

**Carriers of Faith**  
**Lessons from**  
**Congregational Studies**



A festschrift  
in honor of Robert W. Lynn

Edited by  
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## *Dedication* \*←

Robert Wood Lynn's career has stretched thus far from his early years in Wheatland, Wyoming, to retirement in Leeds, Maine. During the first sixty-five years of his still unfolding journey, he has completed programs of study at Princeton University, Yale Divinity School, and Union Theological Seminary, has served in the United States Army and in the ministry of the Presbyterian Church, has taught practical theology, religion, and education at Union Theological Seminary in New York and, as vice-president of the Lilly Endowment, Inc., has directed the largest program of grant-making in the field of religious inquiry in America.

Dr. Lynn has helped revitalize religious communities throughout America, shaping and supporting numerous research projects and serving as consultant to both institutions and individuals. He is known as foremost among students of the history of theological education in America, and has written many articles and books in the field. His legacy is found in the careers of many scholars and in the mission of many congregations, communities, seminaries, and universities. His special concerns have brought together black and white, Protestant, Catholic, and Jew, providing them opportunities to understand and learn from each other, to strengthen America's religious institutions, and to increase the quality of our nation's religious and intellectual life. Together with his wife, Katharine, and their children, Thomas, Janet, Elizabeth, and Sarah, Robert Lynn has created a warm environment of teaching and learning that many have found nurturing and life-affecting.

The authors of this book have received Dr. Lynn's encouragement to understand and improve congregational life. This aspect of American religion was neglected until he urged researchers to pay attention to the congregations in which the faith and morals of millions of believers are formed and transformed.

To honor Robert Lynn's conviction that congregations are the place where theory meets practice, we offer insights from our research, which we think will help pastors and lay persons become more effective leaders.

## Congregational Self-Images for Social Ministry

CARL S. DUDLEY AND SALLY A. JOHNSON

Congregational self-images are both the mirror in which the members see themselves and, in turn, the shape they give to the church. A congregation that sees itself as a "big church" may have confidence in its own resources that can sustain a variety of ministries; yet that sense of bigness may allow members to feel anonymous and hide in the crowd rather than become actively involved. The "small church," on the other hand, which may enjoy its intimacy, may let the feeling of "smallness" limit its programming. A "neighborhood church" feels that it knows the people and problems of its turf, while a "tall-steeple church" may be proud of its grand Gothic arches and large pipe organ. These images reflect some of the values and commitments of church members.

Names that draw on scriptural images carry their own kind of power. Church names like Calvary, Bethel, or Zion were chosen to evoke biblical stories. The ministry project named The Mustard Seed expects to grow quietly yet irresistibly. Strong and compelling congregational self-images bind members together, expressing their shared identity and delineating the ways they differ from others.

The most powerful bonds often remain unspoken. Most compelling—for good or for ill—are the silent assumptions based in shared values, experiences, habits, and relationships. When a congregation discovers symbols that articulate its identity, it can build on its strengths and address its weaknesses. The best self-images affirm the values that bind the members, give sharpness and meaning to areas of disagreement, and provide a context for change and growth.

Theologians and sociologists have clustered church images in typologies to describe patterns of belief and ministry by which congregations serve the Lord. These typologies have been based on such factors as size, social context, and organizational dynamics.<sup>1</sup> Other, more popularly recognized images have been suggested by church leaders and reinforced by

the mass media. The self-image of an evangelical church encourages its members to talk about their faith with others, while members of a liberal church expect to be tolerant of wide differences among themselves and in their communities.

In the past three years we have had access to a wide spectrum of congregations, learning from them the images in which they see themselves and how those images are related to the roles they play in their communities. With a grant from the Lilly Endowment and with the encouragement of Robert W. Lynn, senior vice-president for religion, we have been able to seed forty congregation-based social ministry projects in the Midwest. These projects are sponsored by Roman Catholic and Protestant churches from more than a dozen denominations, roughly typical of mainline and some evangelical congregations in Chicago, central Illinois, Indianapolis, and northern Indiana.

