population growth or stability does not necessarily mean economic development.

In the 1960's rural areas lost 2.8 million citizens. Between 1970 and 1980 non-metropolitan areas grew by 15.4%, whereas metro areas increased only by 9.1 %. Counties with densities of less than 10 people per square mile grew the fastest during the 1970's. In a related statistic, counties with no city above 10,000 grew by 13% during the 1970's following a 3% decline during the 1960's. The farm population continues to decline with some slowdown in this trend in recent years. Additionally, 9 out of every 10 farm families have some off-farm income. The recession of the early 1980's hit the rural areas and small towns the worst, leading to a slowdown in the exodus to the countryside. The most recent data show a net out migration from the rural areas.

Decentralization of population to the town and countryside has changed the nature of the labor force and the jobs their people perform. Recreational and retirement areas particularly in the West and the South have developed. The number of jobs in mining, manufacturing, trade and services has increased in town and country areas. While jobs and people are moving away from the metropolitan areas, non-metropolitan residents are often independent of metropolitan labor markets.

One of the implications of these emerging patterns is an even more complex rural and town parish with a more diverse mix of parishioners. This has already created the potential for conflict coming from people with differing religious needs and motivations as well as social backgrounds. Rural/town parishes are often ill-prepared for such changes, lacking even basic information about the proportion of people who are new, where they formerly resided, and what being a Catholic means to them. Rural/town parish consultants tell us that their first step is typically to collect such information.

A Short History of the Rural and Town Parishes in the U.S.

The sequence of events which led to the urban/suburban orientation of the Catholic church in the United States can be quickly sketched.

Colonial Period — In a real sense the early history of the Catholic church in the U.S. was that of the rural and town parish. At the time of the Revolutionary War there were no cities exceeding most definitions of small town. Only Philadelphia had a population of more than 25,000. Most cities were village size and the major centers were mostly in the range of 3000 to 10,000.

The rest of the population lived in the outskirts, the hinterlands, and the barely explored areas. Often there were no churches to serve these rural peoples, particularly among Catholics who remained a very small minority of the total population of the colonies.

Catholicism entered the Revolutionary period looking like a church without a bright future. There had been massive defections of Catholics from the faith, some to Protestant groups, but most probably just became inactive. Lack of clergy meant that the basic structure of American Catholicism could not be erected as it existed in Europe. (Some observers would say all of these conditions obtain nowadays in town and countryside Catholicism.) Catholicism had only three or four urban centers of activity and scattered rural and small town concentrations of the faithful.

The response was the creation of the lay-centered parish, the development of trusteeism, along with the collective request to mission societies and national churches in the homelands for pastors. From the beginning, then, the American parishes of the rural and town areas developed traditions of "bottom-up" activity, of local lay responsibility for parish life. It is only later with the growth of larger cities and the consolidation of religious order among the dioceses that the American church became primarily a "top-down" organization.

Growth and Expansion (1800-1870) — Before the Revolutionary War, the territorial expanse of the colonies lay barely beyond the Hudson River in the North and the Appalachian Mountains in the South. By 1800, the territory of the U.S. extended roughly to the Mississippi River. Cities were founded as trading centers and early sites for manufacturing and transportation. The hinterlands surrounding these cities were also extensively developed.

The construction of the infrastructure of this region's economic, social and political life also made way for the spread of the Christian European's religious life. The religious needs of the settlers, explorers, traders, farmers, miners, and townspeople were first met in simple ways through house churches and occasional priestly visits. Eventually religion in the Eastern part of the country became organized and underwent many revitalization movements. These in turn, resulted in periods of religious awakening and missionary activity to the Frontier. As part of this great evangelization effort, both priests from religious orders and bishops in their newly-created dioceses began to colonize the new territory with Catholics.

Often a monastery was founded with the monks servicing many missions in the surrounding territory. Likewise, once a parish was established, it often acted as the development agency for the growth of multiple daughter parishes in the territory. When established parishes and/or monasteries could not supply priests to the parishes, the diocese would typically take over jurisdiction of these parish units. Often these early parishes in frontier territory were settled by ethnic groups who quickly built their parish infrastructure and expanded it to new areas.

The Urban Immigrant Church — Just as this settlement and evangelization of the South and Midwest was beginning, large movements of people from Europe began concentrating in the cities of the East and Midwest. It was but a short time and the church began to see the cities as its new frontier. This period has left its mark on the

contemporary church in the form of the so-called "urban bias." Numerous Germans and Irish were moving into these cities, with the Irish basically staying and the Germans splitting themselves between the city and the country. The urban Irish, greatly aided by their knowledge of English, took the lead in Americanizing and reconciling the church to American culture and politics. By the time the Poles, the Italians and other Eastern and Southern Europeans came, the Irish had already set the dominant urban tone for the American church. However, while the church was becoming urban in the pre-Civil war days, the numbers of town Catholics, including the Irish, also grew enormously. Later in the period between 1880 and 1920, unprecedented numbers of Catholics came to the U. S., largely settling in the burgeoning cities of the East and Midwest. Whatever was left of the early small town and rural flavor of the church now quickly gave way to an urban orientation.

While official church statistics on location of parishioners/parishes are hard to come by, one author from the 1920's claims that a conservative guess would locate five-sixths of American Catholics in urban areas, thus leaving only one in six in the rural areas and small towns. Nine-tenths of the parish schools were believed to be in towns of more than 2500 population. Finally, this same author notes that about 90% of the resources in personnel and equipment was used in distinctly urban religious work within the American church.

Another author writing from this same period claims that the rural Catholic population might have dropped to more like one in five or even one in four.

The Twentieth Century Suburbanization of the Church — Just as the church was becoming strongly urban in location and agenda, another movement of people and ideas was occurring. This was the upward mobility of Catholics, documented in Reports 1-3. As Catholics became more educated, acquired jobs of equal or higher status, and made incomes of the same or higher levels as the general population (which was basically Protestant), they too participated in the general decentralization of American cities. In 1920, census figures showed that 50% of all Americans lived in urban areas and of these 30% were located in suburbs. In 1980, 75% lived in urban areas, of these nearly 60% were in the suburbs. Clearly, the nation as a whole had suburbanized over the middle part of the twentieth century. Catholics too had participated in this trend.

As the Catholic population has migrated to the suburbs so too has the general orientation of the American church. Whereas the church had adopted an urban model over much of this century, many observers feel it is now in the process of taking on a suburban agenda. When one considers that an estimated 46% of parishes and one in three Catholics are located in non-metropolitan areas, however, perhaps a pluralistic view of the American church would be more appropriate moving toward the twenty-first century.

Definitions of Rural and Town

The Census Bureau offers a size-dependent definition of rurality. An "urban" center consists of 2500 or more persons within a town boundary and the "rural population" consists of all other persons. By this definition approximately one in four Americans are rural. It does not, however, address the many Americans outside larger cities and suburbs whose values and way of life are decidedly not like "urban" residents in the metropolitan sense.

