Churches public interest groups and environmental issues in the northern Rockies

Mark E. Carlson

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CHURCHES, PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES
IN THE NORTHERN ROCKIES

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
1979

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5-18-79
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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper concerns itself with "insurmountable opportunities" and the effort to close the gap between what an organization does and what it would like to do. It is concerned specifically with the perils and possibilities of mixing religion and politics in the work for a greater measure of justice and ecological sanity. For better or worse, religion and politics are irreversibly entangled. It is important for citizen groups and the "public interest movement" in the Northern Rockies to recognize the role of religion and religious organizations in public affairs. It is equally vital that persons of faith, especially leaders in religious communities, recognize the role of secular citizen organizations in working for peace, justice, and a sustainable future.

Any paper on religion and politics deals with some extremely difficult terms and concepts, loaded with ambiguities and varying connotations. The risk is high that the reader will be alienated over an apparently innocent word or idea. For example, "sin," "the public interest movement," or "reconciliation" may be essential concepts to some, and completely meaningless to others. Discussions of religion and politics are surrounded by all sorts of irrational fears, prejudice, and "old baggage." The discerning reader can probably detect some in this paper. Bearing this in mind, unfamiliar vocabulary should be received in a positive and hopeful frame of mind.
What follows will deal primarily with the Christian religion, and the "Judeo-Christian tradition," partly because of my own personal experience and bias (i.e. conviction), and also because it at least nominally dominates American religious belief, if not practice. The term "church" will hereinafter generally refer to that melange of religious organizations which attempt to meet the spiritual needs of a pluralistic society. What is to some people a scandal of denominational and sectarian division does not deny, in my mind, the essential features of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In its purest form, "the church" is simply the people of God.

In an effort to avoid confusion and confine the scope of this paper, the Jewish faith will not be specifically discussed. Much of what is said may apply to any religious faith, and any movement for a politically effective religious witness to the demands of justice will require the efforts of all faiths working together. Jewish and Christian leaders are recognizing that in several important respects they share the same tradition and the same basis for action in the political arena.

"Mainline" Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church will be emphasized because of their demonstrated commitment to involvement in the political process, their cooperation through interfaith or ecumenical activities, and their tangible efforts of outreach to victims of injustice without always coming at them with a club disguised as a Bible. These are generally the so-called "liberal" churches. The "conservative," evangelical (i.e. more evangelical) churches are not to be dismissed by any means. They cover quite a broad spectrum in themselves, from the traditional peace churches like
the Mennonites, to those that would not think twice about "killing a
commie for Christ." There is substantial and growing concern among
many evangelicals, a concern that is both deeply rooted in the Chris­
tian tradition and relevant to contemporary problems. It is evidenced
in the Chicago Declaration of 1973 (a statement of Christian social
concern by a gathering of leading American evangelicals; not to be
confused with the Chicago Declaration of 1978), in magazines like
Sojourners and The Other Side, and in a new membership organization
called Evangelicals for Social Action. The movement toward what is
called "radical discipleship" cuts across old divisions and labels in
the church, and emphasizes small, close-knit communities of believers.
Its greatest strength is in large urban centers, but signs of it have
appeared in the Northern Rockies.

The impetus for this paper comes from the troubling observ­
ation that the church has not adequately filled its role as a public
conscience or moral witness to many of the problems facing the Northern
Rockies region, especially those related to agriculture, energy devel­
opment, use of natural resources, and care of the earth. There has not
been a highly visible commitment on the part of the institutional
church to its own imperatives of justice, neighborliness, and steward­
ship. I expected the church to be raising fundamental ethical and
moral questions concerning the purpose, direction, and meaning of life
in the Northern Rockies. In this region, such questions are intimately
tied to the use of the land.

Compounding the lack of an active and widespread church witness
to natural resource and environmental issues is the fact that many
environmentalists not only do not expect the church to be involved, but are convinced that the Judeo-Christian tradition has provided the religious justification for extravagant waste of resources, careless pollution, and insensitive disregard for the creatures who share "earth household." Those faithful to the Judeo-Christian tradition have been on the defensive since historian Lynn White published an article entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" in 1967. White contended that the increasing disruption of the global environment was the product of a science and technology which originated in Western, medieval culture. That culture accepted a "Christian" axiom, based on the Genesis story of creation, that "nature has no reason for existence save to serve man." White also believed that

Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone. Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not."  

White's analysis of the source of the problem may have been fair history, but he did not sufficiently emphasize the essential elements of Christianity upon which could be built a remedy, a new way of looking at the earth and the place of humans on it. His arguments did help to initiate the debate which is exposing the wide gulf between the expressed values and actual practice of most believers, and the powerful but neglected themes of justice and stewardship found in Judeo-Christian theology.

I will not attempt to outline the foundation for a Judeo-

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Christian environmental ethic. However, it is important to say that there is a maturing theology, based on justice, stewardship, and the uniquely Christian concept of grace, which provides the basis for action toward an equitable and ecologically sustainable future.¹ This theology should be sufficient to satisfy the pragmatists, if not the purists—both believers and nonbelievers who are working in practical ways for a better quality of life. It provides religiously-based reasons for persons of faith to act as responsible citizens and trustees of the earth, together with people who are motivated by different reasons.

The environmental ethic expressed by the church is crucial because the Northern Rockies region is facing unprecedented demands for its natural wealth of energy, timber, minerals, water, and soil. The values that underly these demands are mainly destructive and contrary to Judeo-Christian values. A dominantly exploitive view of nature results in rapid per capita growth in material consumption, resource depletion, and impairment of the productivity of natural systems. An exploitive view of human relationships—a rip-off mentality—is responsible for the inequitable sharing of costs and benefits of resource development. It has also resulted in widespread apathy and cynicism toward the political process, an attitude of powerlessness and lack of control over the future, and a sense of moral paralysis and decay.

As conflicts over resource development and use grow and intensify, they spill over into all areas of human life. A few

¹See the bibliography under "The Church and Environmental Problems."
sweeping observations here cannot adequately describe the deep social and physical wounds, the broken relationships, and the urgent need for healing. The tragic human consequences of poor planning and selfish, short-sighted use of resources are increasingly well-documented, even though they are often manifested in a variety of forms of antisocial behavior not obviously or directly linked to underlying causes.

An additional dimension in the Northern Rockies is the presence of several Indian tribes struggling to control their land and resources, maintain cultures quite distinct from the dominant one, and develop positive visions for the future. Clearly, it is an inadequate response to continue business as usual by hiring more social workers, funding more prisons and alcoholic treatment centers, and building more churches. It may be a prescription for a disastrous boom-and-bust cycle over the long run.

Because of their size, geographic dispersal, credibility, and purpose, religious communities in the Northern Rockies are uniquely suited to advocate a new set of values that will help guide the future. Such a new vision will incorporate a rediscovered ethic of neighborliness, the conviction that true wealth is spiritual, and a renewed emphasis on self-determination and self-reliance. A greater measure of control over one's life should develop together with a greater awareness of one's responsibility for the rest of the human family. A new emphasis on reconciliation, cooperation, and mutuality could replace the excessive reliance on conflict, competition, and adversary processes, which drains the meager resources of citizen groups. Such an emphasis will allow citizen groups to focus more effort on those
inevitable divergent problems that are less subject to compromise and final resolution.

Religious communities and the "public interest movement" have much to gain through complementary action in advocating and building a future with a more equitable sharing of power and resources, and which sustains the health and well-being of all people. This paper assumes a need and a desire for greater communication and cooperation between church organizations and public interest groups. The desire is often lacking because the sense of need is not clear. Church and public interest group leaders often believe that things are going along reasonably well, that they are at least holding the line and making some forward progress. They win a few victories, do competent work in their own little niches, and sometimes see little need for self-evaluation and personal and organizational growth. Occasionally they are victims of excessive pride. Even power among the powerless can breed arrogance. Yet, a broader view of the range and depth of social conflict and uncontrolled change yields a humbling perspective. The juggernaut of environmental destruction and exploitation of people rolls on, barely slowed by the machinations of a few activists of vision and conscience, Christians, Jews, or otherwise. The material resources of those working for justice and self-determination (controlled social and technological change)—all the churches and public interest groups combined—are puny in comparison with the resources of those who benefit from injustice and environmental degradation and selfishly manipulate people and the political process to maintain and increase their power.
In the rest of this paper, I hope to describe why a strong, healthy religious community (not simply, or necessarily, a large one) is important to public interest organizations, and what might be gained by such organizations' outreach to churches. I will also point out why the existence of effective public interest groups is important to the mission of the church. I will summarize the current organizational needs of churches and public interest groups, and then discuss the theological underpinnings and models of church involvement in public issues. Some evaluation and commentary on the gap between ideal and practice in church social action will be made, along with a review of some past and present church efforts in the Northern Rockies and elsewhere. Based on the theological underpinnings, models, and what has and is being done, I will make some recommendations concerning church engagement in social issues, and future relationships between churches and public interest groups in the region.
II. WHY CHURCHES ARE IMPORTANT TO PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS

Churches, taken in aggregate, form the largest network of voluntary associations in the United States. They focus and channel a vast amount of material and human resources, including money, buildings, mimeograph machines, talented leadership, a variety of skills and expertise, and large numbers of people. Membership figures for denominations which participate in state ecumenical associations in the region are found in appendix A.

George Gallup, Jr., writing in the United Church of Christ's Journal of Current Social Issues, has identified religious motivation as one of the reasons behind the current explosion in volunteerism in the U.S. One of every four people, fourteen years of age and older, now volunteers time to some non-profit organization, and over fifty percent of this volunteer time goes to churches and synagogues.¹ The reasons for the upswing in interest in religion are several, and open to a variety of interpretations. I choose to view renewed interest in spiritual matters as a hopeful sign for society and an opportunity for strengthening public interest organizations—an opportunity I believe they can ill afford to miss. For example, the current emphasis on spirituality, prayer, and meditation need not be viewed as an escape

from contemporary problems. A disciplined habit of prayer and reflection can lead to more sustained, effective action in the political realm.

Immediately one recognizes that, given human prejudice and imperfection, the imprecise and unspecific nature of much of Judeo-Christian teaching, and the pluralistic nature of American churches, many church members can be counted upon to oppose positions taken by public interest organizations. More accurately, church people can find "public interest" organizations, broadly defined, with positions compatible with their own place on the religious spectrum. Why bother to stir up a hornet's nest of religious fanatics with opposing views?

Why bother? The fundamental reason is that churches have significant political power, in a variety of forms. This power has often gone unused, in effect perpetuating an unjust status quo. At other times this power has been used, usually unintentionally, to foster injustice. Nevertheless, the ideals of justice and service to neighbors are essential features of Christianity, not optional activities for church members who wish to do a little extra. Despite stereotypes of pious, self-righteous hypocrites and well-intentioned but ill-informed do-gooders, many members of churches have internalized a genuine ethic of responsible service to society. They are used to giving of themselves, their time, talent, and money. Some are looking for new opportunities of service, and some may be weary of church routine that can sometimes become a substitute, if not an outright obstacle, to work for constructive social change.

Churches, which are in fact part of the public interest
movement, contain vast amounts of the diffuse interest in issues which is the basic raw material of the movement. My thesis is that citizen groups should be looking to this underappreciated source of human energy to expand their base of political power. Churches could gain valuable insights on citizen action and effective use of political power from public interest organizations with proven records of success.

Church affiliation implies a commitment to making members' communities and the world a better place to live. But the step from talk to action is often a gigantic one within the church. Church people spend a lot of time talking about what "ought" to be done, but usually make an active response conditional on someone else's action. Since that condition has been met by those church persons also involved in secular public interest organizations, churches are important source of people ready, at least in a relative sense, to take the step from talk to action.

A corollary reason why churches are important is the fact that some public issues have already been addressed by churches, sometimes unbeknownst to secular organization leaders. There is no guarantee that churches will begin or end with the same outlook on an issue as public interest organizations or "the movement." It is important that churches—and public interest groups—listen to all parties affected by an issue, not just to those with a more concentrated, vested interest.

For almost all public issues, whether or not churches have become involved or devoted any resources to them, there are existing ideas or arguments in churches' doctrines, traditions, and policy statements that will contribute to advancing the values of justice and
environmental health. It only remains for churches to be held accountable for practicing what they preach. From the outside, citizen groups can legitimately hold churches accountable by requesting assistance on a specific problem or by asking them to join in coalitions around specific issues. Members of citizen groups can also hold churches accountable from within, as individual members of various church organizations.

There are other reasons why citizen organizations should be concerned with the position and influence of churches in public affairs. Churches introduce, when they have a mind to, a fresh new dimension to public debate: ethical considerations. For better or worse, they attempt to fill the role of public conscience in society, and set the boundaries for good and bad behavior. Careful attention to ethical considerations will require some creative thinking on the part of both churches and citizen organizations, and some patient and persistent cooperative efforts to raise the quality of public debate. Discussions on the ethics of natural resource problems, for example, may raise more questions than answers, but such a result would generally support those who advocate prudent use of resources, who are sensitive to irreversible consequences, and who seek to turn around the trend toward destruction of the environment. Clear thinking about underlying ethical choices may make advocates of constructive social change and leaders of citizen groups squirm a bit at the inevitable ambiguities, but ultimately will make those who accept prevailing exploitive values and seek to carry out business as usual much more off balance and uncomfortable.
Another dimension—and another opportunity—is the geographical one. Churches present a pattern of organization which cuts across conventional political boundaries. It provides access and mandates responsibility to persons in all walks of life in all parts of the world. For example, we hear much of the idea that the Northern Rockies should share its natural wealth with other regions, certainly an assertion with some validity from the point of view of neighborliness. But should not those who see their land and culture turned upside-down reasonably expect their neighbors to exercise some self-restraint, to use resources wisely and efficiently? Imagine a national church convention where a rancher from Wyoming holds a fellow church member, from a large urban area at the other end of a railroad, pipeline, or transmission line, accountable for the manner in which the energy he or she uses is produced, distributed, and consumed!
III. WHY PUBLIC INTEREST ORGANIZATIONS
ARE IMPORTANT TO CHURCHES

Quite simply, public interest organizations present church
people and church organizations with multiple opportunities to carry
out the church's mission to heal and transform both individuals and
society. They provide a challenge to the church not only to bind up
wounds, but also to assist in the work to change those social struc­
tures and systems which create and perpetuate suffering. Citizen action
organizations provide the expertise, information, and access to the
political process which concerned churchpersons are, or should be,
searching for to facilitate the practical expression of their religious
convictions.