Drawing on narratives written by the people themselves, we have identified five types of congregational self-images. We have supplemented their stories with written survey questions, interviews with church leaders, and observations of their development of social ministry projects. These are not the only images that could be identified, but they reflect five different and effective ways these congregations relate to their communities as they remember their stories. First we will introduce and summarize these types as previously reported,<sup>2</sup> and then we will explain with more recent data the ways they shape their social ministries.

### Five Congregational Self-Images

*The survivor church* tells of the crises it has weathered. Most often these have been struggles internal to the church, though some congregations share this identity by virtue of being a gathering of people who have survived other perils. Survivor churches are reactive, and always on the verge of being overwhelmed by emergencies. They do not expect to conquer their problems, but they will not give in. They are determined rather than domineering, relentless rather than aggressive. They hang on long after others would have quit, because "we've made it through worse than this before." Although outsiders have often seen these churches as "weak," we find this self-image to be remarkably resilient and productive when leaders learn to make positive use of their crises.

*The crusader church* never tires of seeking out issues and championing causes. Crusader churches are the high-profile congregations against which

the social commitment of other churches is sometimes measured. Independent, often entrepreneurial in style, they are largely made up of members who have chosen the church for the stands it takes and the causes it pursues. Crusaders share with survivors a high level of commitment and energy, although the crusader differs by being proactive in its approach to problems. We have found these highly visible congregations to be significantly different from their familiar stereotypes.

*The pillar church* is anchored in its community and feels a distinct responsibility for it. The architecture often reflects this self-image—strong pillars that lift the roof physically and the community spiritually. The building may be modest in a small town, or imposing in a neighborhood that expects a prominent architectural posture. Like the building, the members are pillars of the community, good citizens individually and corporately. More than the building, they share a pillar mind-set. Resources of heritage, experience, or money are to be used for the good of all.

*The pilgrim church* tells of the movements of cultural groups in its history, in counterpoint to the pillar's sense of being rooted in a place. Most pilgrim congregations have seen waves of immigration or racial change, and often "old ethnics" and "new ethnics" now share the story. These are the Slovaks or Swedes whose neighborhood now receives Mexicans or Asians, the interracial parish with Italian and German roots, the black adherents of a largely white evangelical tradition. Another kind of pilgrim congregation recites its own life story move by move, from one dwelling place to another. For pilgrim congregations, their culture and their Christian faith are woven into a single fabric.

*The servant church*, finally, goes about the work of helping people in need with a quiet faithfulness. They are neither threatened like survivors nor aggressive like crusaders. Where pillars feel responsible for the whole community and pilgrims respond to distinct groups, servants see individuals in need and reach out to help them in supportive and pastoral ways. Servant churches are sustained by servant people—those who visit the sick, take meals to the bereaved, and send cards to shut-ins. From there it is a natural extension for them to provide food, clothing, and other basic needs to their neighbors. Their faith is lived out in service.

In summary, the images may be understood by their primary style of response to human need:

Survivor: Is reactive to the crises of an overwhelming world

Crusader: Is proactive to translate crises into causes

Pillar: Takes civic responsibility that embraces the community

Pilgrim: Cares for extended family or cultural group

Servant: Provides support for individuals who need help

Some congregations fit easily within one self-image, but most churches have elements of several. The pastor or lay leaders may hold a different image than the members at large. Age groups or other segments of the congregation may see the church through different lenses. The dominant self-image of the congregation may have changed over the years with shifts in circumstances and membership.

One church in our study is seen as a survivor by denominational staff who have debated closing it for years; yet the members see themselves as pilgrims historically who are now crusaders in their neighborhood. Another church is proud to be an innovative crusader in its community, yet a pillar style of worship provides an important source of unity and energy. A congregation with impressive architecture and a downtown location looks like a pillar, feels like a group of pilgrims with survivor undertones, and has energetic crusader leaders.

From our experience, tensions between these images can be creative, and need not be destructive. Leaders who recognize the variety of self-images can help to set diversity in positive perspective. Differences among individuals and between congregations can be constructively channeled—when and if they are understood. Church officers, pastors, and consultants who appreciate these differences can give leadership that is uniquely appropriate to each congregation. With an understanding of biblical and theological foundations for each, all five approaches can invigorate healthy congregations, and all five can motivate and give focus to social ministry. But they do it differently, each with its own style.