Because there are degrees of "urbanness," many scholars use the Census Bureau's Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) designation to make urban-rural distinctions. An SMSA is any county or related counties with a central city of greater than 50,000 residents. Generally, then, residents of cities of greater than 50,000 people are called "urban," residents of suburbs within the SMSA are called "suburban," residents of incorporated areas of 2500 to 50,000 are called "town," and those outside these locales are "rural." There is considerable dispute in the middle ranges of this classification, and many scholars would limit the town classification to 2500 - 25,000 residents. Further, it is unclear whether residents of the unincorporated hinterlands of SMSA's should be treated as suburban or rural.

The precision and inclusiveness of a definition has immense implications for the analysis of data resulting from such a definition. The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life took place in several stages, and, therefore, was affected by the definitions of location used in each of the stages.

In Phase I a 10% proportionate stratified sample of 1,800 parishes was drawn from the 18,000 American parishes listed in the Kenedy Directory. The location of these parishes was stratified using Census Bureau classifications based on SMSA designations. Of these 1,800 parishes, 1,099 sent back usable questionnaires. The questionnaires asked respondents to classify the locale of the parish in any of eight categories, as listed below.

To make for consistency of comparison between Phase I and Phase II of the research, these categories were later collapsed in the following fashion: (1) inner city, business areas, and other urban categories were coded simply as *urban* (30%); (2) high and low density suburbs were coded as *suburban* (23%); (3) small town remained *small town* (32%). Finally, rural, farm, and resort were coded as *rural* (14%). If the latter two categories are added together and the range of sampling error for Phase I is applied, we can assert with some confidence that between 43 and 49 percent of the U. S. parishes are in the towns and countryside, as perceived by their pastors or parish administrators.

When we compare their perception of their locale with the reality of U.S. Census conventions, we find a high degree of consistency. Of those parishes where the respondent chose one of the "rural" categories, 78% are in locales of less than 2500 people or in open country, 18% are in locales of greater than 2500 people, and the rest are in unincorporated areas near a larger city. Of those parishes where the respondent chose the "small town" category, 43% are in locales of 2500 or less, 51% are in towns of 2500 to 25,000. and the remainder are in small cities. When we make generalizations about rural and town

parishes. then. we are reasonably confident that by both subjective perception and objective conventions we have selected appropriate samples. But the boundaries between the two are not firmly fixed.

The nuances of the Phase II sampling plan, where we studied 36 parishes intensively, yielded five rural parishes and fourteen town parishes. Our generalizations regarding parishioners' religiosity, social values, and demographic characteristics, and our information on leadership and conflict among volunteers, staff, and pastors comes from the Phase II sample, as well as ethnographic reports on each parish. Overall in Phase II, there were usable questionnaires from 2667 parishioners, 202 volunteers, 89 staff, and 35 pastors, generally proportionate to the size of the parish.

The Rural and Town Parish in the United States

Parishes of the town and countryside can usually be characterized by their small size because they are located in places with less population size or density. Table I addresses the relationship between urban-rural locale and parish size. The entries show the proportion of parishes within each size class. The first entry tells the current size, and the second entry tells what the size was five years ago. These figures allow us to determine in which urban-rural classes there is growth and decline. For example, currently only 41% of rural parishes have fewer than 500 members, whereas five years ago 49% had fewer than 500.

**Table 1
Size of Catholic Parish by Urban-Rural Class**

Size	Rural		Town		Suburban		Urban		
	<i>Now</i>	<i>5 Years Ago</i>							
Under 500	41%	49%		29%	2%	4%	12%	11%	
500-999	29	24	26%	25	24	6	6	10	12
1000-2499	22	20	33	31	21	32	33	31	
2500 +	8	8	16	16	71	58	45	46	
	100%	101%		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
	(152)	(152)	100%	(350)	(350)	(259)	(259)	(330)	(330)

Table I clearly shows that the rural and town parishes are smaller than the city and, especially, the suburban parishes. The combination of smaller size and the rural or town environment reveals much about these parishes as human organizations.

Literature in organization science tells us that small size is correlated with a number of organizational factors. We would expect, therefore, that types of parish integration, leadership, conflict, organizational climate and effectiveness would differ with parish size.

Every parish is an open system organizationally. Thus, rural and town parishes are open to the rural environment and other external influences. This should caution against the automatic application of urban or suburban organizational models when dealing with these kinds of parishes.

We have earlier pointed out that rural environments can be expected to undergo increasing complexity and heterogeneity. While recognizing that rural parishes exist in different environments from the urban and suburban parishes, we should, nonetheless, be mindful of the fact that this environment is changing and is likely to have many implications for rural parishes of the future. Therefore, we should see parishes of town and countryside as open to increasingly complex, diverse, uncertain and changing environments. More specifically this rural environment includes (1) rural culture with its concomitant customs, traditions, mores, values, and (2) rural social structure with its changing patterns of settlement, technology, communication and transportation systems.

Modeling the rural parish would further call our attention to the fact that its structure is likely to be much less complex with less formalized programming to carry out its religious *raison d'être*. We would anticipate a parish with fewer priests and differing ages and tenures than the urban/suburban parish. Likewise, we would expect fewer parish staff members in well differentiated roles. Staff meetings and staff relations are more likely to revolve around the pastor and several key parish persons. Parish programs are more likely to be carried out informally by the pastor and a few volunteers. While many religious functions are met by the rural parish, some functions are adequately taken care of by the broader rural/town community and are, therefore, not needed by the rural/town parish.

The rural/town parish council is more likely to take on a significant role relative to other decision-making units in the parish. On the other hand, some rural parish councils may not be strong or active at all due to the strong influence of the pastor's personality and leadership style.

Because of a much less complex structure, the rural parish needs to resort less often to more complicated forms of organizational integration, such as planning processes, parish teams, integrating roles and boards. Since there are a certain number of religious functions to be met by the rural parish and a smaller number of parishioners to participate in these functions, the intensity of lay involvement is likely to be higher in all roles but

those traditionally reserved to the ordained priest. Since the resources of the rural parish are often meager, there will be a greater emphasis upon volunteerism.

Parishes can be said to vary in their overall climates, just as other organizations do. The degree of warmth and consideration shown, the degree of autonomy of workers from orders from above, and the overall emphasis upon goal accomplishment and achievement, are all indicators of the way in which parishes differ in climate. Rural parishes are usually thought to be characterized by warmer climates, but this will depend upon the personality and leadership style of the pastor and the degree of turnover in priests and/or pastoral administrators. While the potential exists in parishes without steady leadership by priests for the laity to do most of the parish's activities themselves, parishes may be demoralized by frequent pastoral turnovers, by uncertainty that the diocese will allow a successful pastor to stay, or by fear that a priest ill-suited to the local situation will be assigned. Their small size makes such parishes more vulnerable to changes in the authority figure. Due to these factors we can expect some rural parishes to be very high, but others very low on parish climate. We now turn to the data to see if these expectations are met.

