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RECONNECTING CHRISTIAN FAITH WITH PUBLIC LIFE

A Thesis Presented to the Departments of Political Science and Theology in Consideration for Graduation with Honors

Kelly Raths

April 1999
SIGNATURE PAGE

This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Departments of Political Science and Theology.

Director Dr. John Hart Date

Reader Sr. Annette Moran Date

Reader Dennis Wiedmann Date
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Life is kind of like a big pinball game. The high speeds and gentle rolls are both exciting and at times painful. We scurry through collecting experience like points and adjusting to everything and everyone we bump into. Looking back upon the last four years at Carroll I owe my “high-score” to the people who placed themselves in my path. Each person has given me momentum—each person has made me rich.

This thesis is the springboard of conversation that I will continue to have both as a citizen and as I enter the ministry. Though I’ve chosen this particular topic of discussion, the ideas and the encouragement for the conversation are the product of many wonderful people. My readers, Dennis Wiedmann, Sr. Annette Moran and Dr. John Hart have brought insight and clarity to my thesis. I especially want to thank Sr. Annette and Dr. Hart who are loving role models to me. The community of St. Paul’s Church and its many passionate members have also been role models, demonstrating the potential of a church who embraces the call to justice and public life. I thank people like Laurie Gaffney and Patti Opitz who, through their model and support, fuel my own passion for justice and my hope for the public life. I thank my mom for her prayers, my brother for his reminders of life’s joys and my dad for always checking up on how “the beast” was progressing. Finally, I would like to recognize all my friends, in particular my roommates, who love, laugh and think with me.

Like a pinball game every interaction is brief, but, like a pinball game, each contact determines the direction I take. Thanks to every person who has touched me; your friendship will guide me along the paths of my life.
ABSTRACT

This is a thesis about reconnecting faith lives with public lives. It is a vision of Christians who are seeking and living out their values at work, school, in entertainment selections, conversations on the phone, consumer habits, and interactions with self and others.

An assessment of contemporary American society describes the need for such a vision. Americans have been described as increasingly placeless people who feel a lost sense of social empowerment, community and meaning. There exists a strong resistance to reconcile facts with values, leaving personal beliefs isolated in the private life. The church must make the choice to consciously follow the retreat from public ambiguity or gently guide its people into a holistic and public faith life.

By examining scriptural and historical precedent, this thesis explains how it is both the intention and the challenge of church leaders and members to live their faith publicly. Christian tradition and scripture teach the discovery of God among people, especially the poor. To be Christian is to be an advocate of justice—a role that can not be fulfilled if secluded from the immediate and global communities in which one lives.

The church proves ideal for bridging the private and public gap. Unique to any other body of people, the church on a frequent basis draws together a diverse group of members united by heartfelt beliefs. As well, churches are found in every community thereby providing stability and a place to be informed and
connected. The understanding of church in this thesis comes from my own experience of church both as a Methodist and as a Carroll College student. Not only has each community fostered my faith, but has energized me to experience and penetrate my faith publicly.
INTRODUCTION

The words "politics" and "public" often invokes suspicion. For some the word politics has evolved to narrowly imply actions government scandal, complexity and dynamics. It is understandable, therefore, that most people squirm when called to be politically active—in fact most choose to avoid politics and the public altogether. More accurately defined, politics is the public life of the people, that is the public life of every citizen regardless of race, economic level, gender, age, or faith. Participation in religion, specifically Christianity, is a public action for a majority of Americans. This work will be focusing on how Christians who join together to form a church embody their faith in politics.

Contemporary theologians and political theorists describe a growing American desire to permeate their secular public lives with deeper values and meaning. One factor leading to the retreat from public life is its lack of relevance and apparent proximity to one's life. For many, politics and the public are an abyss. To feel at peace in the vastness people establish non-committal public routines which avoid public ambiguity until they return to the confines of their home or social niche. Having removed their morals and values from the public domain people grow accustomed with the relativism. The NIMBY (not in my back yard) enthusiasts endure diverse public morality so long as it goes no farther than the parameters of their picket fence. As a result, American citizens have been trained to believe that personal values are exactly that—personal—and should not enter into public life. Fear is also a factor in the silence of personal beliefs. The thought of openly sharing ideas or expressing one's notion of justice comes at the risk of
disagreement which is uncomfortable for Americans. This moral ambiguity makes the decision-making processes of our social structures very difficult for they can find no moral rocks to stand upon.

Many Americans today don’t like to live in the midst of contradictions and the public arena is full of them. Consistency seems nearly impossible when reconciling sex scandals in the White House with the standards we uphold for our children. “How,” Americans find themselves asking, “can we possibly adhere to what the Church says and still respond to the realities of public life.” Because people are not capable of Christ-like purity they get caught in the inevitable hypocrisy of being a Christian and living public lives. The apparent dichotomy leads to separate lives, the secular box and the sacred box, and the church becomes a place of retreat from the conflicting nature of the public context. The desire for escape draws large audiences to church. If not careful the church, for the sake of its own security and acceptance, may capitalize as an isolator and protector from the pains of the external.

Christian teachings tell us and reality affirms for us that life is an ambiguous wedding of inescapable pain and joy. The role of the church then is not to shelter us from the inevitable, but rather to support and guide us through these elements of elation and challenge. There is truth behind people’s inherent desire to reconnect values with public and social life. Such a reconnection begins to dissolve the overwhelming sense of placelessness, powerlessness, and isolation prevalent among Americans.

The church, a group of people founded on a belief system, is the ideal community for bridging the public/private gap because it provides a guideline for right and wrong
with the scriptural and historical mandate of social justice. Increasingly, both the governmental and private sectors are recognizing the church's capacity for enhancing public quality via belief-based vision and not just need-based urgency. Examples include: the inner city partnership of police forces and churches to eradicate gangs, organizations like Habitat for Humanity and Bread for the World which effectively empower those in need, and rehabilitation services for alcoholism, mental distress, and other ailments that not only alleviate the problem but fill the void with spiritual reality and communal belonging.

In the Christian community, efforts at public partnership have been described as wedding discipleship with citizenship.1 Many churches, teachers and lay people naturally wed their faith values with their teachings and life. For others, however, the two seem irreconcilable, contributing to the false understanding that a Christian must endure and survive the evils of the earthly life in expectation of the Kingdom. This isolating approach to life does not affirm Christ’s public example or our call to be active disciples. Christians cannot forget that the Savior Jesus Christ was a radical lover and activist not only of people’s personal well being but also social justice.

Anyone involved in the complexities of economic, governmental or other social processes knows the need for a moral rudder. In society, religion is the moral authority and must fulfill its responsibility not only to the individual but to public bodies as well. The immediate response to such a suggestion is, “We don’t want one narrow-minded group of people telling us what to do.” To clarify, the intention of a moral rudder is to
stimulate dialogue not monologue. Both parties benefit. Social structures gain a better sense of right and wrong and religious groups gain insight into the needs, concerns and rewards of people’s everyday life. As Parker Palmer writes in his work *Company of Strangers*, the private life exists within the public making them mutually dependent. Private values give rise shape to public values and public values give shape to social conditions. If the public does not have the values of its citizens to serve as a check and balance, its actions become useless and often corrupt.

Uniting religion and politics can be a difficult task in a nation priding itself on separation of Church and State. Coming out of the 1970’s the United States felt it had finally separated church and public/politics. Religion was left to focus on the private things like family and Sunday morning. The separation provided a sense of order and tidiness giving the illusion that the two would never again need one another. Separation, however, is not so simple: not only are the private and the public interdependent but also religion is and has always been a vocal player in politics. Currently faith groups from every spectrum of political thought are involved in politics. They include deeply conservative groups like the Christian Coalition, one of this country’s strongest lobbying units, to left wing civil rights advocates and Liberation theologians. Religion is a mover and shaker of the governmental process.