### Images for Social Ministry

These five self-images all assume different ways of relating to the community. We have explored possible implications for a church's mission orientation and response, its leadership style, the ways it goes about forming community partnerships, its theological and social beliefs, its decision-making and sense of group cohesion, and its readiness to venture into social justice advocacy along with service. While some of our findings have supported traditional assumptions, others have surprised us—and may liberate church leaders from some negative stereotypes regarding social ministries (see Table 6.1).

TABLE 6.1

## Churches by Self-Image

| CHARACTERISTICS<br>OF CONGREGATIONS   | SURVIVOR  |      | CRUSADER |      | PILLAR |         | PILGRIM |                                 | SERVANT |   | N*   |
|---|---|------|----------|------|--------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|---------|---|------|
|   | C   | N    | C        | N    | C      | N       | C       | N                               | C       | N |      |
| PARTNERS: Average (mean) number of partners per church. (Churches, Nontchurched partners, Total)                                      | .44   |      | 1.33     |      | 2.00   |         | .67     |                                 | 1.50    |   | (40) |
|   | .22   |      | 2.67     |      | .73    |         | .50     |                                 | .13     |   |      |
|   | .67   |      | 4.00     |      | 2.73   |         | 1.17    |                                 | 1.63    |   |      |
| CONGREGATIONAL THEOLOGY: Views on biblical authority and salvation. (Evangelical, Moderate, Liberal)                                  | 44%   |      | 33%      |      | 0%     |         | 17%     |                                 | 0%      |   | (40) |
|   | 44%   |      | 33%      |      | 36%    |         | 67%     |                                 | 63%     |   |      |
|   | 11%   |      | 33%      |      | 64%    |         | 17%     |                                 | 38%     |   |      |
| 7   |   |      |          |      |        |         |         |                                 |         |   |      |
| MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS<br>OF THEIR CONGREGATIONS  | 1   | 2    | 3        | 4    | 5      | SERVANT |         | PAIRS SIGNIF.                   |         |   |      |
|   |   |      |          |      |        |         |         |                                 |         |   |      |
| INTIMACY: Scale measuring social cohesion of congregation. Higher score = greater sense of intimacy.                                  | 11.5  | 11.8 | 11.5     | 11.7 | 10.2   | (3939)  |         | 5 < 1,2,3,4                     |         |   |      |
|   | 16.1  | 15.7 | 14.9     | 15.1 | 14.6   | (3076)  |         | 1 > 3,4,5<br>2 > 3,5            |         |   |      |
| ACTIVISM: Individual conscience vs. corporate congregational action on social issues. Scale from 1.0 = individual to 7.0 = corporate. | 3.9   | 4.4  | 3.5      | 3.7  | 3.6    | (3783)  |         | 2 > 1,3,4,5<br>1 > 3,5          |         |   |      |
|   | 10.7  | 11.0 | 10.3     | 11.0 | 10.6   | (3771)  |         | 3 < 1,2,4<br>5 < 2,4            |         |   |      |
| ADVOCACY: Scale measuring priority given to church's advocacy for social justice issues. Higher score = greater priority.             | 4.8   | 5.4  | 4.6      | 5.5  | 4.0    | (2999)  |         | 5 < 1,2,3,4<br>1,3 < 2,4        |         |   |      |
|   | 13.0  | 13.5 | 12.0     | 14.1 | 12.1   | (3818)  |         | 3 < 1,2,4<br>5 < 1,2,4<br>1 < 4 |         |   |      |
| SOCIAL ATTITUDES: Scale measuring members' orientation to social issues. Higher score = more liberal.                                 | 32%   | 32%  | 22%      | 35%  | 21%    | (3953)  |         | ***                             |         |   |      |
|   | COD OF JUSTICE: Percent agreeing that the church should work for justice. |      |          |      |        |         |         |                                 |         |   |      |

\* The first two items consider the forty churches as the units of analysis, while the remainder are based on individual-level church member data. In the latter, respondents' scores are weighted according to size of church sample, so that each church receives equal weight in the analysis.

\*\* The test used to determine significance for these items is a one-way analysis of variance. Scheffé multiple comparison test used for testing any two pairs of means.

\*\*\* Tested using chi-square test; significant at < 0.01 level.