Public interest organizations also present churches with an
opportunity for reconciling ministry, a ministry that is more in the
nature of a lovers' quarrel than a battle to the death with the forces
of evil. The public interest movement is composed of people who share
the same leveling trait—sin (human fallibility, imperfection, the
capacity to miss intentionally or unintentionally the mark of some
higher moral standard)—with churchpersons, but who sometimes seem to
be aware of that trait, whatever one calls it, to about the same extent
as the outrageously pious religious hypocrites they are so often quick
to criticize. Churches ought to be holding citizen groups accountable
for their sometimes arrogant and demeaning tactics, for their occasional failure to recognize the axiom in human relations that whom one would change one must first love. By advocating constructive social change themselves, churches now less than burdened with the role of social criticism might discover new possibilities to provide spiritual nourishment, and begin to regain some of those people disillusioned with institutional religion.

To sum up this and the previous section, it is my contention that churches and public interest groups need each other. Both have missions to fulfill and can benefit by communication and cooperation. Each includes people who feel a sense of responsibility to the larger community, who reject the "free rider" ethic, and who face the same problems and obstacles. Both types of groups advocate a vision for society which seeks to move away from the dominant destructive values and practices. Yet each has its own unique areas of competence which, if adhered to, should minimize the conflict and competition over organizational resources and personal loyalties. Churches and public interest groups should view each other as friendly "targets," as indispensable allies in broadening support and building political power—votes, dollars, public opinion, skilled leadership—in the pursuit of mutually acceptable goals. Without the critical public conscience which elements of the religious community can provide, secular citizen groups must assume alone the awesome and thankless task of attempting to define the limits of right and wrong in public affairs. Without the political experience, practical skills, and technical expertise of grassroots citizen groups, church members must content themselves with dreaming
about what ought to be, without all the political resources necessary
to bring their vision closer to a living reality.
IV. ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH AND NEEDS OF CHURCHES
AND PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS

To enhance understanding of how both churches and citizen groups can be more effective in public affairs, a brief look will be taken at the internal health and status of both types of organizations. There are, of course, some striking differences, as well as some remarkable similarities. Both are concerned with organizational survival and growth. They are constituency-based, or at least accountable to a larger public. They are concerned with conducting a program, raising funds, and building and maintaining a membership or support network. For many religious organizations, lines of authority and patterns of decision-making are similar to citizen organizations. It is self-evident that although not all voluntary citizen organizations are churches, all churches are voluntary citizen organizations.

The most obvious difference between churches and citizen organizations is size. The membership of several large churches in a major city in the Northern Rockies may exceed the membership of all the citizen groups in a state, although one must acknowledge that many who affiliate with a church are only nominal members. Members of public interest groups can be expected to score higher on intensity of member commitment.

Another noticeable difference between churches and citizen
groups is the fact that churches have been around a very long time, while the rapid growth of citizen organizations in the Northern Rockies is a recent phenomenon. As organizations, churches are farther along in the process of institutionalization than those citizen groups which have indicated intent to become institutions. However, in their grasp of the range and depth of problems confronting the region which embrace energy, agriculture, and the environment, and in their awareness of alternative ways of dealing with them, citizen groups are maturing more quickly than churches.

Because of their wide diversity in outlook and emphasis, it is difficult to make generalizations about the health and immediate concerns of churches, even confining the subject to mainline churches in the Northern Rockies. Of course, churches in the region share many of the same features as churches nationally. For example, the boom in church growth in the 1950's was followed by a period of stagnation and decline in membership. At the present time there is an upward trend in total church membership, largely a result of growth in the more conservative churches which are part of the evangelical "born again" movement.

Depending on one's vantage point, all sorts of predictions can be made about the future of religion in America. Several characteristics are clear. First, mainline churches are especially concerned with growth in membership. For example, major Protestant churches, spurred by declines in membership, are placing new emphasis on evangelism. Evangelism is to the church what constituency-building is to public interest groups and marketing is to business, but it is certainly
different in quality and content. In simple terms, evangelism is the spreading of the faith. Emphasis on evangelism can be both personal and corporate. It can be directed toward bringing new individuals into the fold and making new converts, and it can focus on presenting a positive public image. In either case, Christian evangelism works for the winning or revival of commitments to Jesus Christ.

Evangelism can give a firmer basis to church social action, but many church leaders recognize that it can also become an obstacle to constructive criticism and change if it emphasizes private, personalized religious experience and escape from social problems, and attempts by the "body count" approach to make the church all things to all people. A growing and increasingly vocal group of people suggest that evangelism might best be carried out by speaking with both a critical and reconciling voice to pressing social issues, by attending to the needs of uncommitted individuals, and by simply living in a way that radiates peace and joy and a commitment to justice.

Another current emphasis in churches is fund-raising. Increases in contributions to many major denominations have been at or below the rate of inflation. The impact of financial strain has been serious for the entire work of the church, but especially for involvement in emerging social issues which have been a discretionary part of the church's agenda. Anxiety over financial stability is certainly no inducement for church organizations to become more involved in controversial and potentially divisive problems. This tension is especially present in the local congregation, which is the principal source of funds.

On the other hand, major new funding campaigns, such as the
Lutheran Church in America's Strength for Mission and the Episcopal Church's Ventures in Mission, are regarded as a way to respond to the spiritual and social needs of growing areas, such as energy boomtowns in Alaska or the Northern Plains, or the new communities in the Sun Belt. While cynics may with some justification regard this effort as simply another case of the church following the people, from the point of view of social change the new emphasis on mission can be viewed as another outstanding chance to recognize that the task of ministering to human problems is overwhelming and futile in the absence of conscious political attempts to remove the causes of problems through structural and systemic change. It is safe to predict that increasing percentages of church mission funds will be used for advocacy-related work, as church people recognize the awesome power of government and large corporations to enhance or hinder the church's work for healing and justice.

In the Northern Rockies, because of its largely rural character and dispersed population, many local churches are especially concerned with staying alive. Small and marginal, they are frequently subsidized by the parent denomination. They, or at least their clergy, are much less inclined than large, diverse, urban parishes to involve themselves in social conflict. On the positive side, rural churches may reflect the mix of individualism, neighborliness, self-reliance, and political conservatism that generally describes the region as a whole. What is positive about that mix is the sense of honesty and fair play associated with a commitment to the idea of "no such thing as a free lunch." As experienced public interest group leaders recognize, people who share these values make up what must be a significant membership overlap.
between rural churches, sportsmans' groups, agricultural organizations, and other grassroots citizen groups concerned with energy development and related issues.¹

From the emphasis on evangelism, fund-raising, and basic survival, one might gain the impression that the focus of the church has been internal, on service to itself rather than society, and on saving itself rather than the world. That impression, I believe, is generally accurate. The focus has also been largely internal when the church has dealt more directly with current social issues. Issues of race relations and human sexuality have dominated the social agendas of major denominations in recent times, whether they are Mormon or Roman Catholic or Protestant, liberal or conservative or in the middle.

Roles of men and women in the church are at the head of the list of internal issues in several denominations. The schism in the Episcopal Church, precipitated by its decision to ordain women, was voted the top religious news story in the U.S. for 1977. Reporters who cover religion voted as the number two story of the year the drive by homosexuals for understanding and acceptance by churches. On the world religious scene, the same two issues were voted by the editors of Christian Century as the number two and number four stories respectively.²

For churches with what could be called a liberal or open

¹For a case study of overlapping memberships between church and environmental/conservation organizations, see appendix B.


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approach to problems of racism and sexism, the internal emphasis represents an awareness that they must get their own houses in order before passing judgment on the rest of society. Whatever "official" position churches take or are leaning toward, the diversity among and within them assures that roles of men and women will continue to be divisive issues which test the resilience and flexibility of all major denominations.

Churches for some years now have been confronted with high expectations from racial minorities. Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant denominations have responded by establishing church-wide agencies to deal with race relations and the empowerment of minorities. Native American concerns seem to be receiving the most visible attention at the present time. Internally, the role of minority persons in the church has been a constant agenda item. Some controversy has been generated over the means for facilitating increased participation by all persons in the life of the church.

Those who wish to advocate a particular point of view in church forums have much to learn from the experience of women and racial minorities in the mainline churches. On the whole, these groups have been successful in getting the churches to respond to their demands. Other powerless groups demanding greater participation are following their pattern. Youth, the elderly, the handicapped, and others are organizing caucuses and making their presence felt. There is a trend toward small support groups and task forces concerned with simple living and less material lifestyles, and broader issues of food, energy, and environment.
Whatever the merits of all these issues, it seems reasonable to predict that churches will increasingly be centers of debate over a wide variety of public concerns which have a direct and immediate effect on church members, and which may lead them to further debate and action outside the church. For the near term, however, despite all the clamor about social issues, church efforts will be mainly directed toward building and maintaining a strong organizational foundation. To those with little tolerance of large organizations or organizations of any kind, such a focus will seem to be a diversion from the essential work of social justice. Public interest organizations which recognize the benefits of internal health and stability, however, should feel a special kinship with churches as sister voluntary organizations.

Admittedly, there is a threshold beyond which the church (or any public interest group), in its local or multinational manifestations, begins to serve itself rather than the human family. I have suggested that this threshold has been passed. The imagery of the church as the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and the leaven in the loaf is strong in the Christian tradition, and is an elegantly simple way of saying that the church and church people are called not to be uncritical pillars of an unjust status quo, but to be agents of personal and social change. The church should play the role of change agent toward the public interest movement as well as other political and social institutions, supporting them when they serve justice, and speaking a critical word of judgment when they do not.

The point to be made here is that when the church strays from its tasks in support of reconciliation and justice, it is itself in
need of salt, light, and leaven. Secular advocacy organizations are well-equipped to perform that role, organization to organization, and people to people, but too often that role has been mostly criticism, with little in the way of support. There are a distressing number of progressive social activists who apply more stringent standards of performance to churches, no matter how involved they are, than to their own secular organizations. In effect writing off churches, they fail to realize that both churches and their own groups are comprised of imperfect people. The gap between objectives and performance is simply larger, by definition, for churches than for secular citizen groups.

While public interest groups concerned with energy and environmental issues are clearly in need of salt, etc. in the form of constructive criticism from the religious community, their most immediate and obvious needs are members and money. Not only are new members and new sources of funds needed, but also new leadership and more volunteer activists. Organizations have been established and have experienced quick bursts of growth in membership, staff, and budgets. They have also won some quick victories—their political clout has exceeded their numbers up to now—but their resources are still minuscule by comparison to those who represent opposing viewpoints.

Citizen group leaders recognize the urgent need for more organizational resources as well as the need to use them with greater sophistication and efficiency. As patterns of conflict become more sharply defined, and groups recognize the intense struggle ahead and the present odds against them, there is greater awareness of the need to broaden their base of support and build a sustained political movement.
that has something to offer those who are not hard-core activists. Like churches, public interest organizations are also seeking new approaches to "evangelism" and are concerned with projecting a positive public image. A growing number of public interest group leaders are increasingly sensitive to the charge that they are unconcerned with economic health and vitality and the welfare of people. They are working to dispel the "elitist" and "obstructionist" stereotypes which have fueled the anti-environmental backlash. They are effectively beginning to put down the popular notion that they are negativists, by advocating a positive vision for the future based on equitable human relations, satisfying employment and recreational opportunities for all, and a life of humility and respect for the limits of the earth. They are more aware of the need to influence and be influenced by public opinion, and are also responding to the need to work through the electoral process for friendly faces within legislative assemblies.

In sum, public interest organizations need, and are actively seeking, fresh new approaches to issues and new avenues for influencing public policy from a broadened base of political power. In the meantime, much like churches, they must meet a budget and react to an endless succession of crises on a wide range of issues.
V. THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF CHURCH SOCIAL MINISTRY

Churches are not choice corner lots and buildings, impressive or otherwise. Churches are God's people in mission, communities of believers which gather together to develop an understanding of the will of God for the world, and which act to carry out that will in their own cultural milieu. The purpose of the church is mission and ministry. Mission is the aim of the church's entire life and work, God's work of salvation and service in a particular time and place, and the answer to the question: "Why is the church here?" Ministry is the service of people, with people, and to people.¹

There are at least two ways in which ministry, or mission, can be analyzed. One way of looking at the church's mission distinguishes between the pastoral, the priestly, and the prophetic. The pastoral function of ministry involves meeting and responding to human hurts and needs in a personalized, service-oriented way. The priestly function includes the traditional rituals and ceremonies of church life. The prophetic function is vitally concerned with the requirement that justice be done among all persons. It involves a critical word of

¹This chapter relies extensively on concepts presented in denominational social ministry handbooks: Guidelines for Social Concerns (The United Methodist Church, 1977); Social Ministry Manual (Philadelphia: Lutheran Church in America, 1977); The Servant Congregation (Minneapolis: The American Lutheran Church, 1977).
Judgment, based on biblical and theological imperatives, to both church and secular institutions and processes. It is inescapably negative in its condemnation of wrongdoing, but also positive in its vision and promise of justice. The prophetic role is the basis of the church's interest in social issues.

A second way of looking at ministry distinguishes between ministry within the community of believers and ministry beyond that community. Ministry within the church generally includes worship, fellowship, mutual care and assistance, and nurture and education in the faith. Ministry beyond the church includes two general types, evangelism and social ministry. They are distinct but inextricably interrelated. Evangelism, as mentioned earlier, emphasizes the proclamation of the good news of God's activity in the world, and its goal is to help others understand in a personal way the promise of peace of mind and "abundant life." Social ministry emphasizes people actively loving others as God loves them, and its goal is to help others toward living in wholeness, regardless of their status as believers or non-believers. Social ministry, in its prophetic aspect, places particular attention on the social setting, the systems and institutions of society.

Social ministry is not optional for Christians. It is an essential function of the church at all levels of organization. It is not motivated fundamentally by the desire to attract nonbelievers. When it appears to be, as is sometimes the case, both the deeds of Christians and their faith are suspect. Social ministry is, in essence, a loving response to people in need. It does not depend on their conversion or the conversion of whole segments of society.
The authentic life of the church has been described as a pilgrimage, or a voyage at sea, with the church tossed about by the complex and ambiguous forces of good and evil, persecuted from all sides, but confident of the safe harbor ahead. Yet to many alienated from the church, and to those critical from within, the church often gives the appearance that it believes it has already reached the security of the harbor, and has passed completely through the gates of the Kingdom of God. It appears to see little reason for social criticism and change. The most urgent need for the church today, especially local congregations, is to get out of the false security of the secular and religious status quo and into the confusion—but ultimate security—of the open sea of social ferment.