The public responsibility of Christians and the church is nothing new but perhaps has become a misplaced priority. Historically, the church has always played a public role

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in providing the birthplace for national movements and organizations. Any thorough study of Civil Rights, the Women's movement or the founding of our nation recognizes the inescapable influence of Christian beliefs on their formation. Martin Luther King Jr. was a preacher, theologian and social activist who found his spirit and motivation in the teachings of Christ. King alone could not have achieved what he did had he not been supported by the multitudes of fellow Christians. Success by way of supportive Christian communities also rings true for other cornerstones of our nation. A church is successful because it is unique in any social body. In his work *Faith and Philanthropy* Robert Wuthnow says the church is a motivating foundation because it provides an empathetic bond to others. This notion of empathetic bond supports Albert Borgmann's comparison of democracy and religion.

In *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* Borgmann states that people are more manifestly religious than democratic. He goes on to explain the truth of this statement making the case that people are orientated towards a comprehensive and comprehending expression of life and themselves. Democracy alone, with its laws and rights, is only a mechanism for and not a means of filling what popular writers, theologians and thinkers have been calling the "God gap." Left unattended this gap festers feelings of discontent. People are indeed ordained for something beyond personal existence. Both the

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4 Smith, Kenneth L., *Search for the Beloved Community* (Judson Press, 1974)
recognition of this universal call and the social implications of the Gospel demand that
the church address public life.

The Christian community should never be seen as a retreat from responding in the
world, but as a base for transforming evil and doing good. Similarly, the Alban Institute
describes church participation as a pendulum. Members swing back and forth motioning
between the activity of the public and the invigoration of the church. The cycle provides
people the essential public experiences of discipleship and revelation of faith in the world
while not forgetting to nurture one's personal needs. In this way church membership
gives reason and energy to the external experience that is otherwise rejected as
meaningless.

Thus, the church, if fulfilling both public and private service, is an ideal halfway
house for moving people into public roles. If a church member attempting to make a
change on an unjust piece of legislation or a failing social service program becomes
agitated and at the door of defeat, she or he knows there is a community waiting to
support her/him. Some may ask, is not this support the role of family or close friends?
Indeed it is. The church does not infringe upon such relationships but compliments them.
Realistically speaking, however, people in our highly mobile society often find
themselves in unfamiliar contexts distanced from loved ones. As well, the traditional
stability and definition of family is no longer neat nor guaranteed. Both characteristics
understandably amplify the desire for community.

The writing of this thesis is a personal quest. As a Political Science and Theology major I am drawn to the political capacities for promoting justice. The personal question that I have tried to answer in this study is, "Where do my faith and my passion for politics intertwine?" For me the answer is the church. As the writer of this thesis my perspectives have been very much shaped by my own Methodist background and my coursework and experience at Carroll College. As a student I have been moved through my acquaintance with liberation theology. As a Methodist, I am a member of a denomination that gained popularity for its unorthodox practices of empowering the lay people. Original pastors were common people who spoke in layman's terms and learned side by side with members. The Methodist church continues adhering to the practice of holding members accountable to living the gospel. When I speak of the public and political role of the church I am not referring to well known public entities like Pat Robertson or the Christian Coalition. Rather, I write to the level of personal and grassroots congregations and their efforts to realize the Kingdom on earth. I focus on the grassroots and the individual because we must believe that who we are and how we live makes a difference.

This thesis proceeds in stages. The first chapter begins with an assessment of religion, politics and society in America today. The aim is to create an understanding of the context in which modern day churches and politics must operate and to which they must respond. The second chapter examines the historical and scriptural guidance for the church detailing the importance of its public engagement. The third chapter shows why the church is the ideal political body in light of the conflicts and desires that face the
nation. The last chapter acts as a tool and guide to church leaders and members who respond to the public call. It makes reference to St. Paul’s United Methodist Church in Helena, as a striving body of people committed to their personal and public faith. Finally, in the conclusion I summarize what I have learned and share the direction toward which this thought process sends me.
CHAPTER 1: WHERE ARE WE TODAY

On the coffee tables of most any American home sits an array of magazines. A person will likely find subscriptions like *Family* and *Better Homes and Gardens* full of pages on how to enjoy simple pleasures, make more time for self and children, and be charitable. Just beneath these might lie *Business Week* and *Money* preaching the message of capitalism: maximization of time and wealth, and competition. In the side shelf of the table rests a *Daily Devotional* used privately by one member of the family. Culture tells people how to make money, how to aspire towards a loving family and community, and how to find our personal relationship with God, but people are not told how to integrate them. There is a clear desire for reconciling the multiple facets of one’s life. The task of reconciliation falls not only on the individual but on the primary social structures—church and state.

Religion and government are most effective when in dialogue with their context. To make clear their utility the church and government need to heed the signs of the times. Both the church and government are intended to be dynamic institutions which, while never straying from their primary functions, adjust their delivery in response to public personality. It is, however, a difficult balance for these institutions to appropriately respond without undermining core values and functions. For example, the government’s primary function is to ensure just representation, participation and stability for its citizens. The function of the Christian church is to reveal God’s presence in their lives. This first chapter begins with an assessment of contemporary American society. This
assessment is important in order that the church and the state might know to whom and what they are called to serve

DECLINING SOCIAL CAPITAL

One American trend is the dwindling involvement in public activity. This loss of public enthusiasm and skill is what Robert Putnam calls the decline in social capital. Social capital will be a term used broadly in this chapter and throughout the work so it seems important and appropriate to define it here. Putnam defines the term as follows: “By analogy with notions of physical capital and human capital—tools and training that enhance individual productivity—social capital refers to features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits.” In the introduction to his updated edition of Habits of the Heart, Robert Bellah gives evidence from both his and Putnam’s research to justify their assertion of this decline in social involvement. Putnam, in his “Bowling Alone” essay, uses the pasttime of bowling to demonstrate the decline in social capital. Between 1980 and 1993 the total number of bowlers increase 10 percent while league bowling decreased 40 percent. Extending from that, nearly 80 million people went bowling at least once in 1993 which is almost a third more than voted in the 1994 congressional elections. The number who bowled is roughly equal to the number of Americans who report regularly attending church. Why is this random comparison important? It signifies, in the isolated example of bowling, that people are moving away from social organizations to more

2 Bellah, Robert Neelly, Habits of the Heart (University of California, 1996) xvi.
3 Ibid
isolated forms of entertainment. It also shows that habits of isolated entertainment rival basic citizen involvement like the right to vote. This disheartening trend is not isolated to bowling but is apparent in the massive decline of participation in civic organizations, public meetings and union membership. The decline in social involvement is directly linked to declining social capital. The result is a citizenry unable to empower themselves publicly.

Though they are increasingly choosing not to participate, most citizens remain strongly opinionated on where and how social structures should conduct their business. The local coffee shop or the random Gallop poll are saturated with public opinion. Unfortunately, either for lack of skills or lack of motivation, public opinion is not voiced through organized groups of people who can effect the quality of public institutions. One example is the growing trend to send children to private schools. Even the word “private” conveys society’s resistance toward the public. Indeed, the education in some public schools appears to be declining, but not all blame lies with government or educators. Declining public education can also be linked to shrinking PTA membership and other parent involvement in the schools. Interestingly enough, many churches are now supporting school vouchers; and in doing so they inadvertently support the movement away from public involvement and social capital.

For the most part, however, church membership has been associated with higher social capital. In his work *Faith and Philanthropy* Robert Wuthnow says that individuals who are members of religious organizations are twice as likely as nonmembers to

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contribute and volunteer civically. Unfortunately, most denominations are undergoing a decline in traditional church membership and attendance. Because of the direct connection of social capital with church membership, Wuthnow suggests that if church attendance continues to decline so too will the giving and volunteering for all charities and civic groups.