These five congregational types appear to cut across denominational and theological spectra. Of the forty churches we have studied, eight to eleven fall in each group (including five churches that share equally in two identities and are profiled in both). There are at least six different denominations represented in each type, including Roman Catholics and Protestants in all types. Evangelicals, moderates, and liberals were well represented throughout the types. Most congregations showed elements of more than one self-image, usually with one predominating. The forty churches in our study provided living stories from which we draw these five self-images.

### Survivor Churches: Against All Odds

Survivor congregations feel overwhelmed in a world beyond their control. Driven by the needs they have experienced and the troubles they have endured, they feel they are moving from one crisis to the next, one step ahead of disaster. Equally influenced by tradition and by contemporary trends, they are pulled by both forces and stabilized by neither. Pastors and active lay leaders often feel both psychologically and spiritually overworked and undernourished. Fatigue and burnout haunt these ministries.

When survivors look toward their communities, it is with the same sense of being overwhelmed that they have experienced in their own internal struggles. Often they are located in declining or impoverished neighborhoods (not unrelated to their own decline), and the social problems seem too great and complicated to conquer. Rather than withdraw, however, the survivor starts someplace and tries to make a dent in the situation.

These churches can do more than just survive. They can become sources of individual help and catalysts for social change. The survivors in our group have come to view their hardships and struggles not just as liabilities but as grist for the mill of ministry. Crisis gives them an identity. In reacting to their conditions, they have learned to use the pressure of negative circumstances as a positive motivating force to generate ministry.

They may be reacting with their backs to the wall, but it works. These are activist congregations, second only to the crusaders in their corporate commitment to respond to social problems. They are also close-knit groups with a strong sense of their own communal bonds and highly participative decision-making. Most of our survivors are evangelicals and moderates.

Though it would seem that they need all the help they can get, the survivor congregations in our group have formed the fewest community partnerships for ministry. When they do, they turn to safe and familiar

partners, such as churches on the same corner or of the same denomination. It may be a sense of isolation and precarious existence that makes them unwilling or unable to risk new alliances. It may also be part of their long-conditioned pattern of resolutely slogging through the swamp. They have made it through worse before, and they "keep on keeping on."

Sometimes well-meaning advisors are tempted to urge pastors and lay leaders of survivor churches to set more realistic goals. But in our experience, many of these leaders seem built for crisis ministries. They have the gift of long-suffering commitment, and often the gift of arousing others as well. They can use crises to generate energy, recruit volunteers, and raise money. Crises provide people for their prayers and a pitch for their sermons. Often tired, always overextended, these congregations find their identity in survival—and they will not give up.

### Crusader Churches: Tackling the World

The dominant public image of a church in social ministry has often been the crusader congregation. Assertive, restless, ready to risk all for a cause, these churches have been the battering ram of social justice issues. More influenced by new trends than by tradition, these groups are the most independent of other authority, including denominational ties. They need and produce strong, dramatic leaders with sharp ideas, and those leaders hold their primary loyalty.

Crusaders are proactive, where survivors are reactive. As the survivor church is driven by crises within, the crusader is activated by crises without—and sees in every crisis a larger cause. Run-down homes signal community decline, and their repair represents more than bricks and paint. A victimized woman brings vivid consciousness of widespread spousal abuse, and sheltering her family is a step toward sheltering all. Of the five types, crusaders have the greatest activist identity, taking corporate stands on justice issues, and they have the strongest conviction that those stands are required by their faith in a God of justice.

Members of crusader congregations participate more actively in social ministries than do members of most other types of churches. Their sense of inner community is strong, and they are satisfied with their own decision-making systems. Crusader churches sustain a high energy level that mobilizes their own people and others around them. Aggressive and decisive, they often develop innovative responses to urgent community needs.

These churches are particularly resourceful in the coalitions they build.

Among the churches in our project, the crusaders have formed the most partnerships. In doing so, they are the least likely to stay within familiar networks and the most likely to develop functional and creative coalitions with service agencies, schools, hospitals, businesses, banks, and community organizations. Partners are allies in the fight for the cause at hand, and temporary coalitions are often built for specific purposes.

