
**THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
TRADITION
AND ITS POTENTIAL APPLICATION TO
THE GERMAN PROTESTANT CHURCH
AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT**

By

Rev. Paul Cromwell

March 1, 2006

Written with the Support of a Study Stipend

Provided By

The Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland

A.	Power and Values	7
B.	Strategies for Democratic Participation and Powerful Community Problem Solving.....	8
C.	Additional Characteristics.....	12
A.	Example #1: Public Transportation for Low-Income Workers.....	19
B.	Example #2: Early Literacy Education in the Public Schools	21
A.	Building Relationships.....	23
B.	Training Leaders	24
A.	Compassion, Justice, and Righteous Anger.....	27
B.	Vision of the Shalom Community	29
A.	Power Misunderstood and Avoided.....	33
B.	Power and God.....	34
C.	Paul’s Understanding of the Spiritual Dimensions of Power.....	36
D.	Nehemiah’s Exercise of Power.....	37
III.	Human Relationships and the Presence of God	38
A.	The Church In, To, and With the Community	39
B.	Developing the Skills of the Church’s Lay Leadership	41
I.	Opportunities and Challenges	42
B.	Love, Compassion, and Caring.....	44
C.	Prophetic Hope	46
D.	Gratitude	47
E.	Recognizing the Demonic Within.....	48
B.	Daily Triggers	52
C.	Planning and Strategic Reflection.....	52
D.	Time Off, Vacations, and Sabbaticals.....	53
E.	Nurturing and Being Nurtured by Others	54
F.	Laughter, Celebration, and Awe	55
1.	Professional Leadership, Finances, and Mission to the Community and World	58
2.	Everyday Church Life.....	60
D.	German Diakonia.....	69
I.	Overview to Activities from July, 2005 to February, 2006	88
C.	Parish Development.....	96

**THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING TRADITION
AND ITS POTENTIAL APPLICATION TO THE GERMAN PROTESTANT CHURCH
AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT**

By Rev. Paul Cromwell, March 1, 2006

Author's Preface to the Full Report

The author of this report is an American minister in the United Church of Christ who has served in his ministry for twenty-five years as a community organizer. The majority of this work has been done with faith-based (or church-based) community organizations in the United States.

For twenty months (July, 2004 – February, 2006) I have been living, working, and studying in Germany as a result of receiving a twenty-two-month stipend from the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) in cooperation with the Forum on Community Organizing (FOCO). During this period of time I have held conversations with approximately 270 persons from 40 German cities and given presentations on 56 occasions involving approximately 830 people. I have also been a member of the Qu/A/Si Project of European social workers (Quality & Accessibility of Social Services for Social Inclusion, a partnership of 16 social service provider organizations including German Diakonisches Werk and Eurodiaconia). This involvement has taken me to 7 other European countries and permitting extensive conversations with approximately 75 non-German Europeans. My contacts have been primarily with church leaders, pastors, and members, along with social workers and other professionals.

This report is written in two parts. The first part contains four chapters and attempts to explain the American community organizing tradition, including its guiding concepts, values, and strategies. It provides a few concrete examples drawn from the author's direct experiences as a community organizer. It also attempts to explain the values, which connect community organizing to the values and traditions of Christianity. The final chapter in this first part contains the author's reflections on a potential "spirituality of organizing." The second part contains two chapters. The first chapter grows out of the author's first year of work and study in Germany and contains a description of the German Protestant Church and community organizing strategies that may apply to help strengthen the life and practices of the church. The second chapter

was written in February, 2006 after the author had more time working with parishes and organizations seeking to use community organizing strategies in concrete German and European situations.

The different parts and chapters of this report have been written as “stand alone” pieces. In other words, the author has found it helpful to share the different chapters with different persons during the past eighteen months. Hence, the reader of this full report will find that some concepts and ideas are repeated in different chapters.

A few words need to be said about the methodology utilized in the author’s conversations with persons here in Germany and Europe, along with the guiding values of the author’s research and findings. One-on-one visits are described in the first chapter of this report. This method was developed by the founder of community organizing, Saul Alinsky, and persists to the present day. The two primary purposes of these visits are to build relationships and discover persons’ concerns, visions, and talents. These visits differ from more traditional “interviewing” methods utilized in academia, social sciences, government, business, and elsewhere. No standard or written questionnaire is utilized. The formality of a questionnaire inhibits the goals of building a relationship and allowing the visit to be open-ended; i.e. following the most important concerns and visions of the person being visited. As I have visited with people using this one-on-one method, my goals have been to get to know them and to ask them open-ended questions such as, “What is your perception of where the German Protestant Church is today?”, “What do you see as its greatest strengths and biggest challenges?”, and “If there is one thing that would make your parish or the surrounding community better, what would it be?” Such open-ended questions lead to responses as diverse as the people with whom one visits. From initial responses to these questions, further questions and conversation follow. And when one displays a genuine interest in someone and gives them an opportunity to speak about their most heartfelt concerns and visions, a relationship of respect is fostered upon which further work and cooperation can be developed.

One final note should be made regarding methodology and values. The author of this report works from the values premise that love, justice, and democratic participation are fundamental to the development of healthy individuals and society.

These values are a major tenant of the Christian and other faith traditions. The author also believes that the church has an important role to play in fostering these values in individuals, families, and societal institutions. These background values have shaped the one-on-one visits, research, findings, and recommendations of this report.

The author wishes to acknowledge that many of the ideas contained in this report are not uniquely his own. The chapters on the American community organizing tradition draw heavily upon the trainings conducted by community organizing networks such as the Direct Action Research Training Center (DART), Gamaliel Foundation, and Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), in which the author has attended and/or served as a trainer. The chapter relating to community organizing and Christian values draws significantly from the writings and workshops of Dr. Robert Linthicum. The reader will find in the attached bibliography many sources for further information.

This report is written by someone who has a very deep appreciation and sense of gratitude for the significant role that the church and Christian faith has and continues to play in my life. I have also been richly blessed by the American community organizing tradition and the many fine organizers and leaders I have met over the years. Without the mentoring and sharing of the following colleagues and friends, this report could not have been written: Rev. Charles Baldwin, John Calkins, Jim Capers, Rev. William Sloan Coffin, Rev. Jim Drake, Don Elmer, Greg Galluzzo, Choe Hyondok, Jean Levis, Rev. Robert Linthicum, John Musick, John Norton, Catherine Peterson, Jerry Silbert, Shel Trapp, Herb White, and James Wiles.

I am extremely grateful to the EKD for the study stipend, which has allowed me to be in Germany, and to FOCO, the Qu/A/Si Project, and members of the German church for having warmly received me and introduced me to so many wonderful colleagues. My thanks to all whom I have met these past twenty months. The “Gastfreundlichkeit” (hospitality) I have been shown has been overwhelming.

Finally, this report is dedicated to my son, Jesse Levis Cromwell, the light of my life, and to my family of origin that nurtured me in unconditional love. Thanks be to God!

PART I: THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING TRADITION

CHAPTER I: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AS PRACTICED IN THE UNITED STATES

I. Historical Roots and Uniqueness

Community organizing as practiced in the United States has as its roots the work of Saul Alinsky (1909 -1972). Alinsky's work, begun in Chicago and then moved to other American cities, can most simply be described as the transferring of concepts and strategies used in the American labor movement for greater worker justice, to poor and ethnically diverse large urban neighborhoods in order to improve city services and the quality of life in these residential neighborhoods. Near the end of his life, Alinsky's associates sought to institutionalize this work in the form of systematic trainings for community organization leaders and staff, and by creating an institutional structure that would help sustain and spread these efforts. The legacy of Alinsky's work can now be found in hundreds of American cities, towns, and rural areas through the work of individual membership-based organizations, as well as, organizations of organizations where religious congregations, labor unions, and others band together.

Community organizing differs significantly from the work of social service providers, single-issue social movements, and political parties. While social service providers deliver needed services to persons in need, and who are often the victims of unjust social policies, community organizing works to empower people to change and hold accountable those institutions which often create the victims in the first place. Unlike single-issue social movements often lead by charismatic leaders, community organizing is multi-issue oriented with a broad collective of leaders. Community organizing is political work in the very broad sense of this term, meaning that it engages people in the civic and political affairs of their communities. Community organizations, however, are never affiliated with any political party, nor do they campaign for persons running for office. Rather, they seek to hold accountable these and other civic leaders to the needs and visions of the entire community, especially its low and moderate-income residents.

II. Basic Values, Concepts, Strategies, and Characteristics of Community Organizing

A. Power and Values

Two basic values govern and guide the work of community organizing. The first is that of democratic participation and broad inclusiveness. All people have the right to actively participate in the civic decisions, which govern their individual and collective lives. Community organizing embodies the value of democratic participation both internally, within the organization itself, and by engaging the organization with the broader community and decision-making processes. The organization's members are systematically listened to and actively engaged in the selection, research, and solving of community problems. The organization's leadership is democratically elected and its governing structures and decisions are held accountable by the membership to insure the will of the people is being followed. The organization then engages in the broader community and democratic procedures. It negotiates with and for people who are often excluded from the political mainstream due to their lack of power on the basis of income level, or racial and ethnic composition.

The second governing value of community organizing is justice and compassion. Community organizing works to see that all people and areas of the city are treated with dignity and respect, and that a degree of fairness is being lived out in a community's distribution of goods and services.

Power is needed to see that values of fairness and compassion are implemented in the community. In this regard, community organizing makes an important distinction between private and public relationships. In our private relationships of family, friendships, and small voluntary associations, the individual can often exert the needed power and influence to see one's needs are met and that one is treated fairly. If not, the individual has a good deal of freedom to leave these relationships and select new ones. In the public arena of involuntary relationships (i.e. with large institutional structures such as city hall, the police, banks, school system, and the like) the individual is more often than not powerless to negotiate one's needs and interests.

Community organizing points out that power and influence are manifested in society in two major forms: organized money and organized people. When the

millionaire developer wants something from city hall, they often get their way due to their organized money. When individuals of modest income and wealth want change, however, they must band together to see that their interests are met. In community organizing, power and influence are exercised in large public assemblies where elected officials and other civic leaders see that the threat of public embarrassment or the loss of prestige or votes in the next election are worse than responding positively to the needs and demands of the organization.

Community organizing follows three primary steps to achieve its purposes of citizen empowerment and community improvements. The first step is to systematically listen to the needs and visions of the people involved, and to democratically prioritize them. One example of this “listening process” will be subsequently described. The second step is to conduct research to see what solutions can address these needs and visions, and what public or private institutions and leaders have the power and resources to carry out the needed solutions. Third, a large public gathering is held to which the media and key civic leaders are invited. The community problems are graphically described, the solutions are presented, and the agreement of civic leaders is sought in the form of specific steps they will take to address these problems. Smaller negotiating meetings of the organization’s leadership with civic leaders take place before and after such public assemblies where the details of solutions can be fully developed.

B. Strategies for Democratic Participation and Powerful Community Problem Solving

1. Why People Participate

When people acknowledge that the power they need to positively change their communities comes in the form of organized people, the challenge arises how to best mobilize them. Community organizing works from the premise that people become involved in activities for one of two primary reasons.

First, people engage because they have a direct self-interest in something. Human self-interest can revolve around many factors, ranging from self-survival to self-esteem. One can witness in community organizing people’s involvement based upon the direct impact a community problem has on a person’s life and family (the most

common), the offense to one's values a community problem has (for example, a person may say, "I am not homeless, but I become involved because I believe that there should not be the conditions of homelessness in our city."), or the satisfaction one gains from working closely with a diverse group of committed people.

The power of self-interest is captured well in the following quote from former American politician Mario Cuomo.

You cannot have been in politics as long as I have and be blind to the fact that for most of us, most of the time, self-interest is a powerful motivator – perhaps the most powerful one. If we hope to reestablish our strength, confidence, and balance as a nation, we need to help one another see that our self-interest is not identical with our selfish interests, that self-interest is inextricably linked to the common good. We need to understand that apart from the morality of recognizing an obligation to our brothers and sisters, common sense by itself should teach us that we are all in this thing together, interconnected and interdependent. - Mario Cuomo, Reason To Believe, 1995

It is very important to point out, as Mr. Cuomo does, that self-interest is different than selfishness. Wanting the best for one's life, family, and community only becomes selfish when these desires are sought at the exclusion of others. When they are sought in relationship and cooperation with others, when overlapping and common self-interests are recognized and affirmed, the nature of power to achieve them is transformed from an oppressive "power over" others to a liberating "power with" others.

The second primary reason people engage has to do with relationship of trust and goodwill one has with a person who invites them. When asked, "Why did you attend this meeting?" or "How did you become involved in this group?", it is very common to hear the response, "Because a friend invited me." Long-term involvement ultimately comes back to self-interest. Relationships, however, often determine initial involvement.

One final note can be made regarding participation, especially regarding involvement in public and civic affairs. Often people blame apathy for the lack of

people's civic involvement. The word "apathy", or "a-pathos", implies a lack of passion and concern. Very few people truly lack in passion or concern for themselves, their family, or their community; but they often do feel powerless to make a difference. Community organizing awakens a realistic hope that things can change through one's involvement with others.

2. One-On-One/Face-To-Face Visits

One of the most effective strategies used in American community organizing is the one-on-one or face-to-face visit. Its purpose is to discover a person's self-interests and to initiate a relationship of trust and respect. While it is very rare during a first visit that the person visited will be invited to participate or become involved in something, a foundation is laid to do so in the future.

A one-on-one visit is an intentional conversation, always arranged ahead of time, and lasts for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. It begins with the person doing the visit establishing the reason for visiting. The following example is typical within the context of a faith-based community organization where one lay person is visiting another from their own congregation.

Thank you for taking the time and allowing me to visit. As I mentioned when I called to arrange this visit, I am part of a team of twenty persons from our church who are each visiting five to ten other members as a way of strengthening the fellowship of the church and understanding our members concerns for the church, our neighborhood, and our city. Before we talk about visions and concerns, however, I would enjoy getting to know you better. Please tell me more about yourself.

Visitors ask about the background, family, work, hobbies, and future aspirations of the person they are visiting. Questions such as, "How did you choose your job and what do you really like about it?", and "Were there any key people or events in the past that really helped shape who you are today?" lead the conversation to a deeper level. Eventually the visitor will ask about the community and church with such questions as, "If there was one or two things that would make our church a better place than it already

is, what would that be?”, and “What makes you angry and what would you like to see changed in your neighborhood or our city?” The visit ends with the visitor saying something like this.

Thank you for taking the time to visit and share. Next month our church team will report back to the full congregation what we have found. Then we will invite the membership to take part in developing strategies to address the visions and concerns we have heard. I will call you when this occurs.

Persons conducting such one-on-one visits consistently report how rewarding they are, how it expands the number of people they know, and amazement at how much people are willing to share about themselves during an initial conversation. Upon reflection, this final conclusion should not be surprising. It is a wonderful experience when someone truly listens to and takes a genuine interest in us, all the more so in our increasingly busy and impersonal culture.

As alluded to in the one-on-one example just cited, these visits often occur in the context of a “listening process”, an eight week period when a trained group of people will each visit five to ten others. After the visits are completed, the visitors will share with each other what they have heard, look for a pattern of repeated concerns and visions, and then report back to the membership their findings and preliminary recommendations for next steps. Within faith-based community organizations of thirty congregations working together, it is not uncommon for 2,000 people to be visited and listened to during this eight-week period. Each parish listening team, in addition to reporting back to their own membership, will also share the community concerns they heard at a meeting with listening teams from other congregations and parishes. Such a joint listening process generates great energy, excitement, and hope that community problems will be effectively addressed. *What helps guarantee success, however, is that the listening teams can now invite the 2,000 people they visited to participate in the organization based upon the self-interests they have discovered and the relationships they have begun to establish.*

3. From Unmanageable Problem to Solvable Issue

In addition to being able to mobilize large numbers of people as a means of exerting power on behalf of the values of fairness and compassion, community organizing helps people translate vast community problems into specific and winnable issues. The quality of education, crime in neighborhoods, or the poor delivery of city services are vague and vast community problems. Working to see that Lincoln High School implement an after-school reading tutorial program for 100 struggling readers by the start of the new school year is a specific and winnable issue. Demanding that the police adds extra patrols for three months to eliminate drug dealing in ten identified drug houses is concrete. Requesting that the city fix the potholes on twenty named streets, transforms a vast community problem into something the organization can take to their public leaders. Community organizing trains citizens to demand from civic leaders precisely what they want and by when.

Such demands allow for concrete negotiations and specific accountability. At large public meetings, civic leaders are asked questions such as, “Will you implement a tutorial program for one hundred struggling readers, beginning October 1st?” Such questions require a “yes” or “no” answer from the public official. Details of the final solution and needed modifications of the original request can be further developed in subsequent negotiations. The specific nature of the request, however, will keep the negotiations on track and prevent civic leaders from diverting attention from peoples’ true concerns and visions.

C. Additional Characteristics

Three additional characteristics of community organizing help distinguish it from other forms of community and social work: the nature of its financial income, leadership, and staff. Community organizations need money for staff, leadership training, and basic office expenses. This money comes from a variety of sources and, as much as possible from the membership. Membership-raised money is important for two reasons. First, people feel greater ownership over that which they personally pay for and invest in. Second, membership raised money equals independence. It is difficult to hold city hall accountable if a large portion of an organization’s budget comes from government sources.

The membership and leadership of community organizations are its most valuable asset. Leaders in community organizations come with different styles and characteristics, but they hold in common that they are people with an identifiable following, and they are able to mobilize this following when the organization needs to exert its power. Community organizations place great emphasis on training leaders with the skills they need to become effective players in the democratic public arena. Formal leadership trainings include teaching specific skills on how to conduct one-on-one visits and productive meetings, how to research and tackle community issues, fundraising, and effective negotiating. They also teach theoretical skills like how to understand power, the key differences between public and private relationships, and the importance of clearly understanding our own and other's self-interests. The real training of leaders, however, occurs "in the field" when these skills are put to use.

Finally, the staff of community organizations are paid professionals who play multiple roles. Community organizers spend the majority of their time, especially in the beginning stages of building an organization, conducting hundreds and hundreds of one-on-one visits, drawing people together through the common self-interests he or she has heard from the people themselves. The community organizer serves as leadership trainer in the context of formal trainings, meetings, and all aspects of the organization. A final prominent role of the community organizer is that of agitator. Often the organizer is an outsider who comes into a community asking, "Why do things need to be this way?" He challenges people to act upon their stated beliefs and values. As an outsider and in the role of facilitator, the organizer plays a behind the scenes role, never doing for others what they can do for themselves. So it is the organization's leadership, not staff, that run meetings, hold accountable and negotiate with civic leaders. The organizer, however, helps prepare and reflect with the leadership how these actions can be most effective.