In his essay, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam identifies four explanations for the decline of social capital in addition to shrinking church attendance. First, women, the traditional members of the PTA, League of Women Voters, church committees and other volunteer organizations have moved into the work force. Often forced by economics and public pressure to take a job women have little time for volunteer dependent groups. This re-allocation of time commitments away from civic organizations and family to work is silently undermining the health and public vitality for everyone. Not only does the public suffer from women's physical absence but also their moral absence. Stereotypically, women permeate public service and the upbringing of family with their faith and values.

Mobility is the second factor in declining social capital. Americans are increasingly a placeless people. It is said that the average American will change occupations seven times in her/his lifetime. In all likelihood, each career change will be accompanied with a change in residency. Frequent mobility removes the desire to participate in local events because no sense of belonging or loyalty to one’s surroundings

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has been established. Putnam points out that, "numerous studies of organizational involvement have shown that residential stability and such related phenomena as homeownership are clearly associated with greater civic engagement."\(^9\) Though increasingly mobile, most people never lose their affinity for community and familiarity. Churches can provide community and familiarity because of their universal presence across America’s diverse landscape. Yet, even churches of the same denomination will not provide the same style of preaching or community environment. Simple adjustments like these and others make it all the easier to remain private and to not participate.

The transforming characteristics of the American family are the third thing that chisels away at social capital. This transformation includes fewer marriages, more divorces, fewer children and lower wages. Each draws attention to one’s private life and away from responsibilities to the public.\(^10\) Finally, Putnam argues that technology and its consumption of people’s leisure and daily lives amplifies the decline in social capital.\(^11\) People entertain themselves differently than in the past. Nights and free time are spent watching television in the privacy of the home and individuals strive economically to bring the free-time options of the outside inside via computers, surround sound, and virtual reality. Even mundane public contact like shopping markets and banking is being eliminated by Internet and telephone access.

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\(^10\) IBID  
\(^11\) IBID
In response to the trend of isolation America has become a hotbed for private therapy. Multiple factors have led to isolation and the corresponding rise in therapy. Philip Reiff associates the rise of private therapy with industrialization and urbanization.\(^\text{12}\) Both industrialization and urbanization began periods of American development that led to the breakdown of traditional community bonding. In each situation a person was increasingly left solo in the endeavor to affirm her/him self. Therapy thus entered providing the framework for affirmation independent of the public—enabling individuals to stand on their own two feet.\(^\text{13}\) It is important for people to be personally healthy and independent but the exaggeration of independence is devastating to the health of the public. Community is depicted as combat rather than celebration. Therapy in many ways tries to arm people with the self-help skills needed to survive and avoid the threats of the public.

Parker Palmer is a critic of exaggerated therapy. He quotes C. Wright Mills who states therapeutic realism is “crackpot.” He goes on to argue that it undermines our lives in at least three ways.\(^\text{14}\) First, private therapy, while providing ways to cope with difficult public conditions does nothing to alter those conditions.\(^\text{15}\) Never stopping to face the driving cause of retreat, people find themselves chasing their tails in an instinctual scurry of protectionism. Second, cynicism about the lack of community and the harsh edges of the public become a self-fulfilling prophecy. So dependent on their personal coping


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\(^{14}\) IBID 76
mechanisms, people lose both the know-how and the trust to build community. Lack of a healthy community feeds the therapeutic frenzy. Lastly, the dependence on private therapy deprives people of the transforming power of public therapy. Public therapy provides a network of diverse and similar people who both empathize with struggles and model social behavior. United together in community people have the voice and motivation to rectify the conditions that drive them into private retreat.

Therapy of the public is not to be confused with support groups. Forty percent of Americans claim to be currently involved in support groups. In their prominence, support group membership is to be addressed as a significant trend in contemporary society. Support groups, while connecting people with similar concerns, are a countertrend to traditional civic involvement. They have been called a countertrend because they focus on the individual and not the unity of the group. Members’ commitments hinge upon their personal needs for well being. Another point indicative of the individual focus is support groups’ universal ground rule to always respect what has been said. This ground rule deters participants from expressing and discussing values or being held accountable for their actions. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, was an advocate of small groups but only on the condition that members hold each other accountable to practicing their faith and rectifying the breakdown of their faith. For example, if a person has difficulties in her/his marriage the small group would not only support the desire for a more loving relationship but would also expect progress towards

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that goal. In this, Wesley recognized that a person must be an active part of the ideal. Passions and concerns are a call to action as well as to nurture.

FACT/VALUE SPLIT

People desire both orderly public lives uncluttered with the confusion of social morality and adhere to mysterious intuitive values. As a means of organizing both we have created what Patrick Keifert calls the modern dogma of the fact/value split.\(^{19}\) The fact/value split presumes that the public is sterile and laden with immutable facts that rarely lend themselves to the uniqueness of private life. People adhere even in their rigidity because facts are universal and proven—they unite us. Values are also universal in that everyone has them but they can vary from individual to individual. Values, unlike facts, are rational only because they are products of emotion and prejudices.\(^{20}\) People need both but have a difficult time incorporating the two. However, separating the two further divides public life from private life. In his work *Welcoming the Stranger* Patrick Keifert includes two tables outlining “good” and “bad” from the perspectives of Scientism and Irrationalism, or fact and value.\(^{21}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Scientistic View</th>
<th>Bad</th>
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<tr>
<td>known facts</td>
<td>asserted values</td>
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<td>objectivity</td>
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<td>reason</td>
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<td>science</td>
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<td>proof</td>
<td>rationalization</td>
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<td>neutral universe</td>
<td>invented values</td>
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\(^{18}\) IBID  
\(^{19}\) IBID  
\(^{21}\) IBID 33
Irrationalist View

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>values</td>
<td>mere facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persons, subjects</td>
<td>things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faith, commitment</td>
<td>materialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mind, spirit, soul</td>
<td>human reduced to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personhood</td>
<td>machine</td>
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<tr>
<td>wisdom, knowledge of</td>
<td>reductionism</td>
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<td>the heart</td>
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The lists are interesting because each is rationally acceptable and agreed to. In his or her mind a person will typically agree with both lists. This duel acceptance indicates both desire for factuality and the need for depth and meaning. There is nothing wrong with this apparent hypocrisy. Rather, it is indicative of the reality that human beings are complex, consciously able to identify reasonable patterns and realities of life as well as be in tune with things that go beyond measurable understanding. It is a wonderful thing to be human and have both potentials. They need not be separated. Yet, we do separate because separation has been modeled while integration has not.

According to Martin Marty, America has set the standard that one should not mingle religion with politics, economics or science. Rather, Americans try to keep those things separated in boxes labeled “sacred” and “secular.” Contents of the boxes are only intermingled when people debate the authority of one over the other. Such debates are illogical, however, because the two realms, fact and value, cannot be used to judge one another. For example, one cannot say that because values and God cannot be proven they
do not exist. Nor can one argue that science, because it is a human creation, is simple and insults the complexity of a “higher power.” The American public needs to stop the phobic separation and accept the ambiguous blending of the two. This modern dogma of a fact/value split is important to religious leaders and public officials who must respond to public frustrations.

Public frustrations are evident in the following questions: Why are people so hesitant to reveal personal and religious beliefs? Can reason be separated from passion? How can a person hold a value without sharing it publicly? The struggles of these questions bring to mind the Clinton trial. The American public rides the tide of opinion wrestling facts and legal guides with their values and the contextual reality. Confusion still exists even if one aligns to facts or values. Facts are manipulated with definitions, and laws are subject to the interpretation of the reader. As for values, most believe extravagant sexual acts outside of marriage are wrong but most Americans also believe in the agenda and domestic leadership of this flawed president. In the face of ambiguity the tendency of the culture is to clean up the confusion, sort it out into neat categories, or ignore it altogether.