By status quo, I mean the widespread religious quietism, privatism, and escapism which seems to describe many of those who have "earthly" power and who perpetrate injustice. Also included is the sense of political powerlessness, fatigue, despair, and paralysis that often prevails among the victims of injustice, which induces them to accept religion as escape rather than as compelling them to struggle for their own and their neighbors' liberation. Acknowledgment must be made that most people are at various times in both categories.

The model for the social ministry of the Christian Church is the life of Jesus Christ. Christians are to live as "little Christs" in ministry to their neighbors, whether in the form of education, service, or action. Christians are to love their neighbors as God loves them. Such an understanding is more than an academic exercise, and it applies not only to healing existing wounds through social
service, but also to preventing them through an active witness in the
arena of public policy. As Dr. William Lazareth, Director of the
Lutheran Church in America's Department of Church and Society, writes:

Jesus insisted on action. Once in a parable he used a Samaritan,
a social outcast of his day, as the hero of a story about neighbor­
liness. When a lawyer who listened to Jesus' tale identified
correctly the Samaritan as the real, serving neighbor to an injured
traveler, Jesus told him: "Go and do likewise."

Culbert G. Rutenber, in The Reconciling Gospel, adapts the
parable of the Good Samaritan to demonstrate that it is the Christian
thing to do to organize and act to effect social change:

Suppose the Good Samaritan, later, had formed a committee—The
Committee for Making the Jericho Road a Safe Highway. Suppose
the committee had put on a big publicity campaign and forced City
Hall to string light along the Jericho Road, to remove the shrub­
bery in which the thieves were accustomed to hide before pouncing,
and to increase the number of policemen who patrolled the road?
Why . . . would not this too be a form of neighbor love? And if
City Hall refused because it was in cahoots with the thieves, who
regularly "paid off" the politicians, would it not be an act of
kindness to all potential future victims for the committee to
agitate for the removal of the grafters in the next election and
the installation of an administration which would do these things?
If the motive were the same—the love of Christ and the neighbor—
would not this, too, be a form of Christian good deeds. True, this
involves corporate action rather than individual action and there­
fore is a kind of love-at-a-distance (as someone had defined jus­
tice), being more indirect. But what of that? How many kinds of
good works are exempted from the injunction to perform "all good
works?"

The story has limitless adaptations. Today the emphasis might
be on providing employment opportunities for potential thieves. The

1 William Lazareth, "Biblical and Theological Insights," in
Social Ministry Manual, ed. Frank W. Klos (Philadelphia: Parish Life

2 Culbert G. Rutenber, The Reconciling Gospel (Nashville: Broad­
Agenda," in The Chicago Declaration, ed. Ronald J. Sider (Carol Stream,
point is the same. The church is to look behind chronic social problems for basic causes, and it must attempt to remedy those causes. For example, if the church knows from its own painful experience that strip mining of coal in Appalachia has produced sterile land and impoverished people, it has an obligation to prevent a replay of the same tragic drama in the Northern Plains.

But what about the separation of church and state? Should not the church stick to preaching the Gospel? Isn't the church becoming too "worldly" when it engages in the messy business of politics, rather than reflecting on pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by? Nonsense. Nowhere in mainstream Christian thought is there a theology of silence on social issues. The posture represented by the questions above has been a major pitfall of the church in every age. It has been described as the turtle-in-the-shell approach to human problems, a do-nothing quietism that traps those who wish to forget that an inescapable part of the church's mission is the transformation of social structures. It results in either the acceptance of the status quo with a view of the world through rose-colored glasses, or, at the other extreme, rejection and escape from such a hellish place. Either view ignores responsible prophetic criticism and action for change.

The opposite pitfall has been called the bull-in-the-china-shop approach. It is a busy activism, a rushing to do something, without regard for the biblical and theological hows and whys. Those who are captured by it fail to recognize their roots in a ministry of love and justice, and frequently are tempted by clear and simple answers to complex and ambiguous issues.
In the past, the church's social ministry has been crippled by a dualistic separation of church and society, reflected by quiet withdrawal and careless activism. Those who attempt to justify this classic false dichotomy ignore the fact that individual persons are both members of a political community (secular) and members of a religious community (sacred). Thus, as William Lazareth expresses it, affirming the Christian faith means to "reaffirm the sacred secularity of God's people as we serve others, through peace, justice, and freedom in the world."¹

To describe the relation of Christians to the world another way, the church is the fellowship of those whom God has paradoxically called out of the world in order to do God's service in it. In oversimplified terms, church members are "not of" this world in their refusal to accommodate to the existence of individual and corporate wrongdoing, including their own, and their acceptance through the gift of faith of the promise of a better way which transcends present human weakness. However, the gift of reason tells them that they are very much in the world as part of God's creation.

One temptation is to become the well-intentioned but destructive bull, "of" this world while in it. The other temptation is to withdraw into the shell, pretending that one is "not in" the world, while indulging a pride (and often conspicuous consumption as well) that is really "of" it. Through "sacred secularity," Christians become the light which illumines, the yeast which transforms, and the salt which flavors. They

are also to be the "dung" of the earth, in solidarity with the out­
cast, powerless, and disenfranchised—the world's victims and have­
nots. Fundamentally, Christians are to be social change agents. The
church as the country club "city on the hill," seemingly successful,
content, and blessed with material abundance, is certainly not an
authentic church if that wealth has been gained through reckless
exploitation of people and the environment.

It may be inferred from the above discussion that individual
church members and the church must take sides on every issue. Such
is not the case. But before leaving this general review of the theo­
logical basis for church involvement in social issues, one important
observation must be made. When church involvement in controversy over
public policy does occur, whether or not in an advocacy role, objec­
tions are usually based on something other than theological or biblical
grounds, although they are frequently couched in churchy sounding
slogans (e.g. "the separation of church and state"). Basically, for
the lay person, it depends on which side of an issue one is already
on. If church engagement threatens one's position, the church is
"meddling in politics." If the church supports one's position, it is
"speaking courageously and prophetically to the vital human problems
of the day."

Reference has been made earlier to the "reconciling" task of
the church. This reconciling role involves building bridges, facil­
itating communication between divergent groups, and generally raising
the quality of public debate. Reconciliation involves all people
everywhere, in all their conflicting roles. None are excluded, even
the most ardent nonbelievers. The church as a "mediating structure" in society becomes what William Lazareth calls a place where people can disagree with each other—even dislike each other—and still love each other.

The mandate of reconciliation, although essential, is sometimes an obstacle to constructive social change when it becomes an excuse to avoid taking a stand on a public issue. The reconciling or mediating role must be carried out with great sensitivity, because reconciliation can easily become a process of getting the have-nots to reconcile themselves to their position of relative powerlessness. There are those within the church who argue the impossibility not of genuine reconciliation on some occasions, but of cheap neutrality on all occasions, and discern a mandate to stand with people against those forces and factors which demean them.

The tension between advocacy and reconciliation or neutrality can be creative as well as destructive. Much depends on the specific circumstances of the issues. The point need not be debated further here when one recalls that the church is not monolithic. On many and the same issues, one part of the church may be engaged in reconciliation while another part is engaged in advocacy, with both parts on firm biblical and theological grounds. Reconciliation is usually more comfortable and less risky, at least for those church members not personally present in the middle of a dispute as reconciling agents. It is therefore preferred by most conflict-abhoring Christians, who also happen to be among the affluent and powerful, and who regard themselves as neither victims of injustice nor oppressors.
Two other "theological" obstacles to church involvement in social issues need to be mentioned. The first is a dogmatic belief, intensely held by many who claim the Christian faith, in imminent apocalypse and the coming of the new millenia. Why change one's lifestyle, or go mad carrying the world's burdens or working for social change, when all indications are that prophecy is being fulfilled and the present age will very soon come to an end? This feeling has always been present in the church, in a number of vocal people, but it is usually found today amongst more fundamentalist sects. Whenever and however a discontinuity occurs, such as rapid depletion of fossil fuels, a nuclear holocaust, or the second coming of Christ, stewardship of God's Creation and work for justice remain Christian imperatives.

Another obstacle to social engagement, which also lacks sound theological support, is the excessive emphasis on individual sin or wrongdoing and the unwillingness to recognize the existence of corporate evil. The result is a tendency to blame individuals for social problems instead of looking more deeply into social structures and systems for basic causes. Fatigue, discouragement, fatalism ("It's human nature" and "The poor will always be with you"), and/or "bullish" scapegoating are the consequences, often combined with escapist feelings of impending apocalypse. Mainline churches are generally further along in recognizing the pervasive nature of corporate sin than more conservative, evangelical churches. Awareness of such "cruelty systems" as exploitive foreign trade relationships has made righteous indignation and compassionate outrage new political virtues.
for Christians, and has generated a growing feeling that "something can be done."
VI. ANALYTICAL MODELS OF CHURCH SOCIAL ACTION

Most objections to the church's engagement in public policy debates and social action have to do with matters of strategy and tactics, the "hows" of church involvement rather than the "whys." This section will review ways churches can become involved in social issues and participate in the formulation and implementation of public policy. A Danish political scientist, Jørgen Lissner, has identified four distinct functions which church organizations may perform in working for social change (see figure I).¹ These functions can take place at any level of church organization, and can occur simultaneously.

The first function is that of sensitizing the church's own members to thinking about public responsibility and the relation of the church's message to contemporary social and ethical questions. It involves a long-term process of preaching, teaching, and rooting members in the faith, so that they will have a framework of analysis which they can apply to specific problems. It does not involve the propagation of specific political solutions based on "proof-texts" from the Bible.

The second function is that of caring for victims of social

and political conflict or unjust systems. It is the social service function for which churches are well-known, and which they usually have performed competently, given the amount of resources available and the magnitude of the problems. Caring deals with the casualties of social problems more than with the causes. Its goal is to help hurting persons, not to change the structures which hurt them. The caring function can create controversy. For instance, some churches have suffered financially because they have provided occasional legal assistance to individuals who would otherwise be without adequate defense in criminal cases.

The third function is **diplomatic** in character. It involves working quietly through personal persuasion to influence decision-makers who wield political and economic power. It seeks to remove causes of suffering with the tactfulness and discretion of diplomacy, outside the limelight of confrontation and public visibility.

The fourth role is the **tribunal** function. It, like the diplomatic function, is part of the "prophetic" task of the church. Through this function the church seeks to influence both those who hold significant political power, and the general public—often the former through the latter. The church does so by passing judgment on specific social ills and by voicing an ethical position based on its biblical/theological tradition. In the tribunal function, the church becomes visible. Members and leaders of the church go public, writing letters and issuing statements.

Charles Lutz, in *The Servant Congregation*, presents the above four functions as "ways of thinking" about social ministry. Another way
of thinking is depicted by a figure eight, which can describe individuals, congregations, and even the entire institutional church (see figure II). The figure eight represents the dynamic tension between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the life of a church member, between the relationship with God and the public commitment to become more involved with human problems. "Altar" symbolizes the arena where faith is nourished. "Street" represents the arena where church members grapple with daily human needs. The diagram does not pit one position or group against another. Positions are simply stages in the full sweep of the church's activity for peace and justice. In the current jargon, they represent where people are "at" and where they are "coming from."

Position One, the critical evangelicals, represents the restless believers with strong personal faith and growing concern about the connection between their faith and their various roles in the world. They tend to see religion and politics alike as private matters, but grasp the essential relationship between worship and public service. They desire a more visible link between religion and the rest of life, soundly rooted in traditional teachings, and they become involved in social issues.

Position Two, hopeful activists, represents those who are in the early stages of expressing social and political concerns. Many are engaged in the social welfare or social service aspect of social ministry, and have potential for moving into more direct action. Hopeful activists are the transition from charity to justice.

Between the hopeful activists and the restless activists are
the committed activists. Chances are they sooner or later become over­whelmed by pessimism or cynicism and recall the strength and comfort of the altar. They move into Position Three, the restless or critical activists, still committed to working for justice and social change, but aware that the depth of fear and resistance touches religious roots. Some have become very critical of institutions and are alien­ated or disconnected from the formal church ("drop-aheads"). Because of their awareness of the deeper questions of value and belief, many are open to contact with the religious community because they recognize its potential as a force for change. In fact, they are often more aware of the potential of the church than the church itself. The temptation of this group, however, is to give up too quickly on the institutional church. Ways need to be found to link the efforts of critical activists outside church organizations with those within the established religious community.

Position Four, the hopeful evangelicals or hopeful believers, includes those who find renewed strength in religious experience and who recognize a need for justice and spiritual roots. They may be driven back to the church by frustration, despair, and a greater awareness of the depth and ambiguity of social problems. Some may simply be seeking escape from engagement. Others are attempting to change the church by restoring its primary function of love and jus­tice.

For any individual, movement through the figure eight may hap­pen several times a day or even continuously, like breathing or a heartbeat. A congregation or a denomination may have members scattered
all around the figure eight at any moment. Like the "turtle-in-the-shell" and "bull-in-the-china-shop" moods, trends can be discerned in the life of U.S. churches taken as a whole. The 1950's were strong "altar" years, the 1960's were "street" years, and now the emphasis has shifted again to more personal religious experience.

The key features of the figure eight are its sense of movement and its affirmation of diversity. In church language, evangelism becomes social action, and social action becomes evangelism. The great temptation is to remain static at one point, but no point is inherently better than another. All are ways of expressing the mission of the church.

In addition to "ways of thinking" about social ministry, Charles Lutz has identified four major tasks under "some ways of organizing social ministry."

1. **Social analysis**—finding out what needs are unmet, studying what private and public agencies are doing about them, and identifying issues which the church should be concerned with in the future.

2. **Social education**—setting up opportunities for learning, working through existing education channels, including social concerns in worship services, identifying resources for study, and sponsoring conferences and community forums. Typical study topics include the biblical and theological basis for social ministry, substantive social issues, and organizational processes of public agencies.

3. **Social service**—responding to routine and emergency needs,

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1. Ibid., p. 21.
recruiting volunteers, raising funds, collecting materials, and managing direct service programs such as day-care centers and meals-on-wheels.

Social action (social change)—disseminating information to members on public policy decisions at all levels of government, formulating resolutions for consideration by church bodies, participating in direct action efforts such as distributing leaflets, circulating petitions, and letter-writing. While action is a necessary part of study and service, a more restricted use of the term "action" describes any activity directed toward changing structures and institutions. Its goal is to prevent the emergence of a problem or hurt, or at least minimize the negative consequences and the number of victims. Action applied to the structural causes of problems includes such programs as anti-redlining campaigns and legislative action networks.

