



Spring 2006

Gatherings

Gatherings...

Let's Meet: Rebuilding Community - Part II

David J. Wood

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Small Community

Happenings...

Core Team Development

Core Team development has recently been completed at St. Mary, Unionville. It will be beginning shortly at St. Maria Goretti, Wolcott. Exploratory meetings are also under way in a number of parishes. The two and a half day formation workshop sponsored by the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities (NAPRC) will be scheduled in the months ahead for several parishes that have completed the initial core team development process.

Temporary Office Relocation

Construction is underway at St. Thomas Seminary & Archdiocesan Center for retirement residence apartments for retired priests. This work will entail major construction on the two floors directly above the department and other offices that have been located on what is affectionately known as the Hogan's Alley wing of the seminary. Accordingly, in the middle of January our offices were relocated for the duration to the third floor. Phone and fax numbers remain the same.

Help Us Market Quest

Quest, our archdiocesan

An Inquiry from Cyberspace

When this e-mail inquiry appeared on my screen I was immediately struck by the wealth of implications that are involved. A quick note back would not allow a nuanced reply that would address a whole range of issues. A conversation was needed. So, I called Bev Thompson (The names have been changed, of course.) that same day. My initial concern was to communicate my respect for the tension that was involved and to suggest that this one should not be too quickly or too summarily resolved...

Worth Repeating

Small church communities not only foster the faith of individuals, they are living cells which build up the body of Christ. They are to be signs and instruments of unity. As basic units of the parish, they serve to increase the corporate life and mission of the parish by sharing in its life generously with their talents and support.

Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium,
National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November,
1995.

Let's Meet: Rebuilding Community - Part II

David J. Wood

(Editor's Note: In this issue of Gatherings, we continue with part two of David Wood's interview with Harvard sociologist, Robert Putnam. Part one appeared in the last issue of Gatherings. Putnam's research has focused on the decline and recovery of social capital in American society. Putnam would see the development of small church communities as an important contributor to the development of both bonding and bridging social capital in our society.)

Doesn't religion figure prominently into any building of social capital?

That is certainly true in the U.S., where about half of all social capital is religious. About half of all volunteering is religious. About half of all philanthropy is religious. About half of all group memberships are religious. You can't talk about social capital in the U.S. without talking about religion. Religion is not only a large part of the connectivity, it is also an important motivation for getting people engaged with one another.

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Things are quite different in Europe. Everytime I talk about social capital to people in Britain or Sweden or France, and then talk about the role of religion, people start looking at me strangely. Religion is a much smaller part of community life there. And you have to explain to Europeans that you're not talking about kooks, or the Jim Joneses of the world. Anyway, in the U.S., religion is a source of connectivity. That doesn't mean it's always a source of connectivity.

In some circles people assume that involvement in religious communities detaches people from the larger society.

The main conclusion I draw from the data is that, other things being equal, the person who is involved in religious life is also likely to be more involved than his secular counterpart in the life of the community. That is, the people who go to church on Sunday are also the people who are more likely to be active in the PTA and to be giving to the United Way and to be volunteering for soup kitchens in secular settings.

This pattern is actually more true for some denominations than others. Broadly speaking, it's more true for the mainline Protestant denominations and less true for fundamentalist congregations. There is some evidence that this pattern has changed as the evangelical movement has expanded in America over the past 20 to 30 years.

How do you account for the remarkable attention given to your article "Bowling Alone" and the book that followed?

It's because I accidentally stumbled onto a problem that many Americans know about from their own lives. People have a sense that, "Oh, my Mom belonged to Hadassah, but I don't." Or they know that their Dad belonged to Rotary, or that their parents went to church, and they know they don't and they feel a little bad about that. They thought it was just their problem. And then along comes this Harvard professor who says, "It isn't your problem, it's our problem." Suddenly my work was not just an academic study.

You mentioned television as one of the reasons for the decline in civic engagement. Would you make other connections between technology and the cultural change you've been mapping?

I wouldn't say that all technology has the same effect on social connections. The introduction of the telephone, for example, was probably on average an aid to social connectivity, although at the time people were less sure about that. Lots of technological changes don't have any effect on social networks. However, the one core social change that is directly related to technological innovation in the 20th century has to do with the privatization of our leisure time. By which I mean movies, radio, CDs, television, video games, the Internet and so on.



In 1900, you couldn't listen to music here in Jaffrey unless you did it in the company of other people. And within ten miles of Jaffrey there were five community bands. None exists anymore. Of course, I can now listen to the finest music in the world in the privacy of my own earphones and not see another person. That fact has a powerful, largely negative effect on social capital. This kind of privatization is not

Quest, our archdiocesan reflection booklet for small Christian communities, is now distributed to every state in the union, save one. Word of mouth has been the way people have learned about Quest to date. We have never done any advertising for the booklet. Quest is a much appreciated resource around the country, indeed around the world. We would like to be able to make it even more widely available. To that end, we could benefit from the help of some small community member out there who has some professional experience with marketing and advertising. If you are in a position to offer us some assistance in this regard, or if you know of someone who might volunteer to give us advice, please contact the office at (860) 243-9642.

Small Christian Communities: A Global Phenomenon

Fr. Jim O'Halloran (Dublin, Ireland) wrote awhile back telling of his experience tilling the soil for small Christian communities in South Africa and Lesotho this past summer. He spoke in particular about very favorable work in a parish in Cape Town called Westridge. The pastor there, Fr Eoin Farrelly, had been preparing the ground for six months by celebrating the eucharist in homes. This was followed by a two-week retreat on the subject of community. The first week was in the church; the second was in the homes launching