Parish Demographics

When we examine the Study data, we find that rural and town parishes are overwhelmingly territorial parishes and not national parishes. National parishes are very much an urban, ethnic phenomenon. Both settlement patterns and the commitments of various religious orders to certain ethnic communities in the cities help to explain the presence of the national parishes there. Thus a higher proportion of the urban than rural parishes continue to have clergy from religious orders. However, clergy from religious orders are still found in the parishes of town and countryside, and the mix of religious and diocesan clergy approximates the national average. Since suburban parishes are the newest, they have the fewest numbers of religious clergy.

Proportionately, rural and town parishes are the parishes most likely to sustain missions, with the rural parishes having the highest percentage. Estimates of priestless parishes in rural areas range between 5% and 10%. The true figure is probably closer to 10% because many priests are spending more time in quite distant missions than they are in their home-based parish. A rural parish with three missions may only see its priest "at home" one week out of three or four. Some rural pastors are also in chaplain service and may be gone for months at a time. While urban parishes have more missions in actual number, their overall percent is only 6%, and some of these missions are city jails or storefront churches not far removed from the home parish.

When pastors in the Phase I sample were asked what had been happening to the size of their parishes over the last five years (see Table 1), rural pastors responded that they had grown. Town pastors described this pattern as one of moderate growth. This is in contrast to urban pastors who described modest decline, and suburban pastors who reported enormous growth. Earlier we outlined the trend toward urban deconcentration of population to the rural and small town areas. This testimony on the part of the pastors

would seem to corroborate this trend and suggest its significance for Catholic parish planning.

With the exception of the influx of Hispanics and Asians in urban parishes, most pastors perceive that the number of foreign-born in their parishes has decreased. When asked which ethnic group predominates in their parishes, pastors in both rural and town parishes were very likely to note German, by a large margin, or Irish. There were also considerable mentions of French, Italian, Polish, and Slovak.

The most likely places to find Hispanics and Black parishes are in the cities, and Italians are found heavily in the suburbs and cities. The ubiquitous Irish, however, are the most frequent presence in both the suburbs and cities. Polish and German presence is considerable in each. If Native Americans are found in Catholic parishes it is most likely to be noted in the rural church.

The concentration of recent immigrant groups in urban parishes accounts for the predominance there of various foreign languages, particularly Spanish, at parish services. The only non-English languages that are in use above the average in the rural parishes are German and Latin. Some of this use of Latin may reflect the pastoral needs of elderly located there or may indicate a violation of official norms on the use of Latin.

Reports of pastors on the social class composition of their parishes lack the precision of census data. Pastors do, however, note patterns that are generally in accord with other statistical and sociological measurements of socioeconomic status. They report that most of their parishioners are in the moderate to lower income levels, with grade school to high school educations predominating. There is some indication of pockets of more affluent, educated parishioners in these town and rural parishes. These may occur in exurban "collar counties," in the rich agricultural areas where owners of large farms or ranches have attended schools of agriculture, or in some up-scale resort and retirement locales.

Finally, it should be noted that rural and town Catholics tend to be religious minorities within their surrounding populations. There is one interesting exception. About one out of every eight rural parishes is located in an area where 81-100% of the residents are Catholic. This more than likely reflects the fact that some Catholic parishes are in predominantly Catholic settlements of various nationality groups, such as the Germans.

Parish Programs

Earlier we suggested that parish size is related to the degree of task differentiation or program complexity. When pastors were asked which of an array of *formal* programs and ministries their parishes had, rural and town pastors were least likely to mention that they had programs in every major category of these programs. Report 8 of this series described a cluster analysis of the different types of programs. Both parish size and urban-rural location were good predictors of the complexity of programs. For example, smaller

rural or town parishes seldom reported much more than Mass and religious education for children. Larger rural or town parishes might also have a designated program of ministry to the sick or to the elderly, social service, liturgical music, or adult religious education. A wide range of formally designated parish programs and services, however, was more characteristic of the very large suburban and urban parishes.

It should be clear that we are discussing only formal programs. We do not know whether rural and town parishes accomplish these functions in an informal way. Having less complex task structures should require less complex and differentiated programs. Thus, they may very well do so without making specific staff assignments and program designations.

Parish Staffing

Priests — Rural and town parishes rarely have more than one or two full-time priests. Six percent of rural parishes have no resident priest and, if assumptions made earlier about the number of missions rural pastors must serve are correct, this figure is likely to be considerably higher. A common stereotype portrays the pastor of a rural or town parish as quite elderly and having served the parish forever. In actuality, pastors of such parishes match the national age distribution for active (not retired) priests, but their turnover rate is much higher. Despite this high rate of reassignment, many priests find their life ministry in the rural or town parish and about 30% remain in the same parish for fifteen to twenty years.

Two other patterns are more common, however. A young priest is assigned the pastorate of such a parish, performs well, and is quickly moved to a larger parish with presumably more problems. Or, a middle-aged priest suffers from stress, burn-out, or drinking problems in a larger parish and is assigned to a pastorate that “anyone can manage.” Often his tenure at the rural or town parish is brief because the personal problem remains or he finds the parish's problems more complex than the chancery anticipated. The net effect is that the parishioners of town and countryside must adjust more frequently than parishioners in cities and suburbs to very different styles for handling priestly responsibilities. Furthermore, priests of town and countryside parishes report less tolerance and more vocal opposition from parishioners when their style does not conform to community expectations.

Staff — Staff, other than priests, are also less numerous in the rural and town parishes. Whether such staff are sisters, brothers, permanent or transient deacons, or lay people, urban and suburban parishes are twice as likely to have non-priestly staff. When other staff are present in rural and town parishes, it is most likely to be sisters. That makes the staff future even more problematic for rural/town parishes because the decline in the availability of sisters is even greater than the decline in available priests, and often lay ministers in such parishes have less training than their suburban counterparts.

Seldom are rural or town parish staff found outside religious education or parochial schools. In cities and suburbs, however, staff may be serving as pastoral associates, in youth, ill, or elderly ministries, or a variety of other capacities. Only the larger town parishes have such personnel.

Staff Structure — While many urban and suburban parishes have formally-designated parish teams composed of clergy, staff, religious and lay people, rural and town parishes overwhelmingly admit that the pastor is the team or claim that there is a team that is informally designated. Often this means the pastor and maybe a few volunteers from the parish do most of the planning and execution of parish programming. With small numbers involved, formal staff meetings are often not necessary to accomplish parish business. While rural staff are considered competent and supportive of the pastor and engaged in team work, nevertheless, it is the rural volunteers who would most readily admit that staff relations are only fair to poor in quality. In particular, their relationship to the pastor is problematic.

The Parish Council

Town parishes are the ones most likely to have parish councils, but rural the least. However, rural parishes say they are more likely to be forming or reforming their councils. Perhaps stipulations in the 1983 Code of Canon Law which instruct parishes to have a Financial Council could explain this. The frequent changes in pastors in the rural areas more likely account for this pattern.

Rural parishes tend to choose council members by election, pastor's appointment, and volunteering, and probably have elections only if there are not enough volunteers. At this point few rural parishes seem concerned about representing different constituencies on the parish council. With the growing heterogeneity of some rural environments, rural parishes may opt for more representative elections in the future.