Other mainline denominations approach social ministry with a similar analytical framework. The Guidelines for Social Concerns of the United Methodist Church identifies education, service, and action components. The Social Ministry Manual of the Lutheran Church in America discusses the same three dimensions of social ministry, and relates each dimension to a profile, or level of visibility (see figure III). Profile is related to the quantity or degree of difference of opinion that might be expected. Social ministry is often suspect because it frequently leads to conflict situations. However,

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1 Guidelines for Social Concerns (The United Methodist Church, 1977).

conflict is neither inevitable nor undesirable, and the intensity of potential conflict may vary widely for a number of reasons. The Lutheran Church in America manual argues for a more comprehensive view of the various levels of member acceptance and conflict inherent in possible actions. Churches need to provide appropriate points of entry for all members and promote a common acceptance of diversified activities.

High profile activities, which are of the most concern to this paper, are designed to challenge and redirect attitudes, behavior patterns, and institutional structures. Some change can be accomplished by discussion and persuasion. Frequently, the only alternative is to organize for the purpose of generating more political power. Needless to say, sharp disagreements and intense displays of emotion can be expected.

A word of caution is in order. The dimensions and profiles of social ministry are an oversimplification of reality. First, social ministry programs related to public policy do not necessarily have to be high profile. Public policy questions can be raised to some degree in all profiles. Second, it is difficult to generalize about social ministry programs in specific denominations or the religious sector as a whole. What may be a high profile activity in one congregation may be a low profile activity in another of the same denomination.
## FIGURE I

**ROLES OF THE CHURCH IN MOVEMENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNCTION</th>
<th>TYPE OF MINISTRY</th>
<th>RESOURCES USED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitizing or</td>
<td>Nurture—formation</td>
<td>Our proclamation of the biblical faith, The Word of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientizing</td>
<td>of Christian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>consciousness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Our preaching and teaching, the whole of corporate worship and building faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Social service</td>
<td>Our people and caring communities, beginning with congregations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Our financial resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic</td>
<td>Intercession</td>
<td>Our contacts, relationships with those having earthly power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Our presence as a significant human organization in society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribunal</td>
<td>Prophetic</td>
<td>Our moral authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>witness</td>
<td>Our claim to relative disinterestedness, to be un-partisan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE II


FIGURE III

DIMENSIONS AND PROFILES OF SOCIAL MINISTRY

DIMENSIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult forum on biblical foundations of social ministry</td>
<td>Clothing drive</td>
<td>Joining IMPACT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profiles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Profile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study groups on the LCA social statements</th>
<th>Sponsoring refugees for resettlement</th>
<th>Supporting candidates for office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conducting a seminar on gay rights</td>
<td>Founding a halfway house</td>
<td>Organizing a rent strike</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VII. CHURCH STRUCTURE AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

A brief look at the structure of church organizations and a few words about church decision-making processes are necessary additions to a review of the conceptual framework for church social action and efforts to influence public policy.

"The church" as "the people of God" actually includes several discrete types of organizations. **Denominations** are large-scale membership organizations united to varying degrees around unique mixes of doctrinal, ethnic, or geographic traditions. They are the basic national units of the church. Examples include denominations such as the Unitarian Universalist Association, the United Church of Christ, the American Lutheran Church, the United Pentecostal Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

**Ecumenical** and **interfaith organizations** are composed of different denominations and different faiths, respectively. These terms also apply to occasions or events where people of different traditions cooperate on a formal or informal basis. Ecumenical organizations include such groups as the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, the Lutheran Council in the USA, the National Association of Evangelicals, state associations or councils of churches, and community ministerial associations. Their primary constituencies are member churches, and thus they are a step removed from the grassroots.
membership of participating denominations. They frequently serve as umbrellas for a number of relatively autonomous special interest groups, such as hunger or prison reform task forces.

Church auxiliaries are a third type of organization. Organizations in this broad category may be ecumenical or denominational, and may or may not be membership based, but are related with varying degrees of independence to larger church bodies or particular denominational traditions. I include within this category special youth, campus, and outdoor (camping) ministries, denominational lay men's and women's groups, and a host of special interest groups such as the National Indian Lutheran Board, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, the Episcopal Church and Society Network, the Methodist Federation for Social Action, the United Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, and the American Friends Service Committee. Of special note are WHEAT (World Hunger Education and Action Together), an ecumenical effort to organize the grassroots membership on hunger issues, and IMPACT, the publishing arm and grassroots citizen-action network of the Washington Interreligious Staff Council (WISC) and its several special interest task forces. WISC is the association of professional staff of over twenty-five national Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish offices in Washington, D.C. Its top issue priority is food policy, which it responds to through the Interreligious Task Force on U.S. Food Policy.

The last category I call citizen groups. These are membership organizations which exist independently of more traditional church structures and authority. Perhaps the most well-known is Church Women United. Another is Bread for the World, a citizen advocacy group
concerned with domestic and international food policy and broadly related concerns such as full employment. Clergy and Laity Concerned, which grew out of the Indochinese War era, has broadened its work into a number of issues, including human rights, food policy, and agri-business concentration.

Church decision-making processes defy generalization and easy categorization. Denominations are large national and sometimes international bureaucracies, organized in a roughly hierarchical way which may or may not provide significant clues to how the organization actually functions and decisions are made and implemented. Appendix C presents the organizational structures of a national church and a regional judicatory which are more or less typical of major Protestant denominations. Any organizational chart belies the dynamic flow of information, opinion, and resources within a denomination. The fundamental unit of any denomination is the local congregation. A public issue should normally be raised at the local level and pursued through the chain of organization, but entry can legitimately be made at almost any level. Denominations usually have national church agencies whose responsibility it is to raise public issues and bring them before the membership.

Mainline churches can be found somewhere along a continuum between a fairly rigid hierarchy, such as the Roman Catholic Church, and loose, decentralized associations, such as the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ). Churches with a more authoritarian structure can sometimes respond quickly to public issues, for example, in the form of a public statement or endorsement by a bishop who can
legitimately claim to speak in the name of the whole church, if not for each of its members. More decentralized churches react corporately to public issues through an often painfully slow process of consensus-building that may take years, during which church leaders may state their own personal opinions on specific issues or positions, but must refrain from committing the corporate church itself to a particular policy. By then the need for a corporate position may have passed. Of course, there are churches with decentralized structures and more democratic traditions which have national agencies involved in public issues, without the explicit support of a corporate statement. This involvement may represent a perspective at wide variance with the views of the membership.

A key point is that each denomination probably contains as much diversity of view as there is across denominations. The essential and often difficult task is to discover who is speaking for whom, and by what authority. It saves much confusion and possible damage to one's position if such matters are made explicitly clear from the beginning.

Ecumenical organizations also lack a consistent pattern of decision-making on public issues. Unanimity is desirable, but not always possible. For some organizations, it is mandatory on certain matters. In such instances, corporate statements tend to be of a very general nature, or serve to call attention to problems without advocating specific solutions. On the other hand, ecumenical organizations also tend to made up of the most "progressive" elements of their member denominations. These like-minded people are only
indirectly accountable to a membership, and at times can be expected to take positions not clearly representative of their constituencies.
VIII. REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF CHURCH INVOLVEMENT
IN SOCIAL ISSUES

The intent of this section is to review more specifically ways in which religious concern about social issues can be expressed, and look at examples of current church involvement in food, energy, and environmental problems. It will mention some activities of national church agencies, but focus on issues and events of importance to the Northern Rockies. A major objective of this section is to demonstrate that there is more to social ministry than what appears on the surface. The individual church member often has little awareness of all the social ministry activities of the member's own congregation, let alone the parent denomination and the ecumenical programs in which it participates. The average member has little knowledge of the enormous potential and need for expanded, more effective social ministry. A second objective is to stir the imagination of those who have mixed feelings toward the church—and most everyone does—by providing a glimpse of the multitude of ways and points of access through which anyone can become involved with churches in working for social change.

Before launching into a review of church social "action," or efforts more directly related to public policy, it is important to note the status of "social service" activities. Criminal justice
issues and food policy are two of the most conspicuous examples where church social service efforts revealed a need for changes in public policy. As church people attempted to keep up with the biblical mandate to visit the imprisoned and feed the hungry, some began to discover deep-rooted social and institutional factors that contributed to these problems. Church organizations have for a number of years been advocates in the public arena for changes in criminal justice and food policies. Now a rippling or multiplier effect is taking place in the minds of some church people. A look at food policy draws one into the conflict between sustainable agriculture and more centralized, high-technology food and energy production based on nonrenewable natural resources. A look at criminal justice reveals problems of unemployment, unstable energy boomtowns, and treatment of Native Americans and other racial minorities.

In the Northern Rockies, a number of church people recognized the incipient boom and potentially disastrous impact of rapid resource development, especially of coal, but also of oil and gas, oil shale, uranium, and other minerals. The initial emphasis was—and still is—on providing pastoral ministry to both old and new residents, and on securing necessary community services. There is a growing awareness that more churches and better community services simply cannot keep pace with the often tragic human and environmental consequences of how we produce, distribute, and consume energy. Higher incidences of cancer, respiratory disease and other illness, divorce, alcoholism, suicide, child abuse, spouse-battering, vandalism, involuntary mental hospital admissions, etc. have caused a few church people to think...
critically and search their own religious traditions for insights into better ways of meeting genuine energy needs, caring for the earth, and promoting wholesome human relationships. Certainly any consideration of the quality of life after resources are severely depleted ought to make all reasonable people do some hard thinking about the present way of doing business.

At the vanguard of church efforts to confront energy developments in Wyoming is the Board of Ministry to Impacted Areas (BMIA), a people-oriented ecumenical ministry that is carrying out both preventive and problem-solving programs. Its highest priorities for 1978, not necessarily in the order stated, were to:

— support and stimulate clergy and other church leadership to participate collaboratively in community efforts to relieve/resolve people problems and improve the quality of life in communities facing impact in the state of Wyoming.

— assist local churches within specific impact communities to design action programs. The target areas for 1978 are Sweetwater County, Rawlins, and Sheridan.

— secure additional funding.

— maintain and enhance relationships with other Wyoming agencies and organizations concerned with impact, especially the Powder River Basin Resource Council.¹

The Board of Ministry to Impacted Areas has been involved in such activities as the organization of a child protection council in Sweetwater County and a crisis intervention program in Carbon County. The preventive aspect of BMIA has not included extensive education or advocacy efforts in energy and environmental policy, but if it follows the traditional pattern of church social engagement, it can be expected

¹ Wyoming Church Coalition, Church Letter, April 1978.
Filling a similar niche in Montana is the Eastern Montana Ecumenical Team Ministry (EMETM). It places less emphasis on social service than MIYA (neither can strictly be labelled a social service organization, since both include significant elements of education and action on issues which are related to matters of public policy). The most visible ministry of EMETM is its sponsorship of a remarkable regional newspaper, The Windmill, which is published monthly. The newspaper's primary objective is to provide channels for reader expression and communication which promote mutual understanding. It also aims to:

examine any current issues which strongly affect the lives of eastern Montanans and to advocate those ideas which seem best to support human values. These values include educational and economic opportunity, social justice, a healthful living place, a respectful relationship to the natural elements, religious and artistic experiences and freedom to plan one's own future in ways compatible with mutual good.1

It is now appropriate to turn to more specific ways churches can relate religious faith to public policy. Richard Neuhaus, in Christian Faith and Public Policy--Thinking and Acting in the Courage of Uncertainty, identifies nine "reasonably discrete" ways in which churches can influence public policy.2 The close observer must be alternately despairing and rejoicing at the level of church involvement in public issues through these nine broad methods. Any candid analysis, however, must reach the conclusion that churches have a tremendous gap...
between belief and practice, and between opportunity and action.

Prayer and Proclamation

Rooting concern for social change and public policy in the prayer life, preaching, and worship events of the church can overcome the popular divorce between religious piety and political responsibility, and the conventional dichotomy between comfort (pastoral) and challenge (prophetic). The church affirms the idea of civil order as such, but with the understanding that any given order is marked by intolerable injustices and is always under judgment. Prayer and preaching can be both supportive and critical regarding any particular ideology or policy question, but the church's most frequent witness will be "no" to particular injustices, rather than "yes" to specific policy proposals. Worship must be keenly attuned to the perceptions and needs of the powerless, the victims of existing policies and practices. Neuhaus claims that the more deeply immersed one is in the biblical and classic Christian tradition, the more profoundly radical is the critique of the social order. Neuhaus and others argue that authentic prayer, for example, compels action in pursuit of justice.

The clergy have, on the whole, failed to bridge the gap between piety and political responsibility in their sermons. The Bible, theological journals and other religious periodicals, common liturgy and prayers, and everyday life experiences are full of possible themes related to justice and care of the earth. Secular holidays such as Thanksgiving have provided an opportunity to focus on food policy. Sun Day inspired sermons and worship events on the theme of renewable
energy. Soil Stewardship Week and Soil Stewardship Sunday, sponsored by the National Association of Conservation Districts, have an established place on the church calendar and provide an excellent opportunity for raising environmental issues. At other times during the church year, and even during each worship service, human rights and minority concerns could be expressed.

When themes of justice and care of the earth are used at all, they are normally dealt with in a very general way, unless the position of the parent denomination on a specific issue is unequivocal. Many clergy manage to take up a controversial topic from the pulpit without revealing their own moral positions. They mention controversy without at all being controversial themselves. There are inspiring exceptions, but too often I have left a worship service with the gnawing suspicion that each lay person, using the powers of selective perceptive, came away with his or her own views on issues reinforced, no matter how widely divergent those views might be. Usually there is little opportunity to confirm or deny that suspicion.

Yet there are indications that a majority of people in the mainline churches believe that they and their churches should be addressing more specifically the public policy questions which crowd in on their lives the rest of the week. To the end of lessening whatever imbalance exists between the pastoral and prophetic functions of preaching, ministers are legitimate objects of constructive criticism from lay people. Ministers should be willing to elaborate on what they have said to an essentially captive audience, and many would be moved by any expression of interest in their sermons. In the
meantime, as one sociological study of ministers concluded, "So long as efforts to arouse the average parish clergyman on such human issues as peace, poverty, prejudice, and justice are no more successful than they have been so far, Sunday will remain the same: the American silent majority sitting righteously in the pews listening to silent sermons."¹

**Cultivated Civic Virtue and Piety**

This way of relating faith to policy has to do with the character and limits of Christian political action. Civic virtue, or civility, is an exercise in restraint, a combination of commitment and deference which recognizes an ultimate worth and sacred personhood in even the most unscrupulous opponent. To Christians, all public policy positions are provisional. They seek neither the last word nor the destruction of opponents. They recognize the irony of the political experience, the high moral ambiguity of most issues, and the fact that politics makes very strange bedfellows. They believe the political and social order is under God's judgment, and God alone has the last word. Christians should resist the temptation to idolize the political process or make a false religion out of narrow nationalism or provincialism. Even so, Christians can engage in politics with an intense, even religious sense of urgency, motivated by solidarity with the human family and the obligation to bear one another's burdens.