III. American Churches as Active Participants in Community Organizing

Churches and religious congregations are not the only groups that participate in community organizing in the United States. Many strictly secular community organizations exist. But since I am writing this report with leaders and members of the

German church as a primary audience, and since my own more recent experiences have been in the context of faith-based organizations, I am using these as examples. However, most of the theory and practice of community organizing thus far described apply in a secular or religious setting.

A recent study by “The Interfaith Funders” found that there are over 3,500 religious congregations in the United States that participate in community organizing. These congregations contribute money in the form of membership dues, church space for meetings, and their pastors and members as the active participants of the organizations. In addition, regional and national religious bodies have contributed millions of dollars of financial support to community organizing efforts.

There are three primary reasons for this extensive church participation and support for community organizing. One reason is that community organizing fits the values of justice and compassion found in the Judeo-Christian tradition and scriptures. Second, community organizing offers churches an effective mission strategy to powerfully address community concerns directly impacting their membership, neighborhoods, and city; a strategy that goes beyond more traditional church charity or social service approaches.

Finally, community organizing serves the institutional self-interests of pastors and their congregations. One-on-one listening processes help foster fellowship within the church and is often used to reach out to inactive or potential new members. Listening processes are also often used by congregations and parishes to clarify their own internal programming and ministries. Pastors and lay leaders also learn valuable skills that help their own church run more effectively. For example, church leaders often learn in the context of community organizing how to run effective and efficient meetings, and then bring these strategies back to church committee and ministry meetings.

CHAPTER II: SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Preface

Thus far, we have spoken of the basic concepts and strategies of community organizing. We turn now to some concrete examples in order to paint a fuller picture of community organizing in practice. While many examples could be selected, I will draw from my own experiences since they are ones with which I am most familiar. Examples will be given of the process used in building a new faith-based organization of organizations; work done in selecting, researching, and solving two community problems; and the day-to-day work of a community organizer. I begin, however, with a brief self-description.

Since there are no schools that formally train community organizers, the question is often asked, "How does one become involved in this profession?" The personal stories I have heard which answer this question are as varied as the number of community organizers I have met. In my own case, it was a combination of influences that lead me into organizing. Born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio during the times of the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements, I was made aware of the power of citizen activism in shaping public policy. My upbringing in the church helped connect these struggles for justice to the values of the Christian faith. I remember at the age of fifteen feeling a call into the ministry or politics as a way of contributing to these efforts for greater societal fairness and compassion, but feeling unsure how to connect them. It was during my university studies that I was introduced to people doing a range of organizing activities.

My first professional experience as an organizer began in 1979 with the Southern Woodcutters Assistance Project, working with predominately African-American pulpwood cutters in rural Mississippi. Our work combined a self-help, social service approach with organizing. The woodcutters formed local chapters of a buyers' cooperative (allowing them to purchase saw and truck parts at a wholesale price) and credit union (helping to break the credit trap many of them were in with those who purchased their wood). These services also formed the backbone of the organization.

Attention was then turned to organizing for a state law establishing a fair process for measuring their wood when sold to buyers and getting a higher price for their labor.

After completing my Seminary studies and being ordained a minister in the United Church of Christ, I worked for an individual membership based organization in Duluth, Minnesota that focussed on neighborhood improvements and fair lending practices of area banks. My work evolved in Duluth to that of building an organization of organizations consisting of churches, labor unions, and an assortment of women's, senior citizen's, and tenant organizations. Seven years in Minnesota was followed by four in St. Petersburg building a faith-based organization before serving as the Head Organizer of the Interchurch Coalition for Action, Reconciliation, and Empowerment (ICARE) in Jacksonville, Florida. The following concrete examples will be drawn from my nine years with ICARE, an organization of 35 churches dedicated to powerfully addressing the needs of low and moderate-income residents.

I. Building an Organization

A. Sponsoring Committee 1993 – 1995

Prior to my work in Jacksonville, an organizer from the Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART) spent one to two days a month for two years building a Sponsoring Committee. DART is a twenty year old network of twenty five community organizations in Florida, Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan, and Virginia. They have three full-time staff persons, provide leadership trainings twice a year, organize an annual three-day meeting of pastors, and provide monthly consultant visits to each organization that is part of the DART network. During the past three years they have systematically recruited recent university and seminary graduates for a twelve-week organizing internship, and the twelve DART-affiliated organizations in Florida have worked together and won common issues at a statewide level.

The Sponsoring Committee in Jacksonville, built between 1993 and 1995, had fifteen church leaders (Bishops, District Superintendents, etc.) representing seven

different faith traditions. During these two years they learned about community organizing, raised seed money, and then hired a full-time community organizer.

B. Head Organizer's First Nine Months in Jacksonville 9/1995 - 5/1996

I began my work as the Head Organizer in Jacksonville in September, 1995. For the first six months my primary task was to visit with area pastors, mostly in one-on-one meetings. During these visits I was building relationships, listening to the pastors' visions and concerns for their congregations and the broader community, and explaining the purpose and strategies of community organizing. In February and March of 1996, 35 of the 120 pastors I had visited met together for three meetings and made plans and commitments to build a faith-based organization with their congregations. They also began to introduce me to lay leaders in their churches. I met with these church members individually and in small groups. Then on a Friday night and Saturday morning in late May, 1996 we held a joint training. 125 persons from 25 churches came and learned what faith-based organizations had accomplished in other communities, potential strategies that would build an organization in Jacksonville, and became acquainted with one-on-one visits. They were then asked to spend the next month recruiting other members of their church to a training on how to do one-on-one visits.

C. One-On-One Listening Process 6/1996 - 9/1996

In late June, 1996 ICARE held a three-hour training for 200 lay people from 20 churches on how to do effective one-on-one visits and to plan a visiting process in their congregations. During July and August these 200 persons conducted 1,300 visits and returned to a meeting in September, which we called an "Issues Assembly." Each church reported how many visits they had completed and what three community problems their members most wanted ICARE to work on. Ten community problems were identified, but a vote by the persons at the Issues Assembly selected public education, drug and crime problems, and infrastructure improvements as the three priorities ICARE would address during the coming two years.

D. Issues Research 10/1996 - 12/1996

Three weeks after the Issues Assembly ICARE held an Issues Training attended by 95 persons. We discussed how these three priority community problems could be researched and approached, and asked these 95 persons to volunteer to be part of one

of the three Issue Committees. Between October and December, 1996 these Issue Committees conducted research and developed potential solutions and recommendations. Also during this time the Sponsoring Committee developed organizational by-laws and a list of nominees to serve on the newly created Board of Directors.

E. Convention 1/1997

250 people attended the Founding Convention of ICARE in January, 1998. They voted to approve the new by-laws, they elected a new Board, and they received the reports and recommendations of the three Issue Committees. They also approved plans to hold ICARE's first Public Meeting one month later, and made commitments to bring others from their churches to this Public Meeting.

F. Public Meeting 2/1997

On February 6, 1997 ICARE held its first Public Meeting. Nearly 1,000 people and the media attended. ICARE pastors and leaders from each Issue Committee explained the three community problems and then asked key public officials if they would work with ICARE to solve these problems. The School Superintendent and Police Chief both attended the meeting and responded, "Yes, I will work with you to solve these problems." The Mayor, however, did not attend but instead sent a representative who could not speak on his behalf. The next morning the Mayor called ICARE pastors and apologized for not coming. He also told TV and newspaper reporters that it was a big mistake that he did not attend. Three weeks later the Mayor came to a meeting of 125 ICARE members. He brought his 18 top government leaders and said he would work with the organization.

G. Negotiating Solutions 3/1997 - 5/1998

Between March and May, 1997 ICARE leaders met with the Mayor, Police Chief, and Superintendent of Schools. The Mayor committed to make 125 infrastructure improvements presented to him by ICARE including street and sewer repairs, the tearing down of abandoned buildings, cleaning up of neglected parks, and installing new street lights in areas where crime was occurring at night. The Sheriff ordered new police patrols in areas of high crime and arrested known drug dealers. The School Superintendent agreed to set up a new "In-School Suspension Program" for

misbehaving students that would keep them in school rather than send them home to unsupervised environments, and would help them with their homework so they would not fall behind in their school work. The pledges of all three leaders were fulfilled.

H. The Work of ICARE Continues 6/1998 – Present

During the two or three years ICARE was beginning, some of the pastors and lay leaders asked why we were taking so much time before we began to work on community problems. Later they saw that this work was necessary. Without this initial groundwork, ICARE would not have been able to bring a thousand people together, and it was this large Public Meeting that made the political leaders positively respond to the community problems. The preparation work also allowed the pastors and members of the different and diverse churches to understand, respect, and trust one another. Finally, the preparation work allowed us to build a multi-issue and long-term organization that would not die after the first or second issue was solved.

ICARE has a Convention every two years. Before this Convention, ICARE member churches conduct the “community issue listening process” during which they have listened to between 1,300 to 2,300 persons on each occasion. Issue priorities and the twenty-five member Board of Directors are selected and elected at the Convention. The Board meets monthly to direct and coordinate the work of ICARE. New Issue Committees are formed after each Convention to address the three or four issues selected at the Convention. During the past nine years these issues have included education, drugs and crime, infrastructure improvements, youth activities, health care, public transportation, affordable housing, and health care. At least one time a year, ICARE holds a large Public Meeting with important government and other community leaders in order to solve community problems.

II. Solving Community Issues

A. Example #1: Public Transportation for Low-Income Workers

As was stated earlier in this report, community organizing follows three basic steps in solving community problems: democratically selecting the community problems to be addressed, research, and negotiating with public officials. During ICARE’s second “community issues listening process” conducted in the Fall of 1998 many of its

members complained that public transportation for low-income workers was inadequate. A typical bus ride took as long as three hours from Jacksonville's Northside residential areas (where unemployment was the highest in the city) to the Southside industrial and commercial parks (where job growth was most prominent).

ICARE leaders learned that efforts in other parts of the country had successfully addressed this issue through a variety of strategies. ICARE invited staff from the national Center for Community Change to Jacksonville to conduct a 50 person training to see which of these strategies might work. The approach used elsewhere that seemed most appropriate for Jacksonville was the creation of a bus hub in the Northside that would gather bus riders at one central location and then transfer them to an express bus line to the Southside. ICARE leaders had learned from conducting local research visits with area business and governmental leaders, as well as with residents, that the ideal location for such a hub would be the Gateway Mall. Gateway had been built as Jacksonville's first suburban shopping mall in the 1950's but had fallen on hard times as the neighborhood transitioned from middle to low-income residents. A bus hub at this location would bring potential customers back into this area and assist in its economic revitalization.

ICARE leaders and staff prepared a seven-page report of its research findings and recommendations. 25 ICARE leaders met with officials of the Jacksonville Transit Authority (JTA) to present the report and begin a dialogue. Two weeks later, ICARE held a meeting of 600 of its members, explaining the findings of its report, presenting testimonials of bus riders who wanted solutions, and asking the JTA President to act upon ICARE's recommendations. The JTA President agreed to all of the recommendations. Within two months the bus hub was established at the Gateway Mall, direct bus lines were established to the Southside, and transit time was reduced from three hours to fifty minutes. Within a year, the Gateway Mall began attracting new businesses and has now become a flourishing shopping and service center in Jacksonville's Northside.

ICARE's work on this issue continued in two primary ways during subsequent years. ICARE continued its relationship with the JTA, providing citizen input for future transit reforms, and helping JTA receive three separate one million-dollar grants from

the Federal government to establish additional bus lines for low-income workers in other parts of the city. Ridership on all of these new lines has been successful enough to allow the JTA to profitably continue them beyond the initial seed funding provided by the Federal government. ICARE leaders also became active in the Transportation Equity Network, a special project of the national Center for Community Change that gathers leaders from community organizations from around the United States in order to share strategies and help shape Federal government policies and spending on transportation issues.

B. Example #2: Early Literacy Education in the Public Schools

If ICARE's work on public transportation serves as an example of a truly cooperative partnership between grassroots citizens and public officials, ICARE's work on early literacy education in the public schools illustrates its efforts with an entrenched bureaucracy, resistant to change.

The history of public education in Jacksonville, Florida is one of low quality and numerous struggles. During the 1960's Jacksonville's public school system was dis-accredited due to its poor quality. During the 1970's many white students left for private schools as the public schools were forced by court order to integrate African-Americans. Twenty years of struggle over integration still left many low-income and African-American students in substandard classrooms and receiving a poor-quality education.

ICARE's membership continued to select the quality of public education as its highest priority issue during the organization's successive biennial listening processes. The education issue most important to ICARE's membership was the quality of literacy education. ICARE's members knew from their own experiences what research has continually found to be true – that the key to a student's ongoing academic success begins with their learning to read fluently during their first three years of school. Research and years of poor test scores have also shown that low-income children are far less likely to become successful readers. The challenge for educators is that low-income children often have less literacy training in their homes than their middle and upper-income peers. Whether it is that their parents have less time to read to their children, or that their parents themselves are illiterate, many low-income children are in need of more foundational reading and communication skills at the beginning of their

formal schooling. Public education, however, too often uses the same teaching strategies and curriculum materials with these low-income children as they do with middle and upper-income children who often begin school already knowing how to read.

A typical “social service” approach to this issue of early literacy education, and one used by a number of ICARE member congregations, is that of setting up after-school tutorial programs for struggling students. The limitations of this approach, however, are numerous. In particular, an ambitious tutorial program may assist fifteen to thirty students, whereas in the city of a million people like Jacksonville, thousands of children fall behind every year.

ICARE learned through its initial research that there were teaching strategies and curriculums that took into account these significant differences in the literacy backgrounds of children. In April of 1997, eighteen ICARE leaders traveled to a low-income, inner-city school in Columbus, Ohio that was using these alternative teaching strategies and were amazed with what they saw. Low-income and African-American children were reading fluently and with great self-confidence by the end of first grade. The vast majority of students at all grade levels were outperforming their middle and upper-income peers in other parts of the city. The curriculum used by this school started with foundational literacy skills in the early years, like phonemic awareness and lots of repetition, before then moving the students into more complex critical thinking skills. For ICARE members who had seen their own and so many other children in their neighborhoods struggle academically, seeing with their own eyes children like their own succeeding at such high levels was a revelation. They became determined to bring these strategies back to Jacksonville.

ICARE asked the Jacksonville School Superintendent to send principals from the city’s low-income schools to Columbus, Ohio. He agreed to send five, and ICARE paid for seven other principals with whom the organization has begun to build relationships through research visits. Twelve of the thirteen principals who traveled to this school reported back to the Superintendent that if they were given permission and support from the School District, they would begin using these teaching strategies immediately. Two months after this visit, ICARE held a 700-person meeting and a series of workshops involving 150 community leaders. Four outside educators were invited to speak about

their alternative teaching strategies. At the 700-person assembly, the Associate Superintendent agreed to begin developing a plan to implement these strategies. Three months later, in February of 1998, ICARE members packed the Jacksonville School Board room to witness final approval of a three year pilot program involving twelve schools, the creation of a District trainer, and allocation of \$ 1.5 million in order to hire an outside consulting firm to provide teacher training and to buy curriculum materials.

Little did ICARE realize at the time that this initial victory was to be only the beginning of a long battle to maintain these efforts. One month (August, 1998) before the 12 schools began implementing the new reading strategy, the School District hired a new Superintendent who was determined to implement new reforms that left no room for anything he did not see as a priority. ICARE and an outside evaluator hired by the District both gathered test scores and conducted stakeholder satisfaction surveys from educators, parents, and students. Despite test scores improving dramatically and overwhelming satisfaction from all persons directly involved, the Superintendent and high level administrators used numerous behind the scene and public tactics to undercut these reform efforts. Speculation regarding this administrative resistance ranged from the controlling ego of the Superintendent, to the resistance of the education bureaucracy in general to change suggested from the outside. ICARE continued its support of these reforms in numerous ways. ICARE raised money to pay for over 100 teachers, parents, and community leaders to visit model schools that were successfully utilizing these alternative strategies. ICARE held numerous large public meetings, press conferences, and wrote two major reports documenting successes.

ICARE's efforts, like the debate over and attempts to reform American public education, are not over. The organization and its members, however, have taken deep satisfaction over the thousands of children who have thus far benefited from its efforts.

III. The Role of the Community Organizer

A. Building Relationships

Community organizers perform many tasks, but first and foremost they are

relationship builders. Especially in the early stages of an organization, the majority of an organizer's time is spent visiting one-on-one with potential members and leaders of the organization. It is not uncommon for an organizer to conduct twenty to thirty one-on-one visits a week. Through these visits an organizer is becoming familiar with the community's passions, concerns, and visions, as well as, looking for persons willing to act on these concerns and the talents they can bring to the organization's efforts.

The organizer then brings these people together, assisting them in creating an agenda and leading a meeting, which will allow common concerns to be shared, and for new relationships to be formed. Preparing for a meeting of thirty people, for example, requires that the organizer revisits key persons individually, a small group planning meeting, issuing invitations, and doing reminder calls a day or two in advance of the meeting. A well-run meeting will conclude with clear follow-up steps and an understanding of who will do what in order to move the organization and work forward. Building relationships with face-to-face visits is an ongoing task of the organizer if the organization is to continue to grow and be vital.

B. Training Leaders

Community organizers are constantly training leaders and members of the organization in skills required to make the organization effective. One key area is in training organization members in doing one-on-one visits so that it is not simply staff creating the network of relationships vital to the organization, but many others doing the same. Organization members get their first "training" in one-on-one visits through the visit the organizer has done with them. Formal trainings then occur in workshops where members learn new skills and practice with each other. Then, like all skills one learns, members practice and get better by doing.

Through formal trainings and the process of doing and evaluating, organizers train members in many other practical skills. Members learn to lead meetings that start and end on time, have a clear sense of purpose, and accomplish intended tasks with carefully planned agendas and effective group facilitating skills. Members learn how to take large community problems and translate them into manageable and winnable issues. They learn research skills and then how to negotiate with public officials. For many persons, being able to speak confidently with public officials and other powerful

people is a passage to a new and transforming self-esteem. Witnessing this empowerment process is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a community organizer. Members also learn how to raise money. In doing so they learn to speak effectively about the organization and how to ask for funds with confidence. Fundraising by members not only accomplishes the obvious goal of bringing in money, it also provides leaders with new self-esteem and a feeling of ownership over “their” organization.

The community organizer also helps train members in new ways of thinking that reinforces the practical skills they are learning. Reflecting with members upon how political power operates, and how our behavior in the public arena needs to differ from our behavior in the private arena in order to be effective, gives leaders new understandings of themselves and their communities. In faith-based organizing, trainings often devote time to a scriptural and theological foundation for doing justice, which allows members to see their actions in the context of their heartfelt beliefs and values.