It is likely that parish councils are formed out of the existing power structure in the rural parish. The ethnographic accounts written by the Phase II site visitors indicate that some of these rural councils rubber stamp whatever the pastor wants. Merchants and entrepreneurs of small businesses who serve on parish councils in both rural areas and towns are reluctant to speak up strongly against their potential clients and customers, and, therefore, they try to stay in the good graces of the pastor.

A counter pattern is also evident in the Phase II data. Some rural and town parishes have a strong tradition of lay enablement and empowerment and, therefore, have strong, vocal councils. A decisive factor seems to be the degree of mobility of past pastors and their acceptance of lay leadership. (See vignette entitled "The Lay Parish," *Report 9*, p. 7.)

While the town and rural councils report the greatest frequency of meetings, nonetheless, the rural councils cannot be said to be the most active. Finances occupy

virtually all of their attention. On the other hand, town parish councils are active with a variety of parish matters spread out among planning, staff discussion, and finances. Suburban parish councils act more like parish boards of directors with the priest as the CEO of a complex organization. Councils in towns and rural areas are much more likely to be passive advisory boards to the pastor.

The Parish School

Although about 45% of all American parishes report having or supporting a school, only 20% of the rural parishes and 31% of the town parishes do so. Where schools exist among the rural and town parishes, they seem to be of two kinds. One exists where Catholics are concentrated. In such areas, most of the Catholic children must attend or the school will not have enough pupils to continue. Social pressures to attend the Catholic school are especially strong in rural or small town ethnic settlements. Where no Catholic schools exist in such settlements, Catholics still dominate public education.

A second type of rural Catholic school exists in locales where there is no public school nearby. Both Catholic and non-Catholic children attend the same Catholic school.

While the Phase II sample size for rural parishioners who have a parish school was too small to make any generalizations, there were enough town parishioners in parishes with a school to make some comments. Town parishioners are more likely than suburbanites to send their child to a Catholic school, although a higher proportion of suburbanites have access to a Catholic school. (Fifty-three percent of suburban parishes currently have or support a school, whereas thirty-one percent of town parishes are similarly situated.) Many suburban parents did not have a history of parochial school attendance, whereas the town parishioners did. The town parishioners, however, are not more likely than parishioners elsewhere to cite positive reasons such as daily religious training, values education, or discipline for sending their children to the Catholic school. They are quite likely to point to financial constraints, poor facilities or curriculum as reasons not to send their child to the Catholic school.

Parish Activities and Vitality

Pastors were asked for the most popular parish activities and how these activities lead to a sense of parish vitality. In some ways, these may be looked upon as measures of parish climate and/or effectiveness. Rural pastors mentioned as their most popular parish activities weekend Mass and bingo, followed by children's religious education, socials, Altar Society, Knights of Columbus, and Devotions to the Blessed Virgin. Besides Mass and bingo, pastors of town parishes gave as their top activities children's religious education, socials, Knights of Columbus and Altar Society, the parish council, youth ministry, renewal, and liturgical planning.

The rural parish does not engage in as many activities as the other types of parishes. The functions it has are liturgical, social and community building. The role of

bingo in the rural parish (as well as the urban) is especially important to community-building and reinforcing.

The popularity of the Altar Society is still high in both the rural and urban parish. This vestige of the pre-Vatican II church serves many useful functions including taking care of the altar linens, providing flowers, parish visiting, and covering of funerals. The rural and town pastor knows that he can count on the Society and it is greatly appreciated. Some have argued that Altar Society also provides status for women in the rural and town church. Presumably, this is a women's ministry with a lot of influence in the parish and this influence does not end when the children leave the school system. Urban and suburban women find many other outlets for status and self-esteem and, therefore, do not find such a vehicle necessary. The literature on the status of women in rural/town areas, however, does not suggest a strong feeling of status deprivation among women.

Some have also argued that, prior to the advent of parish councils, Knights of Columbus leaders acted as a kitchen cabinet to pastors and that there is redundancy now between the two. K of C presumably gave status to laymen in the rural/town priest-dominated parish. Our data do not shed much light on the issue.

We suspect that the need for status, if felt by either males or females in the rural/town church, comes as much from the “closed” pre-Vatican II nature of some parishes as from minority status in the community. For some people, the parish is the one institution in the small town where they can be a “somebody”; there, they are not poor and do not have minority status.

Parish-Diocesan Relations

Parish-diocesan relationships appear somewhat more touchy among the town and countryside parishes. Rural (12 %) and urban (16 %) parishes depend financially upon the diocese more than do other kinds of parishes. They are likely to have more problems and less resources with which to work. While rural parishes attempt fewer organized programs, they have fewer people to support them financially and that sets limits on what a parish can do. Many are also trying to sustain missions. Rural parishes often have active finance committees — as the one area where the council concentrates — and they scrutinize income and expenditures; despite the self-reliance of rural people, they are not likely to give up subsidies from the diocese. City parishes also have a lower income base because they are more likely to serve the poor and elderly. Often they too are unable to increase the amount received from collections.

In spite of, perhaps because of this state of dependence, rural parishes are likely to have the highest number of complaints about their relationship with the diocese. Many express concern that their diocese is not set up to think seriously about the needs of the rural parish. Rural parish leaders (pastors, staff, volunteers) are more likely than any of the other groups to say that there is a lack of moral leadership, communication, resources, and contact coming from the diocese. Even when chancery personnel are thought to be

competent, they are housed often in a distant city and staffed by products of seminaries with urban/suburban outlooks; their way of life has little in common with the rural parish. Finally, volunteer leaders are much more likely to say that conflict internal to the parish has been initiated at the diocesan level, we suspect through the assignment of an unliked pastor.

Parish Leadership

We now turn to the ways rules, teams, planning processes, leadership, authority and decision-making function so that parish tasks may be accomplished. We will look first at who the rural and town parish leaders are, and then we will summarize the dynamics of leadership integration mechanisms. Insights for this section come primarily from the intensive parish studies of Phase II.

Backgrounds — Rural and town leaders come from positions in basic parish services such as the parish council, the school, children's religious education, and liturgical music. Leaders from suburban and urban parishes, on the other hand, tend to come from a wider range of specialized ministries. Rural/town leaders feel that they contribute more in the areas of budget and finance, clerical management, liturgy, and religious education. While rural leaders cite their work in planning liturgies and fill such roles as ushers, they either feel less comfortable with or have been excluded by the current pastor from roles executing the liturgies, such as rectors or communion assistants.

Rural and town volunteer leaders are more likely to have lived in the parish while growing up and to have attended the parish school, if one was available. Thus, the parish's past culture exerts a greater influence over the present parish lives of these volunteers than over their urban or suburban counterparts. These leaders are also less likely to have studied in a religious setting elsewhere and been formed as candidates for the religious life. (Many rural people who did join religious communities became urbanized in the process and never returned to their home parishes.) Due to the lack of Catholic schools in their locales, many of these volunteer leaders have not had the influence of religious as role models. Because of their isolation from the chancery (often the traveling distance is great), rural and town volunteer leaders are least likely to have spent time in courses or workshops on religious topics, or to have made retreats. Yet they are more likely than leaders in other types of parishes to have read books and articles on religious topics.

