

NEIGHBORHOOD FOUNDATION IN COLUMBUS, OHIO

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First English Lutheran Church in Columbus is involved in a new type of community organization, the Neighborhood Foundation. The Neighborhood Foundation is a self-governing, tax-exempt corporation for total community service. Its underlying philosophy is the "Jeffersonian Ward Republic." Its primary characteristic is legal structure, its chief dynamics the legitimacy of its institutions. Its aim is the creation of a cultural community. Its benefits include social services determined and managed by the members of the Foundation, with the aid of municipal resources and technical and professional expertise deployed under contractual relationship with the Foundation, new types of jobs utilizing the skills of its members for the development of a style of living suited to the community and the stabilization of the community through communal action. The key to the development of such a Foundation is the acquisition of a legitimate agency which can command the confidence of the neighborhood community as well as the full support of civic leadership in business and the professions. The viability of such a foundation depends on accessibility of its government and on the continued involvement of its members in its operation. The Foundation must, therefore, have clearly defined geographical boundaries and a clearly defined membership. The area of the Foundation must be compact enough to put its government within easy reach of its members and the size of its membership must be such as to make direct involvement of all participants possible.

The idea of the Neighborhood Foundation has been evolved by Milton Kotler of the Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, D. C. The Institute is an educational Foundation supported entirely by non-governmental, private resources, chiefly by well-known national Foundations. The Institute's purpose is to explore ways and means for the renewal of democratic policies in our society. For that reason, the Institute may not enter into contracts with government agencies.

I became acquainted with the concept of the Neighborhood Foundation through lectures given in January, 1965 by Milton Kotler at the Urban Training Center in Chicago. Since April, I have worked closely with Mr. Kotler in an effort to establish a Neighborhood Foundation in Columbus. My interest in this development was aroused by several considerations. I was convinced that community organization is one of the major methods by which social change is sought and will be accomplished in the current social revolution and in the immediate future. That means that community organization will increasingly affect the inner city. Inner city churches will be involved in community organization positively or negatively and the manner of their involvement

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will decisively determine their ministry and, indeed, their very existence. It seemed to me, and still does, that inner city congregations have no choice as to whether or not they will become involved in community organization. The question is rather how they will be involved; and if inner city congregations can help to determine the type of community organization in which they will participate, the congregations face a unique opportunity and a grave responsibility.

Another critical consideration was the following: First Church is an old congregation founded in 1848. In 1912, it moved to its present location, only a few blocks from its original site. In 1950, the congregation added a three story parish house to its facilities. The original membership was middle and upper-middle class. The pulpit of the church enjoyed a good reputation beyond the congregation's membership. By 1960, when I assumed the pastorate, the neighborhood had changed and was rapidly deteriorating, with 70% of its residents being Negroes and 30% whites, mostly Southern, Appalachian mountain folk. Nearly 85% of the members of the church had left the area. The congregation was still strong but unmistakably declining. However, the congregation had decided to stay in the neighborhood and was ready to receive Negroes. But, by the time I arrived, only two Negroes had affiliated with the congregation. The Sunday School had not quite 50% Negro students.

The congregation had for some time been aware of the necessity of having to relate to the people of the community and had with much devotion and with the help of some very dedicated Christians, who were professionals in social work, attempted to offer some kind of services to neighborhood youth. The endeavors had been initially successful but by the time I arrived, neither reached the neighborhood youth in a decisive way, nor had established any communication with community residents. Only about 25 youngsters a week attended the community youth activities, and residents of the community did not respond to very intensive evangelistic efforts. Indeed, there was outspoken hostility to the church. Acts of vandalism were committed nearly every week; members coming to week-day meetings at night felt threatened and some were actually assaulted so that, just prior to my coming, the Church Council had voted to discontinue all evening meetings.

Since 1961, we developed a full scale social service agency of the settlement house type as a department of the congregation. To make this possible the congregation raised a capital fund of nearly \$100,000.00 and spent, over the years, \$75,000.00 from its reserves. During the past two and a half years, the Board of American Missions contributed nearly \$30,000 to this ministry. The multiple services

offered by the Neighborhood Center of First English Lutheran Church won acceptance by the community and changed the attitude of its people to the church. Last year, over 12,000 people were served by the Center. Slowly, Negroes began to affiliate with the congregation. The types of services offered and the manner in which they were rendered elicited the interest and support of the wider community. Capital University and Seminary, several Colleges of Ohio State University, the University's schools of Law, Medicine, and Social Work, the Association of American University Women, the Council for Retarded Children, the Juvenile Bureau, the Court of Domestic Relations, the Child Welfare Board, the Planned Parenthood Association, the Visiting Nurses of Columbus, and others actively participate in the many Center services. These now include a pre-school for culturally deprived children, a pre-school for mentally retarded children, psychiatric services, legal services, referrals of juvenile offenders, volunteers in probation, after school supervised studies, tutoring, remedial reading, clubs and interest groups for children, young people, and adults; workshops, hand-crafts, and sports and other recreational activities; job referrals, etc. The Neighborhood Center has become a respected social service agency and has made the church a friend to the people of the community.