The organizer plays the role of trainer in formal workshops, during meetings, and through reflecting with individual members. The organizer insists that every meeting and action taken by the organization is evaluated. Not only does evaluation help us reflect upon and learn from what we have just done, it also allows the organization’s members to plan what needs to be done next.

C. Two Other Primary Tasks

Community organizers assist the leadership of the organization in doing strategic planning. This planning may be long-term in nature. ICARE, for example, conducts Summer leadership retreats preceded by one or two monthly Board Meetings where overall goals and an organizational timeline for the coming year are discussed and ratified. This provides an overall context within which particular meetings and activities are seen as part of a larger plan, as well as, allowing for the coordination of different issue work and other functions of the organization. Again as with all other aspects of the organization’s work, the organizer carefully listens to and discusses strategic options with individuals and small groups of primary leaders before larger groups discuss and decide upon key strategic directions. Strategic planning is also necessary

for every meeting and action along the way, seeking to answer questions such as, “What do we hope to accomplish with this meeting or action? Who needs to do what? What will be the necessary follow-up steps?”

Every organization requires raising money and conducting administrative tasks like preparing mailings, maintaining databases, and paying bills. Most grant writing is done by organizational staff, but all other fundraising involves significant member participation. In ICARE this takes the form of members seeing that their congregation pay their annual dues, and conducting visits during an annual fundraiser, seeking the financial support of individuals and business leaders. A Finance Committee of the Board, with the help of the organizer, develops and monitors the organization’s budget. For all other administrative tasks, the organizer seeks volunteers or part-time staff to carry out these functions so that the organizer can keep focussed on the primary job of organizing.

D. Qualities of an Organizer

A community organizer must have a talent for relating to and fundamentally respecting a wide-range of people from diverse backgrounds. An organizer must have a passion for fairness and democratic processes, and willingness to work hard to undo the injustices of a community. He or she must be a good listener, carefully discovering the visions and passions of the people. An organizer needs a strong ego, capable of suggesting strong direction but without needing to be front-and-center. An organizer must be willing to take calculated risks, as well as, be able to give and receive criticism. An organizer must be curious about people, institutions, and the political process. Finally, an organizer needs a sense of humor and ability to laugh at oneself.

CHAPTER III: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, CHRISTIAN VALUES AND TRADITIONS

I. Christian Values of Compassion, Justice, and Vision of the Shalom Community

A. Compassion, Justice, and Righteous Anger

The foundational values of compassion and justice found in the American community organizing tradition are not only central to, but can be said to be derived from, Jewish and Christian scripture and tradition. The following Biblical passages are just a few examples regarding the centrality of love and justice in scripture.

Let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream! – Amos 5:24

He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6:8

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. – Matthew 22:37-40

And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love. – I Corinthians 13:13

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. – I John 4:16b

Whereas love can be seen as the guiding value in private relationships, justice and fair treatment is the living out of love in the public arena. An examination of the Great Commandment of Jesus (Luke 10:27, Matthew 22:37-40) helps make this clear.

Jesus tells us that we are “to love neighbor as ourselves.” Implicit in the command to love our neighbor is that we are to also love ourselves. A key element of self-love is the expectation that we are to be treated fairly and with respect. This is especially true regarding the relationships we have beyond our private relationships in the public arena. I may hope for lavish love from family and friends, but in the broader world it is unrealistic to expect that the police department, financial institutions, or politicians will love me. However, I can and should expect their fair treatment. And “loving my neighbor as myself” implies that I should expect my neighbor to be treated fairly as well.

Our emotional reaction to unfair treatment and injustice is anger. Two Biblical examples illustrate this point. The 5th Century BC prophet Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to assist his fellow Hebrews as they sought to rebuild the city walls and temple following the Babylonian exile. In the fifth chapter of the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, the prophet hears the complaints of the people. In addition to the outside threat of invasion from neighboring peoples, the Jerusalem elite are mistreating their own people. The people complain, “We are mortgaging our fields and have had to borrow money in order to buy grain during the famine and to pay the king’s tax...we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery.” (Nehemiah 5:4-5) The prophet’s reaction is described in Nehemiah 5:6: “When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.”

Anger is an important emotional indicator of when injustice and unfair treatment are being enacted against self or neighbor. What we do with this anger is equally important. In Nehemiah’s case, we are told in Nehemiah 5:7 that he stepped back for a moment from his anger. “I pondered them [the people’s outcries and complaints] in my mind, and then accused the nobles and officials.” Through reflection, Nehemiah transformed his hot anger into a cold anger. He directs his anger toward ending injustice. (Nehemiah 5:8-14)

The story of Moses is also instructive regarding anger over injustice and our subsequent action. Moses’ first reaction to the injustices being done to his fellow Hebrews is one of violent or “hot” anger.

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. - Exodus 2:11-12

His second reaction was to flee and withdraw to the land of Midian. (Exodus 2:15) But then “the Lord appeared to Moses in flames of fire from within a bush.” (Exodus 3) Moses’ anger over the injustices inflicted on his people is now a burning passion, but one that does not consume him as he follows God’s command to free the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery.

The anger we feel over injustice can be dealt with in three ways. At one extreme we can choose to ignore it, bury it inside ourselves or flee to another land so that the injustice is out of sight. At the other extreme we can react irrationally and violently out of our anger. But a third reaction is that we can momentarily step back from our anger, ponder the situation, and channel our anger into constructive actions that seek to remove the injustice around us.

B. Vision of the Shalom Community

In addition to the values of compassion and justice, Christian scriptures lay out a broader, more encompassing vision of God’s intentions for community life. It is a vision that runs throughout Scripture, called by many different names: the kingdom of God, Mount Zion, the new Jerusalem, the peaceable kingdom. American theologian Robert Linthicum refers to this vision as “the shalom community.”

It is often difficult, however, for us to see this communal vision because of the eyes of individualism with which our Western culture has taught us to view the world and scripture. An example of this is the famous “Shema.”

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. - Deuteronomy 6:5

How many of us hear these words as a command to us as individuals to love God, when in fact it is addressed to the entire nation – “Hear, O Israel...” It is the nation that

is to love God and to center its economic and political life in God's values of love and justice.

God's plan for human community and its various institutions and systems is laid out in the Deuteronomic laws. These laws were to serve as guides as the Hebrews prepared to enter the promise land and begin a new nation (Deuteronomy 6:1-5). The religious system was to bring people closer and closer to God.

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. – Deuteronomy 10:12-13

The guiding value for the political and governing systems was justice.

You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. You must not distort justice, you must not show partiality, and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the case of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, shall you pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. –

Deuteronomy 16:18-20

The hallmarks of the economic system were that of stewardship, and a fair distribution of goods and services to insure that there is “no one in need among you.”

Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts. There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today. – Deuteronomy 15:1,4-5

Within these systems, the people themselves were to obey God and keep God's commands.

It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your

ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Therefore, observe diligently the commandments – the statutes and the ordinances – that I am commanding you today. – Deuteronomy 7:7-8,11

Finally, there were to be the prophets who would occasionally step forward when the institutions and societal systems needed to be held accountable to their God-given purposes.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. – Deuteronomy 18:15,17b-19

Seven hundred years later, as the people of Israel were exiled in Babylon, the prophet Ezekiel gave a scathing critique of what went wrong with the various communal systems and institutions. In Ezekiel 22:25 we learn that instead of practicing justice, the politicians and rulers oppressed the people.

Its princes within it are like a roaring lion tearing the prey, they have devoured human lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows within it. – Ezekiel 22:23-25

The economic leaders practiced dishonest gain and exploited the people rather than practicing equality.

Its officials within it are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. – Ezekiel 22:27

Instead of leading the people closer to God, the religious leaders mislead them.

Its priests have done violence to my teaching and have profaned my holy things, they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean. – Ezekiel 22:26a

The prophets, who should have stepped in to demand accountability, instead were seduced by the other societal leaders.

Its prophets have smeared whitewash on their behalf, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, "Thus says the Lord God," when the Lord has not spoken. – Ezekiel 22:28

And the people themselves no longer followed God, but rather oppressed and exploited each other.

The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery, they have oppressed the poor and needy and have extorted from the alien without redress. – Ezekiel 22:29

This contrast between God's vision for healthy and just human community as found in Deuteronomy, compared with its opposing values and consequences as found in Ezekiel, can be found in so many other stories in scripture. The foundational story for the Hebrew people and many Jews today is the liberating story of Moses and the exodus from Egyptian slavery. I Samuel 8-10 contains contrasting views of kingship, with its warnings of the potentially oppressive consequences that having a king will bring. The descriptions of King Solomon's excessive wealth and his use of forced labor (I Kings 5, 9, 10) illustrate these consequences. There is the story of King Ahab's confiscation of Naboth's vineyard and Elijah's prophetic condemnation (I Kings 21). Jesus consistently condemned the Jewish religious elite for their unjust practices (Matthew 23). Paul spoke of the struggles with the "rulers, authorities, and powers of darkness" and the need to "take up the whole armor of God" to face these opponents (Ephesians 6:10-18). And the Book of Revelations speaks of the contrast between the "city of God" and the "city of Satan." (Revelations 18, 21)

The apostle Paul's writings have been cited throughout the history of the church as a primary source for the importance of individual salvation and redemption. What is often overlooked, however, is Paul's much more encompassing vision of God's plan of redemption and salvation for the community and the entire creation. Just as the Gospel of John speaks of God's love for the entire created order, not just the individual soul ("For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son." John 3:16), so Paul repeatedly speaks of Christ's reconciling work in such all encompassing terms.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.
– II Corinthians 5:18-19b

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven. - Colossians 1:15-16, 20

Our God is indeed the God of all – the individual and communal, the institutional and all of creation.

II. Power and Values

A. Power Misunderstood and Avoided

Community organizing places great emphasis upon the need to build power in order to see the values of compassion and justice more effectively lived out in the world. But as Martin Luther King stated in the following passage, the concept of power, especially in its relationship to the values of love and justice, is one of the most misunderstood among Christians and others.

Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, or economic changes. In this sense power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice.

One of the greatest problems of history is that the concepts of love and power are usually contrasted as polar opposites. Love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love...What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the

demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.

- Martin Luther King, Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?, 1967

Three primary reasons can be given why people, especially Christians, are so often ambiguous about power. First, our stereotype of power is often shaped by persons who have abused power, by those who have used a tyrannical and oppressive “power over” us or others in the service of values we find offensive and contrary to the values of compassion and justice. Second, having power implies having responsibility. The human tendency to often avoid responsibility means that we often avoid seeking or gaining power. Finally, through our growing up as children in loving families, most of us are educated in the private arena values of compassion and love. Learning the public arena values of justice and fairness, however, along with building and using the power needed to implement them, requires a passage out of childhood innocence that some adults never make.

B. Power and God

To overcome misconceptions of power, it is important to see that Jewish and Christian scriptures describe power as an important attribute of God.

One thing God has spoken,
two things have I heard:
That you, O God, are powerful
and that you, O Lord, are loving.

- Psalm 62:11-12

There are 117 references to power in Hebrew Scripture alone. God’s primary powerful action in Hebrew scripture is the exodus story, where the power of God is used to liberate the people from slavery and bondage. Indeed, we do not worship a God who is ineffectual, but rather a God who is powerful and acts in history.

As Catholic theologian Karl Reiner has said, “Of itself, power is good. Power is a gift bestowed by God.” He goes on to say, “Power and sex – both are created good, but can be misused.” When we use power according to God’s purpose, we underscore power’s goodness and are vehicles of God’s will in history. If we do not recognize, however, our loving and just God as the source of our power, we risk conceit (that we, rather than God, are the reason for our success), as well as, the misuse and abuse of power.

An examination of Jesus’ experience and temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-14) is instructive regarding the potential use and abuse of power. While in the wilderness Jesus resisted Satan’s offer of false and abuse expressions of power. Jesus’ refusal to turn stones into bread is his rejection of the use of power to betray spirituality for the sake of material needs. Jesus would not organize his followers with bribes and the satisfying of material needs over the integrity of their spiritual freedom and commitments. His rejection of Satan’s dare to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple and for God to save him, was Jesus’ rejection of power as reliance on miraculous intervention and an abandonment of the cross. Jesus would not organize his followers with magic tricks and mystery, but rather through faith freely given. Finally, Jesus’ rejection of Satan’s offer to rule the world if Jesus would worship Satan was Jesus’ way of saying, “No, I will not rule the world by becoming like it.” Worshipping our God demands the use of a different form of power. When Jesus left the wilderness and returned to Galilee, he did so armed “in the power of the Spirit.” This same Spirit he also promised his followers when he ascended into heaven. “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” (Acts 1:4,8)

The power displayed by Jesus, and available to us as his followers, is a power characterized by healing, humility, shared wealth, and nonviolence. The power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is not an abusive or imperial power, which walks over and uses people in pursuit of selfish and oppressive gain. Rather, it is a relational, shared, and prophetic power, which develops people, instills hope, and creates anew. When we come together with an understanding of each other’s concerns and visions, and when we form relationships based in trust and respect, one-plus-one no longer equals two,

but two to the nth degree. “Where two or three are gathered together in my name” (Matthew 18:20), we can do almost anything!

It is important to note that God did not exercise power in the great historical events of scripture independent of human actors. Without Moses, there is no exodus; without Nehemiah, no rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple; without Jesus, no healings or disciples; without Peter and Paul, no spread of the church. In this regard, God limits his own power to permit human freedom. God makes his power available to us, however, in two primary forms: in the form of a faith, hope, and love which truly enables us to move mountains, and in the form of gracious and compassionate support in our times of deepest grief, suffering, and oppression. “Emanuel! God is with us!” God is with us as a powerful presence in our times of joy and sorrow, empowering us to work for the Shalom community “here on earth as it is in heaven.”

C. Paul’s Understanding of the Spiritual Dimensions of Power

The New Testament writings of Paul provide additional insight into the workings of power by adding a deeply spiritual understanding. Paul held a worldview that saw a spiritual battle occurring within all created things; not only individuals but societal institutions as well; between the dark forces of evil and light forces of God and the good.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. – Ephesians 6:12

According to Paul, God is the creator of all things on earth, including “thrones, powers, rulers, and authorities” (Colossians 1:16). But they have been corrupted by the dark forces of evil. The church has an important role to play in holding accountable the institutions of this world to their God intended purpose.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. – Ephesians 3:10

God works to redeem the principalities and powers of this world, and restore them to their rightful, God-given purpose (Ephesians 1:19-22). Paul, however, also advises us “to be strong in the Lord” as we battle these dark spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:10-18), and assures us that no power can separate us from God. (Romans 8:31-39).

Paul’s spiritual analysis of power gives community organizing and all struggles for greater justice new insights. Societal institutions have God intended purposes. Schools, for example, are created to educate all children. But when these institutions deviate from their mission; for example, when schools no longer educate all children, but only some; they have lost the purpose for which they were created and need to be held accountable. Paul’s analysis also helps us see that when we are negotiating with or attempting to reform an institution, we are dealing with something more than a collection of individuals and policies. We are also dealing with an institutional “ethos” or “spirit” that shapes the actions of those working there. Without a clear understanding of this institutional spirit, our efforts at reform may be limited.

D. Nehemiah’s Exercise of Power

Not only does scripture help us understand power from a theological and spiritual perspective, it also gives us multiple examples of its practical use in service of greater justice and compassion. One example that clearly illustrates the strategies used in community organizing, is the story of the prophet Nehemiah.

In Nehemiah 1-4 we learn that Nehemiah is a Hebrew working as the cupbearer, or high ranking official, for the Persian king. He is approached by fellow Hebrews and learns that the return from exile to Jerusalem has not gone well. Nehemiah asks the king if he may return to Jerusalem himself in order to help rebuild the city. After helping to organize the Hebrews in rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls while fending off outside enemy attacks, Nehemiah learns of a new challenge. Nehemiah 5:1-13 begins with Nehemiah hearing complaints about the internal oppression that is occurring within the Hebrew community. His anger over this injustice leads him to call a “great assembly”, during which the Hebrew leaders are called to accountability. The power of organized people, a basic premise of community organizing, forces the Hebrew leaders to return property and money that was unjustly taken from the people.

III. Human Relationships and the Presence of God

Community organizing places great emphasis on the importance of building relationships in order to build greater justice. While there is overwhelming evidence in scripture and the Christian tradition of the importance of an individual and personal relationship with God, in the context of Western individualism we too often overlook the importance and power of God's presence in the context of community and human fellowship. This point was well made by Jewish theologian Martin Buber.

When Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher and theologian, was asked "Where is God?" he was wise enough not to give the cliché answers: God is everywhere; god is found in churches and synagogues. Buber would answer that God is found in relationships. God is not found *in* people; God is found *between* people. When you and I are truly attuned to each other, God comes down and fills the space between us so that we are connected, not separated.
– Rabbi Harold Kushner, Living a Life That Matters

Christian scripture also speaks eloquently about the presence of God being found in relationships. The visitation of the angel to Joseph in the gospel of Matthew announcing the coming birth of Jesus states "they will call him Emmanuel – which means 'God with us.'" (Matthew 1:23b) Indeed, Jesus proclaims that "the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:21)

In the community organizing practice of doing one-on-one visits, one is reminded that since we are created "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27), we have an opportunity to encounter God anew in the midst of this encounter with another person. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer articulates how visiting with and listening to our neighbor can imitate our visiting with and listening to God.

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that God not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is God's

work that we do for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother or sister will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words. One who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and be never really speaking to others, albeit he be not conscious of it. Anyone who thinks that this time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have not time for God and one's brother or sister, but only for oneself and for one's own follies.

- Life Together (Gemeinsames Leben, 1938), Dietrich Bonhoeffer

One-on-one visits can be viewed as evangelism with the ears, rather than with the mouth. As the pastor and lay leaders visit others in the parish and surrounding community, strengthening relationships and discovering self-interests, the church's fellowship is strengthened and the church's program and mission can be shaped around the needs and visions of the people. God's presence and kingdom is renewed "among us."

IV. The Church and the Broader Community

A. The Church In, To, and With the Community

Community organizing helps churches rethink their role in relationship to the broader community. Theologian Robert Linthicum has described three fundamental ways that parishes and congregations can do ministry in relationship to the neighborhood and city within which they are located. "The church in the community"

describes a parish solely focussed on its membership, but having no real connection to the needs and visions of the neighborhoods and people surrounding the church building itself. Worship, bible study, the sacraments, and other important traditional functions of the church are conducted for the nurturing of the members.

“The church to the community” describes the congregation or parish that recognizes the needs and visions of its neighbors, and responds with acts of charity. Social services like food pantries, clothing shelves, counseling services, and day care centers are established and run by the church, often under the guidance of paid professionals. The clients of these services, however, rarely engage in the traditional functions of the church, nor do they have relationships with the church membership other than the persons staffing the charity services.