Leadership and Decision-Making — Volunteers perceive that the most significant parish leadership positions beyond the pastor are in music and religious education in the rural parish and in finances and physical plant in the town parish.

As established earlier, many rural and town parishes are dominated by their pastors. This is corroborated by the finding that in rural and town parishes, volunteers are least likely to feel they have any influence on the decisions of the pastor. Furthermore, the pastor of the rural and town parish is far more likely than the urban or suburban pastor to make all decisions on finances, liturgy (if decisions are made), parish activities, groups,

social programs, and the school, where present. Finally, the ethnographic reports show that the parish council in these parishes is also more likely to be dominated by the pastor.

We asked volunteer leaders whether they would like to have a greater say in running the parish and why. Rural volunteers stressed their desire for democratic participation far more than any other group. This desire for participation may reflect their experience of involvement in decision-making processes at the local levels of civil government, such as townships. It is a desire for participation frustrated by the rural pastor's tendency to make financial and other decisions alone or with a rubber-stamp parish council. If they had greater say, most would like to increase lay participation in parish management decisions

Absent from these responses, however, is an articulated vision of what their parish should be in the future. Such visions for the Church are far more likely to inspire suburban leaders.

Consistent with the characteristics of many rural residents to deny, avoid, or ignore conflict, a high percentage of rural volunteers claim that there is no conflict within their parishes. A more detailed analysis of their responses to the sequence of questions on conflict, however, reveals that town and rural parishes experience more conflict than do urban and suburban parishes. These conflicts typically involve the pastor and other parish leaders, some of whom are on the parish council.

The ethnographic accounts offer useful insights into the structural nature of the conflict. Most of the time weak councils work with authoritarian pastors. Where a strong council exists, there have either been highly mobile pastors or collegial priests. Conflict is most likely in the transitional period when a new pastor is attempting to fit into an indigenous parish leadership. If the lay leadership has been accustomed to exerting initiative and exercising responsibility and the new man is either authoritarian or non-collegial, the sparks fly. From the frequency of such occurrences, it appears that chanceries may be paying less attention to local conditions in the assignment of priests to rural and town parishes than to urban and suburban parishes. Or, perhaps the supply of qualified priests is so limited that the rural/town parishes will have to settle for what they get if they want a priest. That is a fear expressed by many rural and town volunteer leaders.

Interestingly, regarding the resolution of these conflicts, volunteers from rural and town parishes report the highest percentage of conflicts not being resolved. When they are resolved, both town and rural parishes show a relatively high rate of "wins" for the pastor. In those parishes where there has been a strong tradition of lay enablement, there is a high "win" rate for their councils. Still, a fairly high proportion of volunteer leaders say that the conflict festers and grows, or that it is "submitted to prayer."

In conclusion, evidence exists to support the contention that pastors have a greater decision-making role in the rural and town parishes. The pastor more often makes

decisions on his own or with the backing of a passive council. There is, however, a second type of rural/town parish with a high level of lay enablement and empowerment and with pastors who govern in a collegial manner. Trouble comes because of the high turnover and mismatch of pastoral types.

Rural and Town Parishioners

Parish life in whatever locale is affected by the values of the surrounding culture. Thus it is just as important to understand the values of parishioners in the towns and countryside as it is to interpret their leadership patterns. To the degree that we can show attitudinal and behavioral differences between urban and rural people, so too can we argue that the rural parish will differ from the urban.

We have established earlier that the residents of town and countryside are increasingly heterogeneous. In fact, the literature on urban-rural differences offers rather contradictory perspectives. On the one hand, ruralites, particularly those who farm, have a closeness to the land that effects beliefs about work, commitment, exercise and health, and lifestyle. Yet, farmers or those who serve them in towns and villages are affected by international markets, by regional economies by mass media and popular culture, by technological change. Although they have chosen to return home, many have been educated at great agricultural universities and have friends in other parts of the country. Often they have another line of work besides agriculture. The most important fact of all is that, of those Catholics who are in our parishes of town and countryside, only 9% are farmers or in farm families. *The overwhelming majority of rural/town parishioners are in non-farming occupations.*

Many parishioners who have lived out their lives in town and countryside now brush with urban migrants and the exurbanites who live nearby and commute to distant central cities. Even those living in isolated towns far from the large cities find that joint ventures between, for example, the Japanese and a major American industry headquartered in Detroit or New York are transforming their towns into significant labor markets. And their parish is no longer *their* parish.

What often happens is that the indigenous population has its places to socialize, but the immigrants, especially if they have been active at another parish, will cling to the church. Whose parish it is becomes an issue because the purposes and visions of parish often conflict. Particularly when the immigrants have greater skills for ministry and demand more of the parish, confusion and conflict result.

It is difficult to say what the end product will be. While many towns and rural areas remain isolated from such changes, in others a host culture and new immigrants are learning about each other. At least at the point of our Study, some values stand out in the host cultures.

The indigenous peoples would appear to be more *moralistic*. This is reflected in their view of God, God-given laws, human nature, morals and ethics. This greater moralism is associated, in part, with a greater conservatism reflected in attitudes toward change, the nature of a true Catholic, church policies and positions, as well as social issues.

A greater *experience of community through friendliness* in the rural and small town people's lifespaces has interesting implications for how they see the parish, its purpose, programming and activities, as well as its public rituals. While the native of a rural locale experiences community in various settings — over coffee, in the post office or at a community meeting — such a person may not be as inclined to look for community in the parish. When a parish and its surrounding community overlap, these community-building functions may be taken care of outside the parish, reserving the church primarily for spiritual activities. The closeness of such communities may account for a greater tendency toward ecumenism and boosterism, except where Catholics constitute a small, class-based minority.

A greater presence of community usually leads to more *informal social control* being exerted. Rural and town natives are often not only life-long friends but cousins, aunts and uncles and grandparents. This tendency for more informal social control would have an impact on reasons for Mass attendance, belief sharing, the way in which God is viewed, and morality. Nearly a century ago Durkheim argued that what a people do in their religion is to project their own group life, making it their God and moral code. Yet as town and countryside become more heterogeneous anomie is more evident, codes are less strict. and serious crime rises.

A further dynamic of rural and town life with its simpler social structure is the tendency to nurture in individuals *less patience with any form of human mediation*. This too is likely to be reflected in the rural parishioner's view of Christ, leadership, parish programming, and social attitudes. Greater informality in leadership patterns and parish programming are likely corollaries. We now turn to the data to see whether these expectations are met.

Images of God

While rural and town parishioners share most of the same beliefs about God with their fellow urban and suburban Catholics, according to our data, there are notable distinctions. Parishioners of town and countryside are less likely to have complex pictures of God and morality. Instead they are more likely to reduce religion in a dualistic manner. They are more likely to see God as judge, as mysterious and creative. Furthermore, they are more inclined to believe that God has given clear-cut rules for humans to follow. On the one hand, God is, in Rudolf Otto's words, "Wholly Other," unapproachable, mysterious, but strict. On the other, humans had better live by God's laws. Both the educational and economic isolation of some rural/town residents and the homogeneity of

the rural community, with its stronger social controls and lessened opportunity for deviance, lend to stricter moral codes and image of God.