But, tremendous problems have also arisen. The more effective the Neighborhood Center becomes, the greater are the demands made on it. Costs of operation are steadily rising, while the income of the congregation is declining. Above all, the church becomes increasingly a community social service agency and is in danger of losing its proper character. Efforts to obtain funds from the United Appeal failed. The Board of American Missions cannot continue its present rate of support, not to speak of increasing its grant as is becoming necessary.

The Economic Opportunity Act added a new dimension to the problem. The provisions of the bill would soon make church directed social service agencies superfluous and would meet the needs of the community as the church could not hope to do. The philosophy of the "War on Poverty" which requires "Maximum possible participation of the poor," would, in fact, render church directed social services unacceptable. Yet, on the other hand, the Columbus structure of the war on poverty did not guarantee that the disadvantaged would be as intimately involved in the solutions offered to their problems as they had been in the Center's programs. It became, above all, quite evident that the deep dissatisfaction of the ghetto, the demands for freedom and justice and the dire needs of the poor and the disadvantaged would seize on the opportunities promised in the new legislation to bring about basic social changes. It was also clear that the vehicle for this endeavor would be community organization, quite aside from the fact that the Economic Opportunity Act includes community organization as a major weapon in the war on poverty.

The Neighborhood Foundation, suggested by Milton Kotler, offered the Church the opportunity to participate decisively in the life of the community and at the same time to get out of the business of social service. The Church Council voted approval of a research project and committed itself to transfer the Neighborhood Center agency to the Neighborhood Foundation. The people in the community expressed their interest in receiving the agency and operating it themselves. The law firm of Arnold, Fortas and Porter in Washington, D. C. , created the charter and the by-laws for the Neighborhood Foundation. Support of civic leaders and municipal authorities was sought, obtained, and cultivated; and the enlistment of members in the proposed organization began. The boundaries of the Foundation were determined which include 6,500 residents of which about 3,000 are over 16 years of age and thus eligible for membership. A faithful member of the congregation and a devout, active and highly knowledgeable churchman, Mr. Andrew J. White, Jr., senior partner of the Columbus law firm, Knepper, White, Richards, and Miller, volunteered to serve as agent and corporation counsel for the new organization and on August 30, obtained its charter from the State of Ohio. Milton Kotler served as consultant in charge of the project and prepared a proposal for a demonstration grant under Title II, section 207 of the Economic Opportunity Act to finance the government of the Foundation, called the East Central Citizens Organization, ECCO.

The research project was funded by grants from the Stern Family Fund, the National Council of Churches and an anonymous donor.

The operating Committee of the Neighborhood Center serves at the same time as the Interim Executive Council of ECCO to assist in a smooth transfer of the church agency to the Foundation.

The proposal envisions that the Interim Executive Council, upon receiving the first phase of the OEO grant of \$26,000 prepares for the first Assembly meeting of ECCO, for the adoption of the by-laws, for the election of the first regular Executive Council consisting entirely of community residents and for a thorough organization of the community through membership enlistment, preparation of candidates for election and gathering of information about the needs of the community, and about the people's wishes and ideas as to how their needs are to be met. Not later than three months after the first phase of the grant becomes operative, the regular Executive Council must be elected, and with its election, the second phase of the OEO grant of \$158,000 for a twelve month period for the government of ECCO becomes operative.

At that time, I will cease to function as the unpaid Project Director of ECCO and will be replaced by the Executive Director, employed by the Executive Council. The Executive Council, in consultation with the Director, will hire a program Director. These two positions and a corporation council are the only ones which might involve non-resident personnel. During the first phase two community organizers could also be non-resident people. The government workers trained by the organizers who keep in constant touch with the people of ECCO. The grant also provides annual stipends for the members of the regular Executive Council.