“The church with the community” is a congregation or parish that consciously seeks to build relationships with residents in the surrounding neighborhoods. Persons are invited to engage in all facets of the church’s life, making them equal decision-makers in determining the way the church can best minister to the needs and visions of the people.

The following words of the prophet Micah well describe these three paths of the church.

He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6:8

The church in the community nurtures our “humble walk with God.” The church to the community is the social service approach and emulates Micah’s command to “love mercy.” The church with the community is the community organizing approach of “doing justice.” Jesus leveled harsh criticism at the religious leaders of his day who ignored any of these three paths.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. – Matthew 23:23

B. Developing the Skills of the Church's Lay Leadership

Community organizing places great importance on the development of leaders through training workshops and the ongoing process of “planning-acting-evaluating”, where persons put new skills into practice and then evaluate their performance for the sake of self-development and future action. Christian and Hebrew scriptures show that Jesus, Paul, and others were constantly developing the skills of their followers.

Jesus displayed essential characteristics of good leadership. He was a visionary; a man of passion, anger, and power; a risk-taker, not afraid to offend, make enemies, or shy away from confrontation and controversy; and one who was not easily diverted from his mission. But Jesus also developed leadership skills in his followers.

Jesus spent approximately two-thirds of his time with his disciples and other potential leaders, not ministering to the people as a whole. He often followed a four-fold pattern of presenting a teaching or parable, doing further and in-depth reflection with his disciples, calling his disciples to a specific action, and then evaluating with them. A series of such patterns can be found in Mark 8:1-9:29 in the stories of feeding the crowds, healing a blind man and epileptic, questioning Peter, and the transfiguration. Jesus fostered close relationships with his followers, discerning and then calling forth their potentials and talents. He consistently sought opportunities to teach, working alongside those he mentored. He combined action and reflection as his primary teaching strategy, and was willing to confront his disciples as well as his enemies, speaking truth in love. And perhaps most important, Jesus trusted God and believed in the people he was developing. He knew that his vision of God's kingdom and the shalom community would not persist and grow if he did not develop many others beyond himself.

CHAPTER IV: A SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

I. Opportunities and Challenges

Being a community organizer is both a deeply rewarding as well as challenging profession. The rewards are numerous. An organizer has the opportunity to devote one's working life to the pursuit of deeply held values. The organizer meets wonderful and diverse people, gaining satisfaction by witnessing their growth and empowerment, as well as, the positive transformation of neighborhoods and communities. Because one is working with people and changing environments, a community organizer is constantly learning. As a profession, community organizing has developed a wealth of experience and knowledge that has transformed it into a learned craft. It remains, however, an art as well, given the creative opportunities that are consistently posed in and with new neighborhoods, people, and community challenges.

The challenges facing a community organizer are also very real and numerous. Organizing is hard work involving long hours. Balancing the demands of work, family, and personal interests is challenging in this job where the work is 'never done.' In bringing together diverse people and being involved in the political process of negotiating and compromise, it can become easy to lose one's own sense of self amidst the chorus of voices and opinions with which one works. In their fight for more just living conditions, community organizations come up against powers of indifference and evil that seek to thwart one's efforts. Organizations, their members, and community organizers themselves are verbally abused and attacked by these powers.

After doing this work for twenty-five years, I am having some sustained time to reflect upon how I, and other organizers I know, have maintained themselves in this blessed and challenging profession, and how we can better prevent "burnout." I am recording these reflections in hopes that they may be valuable to others, and in our efforts to support and sustain one another. While they are written primarily with other community organizers in mind, I sense and hope that they may be valuable to leaders and members involved in community organizations as well.

II. **Attitudes and Perspectives: Food for the Soul and Bread for the Journey**

A. **Attitudes: Powerfully Shaping Our Reality and Action**

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in numbers, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances... - Victor Frankl

People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and if they can't find them, make them. - George Bernard Shaw

It does seem to be true that whatever we focus on tends to increase. Have you ever noticed that if you learn a new word you suddenly hear it everywhere? Or your friend introduces you to blue lobelia and you suddenly notice it blooming all over? Exactly why this happens is something of a mystery, but I believe it's because everything is around us *all the time*. We are choosing, mostly unconsciously, to notice certain things and not others because we just cannot pay attention to everything. As we change what we pay attention to, we notice *that* more. Scientist have proposed that something more amazing is at work – that reality is open to the mind's causal influence and is, in the words of David L. Cooperider, “often profoundly created through our anticipatory images, values, plans, intentions, beliefs and the like.” This suggests that we actually participate in creating what happens to us by the power of our positive or negative imagery. - M.J. Ryan

These three passages speak to the power of our attitudes in shaping our view of reality and our actions within it. So while there are spiritual practices and disciplines

that will be discussed later that can sustain and improve the quality of our lives and community justice work, it is important first to reflect upon our thinking.

In addition to realizing the vital nature that attitude plays in shaping our world view, is the realization that we do have the power to select and nurture attitudes of our own choosing.

The more you do it [consciously fostering an attitude], the easier it is to do. In fact, I'm convinced that this is the difference between an optimist and a pessimist. A pessimist is someone who has exercised the muscles of negativity and lack till they are strongly habitual, while an optimist is a person who has developed thankfulness and a can-do attitude until these are second nature. We all have the choice of which muscles we want to strengthen. - M.J. Ryan

Incredible inner power comes from concentrating our focus and then taking daily actions to achieve that focus. Being clear in our attitudes about what we want empowers the brain and spirit to find answers and overcome obstacles.

B. Love, Compassion, and Caring

The primary values driving the work of community organizing are justice, love, and democratic participation. Community organizers must feel deep compassion and respect for the people with whom they work. Caring implies genuinely getting to know the people with whom we work. Compassion (“com” – “passion”) implies our willingness to share in the joy and pain of others.

While we cannot afford to be loveless critics, we do need to be critical lovers, willing to agitate and challenge the people we work with to help them grow. This agitation, however, simply becomes irritation unless it arises from a relationship of trust and respect, built over time.

Our compassion also needs to extend to those with whom we do battle. Jesus' command to “love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44) contains deep wisdom on at least two levels. First, he assumes that living a life of faith indeed will create enemies – if not, our life and love are probably sentimental and anemic. Love of and prayer for enemies extends to another level that deeply impacts

our own souls. St. Augustine wrote, “Imagine the vanity of thinking our enemy can do us more harm than our enmity.” Hatred and resentment distorts and pollutes our own souls, and concedes a power to our enemy over us that we need not grant. Such hatred also precludes the potential for conversion on the part of our opponents. While we need and must not wait for our opponent’s conversion in order to see that justice is done, attitudes of hatred and resentment do prevent us from thinking about win-win situations that may appeal to our enemy’s self-interest.

The great commandment of Jesus, that we should “love our neighbors [friends and enemies alike] as we love ourselves,” points out the importance of self-love. Such self-love is not selfish, ignoring the concerns and visions of others. Nor is it a selfless love, allowing others to step all over us. Rather, it is a love of the authentic self within, created in the image of God. Such self-love means being clear about our own short and long term interests, and aware of the unique gifts and talents we bring to our vocation.

Organizers I know that have stayed in the profession over the long-term have come to a deep awareness of what Emerson and Cummings state in the following passages.

There is a time in every person’s education when one arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that one must take oneself for better or worse as his portion...It is harder because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

It takes courage to grow up and turn out to be who you really are.
- e.e. cummings

While imitation may be necessary in the beginning of our professional development as we initially learn the craft of organizing, the art and creativity of organizing will never come forward until we discover that which we uniquely bring to the profession.

C. Prophetic Hope

Old Testament scholar Walter Bruggeman has pointed out that the great Biblical prophets always brought a dual message, one of radical critique of the way things are, and one of hope for what God's promise will bring. Maintaining hope in challenging times is vital but not easy.

The first important point to make about hope is to distinguish between hope and optimism. The opposite of hope is not pessimism, rather it is despair. Despair is like the vast ocean surrounding a small craft – it cannot do any harm unless it gets inside. Therefore, we can be hopeful even when we can't be optimistic, faithful when our efforts appear unsuccessful. Hope criticizes and resists what is, while hopelessness rationalizes and adopts to it. There are two reasons to resist and fight evil – to change it and to make sure it doesn't change you. So we keep the faith and maintain hope, often despite the evidence, knowing that in doing so does the evidence have any chance of changing. And amidst challenging circumstances, we are well reminded by G.K. Chesterton that, "Cheerfulness is a more difficult form of asceticism than melancholy."

It is also worthwhile to reflect upon the notion of exile. The Old Testament story of the Hebrew people shows that when they were bound in Egyptian slavery, wandering in the wilderness, and exiled in Babylon, they were homeless, landless, and without a country. They did all by faith and their religion flourished. One can argue that the greatest and most inspired passages of Hebrew scriptures were written amidst these trying times of exile. As they lived in the Promise Land, however, they gained prosperity and their prosperity seduced them. Greed overcame gratitude, selfishness overcame compassion, and they forgot God. "You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor," wrote the prophet Ezekiel (28:17)

Exile need not be physical and forced, it can also be chosen and voluntary. We can be geographically at home, but spiritually in exile, not withdrawing from the injustices of our day but becoming the prophetic voice and actors that put into practice the exilic hope of what can and should be.

St. Paul places hope alongside faith and love as one of the three cardinal virtues (I Corinthians 13:13). Maintaining, fostering, and sharing hope in the face of seemingly hopeless circumstances demonstrates a faith in a power greater than ourselves, that

can truly move mountains, and that refuses to stay dead and buried even when crucified on a cross.

D. Gratitude

If the only prayer you say in your whole life is “thank you”, that would suffice.

- Meister Eckhart

Saul Alinsky often told the story that the Chinese word or character for the term “crisis” consisted of two characters, one that represented “danger” and the other “opportunity.” In a crisis we can choose to recoil, or we can look for an opportunity while being cautious of the inherent dangers. This perspective can be applied to the many challenges we face in our life and work. By adopting and applying an “attitude of gratitude” we more readily uncover the opportunities in everything we face. M. J. Ryan in her book by the same name, Attitudes of Gratitude, makes this clear in the following passage.

If we expect someone or something outside ourselves to make us happy, we lose our power. The truth is we can’t count on anything except our ability to choose how to respond to what happens to us. One way to counteract the tendency to look outside ourselves for happiness is to practice No Matter What. Before you go into a situation, ask yourself, “What is it that I can learn, accomplish, or experience here, no matter what happens?” Let’s say you have to give a speech and are nervous about how it will be received. Your No Matter What might be, “No matter what, I want to experience a sense of peace while talking. As I look out into the audience, I’ll remember to breathe and notice that at my core there is peace.” - M.J. Ryan

She goes on to write,

The more we are grateful, the more we will have to be grateful for. Even if nothing more or better happens, our eyes are opened to the gifts that were

always there. As Susan Jeffers notes, “When we focus on abundance, our life feels abundant; when we focus on lack, our life feels lacking. It is purely a matter of focus. - M.J. Ryan

Far from being a Pollyannaish world view or resignation to the way things are, an attitude of gratitude creates new opportunities to further unleash the possibilities that already exist but that are often overlooked.

E. Recognizing the Demonic Within

I know of no other profession that holds such an optimistic view of the potentials of human nature than that of community organizing. We believe in the inherent worth of the human person and subscribe to what Shakespeare wrote,

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!
- Hamlet II, II

We believe in the words of the Psalmist,

What is man that you are mindful of him,
The son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
And crowned him with glory and honor. – Psalm 9:9

Community organizers subscribe to the Swedish Proverb that states,

In every man there is a king and in every woman a queen. Speak to their majesties and their majesties will come forth. – Swedish Proverb

Yet, we see daily sufferings of people around us and hear on the news of tragedies and evil around the world. While community organizing places its primary

focus on injustices manifested in their institutional forms, we run the risk of arrogance and hubris if we do not recognize the potential presence of the demonic within the individual and ourselves. In reflecting upon the individual person, Martin Luther King had the following to say.

Each of us is something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against ourselves. A persistent civil war rages within all of our lives. Something within us causes us to lament with Ovid, the Latin poet,

‘I see and approve the better things, but follow worse,’

or to agree with Plato that,

‘Human personality is like a charioteer having two headstrong horses, each wanting to go in a different direction,’

or to repeat the apostle Paul,

‘The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.’

- Martin Luther King, “Loving Your Enemies”, 1957

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner tells the following story to illustrate this same point.

I recently ran across a story about a Native American tribal leader describing his own inner struggles. He said, ‘There are two dogs inside me. One of the dogs is mean and evil. The other dog is good. The mean dog fights the good dog all the time.’ Someone asked him which dog usually wins, and after a moment’s reflection, he answered, ‘The one I feed the most.’

- Lawrence Kushner, Living a Life That Matters

So as we turn to spiritual practices and disciplines that can sustain and enrich us in our vocation and struggles for greater justice, it is wise to reflect upon these practices as a means of keeping us honest, true to our democratic and compassionate ideals, and feeding the good and authentic self within.

III. Spiritual Practices and Disciplines

A. Prayer and Meditation

A separation has often occurred in the Christian tradition between struggles for justice and practices of prayer and spirituality. My own life experience for many years mirrored this separation. Raised in a family and tradition that emphasized the social gospel, my prayer and spiritual life did not take on significant meaning until a number of years ago. The occasion was a consultant visit by someone for whom meditation had become a daily way of life. Being curious and feeling in need of strengthening my own inner resources I asked him, “So what do you do when you meditate?” What he described was a process of deep breathing, slowing the mind down, of being quiet, withdrawing from the world, and simply being. When thoughts enter this period of quietude, he stated that it is important not to judge but simply to observe them, take note, and then let them go.

As I began to create time in my own life for this quiet mediation, the more I realized the importance this time played in reconnecting me to my authentic self. M.J. Ryan describes it well.

The practice of gratitude requires that you slow down long enough to notice what is right in front of your nose. If you are speeding through the day, chances are you are overlooking the blessings that are all around you. – M.J. Ryan

As I read more about prayer and meditation, I added new practices. For example, John Maxwell in his book Partners in Prayer describes using the following ten steps during one’s meditation and prayer: preparation, waiting, confession, scriptural reading, meditation, intercession, petition, application, faith, praise and thanksgiving.

Biblical scholar Marcus Borg states that one of the chief characteristics of Jesus was his ability to tap into “the Spirit world”, available to us all, that provides ongoing sustenance and renewal. Marion Williamson well describes why connecting to this Spirit world is so essential.

The only way we can see each other truly is if we see through the eyes of God. Prayer and meditation are the fuel for the missile that takes us to enchanted realms. We spend an average of sixteen hours a day with our minds bombarded by the thinking of the world, and the thinking of the world does not glorify spirit. It glorifies personality, and in that dimension we inevitably fall short of the magnificence of enchantment. We have issues, we have weaknesses, we make mistakes, we fall short, we give up, we get caught, we fall down, we are human. And all of these make us, to the ego self, less ideal, less wonderful, less attractive. – Marion Williamson

Add to these typical daily bombardments those encountered when we struggle for justice, and the need for personal retreat becomes more apparent. In the following passage, Martin Luther King dramatically describes such a life saving and sustaining time in his life.

More than ever before I am convinced of the reality of a personal God...God has been profoundly real to me in recent years. In the midst of outer dangers I have felt an inner calm. In the midst of lonely days and dreary nights I have heard an inner voice saying, "Lo, I will be with you." When the chains of fear and the manacles of frustration have all but stymied my efforts, I have felt the power of God transforming the fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope.

[At a critical and demanding time of the early civil rights movement] it seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point...In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had almost gone, I determined to take my problem to God. My head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone."

At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, “Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.” My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything. The outer situation remained the same but God had given me inner calm.

Admitting the weighty problems and staggering disappointments, Christianity affirms that God is able to give us the power to meet them. He is able to give us the inner equilibrium to stand tall amid the trials and burdens of life. He is able to provide inner peace amid outer storms. This inner stability of the man and woman of faith is Christ’s chief legacy to his disciples. He offers neither material resources nor a magical formula that exempts us from suffering and persecution, but he brings an imperishable gift: “Peace I leave with thee.” This is that peace which passeth all understanding. - Martin Luther King

B. Daily Triggers

While nurturing our authentic self and our connection to the Spirit world occurs in times of meditation, prayer and retreat from daily life, connecting to this reality can occur at any time of day and within an instant. Within my work, I have developed the habit before doing a one-on-one visit of taking a deep breath and saying, “Oh Lord, I am about to enter sacred space with the opportunity to encounter You through the person I am about to meet. Guide my thoughts, words, and actions so they may be pleasing in your sight.” Such a trigger helps me quickly transition out of what I have been doing into what I am about to do, better enabling me to bring the values of compassion and justice to this new situation. Utilizing such triggers helps us focus but also deepens appreciation, enjoyment, and gratitude of life’s daily occurrences.

C. Planning and Strategic Reflection

Organizing is in large part a self-directed profession. Without time to plan our actions, we become reactive rather than proactive, spinning our wheels rather than deliberately shaping our reality. “Have intentions but no expectations”, expresses well

for me the flexible attitude we need in directing our actions, but not being so rigid that we cannot respond appropriately when we need to.

From what I have seen, successful organizers are those who take time every morning to purposefully plan their day, time at the end of the day to reflect upon and evaluate what has happened, and a longer period every week and month to look strategically at the longer and broader picture.

D. Time Off, Vacations, and Sabbaticals

Organizing is hard work and involves long hours. We all know, however, that all work and no play over the long term damages the spirit. So how do we make the most of our time away from work so that it can truly nourish us?

In my experiences one of the biggest challenges is how to quickly transition from the world of work to the world of personal time. When we “bring our work home with us”, when we continue thinking about our work during our free time, then this free time does not truly nourish. For me, children help with this challenge. The playfulness and spontaneity of children can quickly take us from the world of work to the world of play and relaxation. I have also found that having a plan for our free time, activities that we love to do and are part of our daily and weekly schedule helps. For me, this includes playing the piano and listening to music, especially because of its contrasting nature to the world of organizing. Organizing involves us in the world of politics and compromise, whereas music and the arts involve a pure and unadulterated spirit and activity that helps balance our lives. I have also grown conscious of how our daily routines of cooking, cleaning, and the like can have a spiritual nature as well. Rather than seeing them as chores that must be performed, they can provide therapy for a weary soul. And simple solitude in the right doses is essential, as the following passage points out.