Contrary to some popular misconceptions, these socially active churches are not more likely to be theologically liberal. Only a few of the churches in our sample fall in the liberal category, while the majority are moderates and evangelicals. It may be that few liberal churches define issues clearly enough or risk faith so sharply as to become crusaders. It may also be that the crusader identity arises out of a level of energy and commitment that operates independently of traditional theological postures. However, although most crusaders are not theologically liberal, they do hold liberal views on social and political questions.

Crusader congregations have the strongest commitment to justice in their social ministries. They are among the most likely to see that social evils are caused by destructive systems as well as personal deficiencies, and their ministries of service move naturally into advocacy roles.

Although crusaders are proactive and survivors are reactive, they share a number of similarities. Both demand high levels of commitment, and both respond to community needs with a sense of urgency. Crisis motivates both: survivors cope with it and crusaders tackle it head on. The programs and processes they produce are very different, but the energy and commitment are surprisingly similar.

Crusaders typically form the front line of the church's social action—sensing the impending crises, generating interest in the issues, and shaping the theological and social science foundations for subsequent denominational involvement. Admirers are tempted to make them the normative model for congregational social ministry. Yet the majority of American Christian congregations build on other identities to generate effective social ministries.

### Pillar Churches: Solid as a Rock

Some churches clearly approach social ministry with a sense of Christian civic responsibility. Anchored in a place, with resources and status, they feel an obligation to work for the welfare of the community. Often pillar churches are named for their places or have "community" in their names.

They are the Methodist (or Baptist or Catholic—or Christian) presence on that side of town.

Most pillars are large or medium-sized congregations; they tend to have a relatively low sense of group intimacy and more limited participation in their decision-making. Pillar churches expect professional-quality leadership from both clergy and lay leaders. In seeking partners for ministry, they often turn to existing civic networks to which those leaders have connections. Pillars are second only to crusaders in the number of partners they recruit; but where crusaders have the most nonchurch partners, pillars draw the most churches. They often seem to approach partnering from a characteristic sense of strength, extending an opportunity to others to join with them in their community ministry.

Two-thirds of the pillars among our churches are theologically liberal, and one-third are moderate. Yet these churches' views on social issues are the most conservative. Contrary to what might be expected of these rooted, established congregations, they are the least tied to tradition and the most influenced by contemporary trends. Pillar churches are less convinced than others that their faith requires them to take corporate stands on justice issues, and are less inclined to do so. They tend to study an issue longer than other churches, and often they seem slow in making decisions—possibly because they recognize a variety of viewpoints and program options. But when mobilized, these churches can have a powerful impact.

In comparison with the crisis orientation of crusaders and survivors, pillar churches maintain their composure. Built on a rock, they feel no imminent threat to their own existence and offer a presence of stability to their neighborhood. They also offer shelter to a variety of community groups that use their facilities for meetings and activities. When invited to develop new social ministries, they survey their area broadly and identify widespread problems. They are the most apt to develop comprehensive responses to community needs. When a pillar chooses a target population—such as the deaf and hearing impaired, youth, or the elderly—it often tries to meet many of their needs all at once through a multifaceted program.

Though members of pillar churches have the least orientation to the systemic causes of social problems, these congregations are among the quickest to move into advocacy roles as they implement social ministry projects. Thorough and ambitious in their planning, they see themselves as community institutions, networking with other such institutions for the common good. Pillars have a quiet but firm commitment to duty. They live

for the commendation in Matthew 25: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

### Pilgrim Churches: A People on a Journey

While pillar churches are built on a place, pilgrims are rooted in a people—often a people passing through a place. For most pilgrim churches, a cultural history colors their sense of identity. Many have seen several waves of immigration in their neighborhood and have faithfully adopted each group in their ministry. Little has been written about the social ministries of congregations with ethnic, national, and racial roots. As might be expected, the pilgrims in our study have a deep commitment to history and tradition, and have the strongest bonding as a church "family." Pilgrim churches seek "traditional" leaders, as tradition is defined and valued in each cultural group. These leaders are no less professionally qualified than those in pillar churches, but they are expected to function more as parent figures within the church family system—and, as such, must bear and honor the heritage.