Programs will be developed by local neighborhood groups with the help of the Program Director. Programs must be approved by the Assembly which may alter or terminate them at any time. The Assembly also retains the right to remove, for cause, by due process set forth in the by-laws, any member of the Executive Council and the two top Executives. Funding for programs will be sought from metropolitan and national resources. Local and national foundations have declared their great interest and their readiness to provide needed funds.

The demonstration is to last for two years. Interest in OEO is high. OEO personnel have been kept abreast of all developments throughout the months of research.

The support of civic leaders is very pronounced. The charter provides for the appointment of an Advisory Council of these leaders. The Council will only advise as its name indicates. The power of decision rests with the Executive Council alone. Yet, the Advisory Board, beyond offering advice in certain technical areas provides the opportunity for meeting and understanding between these different and largely isolated strata of our society.

What makes this opportunity unique and highly promising is the fact that the disadvantaged are in possession of power and therefore are free not only to hear but to express themselves without fear of retaliation or loss. Civic leaders not only appreciate the opportunity to thus gain new insights but also feel that a community which stabilizes itself will improve the health of the total community.

One of the exciting features of this venture is the participation of the Freedom Movement on a trial basis. At present, two organizers of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), are working for ECCO. The Freedom Movement finds the Neighborhood Foundation concept promising. But Movement people frankly wonder if the church will actually surrender a legitimate agency, owned by the church, to

the people. Slowly, Movement people begin to trust the Church or rather this congregation and its ability to put the interests of people above self-interest. The possibility of a new relationship between the Church and the Freedom Movement thus begins to appear, the promise of which can hardly be over estimated and deserves the most intensive and patient exploration. The service rendered by Freedom Movement people in this type of community organization, is invaluable. Without their cooperation, the venture, in my judgment, cannot succeed. The dedication, wisdom and skills of the Neighborhood Foundation to community residents as no one else can. They are able to convince the people that they may exercise their power under Foundation law without fear of loss or impairment.

They are able to overcome the people's suspicion that the peculiar skills required to use their legitimate power within the frame of democratic institutions are not tricks designed to circumvent their intentions and to substitute meaningless procedures for genuine exercise of their will. The Freedom Movement people have the ability of making the democratic process accessible to the disadvantaged, not in any sense by way simplification but rather by way acculturation so that democratic process becomes for them a viable and trustworthy tool for constructive, responsible action. Community organization within a legal structure can succeed only if the disadvantaged are able to use that tool with confidence. A task of tremendous scope is involved here. For one of the major problems of the disadvantaged is their alienation from the democratic process. Their powerlessness, their exclusion from access to power structures, their inability to make themselves heard, their complete isolation have rendered their participation in the democratic process largely futile and meaningless and have made their withdrawal into "sub-cultures," a matter of survival. Suspicion, hopelessness, and the basic will to live in a hostile environment rather than lack of skill have alienated the disadvantaged from the life of our society and its dynamics, including its goals and its democratic process. It requires not only new forms but incredible patience, tireless wrestling and relentless search for new points of contact to re-establish confidence and to reconnect the disadvantaged with the life of society and thus to make the democratic process a viable instrument for their participation.

Closely related is the problem of opening lines of communication between the disadvantaged and the professionals. Here too, a two-pronged approach is required, the course of which is filled with largely unknown difficulties. The major hypothesis of the proposal presented by ECCO to OEO is that services and programs determined and managed by the deprived to meet their own needs will be different from professionally designed and managed enterprises to that end.

This hypothesis is based on the experience that professional institutions have not been able to come to grips with the major problems of the disadvantaged as well as on the observation that professional services have been received apathetically and have failed to stimulate initiative and effective social change. Patterns of dependency seem to attest to this failure. The ECCO proposal contends that one of the major reasons for this failure is the fact that social service professionals, in contrast, for example, to lawyers and clergymen, are not accountable to their clients but to distant Boards of Trustees. In ECCO's legal structure the accountability of the professional staff to the clients they serve is clearly and firmly established. As the people of ECCO take hold of their problems, two things become quickly apparent. One is that the people are able to get to the roots of severe community disorders in a new and unexpected way, often amazingly more effective than professional approaches, and that they are determined to deal with these disorders in a novel fashion, often outstripping professional therapies in imagination, perceptiveness and daring coupled with an outstanding ability for marshalling support and cooperation. But it is also evident that the people are suspicious of professionals and cannot relate to them. Just as professionals seem to find it nearly impossible to relate to people who are both their "client" and their "employer" at the same time.