Our equal and opposite needs for solitude and community constitute a great paradox. When it is torn apart, both of these life-giving states of being degenerate into deadly specters of themselves. Solitude split off from community is no longer a rich and fulfilling experience of inwardness; it now becomes loneliness, a terrible isolation. Community split off from solitude is no longer a

nurturing network of relationships; it now becomes a crowd, an alienating buzz of too many people and too much noise. - Parker J. Palmer, The Courage to Teach

Periodically we need to get away from our work for longer periods. Making sure that we have at-least one full day a week of rest and relaxation is important, but finding a longer period every year is also vital. If such vacations or holidays are too brief, we often spend two or three days transitioning out of work and then a day or two mentally preparing for work once again. Trying to find two or three weeks together truly allows us to relax, be nourished, and grow. Finally, like many pastors and professors, organizers need periodic sabbaticals, one or two months every five to seven years totally away from their local work where they can relax, study, and visit other organizers and projects that will stimulate their thinking and nourish their spirit.

E. Nurturing and Being Nurtured by Others

Most community organizers I know have time with other organizers during periodic staff meetings and consultant visits. Such contacts are essential to help stimulate and challenge our thinking and work. In my experience, however, too often we discuss the workings of our organizations, but infrequently allow time for discussions about the workings of our souls. The following passage holds true for community organizers as well as teachers.

Teaching, like any human activity, emerges from one's inwardness for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge – and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. - Parker J. Palmer, The Courage to Teach

The consulting visits that are most memorable to me and produced the greatest growth in my professional development included conversations not only about my work

but also about what was occurring within me. These visits gave me the opportunity to look into the “mirror of my soul,” giving me radically new insights into the people with whom I was working. And like the following passage indicates, they remind us of the interconnectedness between what is going on inside with what is going on around us.

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing oneself.

- Leo Tolstoy

F. Laughter, Celebration, and Awe

Organizing is a profession of great intentionality – we plan, we act, we evaluate, and we plan again. We work to make things happen. We set goals and seek to achieve them. Our thinking is linear, our actions purposeful. We are pragmatists to the core. An occupational hazard of such work and thinking is the presumption and temptation that we can “figure it all out”, and then develop a strategy to get us from here to there. What the following two quotations remind us of is that there is an equally important aspect to our lives and short time here on earth.

Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be experienced. – Unknown

The beginning of awe is wonder, and the beginning of wisdom is awe.

- Abraham Joshua Heschel, Between God and Man

Taking time to laugh, to celebrate, and to stand in awe of the mystery contained in our lives, our work, and creation is vital. Like John the Baptist, community organizers work to “prepare a way” for the spirit of justice and compassion to work. But least we focus solely on the future at the expense of the present, let us laugh, celebrate, and stand in awe of mystery. Such nourishment sustains us for the continuing work ahead, but also contains those transcendent moments that truly make life worth living.

**PART II: POTENTIAL APPLICATION OF THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
TRADITION TO THE GERMAN PROTESTANT CHURCH AND EUROPEAN
CONTEXT**

**CHAPTER I: GERMAN PROTESTANT CHURCH – EVANGELISCHE KIRCHE IN
DEUTSCHLAND: AN ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BASED UPON
NUMEROUS INTERVIEWS AND INTERACTIONS, JULY, 2004 – JUNE 2005**

**I. The German Protestant Church/Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland: A Brief
Introduction for Non-Germans**

A. Preface

Thirty percent of Germany is Protestant (27 million of Germany's 84 million people). Thirty percent are Catholic and the remainder are a mix of faiths including a growing Muslim minority with the recent growth of immigrants from the Middle East. The current form and expression of German Protestantism has been shaped by numerous historical factors including the particular 500 year evolution of church-state relations since the time of Martin Luther, events leading up to the Second World War and its aftermath, and the recent reunification of East and West. The German Protestant Church (Die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland – EKD) is distinguished by its extensive system of social services, religious education in the public schools, and support of worldwide ecumenical relations and mission. Its system of revenue collection in the form of the "church tax" is unique in Europe. Finally, its leaders site numerous present-day challenges in an age of growing secularism and consumerism throughout Europe and the Western world.

B. Historical Background

The worldwide Protestant movement has its birth in Germany. Prior to Martin Luther, German church life found expression in the Catholic Church organized under the Holy Roman Empire and the hundreds of feudal kingdoms that made up the lands of German-speaking peoples. Christianity arrived in Germany in the 600's, with the rapid growth of monasteries, cathedrals, and chapels occurring between 1000 and 1500 AD.

Martin Luther's calls for reforms in the church were forced to take form outside the Catholic Church after his excommunication in 1521. The 1555 Peace of Augsburg granted German princes and independent cities full religious sovereignty to choose between Lutheranism and Catholicism as the official religion of their territory. Reformed and Calvinistic creeds were fully incorporated in this arrangement nearly a century later with the 1648 Peace of Westphalia.

The two significant factors emerging from these and subsequent historical events on the current German church are its "territorial" nature and unique relations to the state. The present German Protestant Church (EKD) is organized into 24 Landeskirchen corresponding to the 24 states which composed Germany following the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815. This means that these 24 territorial/regional churches differ somewhat from Germany's current 13 states (Länder) and 3 independent city-states (Freistädte) (Hamburg, Bremen, and Berlin). Each of these regional churches is made up of congregations deriving primarily from three strands of Protestant traditions: Lutheran, Reform, or United. Because Luther and other Reformation leaders had to rely on the assistance of the feudal princes to carry out their church reforms, the state played a major role in the governance of the German church until 1918 when all princes resigned under William II and the Second Reich. For the first time, German Protestantism was fully responsible for organizing and governing itself. In 1922 attempts began to form a national federation of churches. These efforts, however, were dissolved by Hitler eleven years later and replaced by the Nazi organized and controlled Reichskirche (National Church) with its ideology of Jesus seen as an Aryan hero. Some leaders of the Confessing Church who resisted Nazification of the church were forced into exile, jailed, or executed.

Following the Second World War, four significant developments occurred shaping modern church and Protestant life in Germany. First, German Protestant leaders gathered and passed as their first order of business a confession of guilt, which in part reads,

"With great pains we declare: Through us a lot of suffering has come over many countries and peoples...We accuse ourselves because we did not confess with more courage, pray with more faith, believe with more joy and love with more

ardor...We hope that the God of mercy may use our churches again.” – From the Stuttgart Declaration in 1945.

By 1948, these leaders formed the EKD.

Second, the new German Constitution clearly established that German churches would be independent of the state and that, “There shall be no state church.” This does not mean, however, that there are no relations between the church and state. Many working relationships do exist and will be explained later.

Third, between 1944 and 1946 a flood of 8 million German refugees from portions of Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and former German lands; later to be followed by 3.5 million migrants escaping the old East Germany between 1948 and 1961; meant that formerly religious homogeneous states became more diverse. Different forms of Protestantism, along with Protestant and Catholic, lived side-by-side. While old religious geographic patterns still exist, like the Protestant north and Catholic south, they are less prominent today. The final significant post-War development was the imposition of communism in the former GDR. In 1949, 90% of East Germans were members of the Protestant Church. By the 1980’s these numbers had dropped to 30-40%. Church leaders are quick to point out, however, the prominent role the former East German church played in the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and other recent developments in modern German church life.

C. German Protestantism and Church Life Today

1. Professional Leadership, Finances, and Mission to the Community and World

The German Protestant Church (EKD) is made up of 27 million members in 17,000 congregations with a staff of 25,000 pastors and theologians, 200,000 other workers, and 400,000 persons employed by the church’s 30,000 autonomous diaconal institutions, which carry out a host of human services. The member churches of the EKD describe themselves as Volkskirchen (churches of the people) meaning that “they have a broad membership within, and see themselves as having a responsibility to, society as a whole.”

While many of the church service ministries are financed by separate contracts with the state (city, regional, and national), revenue for the church’s core mission is

derived by the church tax, explained this way in the pamphlet “The Evangelical Church in Germany – An Introduction.”

“Church taxes came into existence in the 19th century when the congregations were granted the right to collect their dues regularly on the basis of ‘civil tax roll.’ For the churches in Germany, the church tax is their most important source of income. Church taxes are paid exclusively by church members. All those who are employed or self-employed and pay income tax also pay church tax.

Depending on the Federal State, the amount of the church tax is eight or nine percent of one’s income tax. Church tax is collected and transferred on behalf of the churches by the state revenue offices. The income from church taxes – at least 4 thousand million Euro in 2001 – goes to the regional churches. They are responsible for finances in their region, distribute the money right down to the congregations and take care of their own budgets.”

In addition to the social security and social service system operated directly by the German State, there are five primary social service providers in Germany which contract with the state to provide services. These providers include Caritas of the Catholic Church and Diakonische Werk of the EKD. The Diaconal Work of the EKD includes the operation of counseling services, youth activities, services for the elderly, refugees, the unemployed, handicapped, and others.

While education is under the supervision of the state, religious instruction is offered at schools by the church as part of the ordinary curriculum. Parents have the right to decide whether their child shall receive religious education. This instruction includes a broad array of topics in the fields of Biblical studies, ethics, church history, philosophy, and comparative world religions. Public universities also offer theological education supervised by the church.

EKD contacts with the worldwide church are extensive and generous in nature. Forty percent of the funding for the world ecumenical movement comes from the EKD. Its work is not only through church-to-church contacts through groups like the World Council of Churches and Conference of European Churches, but also in the areas of hunger relief and economic development through groups like Bread for the World and the Church Development Service.

2. Everyday Church Life

In a 1998 survey of Protestant Church Members 18% described themselves as active church members, seeing church as the center of their community and spiritual life. 63% described themselves as happy with the services the church provided to themselves and the broader society, and feeling that the church is there for them when they need it. The remaining 19% fell into other categories including searching for other paths in life and considering leaving the church.

These statistics manifest themselves in rather low Sunday worship attendance and active engagement of the laity in the life of the church. In general, worship is characterized by an organ prelude and postlude, prayers, hymn singing, and an instructional sermon. As one church leader told me, however, “Unlike a typical American church service with its passing-of-the-peace and fellowship oriented coffee hour following worship, German Protestants tend to view worship as a time for instruction and individual communion with God.” Another church leader shared with me, “While only 50 to 75 people may be in worship on Sunday morning, hundreds of people will attend 10 to 30 different classes and groups held in the church during the week. But these are not people who can be defined as ‘active church members’ and can be relied on for the work of the church.” Finally, a school religion teacher described church participation this way: “Church members are like a submarine – they come up to the church for key events in their life; baptism, confirmation, weddings, funerals, etc.; but during the rest of their lives they are out of sight.”

3. Challenges Facing the Church

If current trends continue, due to population decline and persons leaving the church, it is projected that Protestant church membership could decline from its current 27 to 19 million by sometime between 2015 and 2020. Some I have spoken with say that the church tax system has created an anonymity or disconnect between church giving and church participation. Others have described the German Protestant Church as a “professional church”, belonging to the clergy and social service workers, but not to the people themselves. While most German Protestants are very proud of the church’s outreach to the community, they do not see the church as central to their everyday spiritual affairs or fellowship life.

Others see the growing secularism and consumerism in the Western world as a major contributing factor to declining participation, and are most concerned that young people are not being drawn in large numbers into the church. For others, sheer numbers are not seen as the ultimate sign of the church's vitality and faithfulness. Some point to the every other year Protestant and Catholic Kirchentag (Church Day) festivals that attract over 100,000 mostly young Christians from around Germany to a week of festivals and seminars as a sign of renewal and growing vitality.

Based on what I have learned, so many more questions have emerged that I hope to answer as time progresses. While the challenges facing the German Protestant Church appear very real, I sense from the people I have met and the history I have learned that this is a very resourceful place and people – that this nation of the Reformation will discover new strategies of church renewal as they move into this new century.

Sources for Part I.

- “EKD: The Evangelical Church in Germany, An Introduction”, Evangelische Kirchen in Deutschland, First Edition, November 2002
- “Church in Germany: Facts, Pictures, Aspects”, Association of Churches and Missions in South Western Germany, 3rd rev. edition April 1994.
- “The German Evangelical Churches: An Introduction Following the Meissen Agreement”, Colin Podmore, Council For Christian Unity of the General Synod of the Church of England, 1992.
- “Konflikte in der Kirche – kompetent und kreativ loesen”, Dieter Pohl, Neukirchener Verlag, 2003.
- Numerous interviews conducted by Rev. Paul Cromwell, 2004.

II. The German Church in Transition

A. Transition or Crisis

Some in the EKD tell me the German Protestant Church is in “transition”, others say it is in “crisis”. The choice of words is important in as much as it influences the future directions church leaders and members select in guiding the church through its current challenges. “Crisis” implies the need for urgent action, but often can lead to reactive rather than well thought out, pro-active solutions. “Transition” implies the importance of maintaining the past and present practices that are rich in meaning and significance, and that should be retained into the future.

To this outsider, the positive elements of the EKD are striking. Among those I have witnessed during the past nine months include a rich liturgical and musical tradition; an educated, professional, and caring clergy and staff; an impressive array of Diakonia services for those in need; and a Volkskirche tradition that accounts for a large portion of the population feeling some connections to the church. The most striking impression about Germany and the European Union for this American who left a George-Bush-lead-America nine months ago, and I am certain that the EKD “just-peace” beliefs and actions have significantly contributed to, is the following: the multilateral and peaceful resolution of conflicts adopted by the European Union. After 500 years of war, the fact that there has been no violent conflicts in Europe (with the exception of the 1990’s Balkan wars) and the fact that economic benefits and membership in the European Union have been the incentives to improved ecological, human rights, and other progressive policies throughout Europe are impressive accomplishments. The German contribution and leadership within the European Union is undeniable and should be celebrated.

Challenges to the EKD, however, do exist and seem well known to EKD leaders and members. This is so much the case that my academic advisor at the Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal advised me, “Paul, since the challenges are so well known, I advise you spend less time describing them in your report, and spend more time on potential solutions.” I will let the reader be the judge as to whether I have adequately followed my Professor’s advice. Perhaps this “outsiders” perceptions and articulation of these challenges, however, may provide new insights to the reader.

Finally, it should be noted that some of the challenges currently facing the EKD are not unique to the church alone. Participation in political parties, labor unions, and other organizations has declined in recent years. Television, the internet, and other technologies compete with the church and all organization for people's time and interest. Financial challenges are facing the state and other organizations as globalization and other factors shape the German economy. German policy makers are rethinking public education, public welfare, and other institutional practices. Thus, the time of transition for the church is happening within the context of a larger socio-economic transition.

B. Primary Challenges: Loss of Membership and Finances

As stated earlier, one German church official shared with me that the church estimates membership in the EKD will decline in the next ten years from 27 to 19 million members. Another estimated the loss of membership at 1% a year. Given the direct connection between membership and payment of the church tax, income for the church continues to decline.

The results of this loss in membership and income has been apparent with everyone with whom I have spoken. It has been common for me to hear, "We used to have three pastors in this parish, but we now have two, and it may be that within a few years we will have one." Others have shared their discouragement about exciting new programs being planned, only to be cancelled at the last minute due to a lack of financial resources.

C. Other Challenges

1. Everyday Church Life

a. Decline of Spiritual Practices

While matters of spirituality are not a primary focus of my report, or an area of my expertise (I have served as a community organizer for the past 25 years, not as a pastor), I would like to share a few observations and reflections on this theme for two reasons. First, in my work for social justice, I have come to see spirituality as a vital practice necessary to guide and sustain such work. Second, in my understanding of the church and Christian faith, prayer and spirituality are central. They serve as a key experiential element of our individual and communal life as Christians.

I share the following examples of what I mean by a decline in spiritual practices.

- A pastor shared with me the following story: “When I ask my confirmation class what they think is unique about the Islamic faith, they respond, ‘Muslims pray a lot.’ When I ask my confirmants whether they pray at home, almost all of them respond, ‘No.’” He continued, “Paul, we’ve lost an entire generation, the 20 to 40 year olds, who have no daily experiences with spiritual practices.”
- I was asked to speak at a clergy gathering recently. While a homily was delivered on the coming Sunday’s lectionary text, no opening or closing prayer were offered.
- Two pastors shared with me, “It is easier to talk about sex in Germany than about matters of faith and spirituality.”
- A social worker friend shared the importance that meditation plays in her life. She discovered and continues to nurture these practices by going to a Buddhist retreat center at-least once a year. It never occurred to her to see whether any local parish offered opportunities to learn meditation, and doubted whether they do.

I have been reminded on numerous occasions that differences in spiritual practices exist between American and German Christians. Often I’ve been told that it is unimaginable for Germans to have someone like Gerhard Schroeder close a speech to the German parliament with the words, “God bless Germany,” especially in light of the Nazi history which perversely connected church and state in the perpetuation of ethnic cleansing and other horrid practices. In this regard, I am in full agreement and find some American practices of public piety offensive and dangerous. But I will offer the following two reflections that I hope will be received with the gracious spirit in which they are offered.

The Protestant Reformation and European Enlightenment appear to have deeply influenced each other. Finding and identifying with a faith and religious practices which can be reconciled with God’s gift of rationality and intellect has been an ongoing search within worldwide Christianity. In addition, increased travel and communications have magnified our awareness and appreciation of other faith traditions. Within these contexts, theologian Marcus Borg has pointed out that we can unabashedly affirm the importance of our Christian faith without declaring its exclusive nature. For Christians who believe in the importance of thinking and wish to think in their believing, one can

affirm with Borg, “Here, in Jesus Christ and Christian scripture, I see more clearly than anywhere else what God is like.” And in doing so, we can follow Jesus’ example of regular pray and mediation as a way of connecting to that Spirit which animated His prophetic and healing words and actions.

Secondly, I’ve been made aware of a split within German Protestantism between “the pietists” and “the liberals.” According to the stereotypes, pietists pray but see little connection between the Christian values of charity and justice and the church’s mission in the world. The liberals adhere to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s model of “the church for the world”, but find traditional spiritual practices outmoded and unimportant. As one pastor put it, “The pietists have come to own spiritual practices in the EKD, and the liberals gave them away.” I will speak later upon this theme of diversity within the EKD, but suffice it to say now that perhaps this diversity can come to be seen as a source of strength and mutual learning rather than as a source of division and separation.

b. Lack of Regular Participation

As mentioned earlier, a high school religion teacher described German church life as a submarine. “Church members come up for air and back to the church for key events in their life – baptisms, confirmation, weddings, funerals, and the high holidays like Christmas and Easter. But then we rarely see them.” A number of pastors have described their parishes as having 2,000 to 3,000 members, but with 50 to 150 regular participants and 25 to 75 active members. Baptisms remain high and surveys indicate that even those who have formally left the church (i.e. who no longer pay the church tax) still define themselves as Christians. Regular participation in the life of the church, however, is relatively low and has declined during the past 20 to 30 years.

2. Perceptions of the Church

a. Separate from Everyday Concerns: The Church is “Over There”

Many have shared with me that the common perception of the church is that it is a “set of services” that people pay for with their church tax and expect professional expertise when requested, mostly in the form of officiating at key events like baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Church members also appear to deeply appreciate the work of Diakonia. Recent surveys indicate that members believe the church should, 1.