Pilgrim churches carry a strong, moderate faith, and only a few liberal or evangelical groups are included in this type. Secure in their Christian-cultural roots, they are free to explore their differences. A black church is drawn to a largely white evangelical denomination by common bonds of a biblical foundation and personal theological freedom. A Slovakian-Mexican church tells of the excitement of worship when "the traditional organ music gives way to improvised mariachi of guitars and other contemporary instruments."

The pilgrim churches in our project have been nearly as slow as survivors in forming partnerships for ministry. When they do, they find partners in their extended family—groups that represent historic ties, neighborhood connections, or cultural networks. In partnerships as well as in leadership, the trusted relationship of *who* people are is more important than the functional relationship of *what* they do.

The pilgrim congregation's call to mission is different from the crisis orientation of the survivor and crusader. It shares with the pillar a sense of responsibility, but not for the community per se. Drawn mostly from populations that have been marginalized and oppressed in our culture, they have carried the responsibility for "our people." This is the black congregation helping black children to stay in school and achieve, or the Hispanic group teaching citizenship classes to more recent Hispanic immigrants.

There are also pilgrims in a second stage: the most urgent needs of their own group satisfied, they now extend their ministry to another group. The descendants of Scandinavian immigrants foster a new congregation of ethnic Chinese refugees from Indochina, and the two groups tell their common story in terms of the Exodus. In a neighborhood once called Stockholm, now a weekly drop-off point for new Mexican immigrants, "old ethnic" Anglos work with "new ethnic" Hispanics to offer educational opportunities to their Spanish-speaking neighbors.

Born of years of hard work to carve out a viable place in American society, the social ministries of pilgrim churches are oriented toward long-term improvement in people's lives and opportunities. Almost uniformly the pilgrims in our project have developed educational ministries—nurturing children, preparing youth, and training adults for jobs, as well as offering classes in the English language, citizenship, parenting, and other life skills. Their common motivation is to help "our people" make a better place in the land of opportunity—whether the people are "ours" by blood or by adoption.

At their best, pilgrims have a special gift: they are not limited by their own ethnic heritage, but broadened by it. Far from being cloistered, ghetto churches filling only their own needs, pilgrims use their own experiences to help them reach out to others. Though not inclined to think of themselves as "activists," they are among the most active in social ministries. Strong in the values they place on both local and global concerns, they hold the most liberal social attitudes. With the highest comprehension of the systemic dimensions of social problems, they are able to move into advocacy roles along with individual service. When their history is mobilized in ministry, they can become a powerful force for community-building.

### Servant Churches: Faithful Helpers

If high energy marks crusaders and survivors, and if pillars and pilgrims carry a sense of responsibility, then, by contrast, servant churches are characterized by moderation. These congregations are not inclined to carry anything to excess—in social causes, community programs, doctrinal commitments, or congregational intimacy. They are not moved to initiate crusades or campaigns but simply want to help people, and their social ministries have a distinct focus on the needs of individuals.

Of the five groups, servant churches are the most influenced by history and tradition. For them, caring for people seems the most basic and natural



consequence of their Christian faith. This sense of servanthood may be the most widespread and universal foundation for generating social ministries.

Just as their ministries are focused on particular persons in need, these congregations are themselves gatherings of individuals. Statistically they have uniquely low feelings of group cohesiveness and report that their decision-making process is limited to relatively few members. Yet their leaders tend to be caring, supportive, and pastoral, with a conscious focus on enabling individuals to reach their potential. Servant congregations are composed of gathered individuals who know they need each other, who reach out to help others like themselves—people, not systems, who need the love of God in the touch of kindness and concern.

Moderation characterizes their beliefs and their actions. Though socially conservative, most are theologically moderate. They are aware of justice issues, but are not naturally focused on systemic analyses of social evils. Although they do not see social problems through the lenses of “great” causes, they can take stands of conscience when they feel forced by circumstance, and can move into advocacy roles when necessary.

More naturally, servants design ministries that sustain individuals through long-term needs. These churches provide continuing help to seniors with home repairs or insurance paperwork, or help families to develop mutual support systems. Frequently they feel no need for outside assistance and are not aggressive in seeking allies in their ministries. Rather, they may form quiet, neighborly relationships with other institutions and individuals—most often churches—who can help them in helping others.

