



Gatherings

Community

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Bowling Alone, Praying Together

Social capital is most successfully developed through caring and service.

By Mary Jo Bane

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Worth Repeating

We are more busy than bad, more distracted than nonspiritual, and more interested in the movie theater, the sport stadium, and the shopping mall and the fantasy life they produce in us than we are in church. Pathological busyness, distraction, and restlessness are major blocks today within our spiritual lives.

Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, p. 32-33.

Community

Editorial note: This essay has been excerpted from the soon to be published, *Spiritual Exercises for Church Leaders*, a project of the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University. It is reprinted here with the permission of Dolores Leckey, project coordinator.

We all probably think we know what the word community means. After all, we use it all the time, to refer to many things and groups. We apply community to a small neighborhood ("It's a friendly community") and a large geographic area ("We have problems, being such a spread-out community"). We apply it to a group of people with a common characteristic who are living together ("This is a retirement community") and a group of people linked by race or ethnicity, not necessarily living together (the African American community, the Hispanic community). We also apply it to groups of people with shared professional interests who are part of a larger society (the academic community, the scientific community) and even to groups of nations with common interests or policies (the international community).

Sociologist Robert Bellah says that we Americans use the word very loosely. He prefers a stronger, and more focused, meaning. In his book *Habits of the Heart*, he defines community as a group of people with a history (a past) and hope for the future. Community members pass on that history and their hope through storytelling. They also share certain activities - ritual, esthetic, ethical - that define the community as a way of life. These activities almost always involve commitment. Community is interdependent and attempts to be inclusive.

But when community means no more than the gathering of the similar, Bellah says, it degenerates into lifestyle enclaves. People who belong to

Gatherings...

Small Community Happenings...

Alliance Core Teams

On Saturday, February 2, the Core Team from St. Mary Magdalen (Oakville) will be hosting a gathering of Core Teams from St. Gabriel (Milford), St. Patrick (Collinsville), Assumption (Manchester), Sacred Heart (Suffield), St. Michael (Hartford), St. Dominic (Southington), St. Mark (West Hartford) and Our Lady of the Lakes (New Milford). Building on work of the previous session, the focus for this meeting was on going further in the design of focus questions for use in the whole range of parish ministries and activities. Offering an opportunity for silence, an experience-based focus question and a chance for people to speak with one another in threesomes is a hallmark of the efforts of these parishes to strengthen the parish as a whole.

Core Team Identification/Development

New pastors continue to express interest in core team formation. At the request of a pastor, the office facilitates a process of identifying and doing initial formation for parishioners who will form a Core Team for both small church community development and the doing of every parish activity in a more reflective and relational style. Pastors and parishioners interested in learning more about this process can contact Bro. Bob Moriarty, S.M. at (860) 243-9642 for more information.

Cochabamba Report

A small community process-

such enclaves share some feature of private life - appearance, consumption, leisure activities - and one of its? main goals is to enjoy being with those who "share one's lifestyle." Its members differentiate themselves from people with other lifestyles; enclaves tend to be segmental rather than inclusive. There is no interdependence and no shared history.

Most groups in America today, according to Bellah, have characteristics of both communities and lifestyle enclaves.

Interestingly, the Church seems to have known what true community is, long before sociology even became a discipline. The Church has a past: our roots in the Jewish tradition, the saving work of Jesus Christ, and the mission of the Church throughout the centuries since. The Church has hope for the future. We look for the redemption of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting. The Church passes on its story: at every liturgy, we retell our history and proclaim our hope. The Church engages in activities that define who it is and these activities require our commitment: our rituals, our evangelizing efforts, and our outreach. Finally, the Church tries to be inclusive: we welcome as members all those who wish to join.

The Church is a community because it recognizes - has always recognized - that we human beings are inherently interdependent. We are connected to each other in many ways, some of which are not readily apparent. What we do does affect other people, in often-unexpected ways. This understanding runs directly counter to the notion of rugged individualism that is so much a part of American culture. Yet, if we look at some of the most important issues facing us today, we can perceive this underlying interdependence.

Acid rain, for instance, affects many countries in the world, and not only those that cause the acid rain. Winds can spread toxic chemicals far from their point of origin. In fact, many of our ecological problems have global consequences and will require global solutions. What we do in one place has repercussions elsewhere.

Economics works in much the same way. A falling birthrate in a European nation causes a labor shortage, so African workers are invited to fill the vacant jobs. These workers can then send money home to their families, leading to better lives for them and a stronger economy in that country. A stone thrown in a river causes ripples that touch land many miles away.

This is not a contemporary phenomenon. St. Paul understood interdependence thousands of years ago, although he didn't call it that. In the First Letter to the Corinthians, he writes:

Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body ... But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the hand to the feet, "I do not need you."... If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. (12:14-15, 20-21, 26-27)

This is not just a nice religious wish. Paul is describing reality; this is the way the world works. But we have a hard time seeing this. In the seventeenth century, Isaac Newton postulated the existence of a mechanical world that operates according to fixed rules. God, like a great clockmaker, started the world - this machine - running and then left it alone. We have treated our world and everything in it as a machine ever since, believing that the key to understanding it is to break it into its component parts. To understand how the human body works, then, we examine all its different organs and systems. To understand how radiation works, we look at the actions of its atoms and molecules. To understand how an organization works, we separate it into tasks and then study the work flow.