A further difference between rural/town Catholics and their urban/suburban counterparts, lies in their proclivity to relate to God the Father more directly, rather than through mediators such as Christ, the Church, or their fellow Christians. This could be associated with seeing God as more mysterious or it could be influenced by Protestant worldviews, particularly Baptist and Methodist, which are more predominant in the rural environment.

Rural Catholics are less likely to recall a specifically personal religious experience. They may be less able to articulate such an experience as religious because they do not see this type of experience as acceptable in their understanding of Catholicity. Unlike their urban counterparts, they may be culturally or ethnically less inclined to attend to or manifest emotions. And their notions about the nature of God and moral law place a premium on compliance with codes rather than in experiencing God in new, exotic, and deeper ways.

Perceptions of Human Nature and True Catholicism

If rural and town Catholics have a somewhat different view of God, so too do they have differing perceptions of human nature and what it means to be a true Catholic.

While all Catholics tend to have a positive perception of human nature, parishioners of town and countryside are more likely to view humans as cooperative at the same time they are competitive. This may appear contradictory but it is because the ruralites do not think of humans as essentially selfish.

Concerning the question of what constitutes a true Catholic, ruralites reveal their higher level of moralism and/or conservatism. They have rather strict social boundary interpretations and they are focused especially on restrictive definitions of human sexuality. They also include regular Mass attendance and marrying inside the Church. The greatest gap in social boundaries on the Church is between rural parishioners and suburbanites (see Report 19). The exclusivity of ruralites is associated with other beliefs such as seeing God as judge, God as strict, and God as having given humans a moral code by which to live. The greater emphasis upon traditional values, less mobility and a more *Gemeinschaft* community structure are also likely to shape and reinforce more restrictive attitudes.

So while ruralites tend to have a more positive view of human cooperativeness, they have more restrictive definitions about how humans should behave and what it means to be Catholic.

Purpose of the Parish and Parish Programming

The Notre Dame Study likewise asked for views concerning the purpose of their parishes. Catholics define their parishes in multiple ways. The top four ways are: (1) spiritual enrichment, (2) building community, (3) support during the life cycle, and (4) worship and prayer. Rural Catholics clearly define their parish's purpose as spiritual enrichment and worship and prayer, especially through the Mass. Town Catholics are more likely to stress community-building.

This differential concern for spirituality and community-building flows over into how rural and town Catholics view the need for programs in their parishes. Programs are very specific parish activities which come from perceived parish purposes. When asked what programs need more or less attention, rural parishioners are more inclined to say that virtually all programs except the religious education of teenagers need less attention. Quite by contrast, town Catholics voice the view that they want more attention given to virtually all of the programs listed — religious education, especially for adults, evangelizing, helping the poor, improving parish social life, changing unjust conditions, and ecumenism.

A differing dynamic seems to be in operation here. The rural parishioners apparently see their parishes as basically for spiritual purposes, and not for carrying out programs of various sorts. Perhaps such needs are already being met in informal ways in the broader community, and, therefore, church programs would be redundant. The parish reality of the town, however, may be quite different. The town contains churches of other denominations. Boosterism is a way of life. Programs develop to meet this or that need. Word spreads from church to church. Community spirit, raised consciousness about needs, and denominational pride perhaps combine to motivate the town parishioner to want a church program just as good as the other churches have. Perhaps most important, some of the town churches have a greater proportion of in-migrants who have known more active and complex parishes and who have different visions of what it means to be the Church.

Expectations of Pastors

Expectations of pastors also differ with the parishioner's urban-rural locale. Ruralites paint a portrait of their pastor as a holy person who says Mass and performs the Sacraments. On the other hand, the town pastor is supposed to be holy and meet the liturgical/sacramental obligations, but also to be knowledgeable, a good preacher who visits the sick and elderly and teaches effectively. This is in contrast to the suburbanite who, in addition to the pastor's liturgical/sacramental functions, seems to want an efficient administrator and a good therapist, i.e. someone who is sensitive, a good listener, has a sense of humor, and a good counselor.

Parish as Community

The topic of the parishioners' views of their parish as community has been handled in depth in Report 10. According to the indicators enumerated in that report, the traditional view that the rural parish is routinely high on community had to be called into

question. But it should be noted that the quest for community is a more worrisome phenomenon, the more urbanized and fragmented the locale. If ruralites do not attribute community-building functions to their parish nor expect social programs out of it, whether community is found there or not is moot. Community exists outside the parish church's doors and is found all around them everyday. Having a community, they do not expect, nor come to the rural parish for community, as an urbanite or suburbanite might. The suburban church, in particular, must strive to create a community in the parish as it more than likely does not exist outside of the parish. Fewer have deep roots.

The problem of community, where it exists in the rural church, derives from the demoralization and confusion that rapid turnover in pastors creates. The new man, unless he is collegial and enabling, is always an outsider, seldom understanding the community that exists. He becomes a negative force, unable to affirm what long-time parishioners perceive as a natural community.

The other problem area is with the town parishes and their desire to be more than they are. Many town parishioners are noticing the forces of social change that are altering the way of life they have known. They want their parish to respond to human needs as other local churches have and to recover the sense of a community slipping away. At the same time, newcomers among the leadership who have known life in suburban parishes elsewhere can not understand why this parish is so slow to change, why the pastor attributes such conservative attitudes to the parishioners on post-Vatican II reforms, or why the pastor celebrates Mass in such a non-participatory way. It is especially in such parishes that the indicators of community bottom out. The contrasts between "successful" town parish communities and the "troubled" ones are great and they are dissected in the vignettes of Reports 9 and 10.

Change

When asked to list changes made in their parish in the past, rural parishioners seem to indicate a slower pace in adopting Vatican II changes than any of the other types of parishes. This could point out a greater reluctance toward change on the part of rural parishioners. However, it has been said that rural people do not simply oppose change, but oppose it until they can see a good reason for change.

This tendency is reinforced when ruralites are asked directly how much change they expect in the future. Rural parishioners expect less change than any other group. A sizable proportion of rural Catholics appear to be unprepared for the changes that are coming about in parts of rural religious America.

If one asks parishioners to state what areas of change they anticipate in their parishes in the future, rural Catholics were the least specific of all and mentioned general notions: change in lay roles, the exit of a longtime pastor, greater congregational participation in the Mass and parish governance, more liturgical change, a growing parish, women in liturgical roles, active lay leaders and a change in church laws. Curiously, the

overall percentage of rural Catholics expecting these changes is about the same as that found in the other parishes, but it is not so clearly articulated. Apparently, many rural Catholics are expecting to “catch up” to other parishes, but they have only vague notions of what those changes will be.