The themes of reconciliation and responsible citizenship

require further elaboration under the category of promoting civility and order. There has been a distinct lack of civility among people and groups that bring conflicting views to issues of food, energy, and environment. It is noticeable even among parties who are supposed to be on the same side. One of the most important efforts the church could make to promote justice would be an attempt to "humanize" and raise the quality of debate, and bring to fruition the concept of universal human kinship which is fundamental to Christianity. Church leaders have taken an active part in bringing together opposing sides in labor disputes, civil rights conflicts, and now energy and agriculture conflicts such as the one over a high voltage transmission line in Minnesota. The effectiveness of reconciliation efforts is difficult to determine. There is no doubt that the presence of church leaders relieved tensions at Wounded Knee, and at the Bicentennial Celebration at the Little Big Horn. In some cases, a reconciling approach may be the only prudent course of action. In other instances the church's role as reconciling agent may complement or hinder church advocacy efforts. A division of labor may develop when some church organizations adopt an advocacy role and others play a reconciling role, as in the case of the J.P. Stevens Company labor dispute. As mentioned earlier, however, reconciliation can become a cheap way out of taking a stand based on reasonably clear theological imperatives, and it can become simply the reconciliation of the have-nots to the existing inequitable social order.

Two organized efforts toward reconciliation are now developing through the churches in the Northern Rockies. The Montana Association
of Churches has given approval for establishment of a neutral observer corps, composed of clergy, or clergy and lay people. Its purpose would be to provide the presence of a neutral third party in situations of potentially violent confrontation. It would be based on a working model in South Dakota which has been used in Indian-white conflicts.

A second effort is an incipient membership organization called the Midwest League, an ambitious undertaking which would operate in the Northern Plains and the Upper Midwest to bring together different parties for "direct solutions" to "omnibus food/energy/environment" problems, before open conflicts break out in the courts or regulatory agencies. Local churches would be used as neutral "local auspices," the nonthreatening common ground on which all sides could get together, as individual people. Churches would not act as formal mediators, but provide a less-definable presence as a "mediating force." Whatever the merits and problems associated with an idea like the Midwest League, it has attracted high-level support from politicians and leaders of industry and public interest groups. Its guiding hand, a seminary professor, has seen the process work successfully on an electric utility issue in Minnesota.

In evaluating efforts to cultivate civic virtue and piety and promote reconciliation, one must conclude that the enabling of responsible citizenship has been a seriously neglected part of the church's ministry. Churches have, for the most part, not encouraged their members to recognize the enormous political responsibility that is theirs in a democratic society. They have not effectively made the
connection between religious belief and active involvement as voters, taxpayers, and members of interest groups. The latent power of citizens in a democracy is undeniable, and yet church members have been as apathetic as the rest of the public. The nonuse of political power is nothing less than poor stewardship of the resources at the citizen's disposal. Church leaders are seldom reluctant to communicate a sense of urgency when it comes to stewardship of financial resources and the balancing of budgets. They are generally much quieter when it comes to encouraging better stewardship of political power, even with such relatively low profile activities as values clarification exercises, voter registration drives, or sponsorship of forums for political candidates. There is a substantial body of writing on Christian citizenship, but seldom does it filter out to the grassroots, and seldom are words of encouragement heard from the pulpit.¹ There are delightful exceptions here too, however. The Helena, Montana, Ministerial Association sponsored a well-attended candidates' forum before the June 1978 primary election. Members of the clergy have publicly advocated membership in specific secular citizen organizations (e.g. Environmental Information Center, Northern Plains Resource Council) for those concerned about energy and agricultural issues.

The Internal Politics of the Christian Community

This category refers to the fact that how the church orders its own affairs is a significant political experiment in itself. The

¹See the bibliography for references on Christian citizenship.
internal life of religious communities can be judgment, light, and salt to the outside. Especially important within the church is the reconciling function, the bridging of gaps which divide people and the emphasis on universals which bring people together across racial, class, and ideological lines. As mentioned earlier, mainline churches in the 1960's and 1970's have reoriented themselves to provide for greater participation of women and racial minorities. When a church tolerates and encourages creative conflict, it ought to speak well for it rather than serve as an indictment. The church ought to be criticized most when it suppresses conflict and diversity of view.

Neuhaus stresses the transnational character of religious communities, and the church's extraordinary potential for contributing to a greater awareness of human interdependence across geographical and political boundaries. This transcendent feature of churches provides exciting, but often overlooked, opportunities for building bridges between different geographic areas. Churches have brought together their own members who are from different races and economic conditions. American Methodists are getting to know the problems of Kenyan Methodists, and North American Lutherans are supporting the struggle of Namibian Lutherans for self-determination. Churches are now putting more effort into bringing together members with different perspectives on basic economic issues, such as agriculture or alternatives to a military economy. In short, the church offers a unique meeting ground for church members who see themselves at opposite ends of unjust relationships. Imagine the new perspectives gained when self-described Archie Bunker-type, Midwestern, Lutheran farmers lived
with urban, black, Episcopal families in Washington, D.C. during the farm strike!

**Individual Christian Vocation**

Individual Christian vocation refers more specifically to church members who are employed in public life. In supporting such vocations, the church must maintain a healthy skepticism about the claims of the political process, while combating cynicism about politics and politicians. Church members who engage in public life as a vocation, whether in electoral politics, or in government or non-governmental service, should be supported both affirmatively and critically.

Religious affiliation is certainly no guarantee of right behavior among citizens or professional public servants of any kind. The civic righteousness of nonbelievers is frequently a judgment upon church members. The church has often been uncritical of Christian politicians who compromise justice, and hesitant to praise the actions of unorthodox or nonbelieving peace activists, environmentalists, and others with a passionate commitment to justice. Church membership too often has been, and should not be, the principal criterion for individual or corporate support of public servants. The church should support those who are best equipped to exercise public service and promote justice.

**Research and Education**

Research by church organizations on public policy matters has two chief aims. The first is to provide guidance on public issues.
to members, both citizen generalists and vocational specialists. The second aim is to assist churches in formulating collective positions on public issues when such positions are deemed appropriate. Research is one way of attempting to make sure that when the church speaks about public issues, it knows what it is talking about. In conducting research, the church should closely examine the operative assumptions in all policy questions, and pay particular attention to the assumptions which have to do with values by which a society lives.

Churches have a mixed record when it comes to research on public issues. Some have almost no programs for sustained research. Others have strong staff support and an established process for utilizing theological and other expertise in seminaries, colleges, parishes, and public life. Most church research on public policy takes place at the national level, and is carried out by denominations, ecumenical organizations, and special centers for the study of theology and public policy. Much research is simply the collection of diverse perspectives from resources available to the church. For example, the National Council of Churches has held meetings on energy in an attempt to arrive at a corporate position. It sponsored an Energy Ethics Consultation in October 1977 that brought together a list of people which a read a bit like an environmentalists' "Who's Who."

In the Spring of 1978, the Bishops' Committee for Human Values of the Roman Catholic Church co-sponsored a conference on Christian Ethics and Energy. A national consultation on nuclear energy was sponsored by the Lutheran Church in America in March 1978. National church agencies have held several regional meetings around the country to
gather views on food and energy issues, such as grain reserves and the 160-acre limitation on federal irrigation water.

In the Northern Rockies, churches generally do not have the resources for adequate research on regional issues. A notable exception is the Roman Catholic Church, which is large enough to support staff research on a few selected public issues, primarily related to education, social welfare, and the promotion of family values. The Montana Catholic Conference has held a series of meetings on energy problems. Research is also an important part of the work of the Montana Association of Churches and its affiliate, the Montana Religious Legislative Coalition, but it depends almost entirely on volunteer labor.

Research must be combined with education of the church's membership, informing them on issues and enabling them to be more disciplined and reflective in their own thinking. The church's response to energy, food, and environmental issues has been mainly through educational efforts aimed at outlining various choices and consequences and presenting insights into a lifestyle consistent with belief. Emphasis on personal lifestyle and the tradeoffs between material and spiritual wealth will probably continue to be high on the church's agenda, overshadowing, if not actually substituting for, efforts at direct action or political advocacy. That is not to say that changes in habits of consumption are unimportant. A growing number of churches and church people have taken seriously the call to energy conservation and more sensible food production, and are involved in renewable energy projects, community gardens, and similar efforts. Unfortunately, there
are still not very many highly visible models of "elegant frugality" among or within local congregations, and education for personal lifestyle change, where it does happen, does not always include responsible citizenship and work for social betterment as an integral part of lifestyle.

Nevertheless, by comparison to social action, in a strict sense, churches would seem at first glance to excel at education on public issues. The Northern Rockies is no exception. There have been a number of church-sponsored educational conferences on food, energy, and environmental issues, and various local educational efforts related to food policy and human rights, among them:

--The Great Plains Church Leadership School, held at Colorado State University in July 1978, included courses on world food issues, agribusiness, Plains Indian culture, the energy crisis, instituting change in the church, and managing conflict and the use of power.

--The Western Regional Church Leadership School was held in Moscow, Idaho, in May 1978. Its theme was "Ministry to Communities in Transition" and the workshops focused on specific economic and public policy issues having major impacts on communities in the Pacific Northwest, including small farms, transportation, the use of water in the Columbia River drainage, and the 160-acre limitation on Bureau of Reclamation irrigation waters.

--"Dealing with Human Need in Changing Communities" was the theme of the first Church Leadership Conference sponsored by the Wyoming Church Coalition and the University of Wyoming, held in July 1978.

--In April 1978, the campus ministries at Montana State University sponsored a conference/workshop entitled "Resources for the 1980's: Energy, Food, Spirit."

--The Eastern Montana Ecumenical Team Ministry, together with the Montana Committee for the Humanities, sponsored a conference in May 1978 on "Earth, Economics, and Ethics: Charting New Options."

--A "Grainbelt Consultation" sponsored by the Yellowstone Conference of the United Methodist Church in December 1977 brought together producers, consumers, and clergy to promote greater under-

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standing of food issues.

— In January 1978, members of the Pacific Northwest Synod of the Lutheran Church in America gathered in Spokane to test and evaluate new study materials on "Food, Fuel, and the Future."

— The program of the Annual Assembly of the Montana Association of Churches, held in October 1977, was devoted to study and discussion of hunger issues. As a result, the Assembly asked the MAC Task Force on World Hunger to (1) prepare a position paper on the causes of hunger and malnutrition in the world, (2) propose an appropriate response to these causes in terms of a well-defined theology of stewardship and social justice, and (3) provide definite recommendations for action on the part of member churches. The 1978 Assembly included review of the position papers drafted by the Montana Religious Legislative Coalition.

— The Wyoming Hunger Task Force sponsored a WHEAT (World Hunger Education and Action Together) Training Event in September 1977, attended by about thirty-five people, out of which fifteen volunteered to be Hunger Action Enablers (organizers) in their own communities and/or across the state. Montana held a similar statewide WHEAT event a year earlier.

In addition to conferences, too few for some people and too many for others, there is an avalanche of study materials on public issues and Christian citizenship coming from national church agencies and intended for use in local congregations. Most of it raises quite well key theological insights and fundamental choices in the search for social justice. The fact that they often question widely held values may be one reason why these materials are not widely used.

Just because the church is involved through research, publication of educational materials, or conference organizing, there is no guarantee that all sides of an issue will be represented. More nearly the opposite is the case. Church-sponsored conferences may not include those with relevant expertise, but who have rejected organized religion for one reason or another. Sponsors are sometimes reluctant to include the perceived "enemy," of whatever point of view.
The socioeconomic profile of church membership generally insures that "establishment" views are much better represented than "counter-cultural" or "social change" views. The National Council of Churches' Energy Ethics Consultation could not be described as "establishment-oriented," but participation in the Lutheran Church in America's consultation on nuclear energy was probably more representative of the membership, and was biased in favor of nuclear engineers and scientists, utility executives, and professional churchpersons. Two of the LCA's field hearings on the 160-acre federal irrigation water limitation succeeded mainly in soliciting the views of the American Farm Bureau Federation. The bottom line in church research and education is that, despite best efforts and intent to include a wide range of views, the process is much less than perfect. It would be wise for citizen groups to let churches know that they are ready and willing to be a part of that process.

Finally, even when educational materials are used and conferences are held, there is no guarantee that concrete action to influence policy will result. Although it is admittedly difficult to measure, it seems to be a great leap for most people, devoutly religious or not, to move from awareness of a problem to taking action to remedy it. This weakness is common to most educational programs, and certainly not unique to church organizations. Parish educators and facilitators usually recognize the need for action and are committed to it, but have found no magic formulas to make it happen. Of course, action is more likely to generate conflict. To say the least, local congregations tend to inhibit conflict, partly because of their homo-
geneity, and because of their primary self-image as communities of believers, not debate clubs.

Advocacy by Groups and Individuals

This category refers to advocacy by groups and individuals within the church, as distinct from corporate statements or pronouncements by the highest policy-making body of a church. Such advocacy is a primary way of effecting social change, both within the church and in society. Its goal may or may not be to get a larger church body to take a formal position on an issue. It is related to and difficult to distinguish from both the category of internal church politics, and activities found in the category of political implementation. In the advocacy category would be the permanent and ad hoc special interest groups mentioned earlier, such as the Episcopal Church and Society Network or the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. Of course, these groups relate faith to policy in other ways besides acting as advocates.

Advocacy from within the church may sometimes be the chief and only practical way in which a church body relates faith to public issues, but Neuhaus observes that church officials often display excessive anxiety about the use of the church's name in the public arena. He claims that the church ought to be encouraging the multiplicity of viewpoints which nurture in the faith can engender. Professional clergy could play an important role in keeping divergent perspectives in conversation. When a position of an individual or group within a church is confused with that of the church body itself, the church can dissociate itself without disowning the individual or
group. A rule of thumb is that churches should not disown or dis­
courage any public policy group unless its activities and positions
are occasion for church discipline and affect the good standing of
its members in the community of faith. Such rare instances could
include advocacy of slavery, anti-Semitism, or "triage" solutions
to world population problems.