Communicate the gospel, 2. Be close to people in crisis situations, and 3. Identify with the marginalized.

As one pastor put it, however, “People see the church as separate from the everyday concerns of their lives. They see the church as ‘over there’. And to be frank, we don’t do a good job showing people why they should join and participate with us. We are now in a situation where the people are far from the church and we need to bring the church to them rather than expect that they will come to us.” Others who agree with this analysis say, “Too often people negatively view the church as a place that ‘has all the answers,’ rather than as a community that is jointly seeking answers to life’s questions.” Another commented, “People don’t identify with the church because we never ask them about their daily lives, their joys and sorrows, their struggles and dreams.”

Two other common perceptions I have heard of the EKD in this regard are the following. First, many see a separation between the church and Diakonia. The local parish is where one goes for spiritual matters. One goes to Diakonia to get professional help and good works. Secondly, the EKD is seen as a middle and upper-class institution rather than one belonging to lower-income and migrant residents as well.

b. Lack of Ownership

Many have shared that it is rare for church members to refer to “my church.” In contrast to Americans who will often “shop” for a church before choosing to be a member of a particular congregation, German church members are “assigned” to a church based upon a parish or geographic location. The church tax system contributes to this lack of ownership. The church tax is a payroll deduction that goes to the national church and is redistributed to the local parishes. One other often heard comment is, “the church belongs to the professionals”, indicating a perception, whether accurate or not, about how decisions are made about church affairs and who see it as their institution.

3. Practices of Pastors

a. Busy, But with the Right Things?

From the pastors I have met, I am convinced that many, if not most, are well

educated, committed to the Christian ministry, and hard working. I also deeply empathize with demands that the Volkskirche structure places upon their time and energy. In particular, one pastor is often responsible for 2,000 to 3,000 members. He or she may not see these members very often, but when they have a death in the family or a baby to be baptized, they expect the services of the pastor in return for their payment of the church tax. I also have heard pastors say they have an increase in administrative responsibilities and tasks with recent financial cutbacks and the laying off of church secretaries and/or financial administrators. There is work to be done in preparing and leading Sunday workshops, work with the church council, church circle, confirmation class, and leading fellowship and study groups. Two activities I have not often heard mentioned, however, is visiting potential new active members and systematically training volunteers to assume greater leadership and responsibility in the local parish.

b. Waiting for People to Come, Rather Than Actively Visiting

I've heard from more than one person that a common attitude of German pastors is, "I am here, people can come to visit." Pastors I have met who do visitations with their members speak of visiting older members on their 70th or 80th birthday, or members of their confirmation class. When I've asked about visiting persons in the age group 18 to 60, persons who could potentially fill important leadership roles in the parish, I've received two responses. One is, "But Paul, I have 2,000 members. Where would I begin?" The other response has been, "Yes, that is a good idea and I've done a little of this, but then other demands upon my time take priority."

I will spend much more time later in this report explaining how my experiences as a community organizer has lead me to the deep belief that people are the most valuable resource of any organization, especially the church. It has been my experience that making time for visiting new people and building new relationships can easily get lost amidst more pressing and immediate demands. Setting a very modest goal, however, of visiting two or three new persons a week, and sticking to this goal, begins to add up over time (100 to 150 new relationships in a year, in this case) and begins to pay long-term dividends. As to whom to visit, a pastor can begin with persons he or she already met in preparing a baptism or funeral, using the following simple reason for requesting

the visit: “When I met you two weeks ago, you impressed me as an interesting person. Can I simply come and visit to become better acquainted?”

If we in the church simply wait for people to come, they may never arrive.

c. Trusting the Competencies, Gifts, and Talents of People

When the Israelites were in the wilderness and Moses complained to God that he felt overwhelmed by the burdens of leadership, God instructed Moses to share these burdens by selecting elders. But to do so, Moses had to trust in the gifts and talents those new elders would bring to the task.

I’ve heard from a number of persons that too many, but certainly not all, German pastors don’t trust the talents and gifts of their members and, therefore, do not share the power and responsibility of leading the church. One person put it this way: “Too many pastors see their role with the laity as that of a teacher to a student. This is good if they are teaching skills and sharing power. But too often it is a hierarchical relationship rather than one of peers in the faith.”

I have never met an untalented person. Rather, I’ve met persons, each with their own unique gifts. When these gifts are shared with the parish and larger church, one experiences the church Paul described as “the body of Christ” – one serving as the foot, another as an arm, and still another as the hand, put together as a vital and living organism. And when we discover a person’s gifts and invite them to use them in the service of the church, we usually capture their energy, commitment, and time.

4. Lack of Long-Range Strategic Thinking

Whether one calls it a “transition” or a “crisis”, everyone I have met acknowledges that serious challenges face the EKD. I am also hearing a lot of frustration that the current thinking and practice of the church is reactive rather than proactive. One church leader put it this way: “I read most of the church’s literature and attend many key meetings, and I don’t know of any group that is doing serious reflection about the long-term future of the church.” Another church leader put it this way: “Our office recently advertised 25 different educational workshops and seminars. The only two that people signed up for dealt with the subject of how to merge parishes in this time of financial crisis.”

No one I have talked with expects that any one solution will serve as a sole answer to the perceived and real challenges facing the EKD. Certainly, I would be grateful if what I share from my experiences as a faith-based community organizer could be helpful as one piece to a larger puzzle. I thought, however, one pastor's wife put it well. "Paul, the challenges we face are like a big mountain that stands in front of us and everyone can see. But instead of trying to climb the mountain, most of us are traveling around it. Instead, we should begin to climb. So what if we fall? So what if we take small steps? We can learn from our failures and mistakes, as well as our successes. But what we need to do is begin climbing."

D. German Diakonia

1. Description

Diakonia stands for the social work of the Protestant Churches. Because faith in Jesus Christ and practiced charity belong together, diaconal institutions are committed to various social services. They help people needing support and living under socially unjust conditions. – "The Social Welfare Service of the Protestant Church in Germany", Diakonia

So reads the opening paragraph of a descriptive brochure published by German Diakonia. Diakonia is a large operation of approximately 26,000 independent institutions, employing 400,000 persons and utilizing an equal number of volunteers. Diakonia services are wide-ranging, including old people's homes, employment and training services for the unemployed, work with the handicapped, family welfare (counseling, maternal care, etc.), youth welfare (education in special homes, kindergartens, youth centers, etc.), psychiatric work, help for addicts, and migrant work (with asylum seekers, refugees, and emigrants). Diakonia's work is organized at a local and regional level within the twenty-four Regional Protestant Churches of Germany, and a national office provides specialized assistance, support, and coordination.

German Diakonia is one of the "big five" social service providers in Germany (including Catholic Caritas and three secular-based providers). The national Basic Law (German Constitution) defines Germany as a "social state", needing to provide

fundamental services and protection of human rights for all citizens. The legally-based “subsidiary principal” stipulates that those services which can be provided by non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) must be contracted out by state and supported with government funding, leaving the remaining social welfare and security services to the state. The vast majority of funding for services provided by Diakonia and others comes from the state, although the German Protestant Church also contributes some of its own funding.

German Diakonia is a long established institution. As the above cited brochure puts it,

150 years ago almost all diaconal work was done voluntarily and unpaid. Since then social standards have been developed, often by way of difficult negotiations with the political decision makers. People have a legal right to reliable and professional help. Thus, the wide field of professional social work came into being.

Church leaders have shared with me that they see Diakonia’s role as being two-fold and rooted in its historical origins: 1. To provide high quality services, and 2. Advocating for and with people in need.

2. Current Challenges

Church leaders and Diakonia workers with whom I have spoken have cited a series of recent challenges facing their work. The biggest challenge is a financial one. As the German economy has faltered in recent years, less government money is available for social services. In addition, declining church membership has meant decreasing revenue for the EKD and Diakonia from the church tax (a payroll deduction paid by church members, the amount of which is based upon income level).

These financial factors have, perhaps, been key in leading to a second challenge. As one Diakonia worker put it, “Diakonia is becoming some sort of welfare-enterprise/corporation run on economic rather than idealistic Christian principals.” If this assessment is true, in addition to reduced funding, two other factors may be moving Diakonia in this corporate direction. Based upon the subsidiary principal, service

providers compete with each other to obtain government contracts. “Healthy competition” has its place in economic affairs, seeking to eliminate waste, duplication of services, and developing a high quality product or service. But “cut-throat competition” can lead to diminished client care for the sake of cost savings. An additional factor may be moving Diakonia to a corporate model - that of an increase in the professionalization of services. Many have shared that in an attempt to increase quality, the local work of Diakonia has become more and more separated from the work of church parishes and volunteers. Finally, these factors combine, leading to a final challenge often cited – the diminishing role that Diakonia has been playing in the realm of advocating for and with those in need. If this claim is true, perhaps local, regional, and national Diakonia leaders are fearful that they may lose lucrative government contracts to other providers if they prophetically advocate for and with those in need.

III. Potential New Ways of Thinking About the Church

A. The Church In, To, and With the Community

Faith-based community organizing helps churches rethink their role in relationship to the broader community. Theologian Robert Linthicum has described three fundamental ways the church can do ministry in relationship to the neighborhood or city within which they are located. The church “in the community” describes a church solely focussed on its membership, but having no real connection to the needs and visions of the neighborhoods and people surrounding the church building itself. Worship, bible study, the sacraments, and other important traditional functions of the church are conducted for the nurturing of the members.

The church “to the community” describes the congregation or parish that recognizes the needs and visions of its neighbors, and responds with acts of charity. In the United States, social services like food pantries, clothing shelves, counseling services, and day care centers are established and run by the church, often under guidance of paid professionals. In the German Church, this is the work of Diakonia (Caritas in the Catholic Church). The clients of these services, however, rarely engage in the traditional functions of the church, nor do they have relationships with the church membership other than the persons staffing the charity services.

The church “with the community” is a parish that consciously seeks to build relationships with the residents in surrounding neighborhoods, invites and engages them in all facets of the church’s life, and makes them equal decision-makers in determining the way the church can best minister to the needs and visions of the people.

The words of the prophet Micah well describes these three parish approaches.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.

- Micah 6:8

The church in the community nurtures our “humble walk with God.” The church to the community is the social service approach and emulates Micah’s command to “love mercy.” The church with the community is the community organizing approach of “doing justice.”

B. Why People Participate

Community organizing works from the premise that people become involved in activities for one of two primary reasons.

First, people engage because they have a direct self-interest in something. Human self-interest can revolve around many factors, ranging from self-survival to self-esteem. In community organizations for many their involvement is based upon the direct impact a community problem has on them and their family. People may also be

involved because a community problem offends their values (for example, a person may say, “I am not homeless, but I become involved because I believe that there should not be the conditions of homelessness in our city.”). For others the satisfaction one gains from working closely with a diverse group of committed people, or the satisfaction one gains from contributing one’s gifts and talents leads to their involvement.

The power of self-interest is captured well in the following quote from former American politician Mario Cuomo.

You cannot have been in politics as long as I have and be blind to the fact that for most of us, most of the time, self-interest is a powerful motivator – perhaps the most powerful one. If we hope to reestablish our strength, confidence, and balance as a nation, we need to help one another see that our self-interest is not identical with our selfish interests, that self-interest is inextricably linked to the common good. We need to understand that apart from the morality of recognizing an obligation to our brothers and sisters, common sense by itself should teach us that we are all in this thing together, interconnected and interdependent. - Mario Cuomo, Reason To Believe, 1995

It is very important to point out, as Mr. Cuomo does, that self-interest is not identical with selfishness. Wanting the best for one’s life, family, and community only becomes selfish when these desires are sought at the exclusion of others.

The second primary reason people engage has to do with relationship of trust and goodwill one has with a person who invites them. When asked, “Why did you attend this meeting?” or “How did you become involved in this group?”, it is very common to hear the response, “Because a friend invited me.” Long-term involvement ultimately comes back to self-interest. Relationships, however, often determine initial involvement.

C. Asset-Based Approach: Looking for and Developing People’s Gifts and Talents

American Professors John McKnight and John Kretzmann have developed the

concept of an “asset-based approach” to the development of low-income communities. In summary their idea is this. Too often when government policy makers, sociologists, social workers, and others look at low-income neighborhoods, they focus on the needs rather than the assets and talents of people. They view the glass as half-empty rather than as half-full. This often leads to the practice of doing for people rather than doing with people.

The founder of American community organizing, Saul Alinsky, expressed a similar concept when he said, “The Iron Rule of community organizing is ‘never do for others what they can do for themselves.’” When we do for others, we often create dependency, often robbing people of their dignity, and do not help them grow and develop. When we start by looking at people’s talents and work with them, we unleash new energy and commitment.

D. Diversity: Strength Versus Divisiveness

My experience as a community organizer in the United States has involved bringing together African-Americans and Whites; Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and other faith groups; rich, poor, and those in between; and people from vastly different neighborhoods. Bringing diversity together poses a danger and an opportunity. The danger is that differences lead to divisiveness. The opportunity is that diversity leads to enrichment. People bring their diverse experiences, perceptions, and talents together to enrich the whole.

The key to making diversity a strength rather than a weakness is building relationships of trust and respect. Within such relationships, people overcome fear and stereotypes of the other. They begin to see that what unites them usually far greater than that which divides them.

Within the EKD I’ve heard of various subgroups. These include the liberals or “worldlies”, the pietists or “missionaries”, those passionate about liturgy, the church growth movement, and those who advocate structural reform within the church. If what I have heard about the EKD as being a predominately middle-class and German membership is true, than lower-income and migrant people are potential members a just-peace church will also want to include as active members. Viewing this diversity

from an “asset-based approach”, and as something that can enrich the church, could help strengthen the church in this time of transition.

E. Money and Ownership

We have all had the experience of saving our money in order to purchase something of value. When we have done so, it feels like it really belongs to us. We worked for it, we selected it, and we paid for it. The German church tax tends to separate the giver from the activities of the church. A church member only makes one decision, perhaps only once in their life, whether or not to pay the church tax, and often has only a vague idea where their money goes and for what it pays.

In the next section I will share how community organizing promotes a sense of money and ownership among its members. I will simply add here the comments of one church leader who shared with me, “It is becoming clear that the EKD will not be able to rely forever upon the church tax as its sole source of revenue. The time is now, while we are relatively wealthy, that we begin cultivating additional patterns of stewardship and giving among our members.”

F. Voluntary Church Within the Volkskirche

I am not recommending that the Volkskirche be abolished. Nor should persons be negatively judged who pay the church tax but choose to remain distant from the church’s everyday affairs. It does seem to me, however, that expanding and diversifying the core active membership by more consciously connecting the message and actions of the church to people’s everyday personal and community concerns, through systematic listening and relationship building, will help add new life to the EKD. Church leaders have shared with me that a “voluntary church” already exists within the Volkskirche at the parish level regarding local church governance. My suggestion is to build a theological understanding and utilize strategies that will expand the functions and vital energy of this voluntary church.

Pastors and church leaders who have visited American churches speak of being impressed by the strong sense of fellowship that exists among its members. Consciously and systematically developing a “culture of relationships” within the church is important for two primary reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, building relationships of trust and respect is essential in bringing diversity together by helping us overcome

our stereotypes and fears of others. Second, relationships bring us out of our narrow world of isolation and foster creativity, new ideas and energy, and the courage to try new things. This is especially true when these relationships are rooted not only in trust and respect, but also in a clear recognition of overlapping and mutually held self interests and values.

There are strong theological grounds for fostering a culture of relationships. Jesus said that, "When two or three are gathered in my name, there too shall I be." The eminent Jewish theologian, Martin Buber, spoke of the "I-Thou" relationship as an essential cornerstone of faith: "I-Thou" with my God and "I-Thou" with my neighbor. It is within relationships, Buber stated, that we most powerfully and profoundly find and experience God.

In the next section of this report, primarily I will share the important strategies utilized by American faith-based community organizations to foster a "culture of relationships" which leads to the solving of community problems and assists in the revitalization of church life.

IV. Potential Revitalization Strategies

A. One-On-One/Face-To-Face Visits

One of the most effective strategies used in American community organizing is the one-on-one or face-to-face visit. Its purpose is to discover a person's self-interests and to initiate a relationship of trust and respect. These purposes go back to the comments made earlier in this report about "why people participate." If people participate because of their self-interest or a relationship they have with the person who invites them, one-on-one visits become a cornerstone for such participation. While it is very rare during a first visit that the person visited will be invited to participate or become involved in something, a foundation is laid to do so in the future.

A one-on-one visit is an intentional conversation, always arranged ahead of time, and lasts for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. It begins with the person doing the visit establishing the reason for visiting. The following example is typical within the context of a faith-based community organization where one lay person is visiting another from their own congregation.

Thank you for taking the time and allowing me to visit. As I mentioned when I called to arrange this visit, I am part of a team of twenty persons from our church who are each visiting five to ten other members as a way of strengthening the fellowship of the church and understanding our members concerns for the church, our neighborhood, and our city. Before we talk about visions and concerns, however, I would enjoy getting to know you better. Please tell me more about yourself.

Visitors ask about the background, family, work, hobbies, and future aspirations of the person they are visiting. Questions such as, “How did you choose your job and what do you really like about it?”, and “Were there any key people or events in the past that really helped shape who you are today?” lead the conversation to a deeper level. Eventually the visitor will ask about the community and church with such questions as, “If there was one or two things that would make our church a better place than it already is, what would that be?”, and “What makes you angry and what would you like to see changed in your neighborhood or our city?” The visit ends with the visitor saying something like this.

Thank you for taking the time to visit and share. Next month our church team will report back to the full congregation what we have found. Then we will invite the membership to take part in developing strategies to address the visions and concerns we have heard. I will call you when this occurs.

Persons conducting such one-on-one visits consistently report how rewarding they are, how it expands the number of people they know, and amazement at how much people are willing to share about themselves during an initial conversation. Upon reflection, this final conclusion should not be surprising. It is a wonderful experience when someone truly listens to and takes a genuine interest in us, all the more so in our increasingly busy and impersonal culture.

B. Systematic Listening Process

As alluded to in the one-on-one example just cited, these visits often occur in the context of a “listening process”, an eight week period when a trained group of lay people will each visit five to ten others. After the visits are completed, the visitors will share with each other what they have heard, look for a pattern of repeated concerns and visions, and then report back to the membership their findings and preliminary recommendations for next steps. Within an American faith-based community organizations of thirty congregations working together, it is not uncommon that 2,000 people will be visited and listened to during this eight week period. Each parish Visitation Team, in addition to reporting back to their own membership, will also share the community concerns they heard at a meeting with Visitation Teams from other parishes. Such a joint listening process generates great energy, excitement, and hope that community problems will be effectively addressed. What helps guarantee success, however, is that the Visitation Teams can now invite the 2,000 people they visited to participate in the organization based upon the self-interests they have discovered and the relationships they have begun to establish.