Reading of the ethnographic accounts of the rural parishes leads to the conclusion that some rural parishes expect their pastor to be leaving soon, as their other pastors have left in the past. Some of these parishes are fully prepared to “take over” while others seem to be in a state of demoralization coming from too much mobility in their pastors.

Town parishioners lie between rural and urban and suburban parishioners in terms of amount and type of change expected. Town parishioners are much less worried about their longtime pastor leaving, but they are more concerned about their parish, with the presence of many newcomers, and the welling pressures for change in their liturgies.

The rural parishioners' expectation that church laws are about to change probably stems from their belief that their pastors in the past have protected them from change. Once their pastor goes, so too will their protection against change. Some of this concern centers on women's participation in liturgical roles. Yet where the rural parishes in the samples do have women deeply involved in such roles — one is in effect a pastor — there is a vibrant faith community. Those changes, however, occurred a dozen years ago under the guidance of a collegial pastor who nurtured a participatory community among all people.

Attitudes on Church Issues and Social Teachings

The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life questioned parishioners on a number of attitudinal items ranging from church policies and positions to secular social attitudes. While there are no appreciable urban/rural differences toward church policies, such as how the church should operate, the ruralites noted conservatism and moralism are manifested when they are asked about various church positions such as contraception, abortion, divorce, female ordination, married priests, and ecumenism. The rural parishioner is most likely to be in agreement with the church leadership's positions on each of these items. The town parishioner is somewhat less inclined. One notable exception for rural parishioners is their more positive attitude toward married priests. This may be explained by their belief that soon they will be without a priest-pastor, and they may not like the alternative of a local deacon or lay pastoral associate, male or female. Better to have a married priest.

When rural parishioners' attitudes toward these positions are compared with their *perceptions* of their pastor's views on the same items, a noticeable discrepancy exists. When attitudes of parishioners are compared with that of the pastor's actual attitudes, a similar discrepancy emerges. Rural pastors and their parishioners seem to be out of tune with each other; pastors think their parishioners are more conservative than they actually are, and parishioners think their pastors are more conservative than they actually are.

On other questions dealing with their own socioeconomic attitudes and with church leaders as social teachers, rural or town parishioners tend to be the most conservative of all Catholics. They also are more inclined to leave it to their own consciences rather than listen to the pronouncements of the hierarchy on these matters. Rural parishioners tend to be more likely to believe that social justice comes through transforming the hearts of individuals rather than by changing unjust institutions. These items seem again to point to the fact that rural people are less tolerant of mediational structures in their lives.

Town parishioners, like urbanites and suburbanites, tend to favor greater parish involvement in those local issues which seem to affect them the most, e.g. public education and alcohol and drug abuse. This is consistent with the greater programmatic demand on the town parish than on the rural parish.

Personal Morality

Personal morality was operationalized in five differing ways in the Notre Dame Study. The questionnaire asked parishioners (1) Would you behave in a certain way if the situation presented itself? (2) Have you ever behaved in these ways? (3) Would fellow parishioners care if you acted these ways? (4) Are these behaviors morally wrong? and (5) How many fellow parishioners have done these things? The items concern heavy drinking, petty theft, modest tax cheating, lying to a spouse or a close friend, spending money in secretive ways, etc.

Across these five different ways of measuring personal morality, a consistent pattern emerges: town parishioners seem to have a stricter sense of morality, and they are followed closely by rural parishioners. The tighter social controls of the town, and the conservative, moralistic nature of the town and rural parish communities are explanations for such consistency across indicators. It does appear that morality has more certitude and anticipated consequences to the rural and town parishioners. And the boundary lines that separate "we" from "they," that exclude strangers, are especially strong on matters of personal piety, even though there is greater ecumenism among the town and countryside parishioners.

Personal or Family Needs

A series of other questions tapped the degree to which the parish meets people's needs for coping with life's stresses. A factor analysis, described in Report 8, produced three factors which were labeled traditional religious needs, moderate familial stress, and severe economic, familial, or psychological needs. Parishioners were, likewise, asked if they would turn to their friends, the parish, or professionals to meet these needs.

Data analysis revealed that the more severe the stress need, the greater was the likelihood that rural parishioners would turn to friends or professionals, but not to the

parish pastor. However, town parishioners are more inclined to turn to friends and the parish pastor or staff, but not to professionals. We do not know whether parishioners outside the cities and suburbs perceive that they have more understanding friends available, or whether the urbanites and suburbanites feel they have such good professional help that they need not bother friends. Perhaps the country parishioner needs the anonymity of the professional when in need of help. Ethnographic data indicate, however, that some of the rural pastors were experiencing problems sufficiently severe that their parishioners may not have felt comfortable in turning to them for help. On the other hand, many of the towns people seem to have more trust and confidence in their pastors to help them with their stress-related problems and they view such help as part of the church's responsibility.

Ritual Behavior

In terms of public rituals, rural parishioners are less likely to attend daily Mass (which is rarely available), public Rosary, Stations of the Cross, and communal penance (also rarely done). Despite their greater frequency of Sunday Mass attendance and of confession, they commune less frequently. Town parishioners are less inclined to participate in Benediction, Stations of the Cross, and communion. Because it is more readily available, town parishioners are more likely to attend daily Mass and use communal penance in addition to confession.

Religious rites such as Stations, Benediction, and the Rosary also have a social function in rural and town parishes, often being followed by a coffee, get together, or a social of some kind.

Regarding other kinds of religious behaviors, rural Catholics say they are least likely to read the Bible alone or with others, or to share their beliefs with others, either Catholic or non-Catholic. They are least likely to listen to the media for religious programming. Finally, they are least likely to say a daily Rosary or fast and abstain. The close community nature of rural life with its high level of social control perhaps explains the reluctance of the rural person to share religious viewpoints. The greater absence of Catholic schools in the religious formation of these rural people is likely to manifest itself in low participation rates for some of these public rituals. Rural Catholics are, however, above the average in saying grace at meals and having family prayers. Town Catholics have a similar but less pronounced pattern of ritual behavior. One major difference is that town parishioners are more likely to be Bible readers, another similarity with the Protestants with whom they have contact.

We gain more insight into rural religiosity when we ask them what their most fulfilling religious acts are. Rural parishioners are above average only on weekend Mass and praying privately. While they participate in other religious rituals it is the Mass, grace and simple family prayer that describes the focus of the rural Catholic's ritual life. Again, town Catholics have a similar pattern, with the exception that daily Mass, Bible reading, sharing the faith and praying with friends are also cited.

One should not draw the conclusion from data presented to this point that the rural Catholic is isolated from the community. When asked for reasons for attending Mass, the rural Catholic is much more inclined to give answers that hint at the role of social control and pressure. For example, rural Catholics are more likely to say that they attend Mass because it is required, it is a habit, it pleases someone, or it sets an example for the children. To a lesser extent these same pressures are felt in the town parish. These social control explanations should not obscure the fact that the primary reasons rural and town parishioners attend Mass still are to talk to God, to hear the Word of God, and to receive the Eucharist. Thus, rural and small town people attend Mass both for social and spiritual reasons.