Neuhaus lists four legitimate reasons why groups may press
for public policy changes in the name of and from the base of a church
community. First, the rationale of a group's position may be based on
a particular church organization's life and thought. Second, the group
may choose to limit its decision-making in a way that is guided by the
parameters of a particular denominational tradition. Third, the group
may desire denominational identification for reasons of public cred­
ibility and communication. Finally, a religious group can appeal to
a church constituency which may feel less comfortable with a more
generally-based organization. All these reasons have potential prob­
lems, but none in itself is illegitimate.

Advocacy within the church by individuals is frequently a
painful and hazardous affair, requiring great spiritual depth and
stamina. Groups channel and mobilize resources more effectively and
provide a system of mutual support. As noted earlier, environmental­
ists, farmers and ranchers, peace activists, and anyone else with a
growing sense of injustice would be well-advised to follow and learn
from the experiences of women and racial minorities as advocates to
and for the church. There are associations of black churchmen, and
Christian womens' groups for and against the Equal Rights Amend­ment.
There is no reason why similar groups could not organize to push for economic justice for family farmers or a soft energy path. A little effort could pay off handsomely at this relatively early stage of debate on such issues.

One such effort that has paid off is the Center for Environmental Action, based in Salem, Oregon. It is a unique church organization with an advocacy component. In 1976 it was involved in the nuclear safeguards initiatives in California, Oregon, and Washington, and is currently involved in energy and land use issues in those states. As an ecumenical ministry of the church, with three clergy among its staff, its goals are:

1. Consciousness raising within the church constituency regarding the significant issues of the eco-justice crisis, especially emphasizing the role of the church for environmental stewardship.

2. Supportive action for change in public policy that will have the effect of encouraging prudent and wise use and conservation of the limited resources of God's creation.

3. Encouragement of the church in theological/biblical reflection as regards theology of creation and care of the earth concerns and development of mission possibilities for the churches in response to this concern.

4. The empowerment of people for participation in the critical decisions that will affect the future well-being of the human and natural environment.

5. Provide resource to the churches in teaching, preaching, and action functions regarding environmental stewardship/care of the earth concerns.¹

Two other church advocacy efforts related to natural resource concerns have been underway for some time now. The Commission on Religion in Appalachia is a coalition of eighteen denominations doing

¹Center for Environmental Action, descriptive brochure.
research, planning, education, and service in the Appalachian region. Its Church Advocacy and Support Project, with groups in six states, addresses social, political, and economic issues, and acts as an advocate with concerned groups. Project North is a coalition of seven denominations organized to address the challenges of native land claims and northern development in Canada. Its founding objectives are:

1. To support the creative activities of native people engaged in the struggle for justice in the North regarding settlement and implementation of their land claims and land rights.

2. To challenge and mobilize the various church constituencies in southern parts of Canada to become involved in creative action on the ethical issues of northern development.1

Corporate Statements

Corporate statements have two chief purposes. The first is to facilitate and reinforce all other ways and means by which faith can be related to public policy. The second is to define the outer limits within which public policy can be compatible with church beliefs. Corporate statements refer primarily to the pronouncements of the highest body of a church, usually a general convention. They are definitely not intended to be the final or chief means of response by the church to a public issue. They are intended to provide a framework and point of reference for continuing discussion and action at all levels of the church.

Positions can be taken by other organizations in a church, such as national executive councils, church-wide departments or agencies.

1Lutheran Church in America-Canada Section, personal correspondence.
regional legislative bodies and executive councils, and local congregations or committees. The location of final authority to speak for the church varies among major denominations. The point to be made here is that there are obvious differences of process and credibility between corporate statements made by the highest decision-making body of a church, and those made by lesser bodies. Statements made by lesser authorities usually do not depart too far from prevailing attitudes in the church's constituency, or what a convention would do if confronted by the same issue.

Even though church-wide councils, departments, and agencies are usually subordinate to a higher policy-making authority on matters of public policy, they play an important, sometimes decisive role in shaping the official position to which they are subordinate. They can and do exercise some selectivity as to which positions will be interpreted and how.

Corporate statements are also made by church organizations other than denominations or their subordinate agencies, notably interchurch bodies such as the Lutheran Council, the National Council of Churches, and state ecumenical councils or associations. Since these organizations are creatures of member denominations they are more removed from rank-and-file church people, and their process for developing a position may be different from denominations in that there is frequently less broad input. As a result, the base of power or authority behind their statements is usually less in terms of grassroots, constituency-based support. Nevertheless, where member churches are in full agreement on an issue, councils and associations can speak
with credibility to public agencies and other institutions. On other issues, ecumenical organizations challenge and influence member churches, helping to coordinate, shape, and inform their corporate positions.

Not all corporate statements take positions. Some merely raise an issue for discussion. Those that do take a specific position (e.g. endorsement of the Nestlé or J.P. Stevens Company boycotts, support of the Northern Cheyenne tribe's redesignation of its air quality to Class I standards) reflect a consensus that is not to be confused with unanimity, which on most issues is impossible for the church. Occasionally corporate statements include a dissenting or minority view.

Most mainline churches have by now issued thoughtful statements, through general conventions or lesser bodies (including some regional church judicatories in the Northern Rockies) on food, energy, and environmental problems. Those that are not "thoughtful" are either lists of pious platitudes or attempts to reflect unanimity on an issue when there is none. The major problem with corporate statements, one that is recognized by most church leaders, is that they tend to present and perpetuate the popular delusion that the church has acted forcefully and decisively on a public issue. Most resolutions and statements, whether of national or regional origin, commend themselves to appropriate study and action by the local congregation. If the chief aims of corporate statements are to facilitate and reinforce all the means of relating faith to public policy, and to specify the outer limits within
which public policy can be compatible with faith, they have failed to intrude upon the pressing crush of business in the local parish. Human problems would be a lot less severe if individual church members and local congregations would begin to approach the "outer limits" specified by the statements already issued in their names. These statements are fertile ground for the concerned churchperson, or any person for that matter, who wants to base concrete action and specific changes on Christian values and insights. If they had the resources and the inclination, nonchurch groups could be holding churches to account for what they have already said in public pronouncements.

**Official Leadership**

Official leadership includes all those in the church with official leadership roles, especially pastors, priests, bishops, and church executives. They are in key positions to set examples of active citizenship and are responsible for facilitating all the other ways of relating faith to public policy.

A significant obstacle to church social engagement is the lack of aggressive leadership and confusion over the roles of clergy and lay people. The clergy have been far from effective in both setting an example and in enabling lay people to make an active connection between faith and policy. Neuhaus says bluntly that, "In the task of helping Christians relate faith to public policy, the example of church leaders is, with exceptions, a major debilitating factor." They have often kept secret their own convictions,
or conformed to majority opinion out of excessive concern for their own security of position and a blindness to the need for the church to be creatively disturbed.\footnote{Neuhaus, \textit{Christian Faith and Public Policy}, p. 54.} Such compromises of integrity are basic human problems, not unique to the church. Of course, for church leaders to take stands on all issues would be clearly unwarranted. As Neuhaus suggests, they may frequently "represent" the churches best by representing the diversity of viewpoints within the churches.

As facilitators and enablers, the professional clergy can be faulted for a reluctance to pass on the cutting edge of social ministry to lay people. Some clergy prefer to do it themselves, to be on the front lines, or else not do it at all. But the real opportunity for church mission lies in the millions of church members who attempt to live their religious convictions in their daily vocations. The primary role of church leadership is not to lead by the nose, but to nurture in the faith and stir up in the laity the habits of reflection, reason, and public commitment.

Parish pastors can be identified as the chief bottleneck in the internal communications of the church, specifically the facilitation of access by lay people to the people, resources, and communication channels of the larger church, and the dissemination of information from regional and church-wide agencies to the average lay person in the parish. A primary reason for this bottleneck is overwork. Another is fear of conflict. Whatever the reasons, parish minister as catalyst and information broker is the most neglected
role of the clergy in the task of relating faith to policy. Since it would be too much to expect this situation to change drastically, any communication directed to the church from outside should have some way of reaching lay people directly, as well as church professionals. For example, communication might be addressed not only to clergy, but to chairpersons of church councils or administrative boards, or appropriate committees.

**Political Implementation**

In addition to the eight preceding categories, there are several other specific ways the church can influence public policy, including those activities with which most citizen groups would begin a review of political action. Neuhaus points to the use of the mass media, from book-publishing to television, to influence public opinion. He also encourages letter-writing to political leaders, invited testimony before legislative committees, advocacy or lobbying, litigation, use of investment power, and resistance to efforts by the government to define or restrict what constitutes "religious activity."

Church work with the media, whether to present the church's own message or to hold the media accountable to higher standards of public welfare, has expanded significantly in recent years. The Montana Association of Churches has a Task Force on Morality and the Media which has developed materials for use in establishing a constructive dialogue with those in the media. The Wyoming Church Coalition has authorized a Mass Media Committee which will explore ways in which churches can more effectively relate to and utilize
communication possibilities of radio, TV, and newspapers. The PTL Club and prime-time TV shows by the Unification Church are not the only ways churches have used the media. The Mormon Church has effectively emphasized family values through television advertising, and the Campaign for Human Development of the United States Catholic Conference has aired some appealing ads, including one on its support of Northern Cheyenne agricultural development. There is no major reason, other than lack of resources and commitment, why churches could not more aggressively use radio and TV programming and advertising to promote justice, for example, on behalf of victims of energy development and resource exploitation in the Northern Rockies. Precedents exist in the films produced by the Montana Association of Churches on mental institutions and correctional facilities. Regular news releases and editorial comments directed to newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV could greatly aid in creating the climate of public opinion in which policy options become politically viable. A newspaper endorsement-type ad in favor of the Panama Canal Treaties, which contained the names of several of Montana's religious notables, is illustrative of the possibilities.

Leafleting, petition-circulating, and letter-writing to elected officials are legitimately pursued through church organizations under some circumstances, certainly when the organization itself has already adopted a corporate position that embraces the issue at hand. Such efforts usually should be conducted with considerable caution and discretion, and through established channels.
Advocacy and informational testimony before legislative bodies are carried out by the Washington offices of major denominations. Since they feel obliged to cover a wide range of issues, energy and environmental problems are not high on the list of priorities. However, there usually is someone responsible for monitoring them. At the 1978 IMPACT briefing for its citizen leaders around the country, sessions were held on energy and waste; domestic human rights; law of the sea; small farms, family farms, big farms; criminal code reform; human rights and economic and military assistance; church/state relationships; national health insurance; welfare reform; disarmament; and full employment.

Several states have their own ecumenical legislative advocacy organizations. The Montana Religious Legislative Coalition, a committee of the Montana Association of Churches, has a part-time staff person and lobbies on several issues during each legislative session. The issues are selected in advance and position statements are drafted, subject to the unanimous approval of the MAC board of directors. Issues selected for the 1979 session of the legislature include gambling, pornography, conciliation courts, pre-marital counseling for minors, and energy and environment.

The effectiveness of the Montana Religious Legislative Coalition is difficult to assess. There is little doubt that it has been a major influence in preventing the further expansion of commercial gambling in Montana. The first position paper on energy and environment, drafted in 1973, was wide-ranging but lacked specificity. The position paper for the 1979 legislature focused more
on concrete legislative proposals, a result of greater awareness of
the issues and informal assistance from Montana's principal citizen
organizations which lobby on environmental and energy issues. The
major weakness of the coalition is its lack of a well-organized
grassroots action network. An effort to organize Ecumenical Action
Teams (EATS) in communities across the state has never really gotten
off the ground.

Ecumenical affairs in Idaho and Wyoming have not yet reached
the high level of trust on which the work of the Montana Religious
Legislative Coalition is based, although it appears that a majority
of participants in ecumenical affairs in those states would favor
some kind of church advocacy effort on a few specific issues. The
Ecumenical Association of Churches in Idaho (EACI) has a Church and
Society Committee which publishes a guide to the members of the Idaho
Legislature and an informational newsletter during each session.
In the past it has described legislation relating to energy, water
resources, and wilderness, as well as a broad range of other issues.
The Wyoming Church Coalition has authorized establishment of a Leg-
islative Concerns Committee to monitor activities of the Wyoming
legislature and report to the churches.

Litigation, heavily relied upon to resolve disputes in
energy and environmental matters, is used on occasion by churches.
Churches can both initiate and support litigation which affects the
church's mission and vital areas of human welfare. Church organiza-
tions are not entirely loath to use the courts in energy-related
matters. The National Council of Churches has filed a friend-of-
the-court brief before the U.S. Supreme Court in a municipal utility disconnection case. The NCC's attorney in the case, David Sive, is well-known for his leadership in the environmental movement. In another case, Centenary-Wilbur Methodist Church in Portland, Oregon, filed a suit against Portland General Electric in a matter related to storage of radioactive wastes.

Church investment power can be a significant political lever for effecting changes in corporate policies and practices. Corporate investments by church bodies, including church-related colleges, universities, and pension funds, are substantial. Investment in any amount gives church organizations the ability to exercise their economic power through shareholder resolutions, withdrawal of investments, or noninvestment in specified corporations. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), identified as a "sponsored related movement" of the National Council of Churches, coordinates and assists the efforts of most churches and other organizations and individuals concerned about the social impact of corporations and the application of social criteria to investments. Shareholder resolutions and negotiations with corporate officials are the chief tactics employed by church organizations which use investments as a tool for social change. The Corporate Information Center, a unit of ICCR, conducts research and publishes a monthly newsletter, The Corporate Examiner. It ambitiously attempts to cover a broad range of concerns, listing as its areas of examination labor, environment, consumerism, equal employment, minorities, women, agribusiness, military production, government, and foreign investment.
It has done extensive work in human rights and agribusiness, and has published several issues on coal leasing and mining in Appalachia and the West.