Sometimes the servant’s sense of caring for others risks paternalism, creating dependency in those who are receiving help. Yet they faithfully live out the Lord’s words, “I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink. . . .”

In summary, the dominant characteristics of these images among the churches in our study include the following:

***Survivor:* Is Reactive to the Crises of an Overwhelming World**

Leadership feels stretched, often near burnout.

Uses crisis situations to generate strong support.

Close-knit membership with highly participatory decision-making.

Few, safe, and familiar partners.

Theologically evangelical and moderate, socially liberal.

***Crusader:* Is Proactive to Translate Crises into Causes**

Dramatic leaders with a clarity of vision.

Strongly independent attitude, responsive to trends.

High membership participation in mission if not in decisions.

Develops functional coalitions, not long-term partners.

Theologically moderate and evangelical, but liberal and even radical on social issues.

***Pillar:* Takes Civic Responsibility That Embraces the Community**

Professionally trained and organizationally supported leaders.

Larger congregations with lower sense of intimacy and more limited participation in decision-making.

Many partners, but mostly other churches.

Theologically liberal and moderate, but socially conservative.

Tends toward comprehensive, multiservice ministries.

***Pilgrim:* Cares for Extended Family or Cultural Group**

Leaders with traditional values drawn from their ethnic group.

Strong sense of history, and active social ministry participation.

Few partners, mostly drawn from familiar networks.

Theologically moderate, but liberal on social issues.

Ministries that care for “our own” or “our adopted” people.

***Servant:* Provides Support for Individuals Who Need Help**

Leaders who are seen as caregivers.

Low group cohesiveness, a gathering of individuals.

Few partners, mostly resources in times of specific need.

Theologically moderate, socially conservative.

Ministries of direct, personal, and limited services.

## Observations and Implications

This variety of images can free local church leaders from the mistaken idea that there is only one way to generate social ministry. There are many, and we have identified profiles of five of these approaches. In the process, what we have learned from these social ministries has called into question many of the old stereotypes about congregational limits or theological assumptions. The congregation that recognizes its own self-image can generate commitment when it claims its own style. It can build coalitions when it identifies its similarities with some churches and differences with others. To encourage these comparisons, we offer observations in four areas.

### *Recognizing Allies and Developing Coalitions*

Similarities draw some congregations together. Crusaders may appear—and feel—invincible, while survivors are vulnerable, struggling to

stay alive. Yet congregations with these two self-images often discover a common bond in their level of energy and willingness to act. They have a natural affinity in their shared perception that social issues have systemic causes, and their Christian convictions provide a foundation for their ministries of social justice.

Crusader churches live on the active edge, while pilgrim congregations march to a steadier beat, but they share many values—the high priority they put on social ministries, their liberal orientation to social issues, and their personal motivation to work for justice causes. Crusaders, pilgrims, and survivors are often allies—and sometimes the images overlap.

Differences can be the basis for coalitions in ministry, especially when churches discover how much they need each other's strengths. Servants and crusaders begin at opposite ends of the social justice scale—servants by helping individuals, and crusaders by challenging systems. When an inner-city servant church realized the need for transitional housing for homeless people in their community, they formed a powerful alliance with a crusader church from the university district across town. The two churches have very different histories, theological orientations, and personal gifts. What unites them is their shared vision of a better, more caring community—and their teamwork is amazingly effective.

Pillars and survivors are polar opposites in everything from bank accounts to self-confidence; but when they work together, they have an impact on the community and on each other. We have seen one struggling congregation in a depressed area of a midwestern city build a remarkable partnership with a large metropolitan congregation on the outskirts. The survivor church receives resources without losing its autonomy, and the pillar church has found a place to focus its volunteers and other resources in mission. Both are grateful for opportunities to share.

Effective social ministry begins with self-awareness—not only for the greater health and growth of a single congregation, but also to enable the cooperation of those who know who they are and what they bring to a unity forged in a common task.

#### *Faith—Yes! Theology—No!*

Familiar theological models suggest that liberal churches are more likely to be activist in social issues and social ministries, while evangelical congregations (with an emphasis on personal salvation and the Bible as the literal word of God) are more apt to withdraw from engagement in social issues or social ministries.<sup>3</sup> Members in our project churches saw their ministries as

expressions of their Christian faith, but not according to the familiar assumptions about theological foundations for social ministry.