Realistically speaking facts and values cannot be separated--personally or publicly. Facts often mold values. The Church is a good example of this dialogue. As science discovered that the earth is but one dynamically evolving, round planet in a seemingly infinite universe, religious teachings have had to shift and respond accordingly. Hence scientific facts have caused necessary re-evaluation of religious and

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moral values. One of the most prominent areas of redress is the environment. Christians have been challenged to gain humble reverence for the earth and the cosmos because science shows that earth is not the center of the universe and humans have not dominated it since creation. Also, by repeatedly showing the earth's decline science has also forced the issue of environment upon anthropocentric Christian attitudes. Now, Christians are increasingly asking how their faith calls them to respond to the environmental crisis. The Christian association of faith with the earth has had direct implications on public policy. Environmental regulations, watchdog groups, and research for more facts have become an accepted aspect of government and business. In the example of environment, one can see how the church, dialoguing with facts, fuels public shifts in perspective and policy.

**THE CHURCH: PUBLIC PERCEPTION, PUBLIC RESPONSE**

Parker Palmer says that community, in particular church community, is a reaction of the times, and to understand its formation we must assess the animation of the broader society. Parker paints contemporary society as “fragmented, in process of disintegration, and an area in which human relations are cold and competitive. Neighborhood ties have been broken by mobility and sprawl...the workplace depersonalized by bureaucracy, and the family is in trouble.” While leaving out anything remotely positive and appealing, this depiction makes understandable the “need” for a community like the church. When they react to these social factors, the church plays to the hands of atheist critics who say God is merely an escape from the

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realities of the public. The church, then, must be very attentive when responding to society that it does not dig its own hole or lose sight of its social mission.

Distortion of the church’s mission is seen in the trends of religious consumerism and spiritual entitlement whose rise and effect are increasingly analyzed by many sociologists and theologians. Religious consumerism is faith shopping. Martin Marty summarizes a story of a diverse faith sojourner whose resulting religious potpourri makes real the rising trend of religious consumerism.

The pilgrim begins with recall of his Catholic childhood education. Then mother remarried a Baptist and at summer camp that year he converts, is born again. A high school girl friend into Transcendentalists comes along and by graduation he is full time Thoreauvian. At college a Jewish girlfriend, a religious consumer herself, introduces him to Ching and Tarot cards. He later gets into drugs and tries peyote smuggled from the Native American Church. Having dropped out of college he returns to study Islam, gets into karma and lives in a commune. Later he marries an Episcopalian and after becoming successful in business is recognized by People magazine who commends him on his independence from institutional religion.25

The tide of religious consumerism is both positive and negative. Positively, the trend moves away from the competitive absolutism many churches have historically tried to push on their members. With greater exploration consumers discover commonality amongst religions as well as gain greater tolerance for diversity. On the other hand, religious consumerism creates a lack of cohesion and loyalty within a faith community. There is little evidence that these hop-along travelers truly believe in anything other than their freedom to find self-gratification.

A self-centered approach to faith leads to the notion of spiritual entitlement. Marty describes spiritual entitlement as the idea that a church needs to fulfill people’s wholeness and satisfy their hunger. Church pews are increasingly filled with “private strivers” who have already established a trajectory of life and present themselves in congregation so long as the message conveniently reaches them as an individual. Spiritual entitlement too has positive and negative aspects. It challenges a church to make relevant the gospel but undermines the intended communal qualities of the Spirit and the Christian church.

The believer is not the only one adjusting and responding to the social realities of isolation, individualism, and ambiguity. Christian churches are also grappling with the decision to retreat from or to enter into the public. While some churches do very well to adhere to the social and communal qualities of the Christian faith others are foggy in their approach. (Chapter four will describe positive church responses in greater extent.) Three church practices challenge the appropriate public role of the church: evangelization, competitive absolutism, and charity.

Churches are known for and very good at charity but are called to work for justice as well. As a charitable organization the church allows the rich to give anonymously to the poor. Giving is hard to criticize, but anonymous giving perpetuates the physical separation of rich and poor. Charity is not a negative thing in that it tries to redistribute goods but it is much different than the call to justice. Justice work requires an active

26 IBID 34
27 IBID 26
28 Borgmann, Albert, Crossing the Postmodern Divide (University of Chicago, 1992) 142.
examination of the social structures that cause a need for charity. Justice requires application of values to the public and the follow-through to make appropriate social changes. Many churches, likely for the comfort of their members and the lack of resources, do not engage in efforts of justice.

Religious evangelization is a predominant method of making a church public. At times evangelization has tricky motives and can be linked to competitive absolutism. The term competitive absolutism describes a religious mentality centered on the spreading of universal rights and wrongs. It is easy to long for such clarity in the midst of the information age and moral relativism. Some Christians have latched onto this desire for definition and are using the notions of fear and salvation to attract members. As a means of evangelizing, preachers warn followers of those who are “out to get them” and “motivated by evil.” Struck by this apparent urgency people rush to these congregations for salvation. On the other hand, many mainstream Protestant denominations have become comfortable and forgotten their origins of drawing members to religion.29

American people and institutions have swung too far in the separation of church and state—fact and value. The pendulum needs to be guided back to the center where dialogue can take place and people can feel reinvigorated to be a part of, rather than a victim of, the public. Both the church and the state play an important role in the dialogue. The next chapter identifies the church’s particular role in enriching public life with values and meaning.

CHAPTER 2: A PUBLIC CHURCH

And I send you out two by two like sheep among wolves”...”Go and be fishers of men”... “to preach good news to the poor.” The Christian faith is a faith of outreach. It is derived from and dependent upon interaction among fellow believers and strangers alike, all within a public context of the public. When writing his book To Serve the Present Age, J. Philip Wogaman used as his title the words from a hymn written by Charles Wesley. Charles Wesley, brother of John Wesley who founded of the Methodist faith, wrote a hymn reminding people that first and foremost the church is called to serve. It does not exist for its own glory but to serve the everlasting will of God. It is called to serve the present age, not because of its own choice, but because this is where God has placed it.¹

The church is called to make real its public mission through local ministry. The church, like government, exists on many different tiers: global, national, regional and local. In this thesis, and particularly in this chapter, the focus will be on local congregations and their incorporation of the Church’s public call. Many churches acknowledge their public role in the higher tiers of their organization. For example, the United Methodist Church writes in its constitution that the Church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world.² This is good, but the true challenge is moving beyond resolutions and discernment of the gospel. The living testimony of the public call comes through the footwork of an empowered laity. Local congregations have the unique and privileged task of activating the laity with the gospel and Church messages. A living faith is
dependent not only on giving the invitation to serve but also depends upon a laity willing to “Go forth” and embody their faith in the world. The Church, then, is not mere principles and positions but active people.

It is appropriate to use Martin Luther King’s three theological presuppositions of the Beloved Community to help define the role of the Christian Church. The Beloved Community embodied King’s vision of Christian justice and unity. The first presupposition was *universalism*. King used the divine images of the creation story and the Biblical passage from Galatians as the key resources for his universal vision. Galatians 2:28 reads, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, bonded nor free, male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Put simply, every woman and man is brother and sister in Christ thereby diminishing all human-made forms of separation. To be Christian the Church must uphold its responsibility to all people. Universalism commands that faith nurture people to live with and for all of humankind.

The *prophetic vision* of justice, peace, freedom, equality, and harmony was King’s second theological presupposition. The means of realizing this presupposition is through the partnership of church and state. The church, as a value-laden group, provides ongoing advocacy of justice, peace, freedom, equality and harmony and the government provides the mechanism for making the vision real. The Methodist Church sees the partnership in this way:

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2 The Book of Resolutions 206
3 Smith, Kenneth L. *Search for the Beloved Community* (Judson Press, 1974) 130.
4 IBID
The United Methodist Church believes that churches have the right and duty to speak and act corporately on those matters of public policy which involve basic moral or ethical issues and questions. The attempt to influence the formation and execution of public policy at all levels of government is often the most effective means available to churches to keep before humanity the ideal of a society in which power and order are made to serve the ends of justice and freedom for all people. Through such social action churches generate new ideas, challenge certain goals and methods, and help rearrange the emphasis on particular values in ways that facilitate the adoption and implementation of specific policies and programs which promote the goals of a responsible society.5

Justice, peace freedom, equality, and harmony are dependent upon government but government is not the only entity responsible for promoting them. The Christian laity and all members of a civil society also have this responsibility. The United Methodist resolution on Church/Government relations makes it clear that when the churches speak to government they should also bear the responsibility to speak to their own membership.6 This dissemination of values is the task of local congregations.