Any brief assessment of issues in the Northern Rockies would conclude that there is enormous potential for new work in corporate responsibility on natural resource development schemes. In addition to national church agencies, several regional church bodies have their own investment portfolios. These funds have been the subject of investment policy discussions, but lack of resources, awareness, and interest have prevented churches in the Northern Rockies from using their economic power as a vehicle for promoting higher standards of corporate neighborliness and stewardship. For the concerned churchperson with the interest and commitment, an initial first step would be to identify the investments of one's own church, and obtain a copy of that church's criteria for investments, or any church's criteria for that matter. Certainly organizations like the Flathead Coalition, the Northern Plains Resource Council, the Idaho Conservation League, and the Powder River Basin Resource Council would be all too aware of specific issues and corporate policies and practices which would merit further scrutiny and possible action by shareholders concerned about the social and environmental consequences of their investments.
IX. WHY CHURCHES ARE NOT MORE INVOLVED IN PUBLIC ISSUES

It has been my intent so far not only to review briefly and evaluate ways churches are carrying out social action, but to debunk the stereotype of monolithic Christianity, and its corollary myth that all churches and church members have been captured by the prevailing culture and serve to justify the status quo. Certainly if one wants escape from conflict and comforting reassurance of dominant attitudes, he or she can find a home in the institutional church; that fact is painfully self-evident. But visionaries, social activists, and environmentalists can also discover a niche in the church, albeit not a comfortable one. A measure of discomfort—indeed profound anguish—over social injustice is a mark of authentic Christianity. Why do churches often appear so "hypocritical" then, even churches with an expressed commitment to social engagement? Is it because of some peculiar trait of the membership or some inherent characteristic of large institutions? Why have churches not been in the vanguard of the environmental movement, joining hands with others who are working for equitable relationships and an ecologically sustainable way of living?

Several major reasons can be discerned, none decisive in itself, but all adding up to the plain fact that the church is not where it should be and has a long way to go. The reasons explain
why the church is where it is today, but form no basis for concluding that the church will necessarily be in the same place tomorrow. Several reasons have already been mentioned: the human desire to avoid conflict and achieve economic security; poor awareness of the possibilities of creative conflict; confusion of roles between clergy and laity; insufficient attention by the clergy to responsible citizenship and inadequate theological/biblical education for social action; the delusion that awareness of an issue or the passage of a resolution about it is somehow equal to sustained action for change; the tremendous pluralism among church organizations and especially within liberal and conservative traditions and individual denominations. There are also other reasons which need explicit mention.

Institutional Inertia and Self-Preoccupation

The church, like any large institution, is inherently resistant to change. It has its own agenda and existing demands on members' resources, which may compete with the demands of new issues and other organizations. It seems perpetually preoccupied with internal maintenance and survival matters, such as the ordination of women or homosexuals, the balancing of budgets, or new forms of worship. Warren A. Quanbeck, a Lutheran theologian, had this to say in a paper entitled "The Work of God Through Secular Movements:"

The present concern with ecology shows humane and Christian attitudes toward our natural environment, together with some that are utopian and faddist. The Christian church should be leading the movement, had it not been so intensively preoccupied with building its own institutional life and developing religious inwardness . . . Anyone who takes seriously the
sovereignty of God and the doctrine of creation should support most of the goals and activities of ecologists.\(^1\)

When the static tendencies and introspective nature of the institutional church are recognized, the role of change agents within the church ("church renewal" types) takes on critical importance and deserves special attention.

**Uncertainty and Paralysis**

The church is called to minister to all people and all human needs. Its central mission is the proclamation of the Gospel to all, without exception, and the promotion of reconciliation and justice. The result is an awareness of ambiguity in public issues, a rejection of easy or final answers to complex problems, and at least some attempt to "love the enemy," whoever that might be. Many church members intensely desire to take the right course, but their wide vision and sensitivity to unanticipated negative consequences often induces paralysis and a grudging acceptance of the status quo. Particularly on energy and environmental issues, churches are getting "mixed signals" from the various interests and experts in the field. They have a problem of knowing whom to believe, ironically much like the problem of people who are faced with the often competing and conflicting claims of various religions, denominations, and sects.

It should be clear, though, that churches cannot respond

in a positive way to all those mixed signals. They cannot be all things to all people. They must take sides based firmly on the distinct vision they offer society. Some observers of the religious scene argue that liberal religion is declining and conservative churches are growing because of the liberal churches' inability to articulate their vision, and their mixed record on social issues. The National Council of Churches' statements on nuclear energy are a case in point, and have been used by advocates of nuclear energy to undermine the public credibility of the NCC:

In a policy statement issued in 1960, the National Council of Churches characterized the "peaceful atom" and nuclear energy as "a gift from God." In a spirit of enthusiasm, it urged Christians to "look with reverent gratitude upon the well-nigh inexhaustible treasures of nuclear energy for peaceful uses." By contrast, in March of 1976, the National Council of Churches issued a resolution calling for a moratorium on any development of what it calls "the plutonium economy."¹

The two NCC statements also shed light on another fundamental reason for the church's paralysis. Many church members and organizations are themselves keenly aware of their own gap between ideal and performance. They are frequently unwilling to proclaim the imperatives of their faith because to do so invites charges of hypocrisy and inconsistency, which are then forthcoming anyway because they do not act.

There is certainly no pervasive conspiracy behind church inaction, but lest this analysis read like a complete apology, one must admit that there are undoubtedly unscrupulous types within the

church who use its good intentions to selfish advantage. More importantly, the church is full of people who hold considerable power in secular affairs, and who conveniently and often deliberately overlook Christianity's special emphasis on the poor and powerless, and its radical critique of any tendency to idolize prevailing secular values. They are the ones who need a greater awareness of uncertainty and ambiguity, not just the social activists who are committed to an ideal of justice.

Overwhelming Task of Ministry

Apathy seems to be the number one problem in churches as well as other organizations. Much of this apparent apathy is a result of inadequate communication to and among members about problems and opportunities. There does seem to be a vast reservoir of diffuse interest and anxiety about issues. For those who do find the motivation and see their way clear to act, the magnitude of ministry, which covers the whole range of human experience, is overwhelming. Frequently the same few people who engage in social ministry are also heavily involved in the ordinary maintenance tasks of a church organization, whether it be a congregation, a denomination, or an interfaith body. Consequently, the level of frustration among church activists can become quite high. With limited resources of time and energy, it is no wonder that church people respond first to urgent human cries, rather than ignoring them to attempt instead to change their causes.

Churches have felt compelled to cover the waterfront of human problems. For example, church social activists are engaged
in finding new homes for thousands of Indochinese refugees, and in
struggling against the growing militarization of the planet, the
warehousing of people in nursing homes, prisons, and mental hospi-
tals, and the increasing threats to the quality of life from gam-
bling, pornography, and exploitive sex and violence in the media.
But church leaders increasingly recognize the need to focus on a
few specific issues, and work on them effectively. Something inevi-
itably gets left out, and it is usually the less immediate needs
that do not involve as much visibly intense human pain. Support
for Indian treaty rights, for example, takes on a higher priority
than the development of a new environmental ethic among the masses
of church members (thankfully, there is considerable overlap between
the two issues). Since, to paraphrase the Bible, the potential
harvest of social ministry is so great, but the laborers so few,
perhaps the most important need for more effective church social
action is an expanded group of experienced church activists.

Privatization of Religion

One of the most insidious threats to church social action
is the growing privatization of religion, especially prevalent among
conservatives in the church, and liberals outside of it. The result
is that those committed to social justice are victimized by the
monopolization of the language of morality—the language of right
and wrong—by the extreme right wing, which concentrates on issues
of personal morality like abortion and homosexuality, but is blind
to its complicity in "cruelty systems" like inadequate health care
services or exploitive business practices. Authentic Christianity,
to a growing number of people, ought to strive for a wholesomely radical critique of the prevailing social order (or disorder), and both liberal and conservative ideas which perpetuate injustice. When the religious community avoids criticism, based on its biblical/theological vision, of social values and systems, it leaves the field open to secular ideologies (e.g. Marxism) which at the present time have little positive influence on American political culture.

**Lack of Accountability**

Churches have not been as active as they might in energy and environmental matters because they have not been held accountable by the activists for what they profess to believe on the issues. Some of this lack is due, no doubt, to cynicism toward large organizations which, it is hoped, members of public interest organizations do not share. The major reason for the lack of accountability is that what the church believes is both poorly understood and selectively emphasized by those outside the church, who may let their own personal religious beliefs or nonbeliefs interfere with practical power-building around common interests. Most notable is the casual dismissal of Christianity as a force for positive change because of the biblical mandate for humans to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth and have dominion over it. The closing chapter of *The Unfinished Agenda*, entitled "A Question of Values," says that "The equation of growth with good may stem from the way religious institutions have interpreted Genesis 1:28." *The Unfinished Agenda* was published in 1977, ten years after Lynn White's article, "The
Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.\footnote{1}

The authors of The Unfinished Agenda represented the leadership of twelve of the largest citizen organizations in the environmental movement. Their superficial identification of the church as a source of the problem, without any mention of it as contributing to the solution, reflects the privatization of religion and ignores both the small flood of theological perspectives on environmental ethics and the practical role of the church as a force for changing values. Rather than condemn churches, those who are committed to reversing environmental degradation and slowing depletion of resources would do well to study the examples of civil rights and peace activists. Certainly there have been no final victories in the struggles against war and discrimination, but those groups have gained valuable allies by knowing what the churches believed and holding them accountable to those beliefs.

X. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS
AND PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS

In the past, partly for reasons already given, there has not been much organized, intentional communication and cooperation between churches and public interest groups concerned with energy and environmental issues in the Northern Rockies. The situation is improving slowly, mostly at the initiative of churches which are beginning to recognize the seriousness of the problems, and invite public interest group representatives to their meetings and conferences. The problem with this welcome initiative, as mentioned earlier, is that churches do not always do a thorough job of soliciting all points of view. This problem underlies the need for citizen groups to do some of their own outreach to churches.

A less tangible, but very real, barrier to more effective communication and cooperation is that of the mixed and sometimes conflicting values and motives behind a particular position on an issue. One element of this barrier is the fact that people may simply not share the same religious beliefs. Positions are usually based on a mixture of self-interest, a sense of responsibility to others, and a vision of a better way of doing things, with one motive more or less predominant. The dominant motive may or may not be consistent with the publicly stated motive. Church members,
motivated by a better vision or a sense of responsibility to others, may be reluctant to support a position which others advocate out of narrow self-interest. Church members, or anyone else, may be against new military bases, nuclear power plants, or big new dams anywhere. Others may not oppose them in principle, just in their own backyards or favorite recreational areas. Conversely, public interest groups leaders, led by a sense of justice, may be hesitant to work with church members who appear motivated by a desire to grind a religious axe and gain new converts.

A related factor that contributes to the lack of communication is the mutual stereotyping that occurs between "church people" and "environmentalists" or public interest group members. In the view of some church people, all public interest group leaders betray their self-given titles by seeking to preserve their favorite wilderness areas, free-flowing rivers, and, most importantly, their political turf. These church people may view environmentalists as godless hedonists, insensitive to the demands of genuine social justice, whose tactics unscrupulously cater to self-interest, suppress altruistic motives, and are demeaning of people and inappropriate to the ends desired. Conversely, activists outside the church frequently stereotype church members either as closed-minded pillars of the status quo, or as misty-eyed do-gooders who blind themselves to the "fact" that the world really runs on self-interest, a rip-off ethic, and an incessant and bitter struggle for power. They see churches as a possible source of revenue, but usually not as a source of thoughtful comment or committed human beings.
All these stereotypes have some validity in certain cases, but none, individually or combined, is cause for outright rejection of cooperative effort. Many public interest group leaders are passionately committed to a broader vision of justice. Church leaders, of all people, generally have a keen and sophisticated awareness of the role that self-interest plays in people's lives. Stereotypes are usually debunked only one way—by communication instead of talking past each other.

Another problem that separates church and public interest organizations is the unwarranted acceptance by many leaders of a de facto division of labor on issues. The environmental movement is seen by some church leaders as simply another legitimate special interest pleading its case. Churches, for the most part, are regarded by public interest leaders as out to protect their tax status, and tied to social services and traditional issues of personal morality like drinking, gambling, and pornography. Neither "side" has made much effort to become part of the other's agenda, and they lack the resources to do so, or so they claim. Resources might be used more effectively (better stewardship!) if they were combined on certain specific issues, such as utility rate reform, the enhancement of a healthy agricultural economy, or the protection of an environment free of Lake Tahoe-style casino gambling. The assumption of an effective division of labor should be critically reviewed to determine if it is really the best way of dealing with problems.
XI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The chief purpose of this paper has been to stir the reader's imagination by reviewing, in a general way, the opportunities for church engagement in issues confronting the Northern Rockies, especially those involving the use and protection of the region's natural wealth. It has also attempted to point out a few ways in which churches and public interest groups might join forces, and some of the obstacles to that effort and the pitfalls that might be encountered when the church gets involved in social and political issues.

If the many agricultural, environmental, and energy problems facing the Northern Rockies are to be effectively confronted, there is clearly a need for expanding bases of political power by recruiting new constituencies and taking a wider, more inclusive view of issues. Public interest organizations are the first to admit that need, at least in theory. Based on a few months of intensive (but hardly exhaustive) study, several more specific recommendations for action are justified. The suggestions in the following four overlapping categories are made because of their promise of immediate results on specific issues, and long-term pay-offs in terms of building alliances and resolving more fundamental conflicts.
Reconciliation

Reconciliation is more a process the church feels comfortable with, than an inevitable end product. Before reconciliation or conflict "management" can occur, in those cases where it is desirable and feasible, conflict must be generated in a creative way. The clergy should be actively engaged in a ministry of creative conflict. Since members of the clergy are human, and usually overworked, they cannot be expected to initiate conflict and confrontation themselves. They and their congregations or larger church bodies should be presented with concrete, specific proposals on which they are required to act. Such proposals can then become vehicles for initiating conflict in small, manageable amounts, without creating instant polarization. Proposals could be presented by both church members and nonmembers. A process of debate and exchange of views can then occur which may or may not result in reconciliation or resolution, but it is a risk worth taking.

An attempt at reconciliation can take place at levels in the church higher than the local congregation. Conflicts may call for a special task force of a state association of churches, similar to the MAC neutral observer corps. Others may require the intervention of national or regional church officials. But there must be someone to initiate the conflicts, or at least bring them to the attention of churches. Since there is never really any perfect time—especially for church work—the time may as well be now. Individuals and groups need not wait for a more formal process like
the Midwest League, but if and when it or similar efforts become operative, they should avail themselves of the chance to advocate their positions in a new arena, and at least attempt direct solutions to selected, concrete problems. In this way they can avoid, at least initially, the tribulations of legal and regulatory processes which divide people artificially.

Advocacy

There is no major reason why churches in Wyoming and Idaho could not organize active legislative advocacy committees like the Montana Religious Legislative Coalition and those in a number of other states. Even if they do not, their informational newsletters on legislative issues are useful tools for planting the seeds of advocacy in individuals and groups. In Montana, the Montana Religious Legislative Coalition needs and deserves support and responsible criticism from both inside and outside the church. It especially needs assistance in organizing an effective grassroots action network. The MRLC and other citizen lobbies could more aggressively seek each other's cooperation and support on specific issues of common concern. The MRLC has indicated a willingness to do so through its recent efforts to develop a policy for endorsing positions of other groups.