This condition harbors the danger of producing a new kind of primitivism in attempts to deal with complex social ills. However, the people of ECCO are becoming aware of their need for professional assistance; and professionals are beginning to understand that instead of speaking to the disadvantaged with the voice of prophecy they must learn to offer effective and trustworthy tools for their use. The solution to this problem is multifaceted. It involves among other things the development of sufficient self confidence on the part of the deprived to listen to professional advice and to understand its instrumentality and the training of professionals in offering their skills and knowledge in response to claims made on them by the deprived.

In the bridging the gulf between the people and the professionals as well as in establishing the instrumentality of democratic processes, the Freedom Movement people can be of inestimable help. Perhaps they are in this critical moment the only persons capable of undertaking these difficult and delicate tasks.

For the Church a new situation has arisen. The people of the community realize very clearly that with the transfer of its agency to them, the church divests itself of any possibility of dominating them by control over services they need and benefits they desire. The church no longer has that kind of power. The astounding thing is that now the people do not turn away from the church. They rather claim the church! First Church is no longer an institution to which they come because the church

may be in the position of meeting some of their most urgent needs in a manner that seems best to the church. Now the people come to First Church because the church belongs to them. They claim the church as their own. They claim its physical structure, its agency and its services, its standing in the community and the skills of its clergy and other personnel; and they begin to use all of it as resources at their disposal in the manner they deem best, most effective and appropriate. Their claims are by no means confined to the Neighborhood Center and its services, but extend increasingly to all that the church is and has and reveal an astounding degree of perceptiveness concerning the primary function of the church to deal with human problems in their moral and spiritual dimension.

For the church the experience is initially bewildering and somewhat frightening. The church is not used to being claimed by "outsiders." The church regards her offerings to outsiders as acts of charity which, if they do not evoke the anticipated response of gratitude, should at least be received as gifts without questioning or demands; and, of course, the church determines what it offers to outsiders, both in regard to kind and to degree. Claims of outsiders upon the church as though by right come as a profound shock. The lack of any legal basis gives to these claims an air of absurdity. They smack of invasion of privacy and of property and leave the church with the feeling of being used. What makes such claims especially offensive is that they reveal that, in the eyes of the recipients, the charitable offerings of the church are insufficient, often inappropriate, perhaps even useless and unwanted. The church may even feel that there is some truth in such judgments.

Yet, as First Church begins to learn to respond to these "unreasonable" claims and submits to their demands, the church experiences to its amazement that suddenly it looms large in the life of the community and its people. It begins to appear that a new relationship between the people and First Church is emerging in which the very claims of the people make the church responsible and thus open for the church the opportunity to claim the people for Christ. The "unreasonable" claims of the people on the church which make the church responsible, create that essential mutuality in which Christ's claim on the people is no longer a "religious," "other worldly" concern but an address in the very midst of the reality of their life, to which their life itself clearly and unavoidably becomes response. Indeed, as the church responds to the "unreasonable" claims of the people, the servant form of the church emerges compellingly, amazingly reminiscent of the church's Lord who "came to serve, not to be served." The people's claims on the church end the isolation of the church. That brings the church into the life of the people. But as the constricting walls of isolation fall, the church also loses their protection, again calling to mind

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the defenselessness of the Servant of the Lord God whom the church calls "Master."

No one knows in detail what the community will demand of the church in days to come. But it can hardly be doubted that sooner or later the community will expect the church to act politically. The experiences of the past few years in regard to racial justice and human rights and the stormy history of Congressional acts related to these and other social issues can hardly fail to alert the church to this possibility. Involvement in community organization of whatever kind makes the possibility a near certainty. For the church that implies the urgent need for an honest and realistic reappraisal of its political potential and the "demythologizing" of some cherished and stubbornly maintained illusions about the church's non-political character. In this context, the church will have to re-examine the meaning of Christian social action, especially as it relates to Christian love which is the fruit of faith.

Participation in community organization raises constantly new questions and problems for First Church and will continue to do so increasingly. Yet, all the difficulties, past, present, and to be expected, cannot hide the strange and telling transformation that has occurred. The old, dwindling congregation which only yesterday tried desperately and rather futilely to hang on in a rapidly deteriorating neighborhood whose estranged people were as little aware of the congregation's struggles as they would have been of its final demise; that very congregation has become focal point for the community, decisive factor in the life of its people, resource and potential claimed as their own, in their battle for renewal; and its demise would mean a disaster of major proportions to all residents of the neighborhood. From this new vantage point of responsive servanthood and defenseless mutuality, the church is able to make the voice of the Gospel heard.

February, 1966