The third and final theological source of King’s conceptual Beloved Community is Christian love, or agape.7 King’s third principle is explained by Smith as follows:

Agape creates genuine personal relations between people, making them neighbors and friends and is linked with the conception of community. Love is a community-creating force; it is the only force that can bring community into existence because its inherent unselfishness leads to cooperation instead of competition and conflict. In opposition, hate destroys community by depersonalizing it and breaking down its bonds.8

King’s origins of community differ greatly from those of most political theorists who claim that the social bonds of community and government arise from self-love and the

5 Book of Resolutions, 476
6 Ibid 479
7 Smith, Kenneth L. Search for the Beloved Community (Judson Press, 1974) 131.
8 Ibid
desire for security. In this fear-based form of governing the vocal majority makes the decisions. If a Church or a government exists only for self-preservation then loyalty and participation hinge upon the institution’s ability to meet the needs of the tyrannical majority. A Church or a government, then, will have a difficult time upholding the values of justice, peace, freedom, equality and harmony for all people, especially those outside of the majority. But, neither Jesus nor the Founding Fathers condoned the tyranny of the popular majority. Both sets of men advocated that communities progress not on impulses of the majority but on a vision for all people.

In his chapter “A Spirituality of Public Life” Parker Palmer states that the public life is not merely an option for those who feel called to it. “Deeper still, the public life is an arena of spiritual experience, a setting in which God speaks to us and forms our hearts with words we cannot hear in the private realm.”9 This is particularly true when people open themselves to the voices and experiences of the poor and the minorities. In Christian teaching the silent, the minorities and the oppressed hold not only equal but special positions. Paul captures best the integral necessity of every person when he depicts Christ as a living body with many differing and essential parts. In Paul’s letter to the Galatians he writes that all people are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28) To fully be Christian and experience this diversity and richness of Christ a person must engage in the public. Engagement requires that women and men venture beyond the church doors and apply their faith to the totality of their lives. Embarking beyond the comforts of one’s church, class, culture, and mindset is challenging but made possible through faith—
heeding the call to go beyond one's self. If people remain in familiar surroundings and avoid the challenges of the public there is little need for faith.

**The Stranger**

Truth requires various angles of vision.\(^9\) Both in Bible and through Christian history the people who open another's eyes to God's truth and presence have been strangers. Through a stranger's eyes people are called out of their limited scope and into new insight. Many Biblical passages make known the importance of the stranger. In the letter to Hebrews the writer advises, "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (13:1-2). In the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, Sarah and Abraham welcome strangers into their tent, and offer them refreshment and rest. The strangers announce that Sarah shall give birth to Isaac who will lead the Hebrew people.\(^11\) Again, in the gospel of Luke, the women who go to Jesus' tomb following the crucifixion stop to listen and accept the words of a stranger saying that Jesus has been resurrected. Later that day a stranger appears to two of Jesus' disciples who doubt the resurrection. As the three men walk together the stranger reminds the two men of Law and Prophecy concerning the life and death of Jesus. Upon reaching the disciple's home the two men invite the stranger to share in dinner during which the stranger blesses the bread and reveals himself as the Lord.\(^12\) In another transforming experience Jesus comes to the woman at the well as a stranger. After asking for a drink Jesus engages the woman in conversation. Through the

\(^9\) IBID 56
\(^10\) IBID 58
\(^11\) IBID 57
\(^12\) IBID 59
discussion Jesus destroys the oppressive social classifications the woman endures by opening her eyes to God’s universal Love brought to the world through Him.

Most people have a difficult time relating to the direct revelations of Biblical figures and may often feel anxious and fearful in the task of discerning God’s will. Fortunately or unfortunately, burning bushes, voices from the heavens or encounters with the physical Christ do not occur on a daily basis. Without explicit moments of intervention, Christians must discern the loving calls of God with careful attention to God’s presence in the people, events, and scriptural teachings that surround them. This free will of discernment is both overwhelming and empowering. However, it need not scare people. Jesus over and over teaches followers to progress in all Christian tasks without fear for He has walked the paths of humankind on which He will always remain. Christians are given peace knowing that they are not alone but always in dialogue with an ever-present God who loves them in every choice they make.

Christians are to welcome the stranger not only because they are taught to love all people but also because Christians can empathize with the stranger. Christians can look to their own history for lesson and empathy on the hardships of being an outsider. In Exodus 23:9 the ancient Hebrews are told “You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” This command is also given to Christians in Paul’s letter to the Romans. “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). Throughout the Bible the stranger is a pivotal mediator for experiencing God in the world. Interaction

12 Keifert, Patrick R. Welcoming the Stranger (Fortress Press, 1992) 68.
with the stranger is also the measuring stick of Christian living. Christians are told that when the kingdom comes they will be judged on their treatment of the stranger:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you invited me in, naked and you clothed me, sick and you looked after me, imprisoned and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him “Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, imprisoned?” The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Mt. 25:31-40)

Revelation via a stranger is unpredictable, coming when a person least expects it. It is therefore important that people and institutions be open to the perspectives of all, not just the ideas of a selected few. Yet, when churches, political parties, and individuals are open to outside opinion they are often selective, picking and choosing which strangers they want to hear from. This selective listening undermines the message of God. God persistently challenges conventional truth and understanding and regularly upsets the world’s way of looking at things.\(^\text{13}\) Left on their own people choose to ignore rather than accept the propositions of apparent chaos. In avoidance of upheaval people not only restrict their listening but also their sharing. It is easier to say, “At least I know the truth” and hold that truth privately than to offer it up for public discussion. Jesus was always in dialogue with people of opposing mindsets; he even allowed the demons to speak. In
doing so, Jesus could publicly contradict notions counter to God’s so that readers and listeners for centuries could understand the position of their faith rather than ignorantly adhere to its principles. Christians and politicians alike can only approach the truth if they are willing to present their assumptions for debate.

The idea that the stranger most clearly reveals God to the individual, institution or the congregation is quite contrary to the contemporary understanding of a relationship with the outcast. Christians commonly assume that their duty is to bring Jesus or any other form of enlightenment to the stranger. While it is important to share principles, it is dangerous to assume that other people’s principles are lacking or inferior. Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer suggests that the purpose of ministry is “…not to bring Jesus to the poor but rather to discover Jesus among the poor and oppressed, and enter into concrete struggles of liberation with them.” The move toward liberation for God’s people is not a matter of charitable and patronizing advocacy but of respectful empowerment. As Catholic Social Teaching insists there is not just a preferential option for the poor but also of the poor. This concept extends beyond issues of poverty to every issue of politics—every issue in the life of the people. Thus, when children, women, workers, and visionaries argue for justice it is the responsibility of the church to follow their lead.

Hospitality

Each of the stranger stories are similar not only because God communicates through a stranger but because the recipients were available and attentive to the stranger; they showed the stranger hospitality. Palmer spends a great deal of time in his work

13 IBID
Company of Strangers examining the importance as well as the shifting trends of hospitality in the Christian community. Hospitality is a word, he says, that above all else should describe the quality with which we greet the stranger.\textsuperscript{15} *Hospes* means both host and guest—the two are one.\textsuperscript{16} Hospitality was originally intended as a bond between utter strangers. The word conveyed a disposition of accepting difference rather than expecting similarity or conversion to similar lifestyles. Increasingly in contemporary American society people confuse intimacy with hospitality, forcing the requirements of the former upon the latter.