For church members, two other approaches to advocacy should be explored. One approach would be the formation of issue caucuses, within existing church organizations, to advocate specific positions on specific issues. This type of effort could occur at both the
local and regional levels, and within both denominational and ecumenical bodies. For example, there could be a renewable energy group within a congregation, a family farmer caucus within the regional unit of a denomination, or a human rights task force within a state association of churches.

A second approach would be to organize an independent organization, funded by national and regional church agencies and/or local memberships and contributions, to do advocacy and consciousness-raising before churches in the region. This approach would provide the opportunity to benefit from the experience and expertise of other citizen groups while avoiding the possible stigma of being outside the church. Such an organization, adapted from the experience of the Center for Environmental Action, could complement the work of efforts like the Eastern Montana Ecumenical Team Ministry and the Board of Ministry to Impacted Areas. If it were perceived as competing with them, churches could always focus their resources in Idaho, Eastern Washington, and Western Montana, where no similarly organized church efforts are being made to deal with natural resource issues.

Organizational Planning

The objective of increased communication and cooperation between public interest groups and church organizations needs to become a regular part of the planning of both types of organizations. Citizen groups should routinely identify churches as potential allies on specific issues, and should have a systematic way of communicating
with church leaders and identifying their own members who also wear another hat as church members.

Since churches are supposedly conditioned to respond to the cries of the powerless and disenfranchised, public interest groups could consider balancing their pride over victories, intended primarily to keep the membership happy and supportive, with a little more effort to communicate to churches an appropriate sense of urgency, pain, and powerlessness. In doing so, citizen groups should be as specific as possible about problems and make specific requests for help, such as special financial assistance, new members and pledges, the use of church facilities, or the endorsement of positions. For example, to provide a stronger citizen voice in public proceedings, public interest groups could ask churches to line up behind the idea of partial public financing for nongovernmental citizen advocacy groups.

Churches should likewise recognize citizen groups as potential allies and sources of information on specific issues, and take conscious steps to provide opportunities for citizen groups to express their views in church forums. Church leaders should make a special effort to encourage lay members to relate their secular interests and activities to the life of the church.

Several other opportunities exist under the label of cooperative efforts:

— Citizen groups could "contract" with churches to provide them with grassroots education about current issues.

— Both churches and citizen groups in the past have sponsored
community forums and other projects funded by state committees for the humanities. There is no reason why future projects could not be sponsored cooperatively.

— Yearly mutual briefings for church and public interest group leaders could be held, preferably in retreat settings.

— Seminary students could be assigned as interns with citizen organizations. For example, the United Church of Christ has sponsored interns with the Northern Plains Resource Council.

— A broad-based citizen action group, membership based, could be initiated with the support of churches and existing groups. The Oregon Fair Share experience, which has included substantial support and involvement by churches, may be a good precedent.

Finally, it may be helpful to recall the recommendations made over ten years ago by Robert Anderson, then minister at University Congregational Church in Missoula, Montana. In an essay presented to the Faith/Man/Nature Group, an independent and nonsectarian body related to the National Council of Churches, he suggested several areas in which useful action by churches seemed possible, among them:

— the establishment of a department of conservation within the National Council of Churches to (1) contribute to the process wherein conservation policy is created—at any and all levels of the national life that would be open to it; (2) inform the people of the churches of current conservation issues, including implications, opinions, options, and consequences of all the known alternatives involved in these issues; (3) mobilize public opinion (where clear cut issues exist) and help bring such opinion to bear upon the political and legislative processes which are central in every conservation struggle.

— the use of denominational journals as a vehicle for conveying information regarding ecological issues, including the introduction of authors in the conservation community to the
religious community.

--the establishment of conferences or workshops at the state or regional level, designed especially for ministers, to explore some specific problems and study in depth Christian attitudes towards nature and the environment. One objective would be to impart a stronger voice in preaching on environmental matters.

--programming in local churches, through existing groups or the formation of special task forces, and special attention to how churches use their own property.

--use of church school curriculum, from the lower grades to adult education.¹

In reviewing the above assortment of suggestions, my general conclusion is that, with a couple of exceptions, existing church structures are sufficient to bring church and citizen power to bear more effectively on public policy problems. Most of the opportunities presented in this paper are dependent not so much on new structures as on one critical skill that is underutilized: the facilitating and enabling leadership provided by the staff of voluntary organizations, i.e. the clergy and professionals in the public interest movement. Much has been said and written about the constant temptation of hired staff to do all the work themselves, either unable or unwilling to delegate tasks and responsibility to volunteers. That temptation is partly responsible for making church-going what some people describe as the biggest spectator sport in America. Nevertheless, pressure is increasing for greater lay involvement in the work of the church. Volunteers are seeking more meaningful participation

in citizen groups.

The great challenge is for clergy and citizen group staff to use the opportunities present in the many roles and skills of members. What is perceived as debilitating competition among organizations for members and resources can become a means for strengthening all, as the clergy provide the religious foundation and spiritual nourishment for church members' active involvement in citizen groups, and staffs of citizen groups enable their members to be advocates in their roles as members of churches and other organizations. The public interest movement—both religious and secular organizations—will itself surely change for the better through encouragement of diversity and a process of mutual accountability and creative renewal. The quality of life will improve because of a healthier and more effective public interest movement, as people discover new power to influence the forces that affect their lives.
## CHURCH MEMBERSHIP FOR DENOMINATIONS WHICH PARTICIPATE IN STATE ECUMENICAL ASSOCIATIONS*

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* These are recent estimates supplied by the Ecumenical Association of Churches in Idaho, the Montana Association of Churches, and the Wyoming Church Coalition. Methods for computing membership figures vary among denominations.

** Not participating
APPENDIX B

CASE STUDY OF MEMBERSHIP OVERLAPS BETWEEN CHURCH
AND ENVIRONMENTAL/CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS

Hypotheses

In an effort to test the assertion that there are significant membership overlaps between churches and organizations concerned with problems of conservation and environment, a survey was taken of members of the Redding, California, United Methodist Church, and members of the Shasta Group of the Sierra Club. Besides obtaining data on membership overlaps, an attempt was made to test the following hypotheses related to individuals' priorities in church activity, environmental action, and work for social justice:

1. For church members, work for other social justice concerns may compete with work for conservation and environmental protection.

2. For church members, participation in church activities may preclude involvement in environmental organizations.

3. For members of environmental organizations, their participation in those groups may compete with or substitute for involvement in church organizations.

Methodology

The survey was originally planned for the Montana Environmental Information Center (EIC) and a local church in Helena, Montana. A random sample had been taken from the membership of EIC (at which time a significant number of members of the First United Methodist Church in Helena were noticed), but circumstances required the survey location to be moved to the Upper Sacramento Valley region of Northern California. The area of Redding and Red Bluff, California is similar to central and western Montana in that it is largely rural, with an economy based predominantly on forestry, agriculture, and tourism.

After a lengthy period of negotiation with responsible leadership, samples were selected from the membership list of the Redding
United Methodist Church, and those members of the Shasta Group of the Sierra Club living in Redding and Red Bluff. The Sierra Club leadership required the secretary of the group to contact, by telephone, each member of the sample as a condition for approval of the survey. The sample size for the Shasta Group was fifty. A postage-paid, return-addressed postcard and an explanatory cover letter were mailed to the sample. No follow-up was made. Thirty-three cards were returned, for a response rate of sixty-six percent. The thirty-three cards represented forty-three individuals (there were ten couples).

A sample of fifty-seven was taken from the membership list of the United Methodist Church. The sample was reviewed by the pastor and nine names were deleted because they were inactive. Nine additional names were chosen without review by the pastor. The sample was mailed a postage-paid, return-addressed postcard, together with an explanatory cover letter. No follow-up was made. Twenty-two postcards were returned, for a response rate of thirty-nine percent. The replies represented twenty-three individuals (there was one couple).

The reasons for the lower response rate for the Methodists are unclear. The style of the cover letter and the potentially confusing layout of the postcard may have been contributing factors. Since the letter to the Shasta Group was addressed, "Dear fellow Sierra Clubber," it may have been helpful to address the Methodists with "Dear fellow Christian," or "Dear friend in Christ." No doubt the telephone "pre-survey" by the secretary of the Shasta Group contributed to that sample's higher response rate.

In any case, because of the unsophisticated nature of the survey, and especially the small sample size and number of respondents, no claim is made as to the validity or statistical significance of the results. To reiterate, the purpose of the survey was to explore in a limited way the existence of membership overlaps between church and environmental organizations, and the patterns of involvement in those organizations as well as in the broader "public interest" or "social justice" movement.

Results

The results of the survey are summarized in the tables below. Most startling is the fact that while twenty-four members of the Sierra Club (fifty-six percent of the respondents) claimed church affiliation, only one member of the Methodist Church (four percent of the respondents) claimed membership in an environmental group.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>number</th>
<th>percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>percent</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>96</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Methodist Church</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>attend events</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>write letters, etc.</td>
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<td>Other public interest groups</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>dues/financial support</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>volunteer time</td>
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<td>serve on committees</td>
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<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write letters, etc.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
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</table>
The Sierra Club members were also more active in other public interest groups than the Methodists. Following is a list of other organizational affiliations claimed by members of the Shasta Group:

- National Audubon Society (13)
- National Wildlife Federation (7)
- Common Cause (6)
- The Wilderness Society (5)
- American Association of University Women (5)
- National Rifle Association (4)
- California non-game animal support (3)
- Wildlife Society (2)
- Directions Plus (local) (2)
- Soil Conservation Society of America (2)
- Nature Conservancy (3)
- Alaska Conservation Society
- World Wildlife Fund
- PRBO
- AOU
- ICBP
- California Native Plant Society (6)
- Marin Conservation League
- Museum Society
- California Field Ornithologists
- Tam. C. C.
- CARE
- UNICEF
- Museum & art centers
- Women's Symphony League
- Council for a Livable World
- Nader
- American Forestry
- California Rifle & Pistol

Redding Museum
International Fund for Animals
SF Bay Protection Association
American Horse Protection Association
Whale Protection Fund
Mercy Hospital Physician's Library
NAACP
Community Concert Board
U.S. Power Squadron
Women Against Rape
Park & Recreation Commission
Phi Delta Kappa
Elks
Friends of the Earth
Tehama Commission for Women
Project Flash
American Youth Hostel
Fly Fishers' Federation
Society of American Foresters
American Civil Liberties Union
NEA/CTA (Calif. Teachers Association)
CCDA
NAEYC
Sierra Club members claimed affiliation with the following church organizations:

- United Church of Christ (Congregational) (6 - one couple)
- United Methodist Church (4 - two couples)
- Roman Catholic (4)
- Episcopal Church (2 - one couple)
- Jewish Community Center (2 - one couple)
- Fellowship of Reconciliation (2 - one couple)
- Nazarene
- Church of God (Christian)
- Lutheran
- Church of Religious Science
- Ecumenical Peace Council

The Methodists listed affiliation with the following organizations:

- National Wildlife Federation
- senior citizens
- Northern California Regional Commission on Aging
- Republican Party
- local clubs
- Sunday School groups
- Christian Women's
- Mistletoe Parents Club
- 4-H
- participant in Yosemite planning process
- fraternal
- League of Women Voters
- Consumers Aid of Shasta
- American Association of University Women

To analyze levels of involvement in an intelligible fashion, a crude "involvement index" was calculated for each individual in each area of activity, based on a score of zero for no involvement to a maximum of five for participation in all five categories of activity. The individual indexes were then averaged to provide summary data for use in comparing members of the Methodist Church with members of the Sierra Club.

For the Sierra Club, the index of involvement in the club is higher for church members than for those with no church affiliation. Combined Sierra Club/church members are also more active in other public interest groups than respondents who do not belong to churches. Overall, for Sierra Club members who belong to church organizations, the levels of involvement in the churches, the Sierra Club, and other public interest groups are approximately the same. Finally, Sierra Club/church members have a higher level of involvement in their churches than do the Methodists.
## INVOLVEMENT INDEXES

### SIERRA CLUB RESPONDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of involvement</th>
<th>church members</th>
<th>not church members</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1.84</td>
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<td>Church organizations</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.60</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### METHODIST CHURCH RESPONDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of involvement</th>
<th>members of environmental groups</th>
<th>not members of environmental groups</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methodist Church</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other public interest</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental groups</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the Methodists, no useful internal comparisons can be made because only one respondent was a member of an environmental organization. That individual had an involvement index of five (the only one) in the Methodist Church and an index of one in the National Wildlife Federation. In comparing the Sierra Club with the Methodist Church, it can be noted that, just as Sierra Club/church members are more active in their churches than the Methodists, so also are Sierra Club/church members more active in other public interest groups.
Conclusions

From the evidence gathered, one must conclude that there is measurable membership overlap between church and public interest organizations, including environmental groups. Whether this overlap is significant is ultimately a matter of personal opinion.

On the subject of competing priorities and interests, the data run contrary to the hypothesis that participation in environmental groups displaces involvement in church organizations. In fact, for members of the Sierra Club, church affiliation is related positively to a relatively high level of involvement in the Sierra Club, other public interest groups, and the members' respective churches.

No evidence was provided to support the hypothesis that, for church members, work for other social justice concerns may compete with work for a better environment. For the Methodist respondents, there simply is not a significant level of involvement in other public interest groups. Also, because of the moderate level of involvement of Methodists in their church, there is no basis for concluding that participation in church activities preempts activity in environmental organizations.

Finally, no cause and effect relationships of any kind can be inferred from the data. The evidence is purely descriptive, and the big question is whether or not the results would be verified by a larger, more sophisticated survey. A fertile imagination would produce innumerable hypotheses for further research. There is no end to the possibilities of research into the environmental values of church members and the religious values of environmentalists.

However, the primary intent of this project is to provide practical assistance to citizen organizations. It is my recommendation that they include, as part of a general survey of members interests, priorities, and affiliations, some attempt to discover members religious ties. A questionnaire could include an item on membership in church organizations, with opportunity for listing the names of those organizations and level of involvement (e.g., very active, moderately active, marginally active, inactive). I myself have returned questionnaires from Friends of the Earth and The Action Center which allowed me to express my commitment to "eco-justice" from a Judeo-Christian perspective.

Local churches which I have attended take an annual survey of members interests related to the church. The survey is taken as part of the pledging process and is used to develop interest in working with church committees and other church functions. A listing of interest in environmental concerns could easily be incorporated.