As a way of further developing a “culture of relationships”, community organizations often begin regular meetings with a 15 to 20 minute period for one-on-ones. The simple instructions for such an exercise might be, “Please find someone you don’t know or don’t know very well, and get to know them better.” Or the instruction may involve a more specific question like, “Spend the next 15 minutes sharing with each other a little about yourself and one thing that you really like about our church,” or “one thing you would like to change in our city.”

C. Modifying the Listening Process to the German Cultural and Church Context

Some Germans, both within and outside the church, with whom I have shared these ideas about one-on-one visits, have responded by saying, “Paul, this may work in America, but I’m not sure that it will work here.” They site reasons such as greater formality in relationships and less willingness to share on a personal level. Other Germans I speak with dispute these claims and have had direct and successful experiences doing one-on-one visits.

My first response to such comments grows out of my own personal experience. I first learned about doing one-on-one visits when I attended a seven day workshop on community organizing 25 years ago. We spent one full day in the workshop learning about and practicing one-on-one visits. I found these ideas and strategies fascinating and very engaging, but thought, “When I return to my work in the rural South of the United States and try doing this, it will never work. People will think I am being too personal and will throw me out of their houses!” What I found was just the opposite. I think the reason is very simple – people like being listened to and heard! Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated this idea well when he wrote,

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love for us that God not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is God’s work that we do for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother or sister will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words. One who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and be never really speaking to others, albeit he be not conscious of it. Anyone who thinks that this time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have not time for God and one’s brother or sister, but only for oneself and for one’s own follies.

- Life Together (Gemeinsames Leben, 1938), Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Most people I have trained in doing one-on-one visits have the same initial fear that I had, but also come to the same conclusion after they do such visits. When we do systematic listening processes with congregations and parishes, we take steps that will assist the visitors in setting up their visits. For example, the church newsletter and a letter from the pastors to the persons being visited will announce that such a process is about to begin, explaining the purpose of the visits, and hope that persons will agree to be visited.

It is also important to point out that to be a good visitor, a person must be genuinely interested in and curious about people. They must also be a good listener. So in this regard, the pastor and leaders of a parish should give careful consideration to whom they will invite to be a part of the Visitation Team. Training should be provided that includes giving visitors the opportunity to practice with each other. Finally, persons who initially feel less secure about doing the visits may want to begin with people they already know, using it as an opportunity to get to know them better. There will be others, however, who are excited about and feel comfortable with visiting new people from the start.

D. Moving from Listening to Acting

In addition to developing peoples' relationship building skills, the American community organizing tradition has developed numerous strategies to help people take large community problems or grandiose church visions, and narrow them into manageable, realistic, and doable strategies. People like to see results within a reasonable period of time. Success builds individual and organizational self-confidence and self-esteem, and leads to further success. So starting small where people can see very practical results in a short time is always preferable to tackling something too large and then getting caught in endless debates and discussion.

Community organizing refers to this process as moving from a "problem" to selecting an "issue." It trains leaders to think about whether the issue is specific, winnable, and whether it will help build the organization. Leaders also consider who else may be concerned about the issue, and then to ask for their participation in solving

it. Researching the issue will include asking whether successful examples exist from elsewhere that can be used in our situation.

When solving a community problem or issue involves a change in public policy or new direction by an influential institution (for example, the government, school system, or corporation), the concept and exercise of power must be considered.

For many in the church, power has negative connotations and seems alien to the gospel message. American civil rights leader and minister, Rev. Martin Luther King, however, counters this notion in the following passage.

Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, or economic changes. In this sense power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice.

One of the greatest problems of history is that the concepts of love and power are usually contrasted as polar opposites. Love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love...What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.

- Martin Luther King, Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?, 1967

In other words, power is necessary if we want to see our Christian values of love and justice more fully lived out in the world around us.

Community organizing views power in two societal forms: organized money or organized people. Few of us are millionaire developers who alone can influence policy through our financial wealth. But our churches have many people who, when meeting together with key decision makers, can impact decisions that effect the everyday concerns of families and neighborhoods.

When speaking of power, a common question asked of community organizing is this: "Will our work together be political?" The answer is "yes" and "no." "Yes" in the

sense that community organizing moves churches and others into the arena of public decision making that impacts all our lives. “No” in that community organizations never become affiliated with any political party or endorse any political candidate.

E. A Potential Institutional and Financial Arrangement for Community Organizing Involving German Parishes and Diakonisches Werk

Faith-based community organizing; i.e. developing a culture of relationships by conducting systematic listening processes and then solving community problems and implementing new church visions; requires staff and volunteer time, planning, training, and money. Very practically, how could this be done in the context of the EKD?

From what I have been learning, one potential solution lies in a partnership between Diakonia and approximately 10 EKD parishes at a local or city level. I will try to describe this from three perspectives: the roles and responsibilities of key staff and volunteers, a potential income and expense budget, and why it may be in the self-interest of Diakonia and EKD parishes to undertake such a venture.

1. Roles and Responsibilities

- Pastors: With all their other responsibilities, pastors alone cannot build or sustain a community organizing process. They do, however, play a very important role. Pastors provide overall guidance and vision, they help select and invite members of their church to be part of a Visitation Team, and they attend key meetings as the community organizing process unfolds.
- Church Lay Leaders: Church lay leaders conduct one-on-one visits as a part of their church’s Visitation Team. They, along with the pastor, help shape new visions for their parish. Finally, they along with the lay leaders and pastors from other parishes and persons from Diakonia, shape and solve community problems.
- A Community Organizer: The role of a full-time community organizer is to help facilitate and provide assistance at all stages of an organizing process. In the beginning, the organizer works individually and in meetings with pastors and Diakonia leadership in shaping the vision and process of the organization. The organizer also assists the pastors in recruiting members of the parish to be part of the Visitation Team. The organizer becomes acquainted with the Diakonia staff, their work, and their clients. A community organizer does an average of 15 one-on-

one visits a week with parish pastors and members, as well as, with Diakonia leaders, staff, and clients. As the organizing process continues, the community organizer provides training, helps organize meetings, and then assists the organization in research and solving community issues. The community organizer always plays a facilitating, not leadership, role. Parish and Diakonia leaders, staff, and volunteers lead the organization with the help of clearly defined and democratically accountable organizational by-laws and structures.

- Diakonia Staff: Diakonia staff are the persons most in direct contact with the area residents most in need. Diakonia staff would play a role similar to that of the lay leadership in the parish; i.e. that of building relationships with and listening to the clients' self interests, concerns, and visions. Diakonia staff would then invite the clients to play a role in the larger organization as it solves and addresses those concerns and visions.
- An Outside Consultant: An experienced community organizer would provide guidance and training on a one-day-per-month basis. This outside consultant would work closely with the community organizer and key parish and Diakonia staff and volunteers. The once-per-month visits would include training events, meetings, and individual consultations.

2. Finances

The three primary expense items for a local community organizing process involving approximately 10 parishes and Diakonia would be a full-time community organizer, an outside consultant, and office expenses (some of which, like office space, telephone, use of a copy machine, etc. could be in-kind donations).

Income can come from at-least five sources: local parish "membership fees", Diakonia, government grants, foundations, and fundraising events that ask for contributions from individuals, businesses, and others. Government money should not make up a large portion of the income to help insure the organization's prophetic independence.

3. Why An EKD Parish and Diakonische Werk Partnership

Community organizing would help local parishes connect to the everyday

concerns of their members, area residents, and persons in need. By sharing in the costs and staff time of a community organizer, parish members and pastors would have staff assistance in reaching out to new persons and developing a culture of relationships within the parish.

Community organizing would help Diakonia reconnect to local parishes and their human resources. This would assist Diakonia in providing services and advocating for area residents in need.

While the foundation of a local community organization, as outlined here, would be this EKD parish and Diakonia partnership, other area organizations (such as Caritas, Catholic parishes, Lions' Clubs, etc.) could be invited into the organization around solving specific community problems or as permanent members of the organization.

F. Other Processes

Until now I have used this portion of the report to share a process with which I am most familiar from my experiences and somewhat modified to meet a German church context. I am fully aware that this process may not be appropriate in all situations and that other valuable strategies exist that can help the EKD constructively face its current challenges. I confess and regret that I have either not found the time or had difficulty getting appointments thus far with more persons in the EKD who have developed and are implementing parish renewal processes. I have had, however, a few conversations with persons that have shown me such booklets as "Visionen Erden: Der Vielfalt Gestalt geben mit Profil, Beteiligung, Begeisterung and Qualitaet" and "Arbeitsbuch Oekumenische Gemeinde-Erneuerung" that in some ways mirror and augment my American community organizing experiences. I have also heard that there are church leaders advocating the use of organizational models drawn from the world of business. My experience with such models in the United States is that they contain many helpful suggestions, as long as we remain aware of the fact that our goal is not to turn the church into a for-profit corporation.

What I find in common to so many of these processes for organizational development and improvement are the four following elements. 1. They all stress an ongoing process of planning, acting, and evaluating. Evaluation is perhaps the most important step, because it is the place where we grow professionally and personally,

and helps guide our future planning and acting. 2. People's gifts and talents are the most valuable resource of any organization. Put these to good use and your organization will thrive. 3. Good organizational leaders always start by listening to their stakeholders and constituents, share power in key decision making, and are constantly working to develop the skills of those around them. 4. Finally, good organizations utilize the resources of outsiders who can help them look in a fresh way at what they are doing and the progress they are making. For those of us working in a profession as deeply involved with people as the church, good outside consulting not only helps us reexamine the organization, but also helps us reflect upon our own personal and professional growth and development, struggles and joys.

G. Principals of Raising Money

There are persons much more qualified than I who have experience in church stewardship campaigns. Besides writing grant applications and collecting membership dues, my experience in raising money for community organizations is in training members to gather donations from individuals and local businesses. Perhaps these experiences can be helpful to the EKD.

Most people don't like asking for money, so when we start a training on fundraising we begin by talking about three reasons we need to raise "our own money." The first is necessity. We have personnel and office expenses that the organization must pay in order to do our work. And while foundation grants will often help us get started, it is our membership dues and once-a-year appeal to individuals and companies that will pay our expenses over the long-term. Second, we raise our own money because of ownership. We more highly value what we, and not someone else, pays for. Third, we raise our own money for independence. When we get money from others, there are usually strings or limitations attached. If it is our money, we spend it on what we think is most important.

After openly sharing our budget and reviewing what we've accomplished during the past year and plan to do in the coming year, we speak in our trainings about four principals of successful fundraising. The first principal attempts to directly address why people don't like asking for money – because it feels like begging! So instead of asking for a "contribution", we use the term "investment." We are asking for an "investment" in

something that will help the community, including the person from whom we are asking. The second principal for raising money is “asking is winning.” In other words, if you never ask, you will never receive. If you ask, of course some will say “No”, but others will say “Yes.” We have to ask! The third principal is “lead by example.” It is always much more successful when you preface your request with, “I gave 100 Euro, and I would like to ask you for the same.” Which leads to the fourth principal, “ask for the amount you want.” If one simply says, “Can you make a contribution?”, you are likely to get the loose change in someone’s pocket. But if you ask for 100 Euro, you are likely to get the 100, and if not, perhaps 50.

Having large numbers of members involved in fundraising efforts not only accomplishes the obvious task of raising money, it also promotes ownership and is a good leadership development tool. When one asks for money, one is forced to think about and then explain why the purpose and activities of the organization are important to you. American church-based community organizations customarily raise \$30,000 to \$150,000 from individuals and corporations during an intensive ten-week period, with 30 to 75 volunteers doing the asking and staff providing training, and arranging the visits with corporations. These efforts often start small, but grow over time.

H. Delegating Responsibilities and Teaching New Skills

I once heard a community organizer describe community organizations as “schools which teach democratic participation.” Among other things, through the organizing process people gain opportunities to learn listening and relationship building skills, how to negotiate their interests with each other and key decision makers, how to run and facilitate meetings, fundraising skills, and how to effectively live out their Christian values in the public arena. Community organizing trainings teach both democratic theory as well as practical skills, often using role plays as a way of preparing leaders and members to put this “classroom learning” into practice. Normally every training, meeting, and action involves an evaluation that helps us realize what we’ve learned, what could have been done better, and guides our future planning and action. Leaders begin to delegate more and more responsibilities as they see the competencies of their members grow. And structures of accountability; including electing the organization’s leadership, voting on all key decisions, and open methods of

communication; are built into the organization to insure the proper checks and balances necessary for any democratic process.

CHAPTER II: ATTEMPTS AT APPLYING COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN THE GERMAN AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT

I. Overview to Activities from July, 2005 to February, 2006

During my first twelve months (July, 2004 to June, 2005) in Germany and Europe, I was engaged in three primary activities. First, through readings and conversations I was learning about the German and European church, social providers, culture, societal structures, and approaches to solving issues of social exclusion and injustice. Second, I was sharing and receiving feedback about the strategies and theories of community organizing, particularly focused upon its potential applicability in the German and European context. Third, I was building relationships and exploring with persons whether the interest and resources exist to either apply community organizing approaches with existing organizations or to create new community organizing projects.

The past eight months (July, 2005 to February, 2006) have involved a continuation of these same activities along with the development of concrete plans for community organizing projects. This chapter attempts to describe this work and further reflect upon community organizing's applicability in a German and European context.

Concrete planning for community organizing projects has been discussed in thirteen German and three other European locations. Of these sixteen total projects, three have begun, eight are in an advanced planning stage, one is in an early planning stage, and four were stopped but may resume at a later date. In addition, in three locations community organizing strategies were applied to particular situations but no long-term planning was involved. The sixteen projects reflect three different approaches, or a combination of them. One approach is that of existing social service providers who wish to expand their work to include greater citizen engagement and empowerment, with the hope of more powerfully influencing local and regional policy decisions. A second approach is that of an individual parish that wants to engage larger numbers of their members in the ongoing life of their church. A third approach is that of coalition building between various local stakeholders (service providers, religious parishes, clubs, etc.) in order to build greater influence in solving community challenges

and visions. Within these approaches, the targeted constituencies include one or more of the following groups: low and moderate income residents, migrants, parish and other organization members, the unemployed, multicultural groups, the homeless, and those living in low-income housing complexes.

The plans and projects in Germany have emerged from conversations among three primary groups: the Forum on Community Organizing (FOCO), persons at the national office of German Diakonia, and a diverse set of stakeholders at the local level. FOCO is a twelve-year old organization of forty-five individual members living throughout Germany. FOCO was formed following two events. In the late 1980's, university students in Freiburg wrote their final report (later to be published under the title Let's Organize) after investigating community organizing in the United States and comparing it to German community-oriented social work practices. In 1993 and 1995, two American community organizers conducted weeklong community organizing trainings in Germany. Since FOCO's formation, its members have sought to promote the use of community organizing strategies through trainings, publications, and other means. German Diakonia is the over 150-year-old social service arm of the German Protestant Church with approximately 26,000 independent institutions, employing 400,000 persons and utilizing an equal number of volunteers. They work in a wide-range of areas including youth and family welfare, counseling, and migrant work. German Diakonia is currently reexamining its overall social work approach, with a special interest in the use and effectiveness of more community-based approaches.

Conversations between FOCO and the leadership of German Diakonia began in the Summer of 2005. The dialogue between Diakonia and FOCO has evolved into a plan to secure financing from a large German foundation, in order to provide ongoing community organizing consulting and training services to at-least six local German projects over the next three years.

The three non-German projects emerged from conversations that occurred among participants (including the President of FOCO and myself) of a European social workers project called Qu/A/Si (Quality and Accessibility of Social Services as a Factor in Empowering Social Inclusion). A national service provider in Slovakia and regional service provider in the Czech Republic have joined together with FOCO and German

Diakonia in order to secure financing to support four community organizing projects each in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and to share experiences and best practices along with the German projects. A Lutheran parish (and possibly a church circle at a future date) in a Swedish city has begun an extensive outreach process with the goals of parish renewal and greater parish involvement in the life of the surrounding neighborhood.

The goals and interests of a representative sampling of the sixteen local projects will be described in the next section of this report under two headings: “Citizen Engagement, Empowerment, and Coalition Building for Policy Influence” and “Parish Development.” But it may be helpful to the reader to understand the steps used in bringing these projects to the current state of development.

Like all community organizing, the first step involved building relationships of trust and respect, and listening for concerns and visions of local stakeholders (usually in the context of one-on-one visits). This first step also included sharing the goals and strategies of community organizing, and reflecting whether they could be of help in the particular local situation. The second step was that of holding a community organizing orientation meeting, often two to four hours in length, with a larger group of local stakeholders and further reflecting on community organizing’s applicability to the local situation. If this local group concluded that a community organizing approach could assist their work, the third step was to think more specifically about its implementation. For example, the local stakeholders began thinking about which targeted constituencies to include (neighborhood area, particular parish members, potential coalition partners, etc.) and developed a specific timeline that would include training and a systematic outreach process. If additional financial resources are needed to make a community organizing process occur, these plans were incorporated in a written fundraising grant request. After these preliminary steps are taken, the three-step process of community organizing begins (described in the first chapter of this report as that of listening for, researching, and solving community problems and visions) with the assistance of outside and ongoing training and consulting support.

II. Descriptions of Local Projects

A. Introduction

The following description of local projects does not attempt to include all sixteen, but rather to give a representative sampling in order to reflect their diversity, goals, interests, and constituencies. Since a number of the projects are still in planning stages and are applying for funding, organization names and cities are not mentioned. The use of the two broad headings, “Citizen Engagement, Empowerment, and Coalition Building for Policy Influence” and “Parish Development”, is not meant to be mutually exclusive. That is to say, some of the organizations seeking to engage citizens for policy influence are themselves church-based service providers and some are building coalitions with local religious parishes, and some of the parishes seek to have greater policy influence as part of engaging more members in the life of their church.

B. Citizen Engagement, Empowerment, and Coalition Building for Policy Influence

A first example comes from a large urban neighborhood in northern Germany. The initial project leaders are members of a nearly ten-year-old citizen’s organization that has exerted influence upon government policies. These members, however, are aware of three primary limitations in their current efforts. The first is that while their neighborhood consists of forty- percent migrants, the membership of the organization is exclusively German. Second, the limited budget of the organization has prevented them from hiring a part-time or full-time staff person, which has limited their capacity to grow and operate as effectively as they would like. Third, the organization has sought to make decisions by consensus, which worked well early on, but in recent years this process has made it difficult to prioritize and effectively solve community problems.