Hospitality has become a harmless urbane quality in the order of...civility, politeness, and table manners. It is on the verge of being...not far removed from the peculiar oblivion spread ever wider by our obsession with the private. If we manage not to be rude to our friends within our own house...then we are deemed hospitable...We forget that proper hospitality has to do with unrecognizable strangers rather than with kin...ancient hospitality is firstly and primarily a bond between utter strangers.\textsuperscript{17}

Requirements for intimate relationship are not applicable to public life and in fact undermine the offerings of the public. Intimate relationships require energy, shared interests, and similarity. By focusing on intimate relationships people ignore the vast wealth of diversity to be found in the public. The public becomes a blurred backdrop against which our private dramas are played and we miss altogether the drama inherent to public life.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Messer, Donald E. *Conspiracy of Goodness* (Abingdon Press, 1992) 104.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Palmer, Parker J. *Company of Strangers* (Crossroad Pub., 1981) 67.
\item \textsuperscript{16} IBID 69
\item \textsuperscript{17} IBID 67
\item \textsuperscript{18} IBID 68
\end{itemize}
Hospitality, if taken in its correct form, is the tool and the means for linking private and public life. The stranger is found in the public but must be brought into the private realm. Just like the characters of the Bible, people must cautiously make themselves vulnerable to the proximity of a stranger. It is in such moments of vulnerability that God’s truth is revealed. People, however, shy away from this vulnerability preferring the routine safety of private life, religion, and social peers. Private retreat is a subjugation of faith because it denies the public calling of a Christian.

Reality

In his critical work Crossing the Postmodern Divide Albert Borgmann redefines the popular connotation of reality. Presently, reality would convey assuredness and factuality. When people say, “get real” they command a person to focus on what is dependable and reliable knowledge. Borgmann turns the tables on this understanding. He states that reality is unforethinkable joy and pain. It is important to stop for a moment and examine the implications of such a definition. Reality becomes neither controllable nor guaranteed—spiteful as well as pleasurable. To “get real” is to let go of one’s own imaginative constructs and embrace the more exciting and unpredictable happenings of reality.

Borgmann argues that people lose their true sense of reality by trying to predict and control everything. Take for example the weather. By forecasting the climate for the next, day, week and year a person can more confidently plan for their travel, leisure and business. In this age of technology, if the weather predictions do not fit one’s desire, he
or she can fall back upon “virtual” technologies. Borgmann uses the example of a young woman runner who can have her trail runs all year round complete with replicated sunshine, breeze, sound and scenery all within the convenience of a local gym. The run has all the measurable entities of reality but it is not real by Borgman’s definition. Christianity needs a definition of reality accountable of unpredictability. If left to the contemporary perspectives of reality—facts and patterns—women and men are susceptible to idolatry with all its characteristics of control and creation.

Reality, and in particular public reality, is ambiguous and laden with perpetual change. This makes people anxious as they face the precarious changes in technology, politics, neighborhoods, jobs and styles. Often, people prefer to flee from the continual adjustments and seek out stability in the church, public policy, Walden Pond, and places like Montana. Parker Palmer describes this reaction:

There is a tendency toward “puristic” thinking among Christians, a tendency to want to resolve all dilemmas neatly, to draw back from situations that are ambiguous. We imagine, sometimes, that our faith requires us to lead tightly controlled lives and this means placing ourselves only in those relationships that we can shape and form into some semblance of propriety. But, by doing so, we deny God the opportunity to work miracles in our lives. We forget that we are not really in control and never can be.20

God has promised fulfillment in public life and so Christians must enter into ambiguity and struggle lest they deny God.21 The Church needs to reinforce that reality is dynamic. Rather than get caught in the trap of defining reality, the church is best to teach its members how to adhere to principles of faith in the midst of reality’s whims. This is not

to say that a Christian's purpose is to just endure perpetual hardship, for reality is unpredictable pains wed with joyful elation.

The ultimate message of the Christian faith is love. A recognized form of sharing this love is through compassion. Parker Palmer points out that compassion, like most Christian actions, is paradoxical and ambiguous.\textsuperscript{21}\textsuperscript{22} Compassion is offered without expectation of reciprocation. When Christ tells people to love their enemies the impulse is to say, "get real." Loving one's enemy is hard work, unrewarding, and makes people vulnerable but Christ tells His people to do so anyway. Another theme of love throughout Christian teaching and experience is the pattern of crucifixion followed by resurrection.\textsuperscript{23} The more a person tries to escape this duality the greater their awareness that life is an entanglement of joy and pain; each is dependent upon the other. There is no way to experience joy without sorrow; to find a place to stand until one has fallen through; to experience light without darkness. Love leads people to suffering but out of that suffering is greater love.\textsuperscript{24}

**Scarcity and Abundance**

When people define reality on their own terms they often distort the reality that Christ and Scripture taught. Among the distorted concepts are Americans' notions of scarcity and abundance. What is abundance: seven course meals, a bountiful harvest, possession of socially upheld material standards, spacious living accommodations? Christian teaching makes very clear the distinction between spiritual abundance and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{21} IBID 63-4
\textsuperscript{22} IBID 112
\textsuperscript{23} IBID
\textsuperscript{24} IBID}
material abundance. The first is authentic for it has no limitations. It is interesting that for many Americans the two forms of abundance, God's and human's, often find themselves in the contradictions of a zero-sum game. Stereotypically, the affluence of possession leads to fear, leading to protection and isolation, leading to hoarding. On the other hand, spiritual abundance is that of love, which is only good when shared, and upon sharing is multiplied.

People cannot reach out to the public without a mentality of abundance. Americans cannot deny their material abundance and so acquire the power of sharing. Pay particular attention here, for, if understood from a Christian perspective, the power of money and materials evolves from the ability to share, not accumulate. In his sermon “The Use of Money,” John Wesley upholds personal piety and social improvement as means to being Christians. The three principles for success are to gain all you can, save all you can, and the third and most important, give all you can. The mechanisms of capitalism can be used to foster Christian ideals if that which is freely earned is also freely given. In his sermon on money Wesley again proves it is both essential and feasible to connect public life with faith.

24 IBID
Chapter 3: BRIDGING THE PRIVATE/PUBLIC GAP

God, grant me the faith to know what I can do, the grace to know what I can not and the wisdom to know the difference. In its wisdom and simplicity the serenity prayer is a tool for discerning individuals. It reminds people of their particular skills and tasks as well as those skills and tasks best left to others. The serenity prayer might also apply to institutions like the government, economy, family, and church. In the challenge to reunite the public with the private it is important to clarify the skills and tasks of each social entity. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the qualities that would make a church the ideal mechanism for bridging the private and public gap. As well, this chapter argues that the separation of church and state does not mean churches have no role in society or that it is unlawful for the two to interact. Isolating the two leads to privatization and divisiveness amongst citizens who increasingly feel the need to integrate both facets in their lives. As this chapter will show, the vitality of the church is a key factor in the vitality of our social institutions. Overall, the state needs the gifts of the church and the church needs the support of the state.

What is Meant by Church

The church lives under the divine calling to engage in the work of reconciliation: to God, to one another and to ourselves.¹ This call is clearly public in nature. But, even if Christians were not called to be public in the practice and discovery of their faith, the Christian Church would still be the ideal mechanism for bridging the private/public gap. This is because in its form and construction the church provides characteristics needed to
connect private and public lives. Unlike in government, the destabilizing flux of liberal and conservative leadership does not affect the church and its Christian organizations to the extent and frequency that it does in politics. Churches stay true to their social commitment and in doing so are a stabilizing force in the lives of individuals. The Christian church provides pivotal service in unifying people because of its inherent characteristics. Among these characteristics the church is consistent, communal, universal, personal as well as public, and local as well as global.