The most active congregations, crusaders and survivors, are not motivated by liberal theological perspectives. Their strong commitments to social ministry were more likely to have moderate or evangelical theological roots. We can only speculate that liberal churches may be more shaped by class differences, or more divided by the pluralism they embrace, while evangelical churches are more willing to be unified, decisive, and forceful. The majority of crusader churches are inclined to embrace both the salvation of souls and a passion for social justice. One urban congregation emphasizes personal evangelism with preaching for decision and an altar call, then follows with a week full of programs responding to the needs of battered women and single-parent families, and to the hope for developing low-cost shelter for these community residents.

Liberal theology appears more consistently in the pillar churches, but these congregations are conservative on social issues and relatively unaware of the social justice dimensions of ministry. Servant churches, who care the most about helping individuals, have moderate doctrinal commitments and the least interest in the systemic causes of social problems. One tall-steeple church with traditional liturgy, solid preaching, and a friendly, homogeneous membership has responded to the needs of the unemployed with a careful, well-documented plan to provide help for hurting people—but does not make waves either in the church or in the community.

Throughout our study, motivations for social ministry have not been associated with any particular theological stance or doctrine. Rather, the appeal to work for social ministries and to advocate for justice is nurtured by a more universal community concern and affinity with human need, and is supported by a broad-based Christian faith that finds roots in the full spectrum of theological beliefs.

#### *Agents of Change*

Clout—the ability to make a difference—appears in surprising places. The tall steeples of pillar churches command respect, and the dramatic issues of crusaders demand attention. But even a survivor church may well have more strength for ministry than it realizes. Survivor congregations can use their crises as resources for attacking their sense of being overwhelmed by forces beyond their control. When they objectify and lift up those crises, they can mobilize a deep and persistent commitment to meet the challenges.

One small congregation that has struggled to survive because of its size (thirty-five members) has used its location on the tense boundary between a low-income neighborhood and a more affluent university enclave to mobilize people from both communities in an educational program for youth. Their program, new and small but lively, has generated a sense of pride and satisfaction in participants from both neighborhoods, strengthened the commitments of the congregation, and surprised them with new recognition in denominational circles. In this way some congregations develop a larger dream in which they become agents for change far beyond their size or individual resources.

Pilgrims are also apt to underestimate their power to change communities through social ministries. Pilgrim churches frequently have had little experience as agents of community change. Although they may have a cherished history and wide community contacts, they may never have recognized or made use of their status as respected community institutions. One rural church has used latent pride in the community's history to rally dispirited neighbors to work together again. A black congregation became so incensed about children loitering in betting parlors at the rear of convenience stores that they mobilized their network of family, friends, colleagues, and neighborhood contacts to help them create alternative activities for youth of the area. Working in programs of social ministry and issues of social justice has given fresh affirmation to pilgrim congregations and has encouraged them to flex their community muscles in new and creative ways.

### *Unique Gifts*

Each self-image has special, irreplaceable gifts that these congregations alone can offer to others through social ministry, gifts that make them stronger and richer in the act of giving:

- The survivors can cope where other styles would collapse.
- The crusaders can raise issues where others might let them slide.
- The pillars can legitimate change where others might ignore it.
- The pilgrims can embrace diversity where others might deny it.
- The servants can care for individuals who might otherwise be lost.

Ministering congregations are strengthened by translating their faith into action, and the community gains from them all. There is no single way to engage in social ministry—thank God!

### NOTES

1. For an expanded discussion of some biblical and contemporary self-images, see Carl S. Dudley, "Using Church Images for Commitment, Conflict, and Renewal," in C. Ellis Nelson, *Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), pp. 89-113.
2. For the historical sources used by congregations in developing these images, see Carl S. Dudley, "Saints, Crises, and Other Memories That Energize the Church," keynote address to SCUPE Urban Congress, Chicago, April 13, 1988. Reprinted in *Action Information* (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute), January-February and March-April 1989.
3. Although this position has been frequently articulated, its most recent, careful, and well-documented statement can be found in the work by David A. Roozen, William J. McKinney, and Jackson W. Carroll, *Varieties of Religious Presence* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984).