Over the past six months five meetings have been held by a multi-cultural group of fifteen area residents and supporters from outside the neighborhood, called together by the initial project leaders. During these meetings, each individual has shared their experiences and perceptions of neighborhood problems and challenges, as well as, their vision of building a powerful and effective multi-cultural organization that could solve these problems. Among the neighborhood themes mentioned have been the

inferior nature of public education, high unemployment, the lack of job training and opportunities for young adults especially among the migrant population, and an ongoing frustration at getting government leaders to seriously address these themes. They are all aware of government established and lead advisory groups in the neighborhood, but the discussions in these groups rarely lead to concrete and substantial solutions.

In addition to discussing community challenges and visions, this group has learned about community organizing and has begun to develop substantial plans for building a powerful and independent organization with paid staff. A one-year organizational development plan has been developed and written into a grant application. Early in the group's discussions it was decided that two half-time staff (community organizers) should be hired, one of whom would be German and the other from a migrant background, in order to reflect the multi-cultural organization they seek to build. These staff will spend two to three months doing approximately 150 one-on-one visits with diverse neighborhood residents. Those visited who share the groups vision of building a powerful, multi-cultural community organization will be trained to do additional one-on-one visits with family, friends, and fellow-residents as a key step in identifying a few initial community themes which the organization will then research and seek to solve with the help of government, schools, businesses, service providers, and other neighborhood stakeholders and resources.

As this group of fifteen has been meeting, two other important activities have been occurring. Outreach has taken place with and support gained from religious leaders, both area pastors and the church circle. Secondly, a clear sense of growing trust has developed across cultural and religious communities as sharing and a common vision developed.

A second example is drawn from a western German city that is home to seven different community social work projects in low-income and migrant neighborhoods. Discussions initially focussed on the possibility of involving a number of these projects from the start. But this was felt to be too ambitious, so a decision was made to start with one of the organizations and possibly expand later. Staff of this one project has felt frustration over the lack of significant and meaningful participation by area residents, and the limitations of their work without such participation. From their frequent contacts

in the neighborhood, staff identified almost a dozen themes that concern residents including the limited operating hours of an area swimming pool, children's recreational needs, garbage clean-up, and ways school teachers interact with migrants. Plans are currently being developed to train these staff in doing effective one-on-one visits with residents, some of whom would then be trained to do additional one-on-ones in their neighborhoods.

In a low-income and migrant neighborhood of a south German city, the staff and volunteer leaders of a fifteen-year old neighborhood project began imagining how a coalition effort with the neighborhood's Catholic and Protestant parishes, along with the area's community center and other organizations, could be mutually beneficial, as well as, increase their ability to effect local and regional policy decisions impacting their neighborhood. A set of one-on-ones and joint meetings with leaders of these different groups, along with an open neighborhood forum on community organizing attended by thirty people, indicated deep interest in pursuing the idea further. Plans for an organizing process are beginning to be developed.

The staff of a service provider in a northern German city has been feeling frustration over financial cutbacks by local and regional government officials for programs that improve the lives of ex-offenders and homeless persons. While the service provider's personnel have had some success, as they and staff from other area providers negotiated with government officials, something significantly different began to happen when the community organizing process of having the ex-offenders and homeless people themselves testify at government hearings and appear in large numbers outside government offices. Photographs of these testimonies and gatherings have been printed in local newspapers, making government officials much more responsive to calls for change. And the ex-offenders and homeless themselves have been growing in self-esteem as they engage as active citizens in the democratic, civil society process.

In a south-German city, a service provider working with refugees has grown increasingly frustrated by discriminatory government policies. Recognizing the real danger posed to refugees if they attempt to speak out on their own behalf against these policies, the service provider staff has had past successes on policy issues when they,

along with other advocates, have spoken on the refugees' behalf. But they want to do more, in particular two things. First, they want to build a strong and ongoing network of individuals and organizations that can work for policy changes, as well as, provide a safe forum within which refugees can share their concerns and visions. Second, they want to build networks with schools, doctors, and others in the neighborhoods where refugee camps exist as a means of both improving the lives of refugee families and overcoming social exclusion. This provider has begun training their staff in doing one-on-one visits with potential supporters and developing a strategic plan for building these two support networks.

In a central German city during the past two years, a government-sponsored project of an area service provider has achieved a large number of housing and neighborhood improvements, along with providing a range of services for young people, migrants, and women. However, as the two service provider staff persons reflect on what will happen two years from now when they leave this area of 300 residents, they fear that these improvements and services will stop. Their goal is to develop a process of greater resident engagement and to build a democratic resident's organization that can decide upon and oversee continued activities with minimal staff support. Planning has begun for a one-year process to achieve this goal.

The last example presented here of developing community organizing plans draws from two rather similar efforts in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In both cases, large and multi-city social service providers want to add a citizen participation and empowerment component to their work, that will lead to beneficial policy changes. Both want to begin by training staff and volunteers in four cities in a full-range of community organizing strategies. Both also believe that the listening and relationship building techniques, that are the essential elements of one-on-one visits, can also help insure that the services they provide are ones their clients need and want, as well as, improve internal communication within their own organizations.

The biggest cultural difference between these efforts and ones developing in Germany can be summarized in the following brief story. When I conducted a community organizing orientation with the Slovakian social service provider's key staff from five cities, I told a story from my American organizing experience of organizing a

500-person citizens meeting with the city's mayor. When I described how the citizens made specific requests for neighborhood improvements to the mayor, one of the Slovak staff interrupted and said, "We cannot do that! People here are scared. It has only been fifteen years since communism." What followed was a serious conversation about democracy and civil courage. By the end of the meeting, all of the Slovakian staff saw a strong need for community organizing, and wanted to begin the organizing process as soon as possible.

It would be inaccurate to leave the impression that all of the community organizing conversations, orientations, and planning that have occurred in the past twenty months are leading to future projects. I now will give two examples, and one more in the next section, where planning was stopped, although it may be resumed at a later date. One such effort involved plans in a south-German city to work with older unemployed workers with the goals of assisting them in acquiring new job skills and employment, helping them find other meaningful ways of using their skills and talents in socially beneficial ways, and advocating policy changes to help achieve these ends. The detailed plans (including the hiring of staffing) for conducting this work were included in a grant application to regional and federal government officials. Unfortunately, the grant was not funded. While community organizing relies heavily on the involvement of volunteers, efforts that do not involve at-least one paid community organizer suffer from numerous limitations including a lack of long-term sustainability, along with a limitation on the number of people which can be involved and community themes which can be addressed.

Another example of a discontinued potential project involved a coalition-building effort in a southern-German city. Following preliminary one-on-one visits with two interested individuals, members of five organizations were invited to participate in a three-hour community organizing orientation. This led to a ten-hour weekend organizing training and brainstorming session. At the end of this weekend event, the participants concluded that building a coalition, or organization of organizations, was not feasible for two primary reasons. First, there appeared not to be enough overlapping organizational self-interests (due to diverse geography, constituencies, and community themes) to bring the organizations together in a sustained fashion. Second, few of the

participants felt they had the time for further meetings to develop project plans and to raise the money to make such plans a reality.

C. Parish Development

The pastor of a moderate-income parish in central Germany became very interested in community organizing strategies as a means of engaging more members in the life of the church. Ten of his active members also became interested after a two-hour orientation session. A training on one-on-one visits increased interest and planning began for doing a listening process with other parish members. One challenge, however, surfaced. The members asked, "What if we call people, asking them for a one-on-one visit, and they will not meet with us?" As they discussed this further, their fear was that people they called may think that the visitor would either want to preach to them ("They may think that we are like Jehovah Witnesses."), or that they would think the visitor wants to come and sell them something. So the following solution was developed. A letter was written, signed by the pastor and visiting team, and sent to persons they wanted to visit. The letter began by explaining the purpose of the visits: to become better acquainted and to ask about parish and neighborhood concerns and visions. Then the letter said, "Please be assured, we will not preach to you or try to sell you anything." About two-thirds of the people called accepted the invitation for a visit.

The visiting team made approximately fifty visits during October and November of 2005. In early December and late January, two meetings of approximately 30 people each were held. The visiting team, persons who had been visited, and a few additional parish leaders attended these meetings. Thus far, the results of the visits and meetings have been positive. Both visitors and persons visited reported how much they enjoyed these encounters. As one person visited put it, "This is the first time I felt the parish really cared about me." Second, at the two meetings a report was made about which parish and community concerns were expressed by members. These included youth activities, social events for adults, and traffic improvements. Through a vote, it was decided that committees would be formed to develop strategies to address three of these concerns.

Fifteen years ago a parish in a central German city became inspired by a model of doing church “for others” from the Netherlands. Since that time, the church remodeled their worship space to create more room for neighborhood meetings and transformed their parish hall into a multi-service community center. As the pastor and parish council members reflected upon the ways a parish can relate to the community (ideas developed by American theologian Robert Linthicum and described in Part II, Chapter I of this report), the leaders see themselves as a “church for the community.” They now want to become more of a “church in and with the community” as well. Their current challenges include gaining greater clarity about “who we are as a church?”, and engaging more people in the active running and oversight of the parish’s many activities and programs. Beginning plans include an initial time for strengthening the sense of fellowship among the approximately 150 currently active parish members and staff, and then training many of these 150 to reach out to inactive parish members and other community residents.

During a five-day period in the Fall of 2005, I had the opportunity to spend time with the staff, board, and other active members of a parish (along with the leadership and pastors of the church circle) in a mid-sized city in Sweden. In many respects the structure of and challenges facing Swedish Lutheran parishes are similar to those of German Protestant parishes.

Community organizing orientations with this Swedish parish staff and leaders included practicing one-on-one visits and listing hopes and visions for their parish and surround neighborhood. These hopes and visions included creating stronger connections between the parish and surrounding neighborhood, being able to better respond to peoples’ needs, and creating a more multicultural atmosphere. The approximately thirty staff and members involved in these orientations unanimously agreed to do a one-on-one listening process during the Lenten Season of 2006, and asked the parish staff to begin planning this process in January. Interest in community organizing was also expressed by the two Superintendents and a number of the twenty-five pastors and lay leaders from the city’s church circle who attended a three-hour orientation. Plans for future orientations with the church circle are currently being discussed.

During the Winter and Spring of 2005, following one-on-one meetings and two orientation sessions, plans began to develop in a central German city for five parishes and local Diakonia to begin a community organizing process. The Superintendent made a commitment to provide funding for a half-time community organizer if five parishes participated and a full-time organizer if ten parishes were involved. Interest in this process included the desire to engage more church members in active parish life, the desire to connect the work of Diakonia and the parishes, and to more effectively solve community problems where high unemployment and its associated problems have persisted in recent years.

A number of challenges arose during the Summer and Fall of 2005, which have suspended work on this project. Long-term illness hampered two of the project initiators. A major structural reorganization, involving combining the two separate Diakonia and Superintendent structures into one, along with a number of parish merges, overwhelmed other project initiators. And one of the pastors reported having difficulty explaining and getting her church council excited about the community organizing process.

III. Current Conclusions About Applying Community Organizing in the German and European Context

During the past twenty months I have grown firmly convinced that community organizing is applicable in the German and European context. This conviction is rooted not only in the many positive comments made to me by persons in one-on-one conversations and workshop settings, but also by the fact that in fifteen locations plans are either being developed or community organizing strategies have already been successfully utilized. This concluding section will reflect upon reasons for this positive reception, as well as, a few of the challenges involved in applying community organizing in this different cultural context.

Earlier in this report I characterized the German Protestant Church as a “church in transition”. From what I have learned, I think the word “transition” can also be applied to many German institutions and German society as a whole. I would like to briefly describe this societal transition as I have come to see it, because I believe this is

creating objective factors that have contributed to community organizing's positive reception.

A German national politician shared with me that Germany is currently facing three primary challenges. The first is changing demographics, a population that is growing older, causing strains upon health care, retirement, and other provisions. A second challenge has been reunification and the costs associated with rebuilding the former East Germany and addressing its higher unemployment rate. And a third challenge is that of globalization, including the recent expansion of the European Union from fifteen to twenty-five nations, leading to the loss of jobs throughout Germany. These challenges have raised serious questions about the German government's financial capacity to maintain its impressive but costly social welfare system.

To this list of challenges, I would add two more that I have frequently heard. One is that of the growing migrant population and learning to positively embrace a multi-cultural society. And the second is that of diminishing participation in organizational life; such as religious parishes, political parties, and clubs; due to a variety of factors but certainly including the increased competition for people's time from such technologies as the internet and home entertainment centers.

Amidst these challenges, there is also much conversation in Germany and Europe regarding the need to strengthen civil society, increase citizen participation, and overcome social exclusion. These themes take on heightened importance in a time of social and institutional transition if policy and other decisions impacting the long-term future are to be made democratically and with stakeholder involvement.

It is within this context of objective factors that I have found many Germans and Europeans receptive to the theories and practices of community organizing. Four reasons seem to account for this.

1. Community organizing offers a fundamental way of understanding why people participate and concrete strategies for involving them. Earlier in this report it is described that community organizing views self-interest and relationships as the two primary reasons why people participate, and that one-on-one (or face-to-face) visits are a key way to build relationships and discover persons' self-interests. Also described was how an organization or parish can utilize this understanding and one-

on-one visits in a systematic “listening process” as a way of engaging more people in the life of their organization. Repeatedly, persons I have met who hold citizen participation and the strengthening of civil society as important values (as well as, those who want to strengthen their organization through greater member involvement) have told me these community organizing ideas and strategies make sense. Eight of the developing projects have made a one-on-one listening process a cornerstone of their future plans.

2. Community organizing is a means of overcoming cultural divisions. The act of carefully listening to other’s self-interests through one-on-one visits is also an important first step in embracing a multi-cultural society. Through careful listening stereotypes are overcome, commonly held self-interests are discovered, and cultural differences are better understood and often appreciated. At-least seven of the developing projects have as a primary goal that of bringing culturally diverse groups together into working partnerships.
3. Community organizing recognizes the need to build power in order to see that the interests of socially excluded people are heard, respected, and implemented in policy. As in the United States, many I have met in Germany and Europe have negative stereotypes of power – usually because they associate power with persons and actions that run contrary to their values of love and justice. But they appreciate the community organizing understanding of the necessity of building cooperative rather than oppressive power through organized people in order to see that socially excluded people have an effective voice in policy making.
4. Community organizing offers a systematic, transparent, and pragmatic approach to building democratic organizations and getting things accomplished. Persons I have met constantly share that what they like overall about community organizing is that rather than dwell forever in a theoretical realm, it constantly seeks pragmatic solutions within the context of democratic and transparent processes. These comments have occurred in orientation presentations, but even more so in project planning meetings when such topics as decision-making structures, membership activation, action timelines, and community problem solving have been discussed and planned.

While community organizing offers valuable strategies and approaches to a number of objective challenges facing German and European institutions and societies, there are also a number of challenges in adopting it to these settings, four in particular.

The first is a cultural attitude that is certainly present in the United States, but appears to me stronger in Europe and especially in Germany. This is a reluctance to take risks and to move from a reactive to a proactive approach to objective challenges and transition. Community organizing requires local initiators with vision, courage, patience, and the willingness to try something new. Implicit in my previous description of emerging local German and European projects are the dozens of persons who want and are willing to try something new. Among these persons I have found a very healthy approach to the concept of potential failure, i.e. "So if we fail, we will learn from our mistakes and try something else. But maintaining the status quo or simply reacting to current challenges will get us nowhere."

A second challenge in applying community organizing, especially in Germany, is the prevalent attitude, "Why should I become involved? That is the government's responsibility." I will not undertake a long description of the very different roles played by the state in the United States and Germany in the areas of social welfare and its accompanying attitudes toward personal responsibility. Rather I wish to observe that people I have met who are drawn to community organizing believe that in this time of socio-economic transition, the government will feel less responsibility toward socially excluded people unless these people are powerfully organized.

A third challenge I have often heard, especially in the context of discussing one-on-one visits, regards cultural differences between the nature of human relationships in the United States versus Germany. I do not deny that such differences exist, and that this may change the style and nature of a one-on-one visit. But I have now met many Germans who have successfully done one-on-one visits and who see the important value of relationship building in the process of involving people. And as is the case in the United States, the style of a one-on-one visit will vary according to the personality and style of the person conducting the visit and person visited.

The last challenge in adapting community organizing to Germany and Europe is finding the money to make it happen. Indeed, the development of almost all the projects mentioned in this chapter depend upon finding money for staffing, training, and consulting costs. As discussed in a previous chapter, the three primary sources of money used for community organizing in the United States are membership dues, membership-lead fundraising events, and foundations. There are approximately two-dozen foundations in the United States that financial support community organizing. It should be noted, however, that this is an extremely small percentage of the total number of American-based foundations, and that this foundation support of community organizing has developed during the past thirty years as community organizing has become more successful. German foundations need to be persuaded that community organizing is an effective approach to strengthening civil society and social inclusion. Membership dues and member-lead fundraising events are also less developed in Germany, but are now growing in importance.

Many German social work organizations utilize government money. This is seen by many Germans as a key obligation of the state. In the 1970's and 1980's American community organizing also relied heavily on government funding to support organizing efforts. Beginning with the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980, however, much of this government funding for community organizing was eliminated, resulting in the collapse of hundreds of organizations. Since then community organizations speak of the need for "independent money", i.e. money that is not eliminated if government leaders or others become displeased with requests or demands placed upon them by community organizing. Indeed, I have heard in Germany from many whose organizations are funded by the government that they feel limited in their ability to speak and act in a truthful, powerful, and prophetic way.

Some say that the German Protestant and Catholic Churches, along with their service organizations Diakonia and Caritas, are limited in their ability to fund community organizing amidst this present time of diminishing membership and financial cutbacks. The words of a prominent Protestant regional church leader with whom I spoke, however, contradicts this notion. "Paul, despite the recent cutbacks, the German

church is still a very wealthy institution. It is really a matter of priorities. If the church thinks something is important, they will find the money.”

Indeed, those who wish to make a priority greater citizen and membership participation, the strengthening of civil society, and the building of power for the sake of policy changes that reflect the values of social inclusion, justice and democracy will find ways to overcome obstacles and challenges. Community organizing can be a valuable tool to achieve these ends, and in the process will undoubtedly be adopted and transformed to reflect the German and European cultural reality and uniqueness.

IV. Conclusion

Saul Alinsky, the founder of American community organizing, used to regularly point out that the Chinese word for “crisis” consists of two written characters: one that means “danger”, the other that means “opportunity.” Whether one refers to the German Protestant Church’s present and future as a time of transition or crisis, I will leave to the reader. My sense, however, is that its current challenges present unique opportunities to shape an exciting new future while retaining the best of a very rich past. As home to the Protestant Reformation and countless geniuses in so many human pursuits; including theology and church practice; and based upon the concerned, committed, and talented EKD and Diakonia leaders and members I have met, I believe the future of the German church is one of hope and great promise.

I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’, and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.

- Matthew 17:20-21