Throughout American history, the church has always been a natural partner in public life. In his observations De Tocqueville considered religion the first of America’s political institutions. In its formation the church unites people. When the homesteaders of the west were piecing together their lives and their communities they always found the resources and time to build a church. Once established in the community, the church further strengthened the bonds of the community through teaching and frequent gathering. By bringing people together the church provided a communication network where people could discuss community events like the implications of local politics and business, schools and the latest gossip. As the nation moved forward facing triumph and/or crisis church members supported one another in prayer as they looked to their God for comfort and answers. In addition to providing face-to-face communication between neighbors the church liturgy allowed the pastor or priest to communicate Christian statements on issues of the nation and the world.

Churches make statements to guide Christians in their public and political lives focusing on children and poverty, nuclear arms, infanticide, the environment, landmines and numerous other political topics. By taking a position on these issues churches set an example. This example encourages members to use Christian faith as the foundation upon which they stand in regard to public and personal events. Not only have Christian social statements privately inspired individuals, they have also inspired public programs and movements for many social sectors. Worldwide examples include organizations like Habitat for Humanity, Bread for the World, World Vision, and multiple other service groups. Governments depend on the services of these groups. In their report, Faith and Philanthropy in America, Robert Wuthnow and Virginia Hodgkinson identify three present day areas in which the church provides pivotal service and leadership. The first area consists of services like colleges, seminaries, missionaries, poor houses and orphanages. Second are the powerful mechanisms of a unified voice, protest, and suggestion. Lastly, and most conventional of its services, are retirement homes, battered women’s shelters, job training, gender discussions, and alcohol rehabilitation.

Today, the church is the largest and most diverse voluntary organization in America. The Faith and Philanthropy report documents the religious commitment of Americans.

Only six percent of the American people claim no religious preference while sixty-eight percent claim membership in some church or synagogue. Forty-two percent of all American adults say they attend a service of

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3 Cox, Harvey Gallagher, Religion in the Secular City (Simon and Schuster Pub.) 16.
5 IBID 27.
worship during a typical week. Twenty-two percent of the population commit themselves beyond mere membership and worship to participate in a church group, and twenty million Americans volunteer through the church.  

The commitment is evident in time as well as in giving. Americans give more time and money to religion than to all other voluntary organizations combined.  

Church communities spend two billion dollars a year on church construction and to run schools and hospitals. The history of giving and public commitment are stimulated by the church's unique strengths. Among these are trust, accountability, proximity, consistency, and diversity.

We Come Bearing Gifts

An institution must exude a great deal of trust if it is to stimulate these responses of time and money—two precious commodities among Americans. Widespread dedication like that given to religion is given to political campaigns or particular social causes like the environment or poverty. The church likely gains more support because it is all encompassing and includes political as well as social causes. By giving to the church a person knows their money will support victims of hurricanes, Christian efforts of political education and policy statements, environmental and ideological needs, as well as local concerns. A church member feels more comfortable giving to an institution whose values and agenda are made public in scripture and weekly from the pulpit than he or she does to a distanced and self-interested organization or campaign. A church member can also hold the church accountable for its use of money and time. Any

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6 IBID 5.
member can speak with, react to, or rally behind the actions of the church and do it in the company of other congregates. Holding a political entity or national organization accountable requires an extended effort on the part of the concerned because they must seek out other voices and vehicles for being heard. Proximity, then, is an important factor in building trust.

Proximity not only builds trust but is also a pertinent factor in the success and appeal of the church. Often the rest of the world, even the nation, seems far too big and full of issues for a person to experience valid investment. At the congregational level people can see and experience their community and the call to action becomes a tangible thing. The beauty of a church is that it speaks to people on a local level but connects them to the world. Individual congregations are not isolated but belong to a global network of conferences, dioceses, etc. On a congregational level, the church nurtures the inward experience of God, unifies it and then channels it outward. It does this by way of face-to-face contact. Face to face contact alone makes the church unique for, in today’s society, it is a dying breed of interaction. Technology and culture have drastically undermined opportunities for proximity during interactions.9 Face to face gathering reminds people of each other’s humanity. It is much harder to hate, overlook, or disagree with a person close to you and in the context of God’s Love.

Consistency, like proximity, is another important tool that makes the church both successful and unique. The church is a trusted and habitual weekly gathering for people who share similar values. There is much to be said for such stability within a dynamic

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culture. Church consistency is necessary for rejuvenation of the individual and cannot be replicated in a weekend retreat, inspirational speech or a holiday vacation. Albert Borgmann says nothing can replicate the enduring nurture of religion. Participation in a faith community is nothing like a vacation which is simply an interruption of extravagance amidst a long series of hyperactivity. Without a continual presence of a loving community a person’s inward spirituality and outward action are but ephemeral flashes of inspiration. For many, Sunday service is an affirmation that the world is still a good place with good people. Church can provide a weekly dose of hope in a person’s life. Much of that hope comes from the deeper sense of meaning religion brings to people's lives. Rather than talking shop, members of a faith community talk values, joys, and anxieties. All this takes place on a regular basis.

By the same token, however, there is the realistic danger that church attendance is simply habitual and brought on by guilt rather than spiritual incentive. If individual congregates are not careful the church pews and activities can become a breading ground of “holier than thou” competition; how much was put in the offering, what leadership is held, who gave the most time, how many Sunday’s have been missed. The leaders and laity of the church have a responsibility to ensure that consistent attendance is a genuine response to God’s loving call for communion among peoples. Genuine consistency comes out of trust and joy, which are products of a welcoming atmosphere. There are less opportunities for the motivators of competition and guilt if trust and joy are established. Both trust and joy naturally flow to commitment.

A Church service is also a rare place for it gathers a wealth of diversity under the same roof. The church gathers people of all generations, races and socio-economic classes. In their diversity, congregations represent the multitudes of talents, skills, and experience essential for community. On any given day of worship a person could scan the pews and see a plumber with her daughter whose fourth grade teacher is serving communion at the altar. Behind them a family of ranchers struggles to give the same offering they did years ago when the markets were better. In the spirit of the church the rancher and her family acknowledge the realtor across the aisle who keeps pressuring them to subdivide the family land. Each participant is equally welcomed to receive and equally called to go forth and give what they can.

**Changing Concepts of Power**

In the public realm power is believed to be a zero-sum commodity of wealth, status and position. Americans feel there is only so much power to go around and any “power” acquisition by one’s neighbor diminishes his or her own access to power. Frances Moore Lappe’ and Paul Martin DuBois in their book *The Quickening of America* encourage readers to understand power as a relationship among people. Relational power is created and strengthened by the gathering of voices, knowledge, working hands, creativity, and perspectives. These resources contrast those of stereotypical bodies of power like the federal government and corporations. These groups instead rely upon wealth, size, and status. Lappe’ and DuBois argue that the patriarchal form of power is

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10 IBID 14.
11 Palmer, Parker J. *The Company of Strangers* (Crossroad Pub.) 146.

Today's problems require a more encompassing and networked effort of all peoples. Effective solutions demand three things: ingenuity and insight of those most directly affected; creativity that emerges only when diverse perspectives meet; and commitment to actually “making it happen,” which arises when citizens know they’ve helped arrive at answers and understand how they themselves benefit. These three demands of effective power require institutions and dispositions that are universal, welcoming all people to the discussion table. The proposed power paradigm requires that people experience meaning and purpose, organization, continuity, and localization. The Church offers all these characteristics. Churches unite together in compassion numerous and diverse people who are called to live justly. And so, the unique qualities of the Church give it power, but not the typical notion of power that is normally strapped to the church.

The true power of the church is to infuse life with meaning so much that people cannot resist their purposeful role in ensuring Christ’s beatific vision. The power of the church can only come to life when it gathers people together. Together and face-to-face these people are challenged to dialogue their contextual lives with the messages of Scripture. Jesus taught that God’s truth, the truth of love, hinges on the number of voices

13 IBID 54.
14 IBID 56.
15 IBID 56.
that contribute to its formation. Because the Christian church values and invites all people to the Table the Christian Church is advantageous in making public statements that reflect the concerns and desires of the citizens. Compare the church’s diversity to a legislative body. The Senate, during Clinton’s trial by “peers,” consisted of no African Americans, only three people of minorities, and over sixty percent lawyers. This narrow membership inescapably limits the potential for truth or justice.