But Newton's view of the world has been displaced. Modern physics, specifically that branch of it called quantum mechanics, has made discoveries that radically change our understanding of how things work. Looking at what used to be called the building blocks of nature - the subatomic world - scientists now see that these most elementary pieces of life are not separate, isolated objects. They don't even exist as independent things. Rather, they are constantly changing, sometimes taking the form of particles, sometimes of waves, depending upon what they encounter. Relationship determines everything. One scientist has commented, "Relationships are all there is to reality."

This is the way the world works at its most fundamental level: not discrete, separate components but a web, a network of relationships, that is constantly in motion. It has been described as a "continuous dance of energy" and a "complex, never still, always weaving

A small community process-oriented report on the International Consultation on Small Christian Communities is now available. The report is meant both to inform, and to serve as a vehicle to facilitate conversation in community to deepen the small church community experience. Held in Cochabamba, Bolivia in November 1999, the consultation was sponsored by the University of Notre Dame and the Maryknoll Center for Mission Study and Research. Forty-five delegates from seventeen countries spanning six continents gathered to reflect on the worldwide experience of small Christian communities. The consultation gave special attention to the consideration given to small Christian communities at the several regional synods called by John Paul II in preparation for the coming of the third millennium. Part I of the report includes summaries of the continental presentations along with process questions following each summary. Part II offers reflections on the overall experience of the consultation from a North American perspective. Complimentary copies of the report have been distributed to priests and deacons as well as to parish SCC coordinators and core team chairpersons. Small communities may order copies of the booklet from the office at \$4.00 a copy plus shipping and handling.

Volunteers

The office is very grateful for the assistance of volunteers. Small community members from St. Mary, Newington, in particular, have been very generous with their time. They help with preparing the complimentary mailings of Quest to priests, deacons and coordinators throughout the diocese. We are particularly mindful of Libby Bishop, a long-time volunteer who died recently. May she

tapestry.* What's more, scientists have realized that activity in this web is unpredictable, unlike Newton's deterministic model. The linear cause-and-effect with which we are familiar simply does not apply here.

In a fascinating development, experiments have proved that matter can be affected by seemingly unrelated events that occur elsewhere. It's "instantaneous action-at-a-distance." One experiment paired two electrons, meaning that they acted as one electron. They were then separated, to see if their relationship would survive at a distance. It did. They continued to act as one unified electron - showing that there exist invisible connections that stretch across time and space. Relationship is reality.

We are back to Paul's description of the Body of Christ. We are not islands, separated by oceans, but parts of a whole, linked together by invisible connections. We are a community.

Questions for reflection and conversation

How loose or focused is your notion of community?

How much commitment is involved in your experience of small church community?

How interdependent are the members of your small church community?

How keen is your sense of the repercussions of ecological and economic problems in your town/state stemming from or influencing those problems in other towns/states?

To what extent does relationship determine everything in your life?

How strong is your sense of relationship to the rest of the members of the body of Christ?

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The jacket of Robert Putnam's new book, *Bowling Alone* (2000) has an illustration on the front cover that depicts a solitary bowler. On the back flap is a photograph of the bowling team the author belonged to in about 1955. Putnam takes his title from the fact that although about 91 million Americans bowl, the proportion who bowl in leagues has declined almost 75 percent since the 1960's.

Bowling leagues are but one small illustration of what Putnam sees as the collapse of American community over the last four decades. There are almost a hundred graphs in the book - Putnam is a thorough fellow - most of them showing a rise and then a fall in some indicator of social capital. Membership in chapter organizations, for example - groups like the P.T.A., Boy Scouts, Knights of Columbus, Rotary Clubs - rose dramatically as a percentage of the relevant population over the first half of the century and then fell by almost half between the 1960's and the 1990's. The decline is echoed in many other measures - in union and professional association membership, for instance, involvement in community projects, card games and picnics. Civic engagement is perhaps the most important. There have been declines in the proportion of the petition that voted, attended a public meeting on town or school affairs, served as an officer or on a committee of a local group, signed a petition or wrote a letter to a representative or senator.

You're probably asking yourself, Did he look at X? Many people asked him that, and whatever X is, he probably looked at it, which is why the book is 541 pages long. His findings are quite consistent, despite self-help groups and Internet chat rooms. My reading of the data, like his, is that something real is clearly going on.

The findings are troubling. Putnam's book documents the losses to society that the decline of social capital brings. His earlier work, on

who died recently. May she rest in peace.

Spring Gathering

Heads Up! Mark your calendars now. Our annual Spring Gathering will be held on Sunday afternoon, April 29, 2002 at St. James (Rocky Hill). This year's featured speaker will be Fr. William Carrigg (Archdiocese of Boston). Fr. Carrigg has been active for many years in promoting, researching and reflecting on small Christian communities. Flowing from his Doctor of Ministry project, Fr. Carrigg's theme for the Gathering will be: Connecting in the Heart: The Key to Forming Faith Sharing Groups Within the Larger Church Community.

2002 Archdiocesan Pilgrimage

A Fall pilgrimage to Switzerland, Germany and Austria will be conducted from October 7-17, 2002. Combining relaxation, prayer and sightseeing, pilgrims will visit Lucerne, Zermatt, Oberammergau, Salzburg and Vienna. Should a sufficient number of small Christian community members participate, scripture-based sharing experiences will be incorporated into the pilgrimage. Registrations are now being accepted and should be made on a timely basis. Act soon. For further information about the pilgrimage and registration, please call the office at (860) 243-9642.

Quest Writing Teams

As one booklet is finished, another is already underway. A labor of love and commitment to church, Quest is prepared by teams of nine members, men and women, priests and religious from throughout the diocese. At this writing the Fall, 2002 booklet is already underway even as we are busy distributing Spring Quest.