

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

MEMORANDUM #2

FROM: MILTON KOTLER

SUBJECT: ASPECTS OF THE ENGLISH PARISH RELEVANT TO THE
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

1. In the 16th & 17th centuries the parish was the basic unit of the English political structure. Originally an ecclesiastical unit it became, as the result of Tudor legislation, not less political than ecclesiastical. There were more than 8,000 parishes in England. The parish was built around the church. We might view the Community Foundation as being built around "the Community House" (not to be confused with the Settlement House). Just as the parish was responsible for the upkeep of the church, so too will the Community Foundation maintain and administer the Community House as the center of all community projects and activities.*

2. The boundaries of the parish were annually "perambulated" at Rogation Tide. The elders led in this procession because of their memory of the parish boundaries. Young boys walked with them to learn these boundaries. Today the procession in the urban Community Foundation might well take the reverse order. The adolescents of today demonstrate greater knowledge and commitment to neighborhood boundaries, through standards of club or gang memberships and organization, and organization, as well as gang fights over "territory."

3. The parish was a legally corporate body. It could sue and be sued for moveable goods. So too with the Community Foundation. As a corporate body, it has use and rights over the things it owns. It can use the adjudication and enforcement of city and state government to establish its power.

*Could the Community House play a sufficient role to involve and focus the participation of all? Indeed, for what value as compelling as salvation? I argue yes. Its goal can be the compact of generations, and the shared values of the young and old. The war of generations is a major, if not the major conflict, in urban society today. Cultural unity and new tradition could be the community goal warranting the political organization operating through the institutional framework of education. The Community House proposed here as the center of the Community Foundation, would be an educational structure much fuller than our present and familiar education systems. More on this in a later memorandum.

4. With the Reformation, the parish came into possession of much property formerly owned by the church. The rents and fees accruing from this property was a major source of income to the parish government. By analogy, I think the Community Foundation could likely come into possession of property appropriated "for neglect" by the slum landlords. The rent strikes seek such transfer and indeed such a source of deposit. The Community Foundation can operate this property for public, community purposes or use it as a source of revenue through rents or fees.

Further, as a legal corporate body, the Foundation can come into possession of property through wills. As a matter of fact, many cities have a municipal trust serving this purpose (e.g. the Chicago Trust). Why not the same capacity for neighborhood communities? Possession through wills was a major method of property acquisition for the parish.

5. The parish, through the churchwardens administered laws about the poor and apprentices. This later function emerged because of the heavy bastardy in the parish. Supporting illegitimate children led to the obvious role of finding them employment through apprenticeships. The Community Foundation in the urban setting would be an interesting structure through which to work out apprentice programs for its member residents.

6. Related to the preceding item is another feature in the Community Foundation. Under Elizabeth I, the monies of the parish were gained through donations and economic enterprises. (It was not until later, I believe James I, that this proved inadequate and the parish was forced to make assessments,--a taxation system.) A major form of income for the parish was derived from the brewing of beer, renting of pews, etc. Similarly the Community Foundation can establish various businesses in the community e.g. laundries, restaurants, movie houses, etc. Not only is this a way for the Community Foundation to get tax-exempt money through community type activities, but it is also a way to employ people in the community with salaries and build the community treasury for investment, matching and public use.

7. We might think of creating a public role in the Community Foundation similar to the role played by the Justice of the Peace and jury in the parish. It would be important to develop some kind of legal system for the neighborhood community foundation, to check and insure the responsibility and proprieties of Foundation officials, i.e. the Trustees and other salaried functionaries.

8. It is interesting to note that the English parishes used to help out one another. If one parish had a serious fire, other parishes would vote public funds to help the stricken parish. Wealthy parishes generally supported poor ones; as well as the Virginia plantations in the new world. Appropo, community foundations in middle-class neighborhoods could help lower-class community foundations. Sister-community relationships might be established.

9. If we think about it there are probably numerous community functions (public roles and functions) which the Community Foundations could create. I think of the parish which paid people to perform such functions as: (a) shepherd caring for the sheep in the Commons; (b) swineherds looking after the pigs in the woods (c) poundkeepers gathering up stray animals; and above all (d) the dograppers who kept the dogs out of the church, etc. These were all legitimate employment and functions. In addition, the parish gave bounties for certain occasional activities, such as killing foxes, polecats and sparrows. There are probably endless analogies that could be developed in the neighborhood community, once regarded as political communities, as thus subject to "social" and "political," if not "natural" dangers. For example, one has only to look at the city political patronage jobs to find the far limits of functional obscurity, with no cost to their personal dignity, at that.

The next memorandum will deal with the colonial corporation in America and the influence of its form on our political government..

MISCELLANEOUS

The middle class property protective associations should be studied as corporate structures for Community activity. Can their function and structure be shifted to more "generous" alternatives, -- from property protection to new and communally shared property use.