We have been indicating the great importance of the Mass in the lives of rural people. Perhaps because the Mass is central to their public religiosity, we can understand why they seem to be so disappointed in its quality. In virtually every category of satisfaction with the liturgy, i.e., prayers, ritual, readings, music, singing, and the content and delivery of the homily, rural people express dissatisfaction with the Mass. This dissatisfaction is also found to a lesser extent among town parishioners. Satisfaction with most aspects of the liturgy is greatest among the suburbanites, while aspects of the sermons are rated highest by the urbanites.

There are many factors operating to produce this state of liturgical disappointment in the rural, and to a lesser extent the town parishes. For one thing, rural and some town parishes do not often get or keep innovative and creative pastors. The pastors assigned to them often seem uncomfortable with liturgical roles that go beyond the traditional Eucharistic prayers. They are often not liturgists and may even be hostile to liturgical development. Liturgical planning in many rural and some town parishes is done in a catch-as-can fashion with the pastor sometimes deferring to those who know anything at all about music and other liturgical arts.

Many of the rural/town parishes have few additional resources to devote to the Mass. They cannot budget for trained musicians or liturgists; such people typically prefer to live and work in the city and suburban parishes.

As we recall from the earlier discussion, rural/town parishioners often lack the complex pictures of God and the nuanced sense of morality found among the better-educated suburbanites and city dwellers. One should expect, then, that they would resonate only to a narrow range of religious symbols used in the liturgy. When these are absent or underdeveloped, they leave the liturgy with little satisfaction.

Finally, satisfaction with the liturgy, we have found, is often a good surrogate measure for the health of the parish's life and, particularly, feelings about the pastor. There is stronger discontent with pastors in the parishes of town and countryside than elsewhere.

One can argue that, with the centrality that the Mass has in the rural Catholic's religious life, more attention to the Mass in its total liturgical expression should be given. It is not obvious from our data, what direction these endeavors should take. Rural parishioners express the least satisfaction of any group with liturgical reforms brought about as a result of Vatican II. Yet, our site visits suggest that in many instances they have never seen the reforms, and their parish histories suggest that the reforms have never been explained to the people, if introduced. Town parishioners follow predictable patterns in their level of satisfaction with the liturgy, depending on their *pastoral* histories.

Parish Activities

Based on liturgical ritual participation, one may argue that rural Catholics have a more restricted parish involvement. When asked to list their participation in non-liturgical parish activities, however, a different perspective emerges. It is evident that they will take on the responsibilities of *whatever is open to them*. Rural people are indeed very involved in altar preparation, church socials, religious education for children, council meetings (when there is one), Knights of Columbus or other fraternal, and church maintenance. The same is true of the town Catholics, with their wider range of parish programs.

So a more complete composite of the rural and town Catholic is possible. Their religiosity tends to be less complex perhaps fitting nicely with the less complex structure and programming of the parish itself. Ritual life tends to center around family and individual prayer and participation at the Mass, where dissatisfaction is expressed. A high degree of involvement in available parish activities accompanies this less complex religiosity.

Summary

There is evidence from the Parish Life Study that the rural and town parish, in contrast to its urban or suburban counterpart, approximates a somewhat distinct sociological entity which may be called a small-scaled organization. Tasks are less differentiated and structures of accountability less distinct. There are fewer positions and staff of all kinds in these parishes, few formal programs, and a parish council that is often more passive in nature. There is much more reliance on volunteerism in these parishes. Leaders tend to come from basic parish services and all use more informal methods to accomplish their purposes. The pastor, however, is central in decision-making; yet there is indication of conflict that results. Some parishes have authoritarian pastors and rubber-stamp councils, if that. Others have collegial pastors and active, responsible lay leadership. Where there are mismatches there is trouble. Even in the authoritarian types, parishioners express discontent because it does not tap the skills of parishioners. Yet, they do not articulate a clear vision of what the parish should become if their pastor did open up to their input.

Somewhat congruous with these parishes with less complex social structures are rural and town parishioners with less complex religiosity. Parishioners of town and countryside tend to be more family-centered, prayer-centered, and Mass-centered in their expression of religion. Their religious beliefs, attitudes and perceptions are more conservative and moralistic. They think of God as a somewhat distant lawgiver, not as a lover and companion. For the most part, they welcome the reforms of Vatican II, even though their pastors understate their progressive positions; but they, in turn, do not always realize their pastor's progressivism on church issues. They know that change, both social and liturgical, is coming to their parishes, and they have enormous residual respect for the priesthood, but they are not always confident that the priest assigned to pastor them understands them or can lead them through the change.

It is not the purpose of this Report series to offer an itemized agenda to those responsible for the official life of the Church. At the same time we realize that a pluralistic vision of parish life will pay increasing attention to the rural and town parishes, their size as a proportion of the American Catholic church, the rapid and confusing change many of them are experiencing as a result of population mobility and technological change, the centrality of the Mass to their parishioners' religious life and their often unsatisfactory assessment of it, the painful processes of rapid turnover in pastors and the frequent mismatch between pastoral styles and parishioners sense of involvement and responsibility, and the need for lay enablement as the supply of qualified ordained priests dwindles. One of the strengths of the Church over two millennia is its sense of anthropology — that it adapts an immutable message to various social and cultural groups. As research points up the cultural and structural similarities and differences of the People of God in different American places, church leadership can more readily modify the models of ministry it applies to these locales.

Perhaps one starting point in this task is a recognition that many parishes of town and countryside remain isolated from the “institutions of hope” in American Catholicism. Parishes in the metropolitan areas could absorb changes because they were close to the Catholic colleges and universities, to specialized diocesan staffs, to the concentrations of thinkers who grappled with problems and created new symbols to order worship and life. They could fashion a Catholicism that sanctified elements of social change, yet was distinctively Catholic in a special kind of social consciousness. The isolated rural/town parish, however, may be 200 miles from such centers of hope.

Catholics in town and countryside often remain economically and educationally disenfranchised, lack skills for ministry, and lack symbols and visions of *their* future. What in the past made them distinctive as Catholics was Friday fish, and pieties surrounding Mary and special saints. The new suburban symbols leave them with little distinctive about Catholicism when they compare themselves to their neighbors.

Yet their churches are distinctive from those of neighboring fundamentalists and evangelicals. They are inclusive, not exclusive; despite their parishioners' pieties, pastors still accept sinners. They are universal, not parochial; they are part of a church in history,

not the special creation of a magnetic local preacher. The parish has a reputation for caring; a person down on his luck or broken in spirit can get help. And they are sacramental; God still dwells within them every Sunday as they join in communion. The challenge is to find in each parish's history those symbols that will sustain the local natives and welcome the newcomers.

Finally, they must do it with limited professional assistance. Isolated from the institutions of hope, they will have to train and empower laity for ministry. The diocese of Little Rock has fewer priests, for example, than are on the faculty of Seton Hall. The parishes of Arkansas cannot dip into the supply of priests at Seton Hall like the church of Northern New Jersey can. There will be different models. given the ecology of different parishes.

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