Unfortunately, many churches fall short in fostering their relational power. This occurs when the church is merely a meeting of individuals rather than a gathering of community. Church leaders bear much of the responsibility for this distinction. A pastor, rabbi or priest needs to not only stimulate God’s message on an interpersonal level but also apply the message to people’s public lives. This public application of Christian faith is important not only because it is an integral part of Christianity but also because it unifies the church’s members. The public messages of the gospel are items of importance shared among all people. While issues of faith and the public are important to all Christians, naturally, not everyone will apply the messages of Scripture and Tradition identically to public and private issues. The expansive range of ideology among Christians proves this point. Yet despite the contrast Christians must remember they are always unified in the Love of God.

There is no better way to resolve conflict than by people who acknowledge a higher mutual authority. In his stride towards justice, Martin Luther King commanded that all who worked with him cleanse themselves of hatred and find the strength to love

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16 Palmer, Parker J. *Company of Stranger* (Crossroad Pub.) 29.

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all those against whom they protest. Jesus too taught people to love their enemy as He loved. Philip Wogaman says, “A church is one of the few places where one can say to a spirited opponent, ‘we disagree about this but I still love you’ and really mean it.” In few other negotiations but those of the church do conflicting parties pray together for understanding amidst their differences. In doing so the church is the ideal place of discourse for topics where there is no consensus on an issue such as abortion. This form of dispute resolution is needed in public institutions and can be spearheaded by the church. It is important, however, that the Christian Church not only teach consensual resolution to others but practice it within its own communities. Imagine the implications as well as the challenges of reversing patriarchal mechanisms of dominance and reciprocity with Christian ideals of egalitarian construction and justice. Transforming the concepts of power and dispute resolution will come if faith communities and governments become partners in mutual learning.

Church and State are unique and separate but separation does not omit the need to learn from and depend upon one another. This thesis focuses on the successful practices of the church. Senator John Ashcroft says, “Religious people are concerned with the individual’s whole life—even the eternal life. A government can only look at people through criteria.” The church is also unique in the way it responds to suffering and joy. Unlike a government agency the church doesn’t have the sole responsibility to “solve it” (suffering) or guarantee it (joy.) Instead, the church can support and celebrate rather than

17 Wogaman, Philip J. To Serve the Present Age (Abingdon Press) 85.
18 IBID
19 IBID
eliminate or hold accountable. The church succeeds in ways government can not because it brings meaning and gives attention to individuals and unites those individuals in profound faith. This distinction of successes does not, however, mean that government should reinvent the wheel trying to provide the same levels of intimacy. Rather, the government can recognize and support the invaluable ways that the church supports the public.

The government is starting to take notice of the church's inherent capacities. Out of this recognition many efforts of integration between church and state are taking place in the field of social services. For example, the 1996 federal welfare bill gives states the option to fund church groups in place of welfare agencies. Another area of increasing partnership is crime. In June of 1998 Newsweek magazine did a feature titled “God vs. Gangs; the Hottest Idea in Fighting Crime.” The article states that both sides, the church and government, have allied to rescue kids from the seductions of gang cultures. The strategy is to combat gang membership with another, more powerful set of values: a substitute family for young people who almost never have two parents. “The only institution with the spiritual message and physical presence to offer values is the church.”

For impoverished inner-city youth, or any youth for that matter, a proximate, consistent, and loving presence determines the acceptance and success of an outreach program. In any dying inner-city neighborhood two establishments compete for this

22 IBID 22.
outreach: the church and the liquor store. Christians and the government alike have the responsibility to ensure the church is the more powerful of the two.

Building Social Capital

Social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. The church provides simple, yet, essential qualities necessary for building social capital. Wuthnow and Hodgkinson divide these provisions into four categories. First are facilities in which to meet and hold events. A social gathering requires simple things like chairs, tables, and a kitchen. Secondly, the church fosters personal ties that become the first order of caring—for self as well as others. Third, the church is a unit of organization providing constructs for networking and pursuing interests. Lastly, the church disseminates information through worship and the lobbying efforts of its multi-tiered branches of organization. This church setting becomes a place where people are asked to volunteer, informed of opportunities, and given skills and training. As noted in chapter one, these offerings are defining factors in the creation of social capital.

In this time of public retreat and private individualism social capital is important to both government and church. The government and the church can measure public trends like public retreat. For a government the litmus tests of public commitment are voting and polls. Both strongly indicate the apathetic frustrations of American citizens. The church and other voluntary civic groups refer to studies like that of Robert Bellah

23 IBID.
and his colleagues. In his work, *Habits of the Heart* Bellah finds that utilitarian and expressive individualism is rampant, steering people’s commitments towards private spirituality rather than public church.\(^{26}\) The decline in public church commitment may very well be a threat to overall public well-being.\(^{27}\) This is because volunteerism, generosity and other public involvement can still be directly linked to church membership.

It has been accepted almost as a truism that voluntary associations, particularly religious congregations, provide Americans with the opportunity to participate directly in their local community and to remind them daily that they live in a society. Alexis de Tocqueville asserted that such associations were critically important to preserve democratic traditions and to restrict rampant individualistic materialism. He saw these associations as the local groups in which individuals would constantly be reminded of their public responsibility and to build the “habit and task” to work for the “good of one’s fellow citizens.” Without such associations, de Tocqueville warned, the natural development of government could evolve into a benign dictatorship where individuals were provided their material wants but no longer would be free.\(^{28}\)

There is no level of the public that is either isolated from or can do without the social capital—the energies and capacities—of its citizens.

Donald T. Campbell, president to the American Psychological Association, gave a speech in 1975 warning that the psychological profession should pay greater respect to traditional belief systems in order to preserve the structures of advanced civilization.\(^{29}\) He argued that most people need to pay heed to and give support for the religious institutions that provided so many Americans with the moral tradition of generosity and

\(^{26}\) IBID 113.  
^{27}\) IBID 112.  
^{28}\) IBID.  
^{29}\) IBID 309.
commitment to humanitarian causes. This all ties to the reality that people must have an outlet for feeling vital and empowered in their local and broader communities. The church provides such an outlet thereby serving personal desire as well as public vitality.

**If Not The Church, Then Who?**

Without a responsive institution or value system Americans are left yearning for legitimacy and purpose. In such a context, people are vulnerable to enticements that guarantee belonging and identity. There are many dangerous groups that entice people by manipulating their need for belonging. Reflect back to the images of a run-down inner-city street. Like the liquor stores, there are many influencing forces other than the church that fight for people's loyalties. Typically government is not among the successful influencing forces due to its perception as a bloated, money driven bureaucracy. Successful recruiters include militia groups who unify people under the banner of a common enemy, the government. Militia success is a product and perpetuator of America’s fixation with governmental and institutional conspiracies. Conspiracy thinking manifests itself in environments of suspicion, distrust and isolation from the public realm. Other influencing figures are alcohol and drugs. People are won over by these stimulants after finding esteem in the escapes of drugs’ mind-altering capacities. Violence too is an obvious and immediate mechanism for making oneself heard. Finally, cults cater to people in search of direction and belonging. All of these enticements aim to fill a void in peoples’ lives. As the Newsweek article pointed out, most children no longer grow up in a home that has the time, resources or desire to instill a child with

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30 IBID 310.
value systems. The gap left behind unfortunately welcomes violence, drugs, and propaganda. There is, however, another means of filling the gap and that is with the spiritual offerings of the church.

One of the most powerful aspects of the church, unlike any other enticement mentioned, is its power to endure. The church is an institution that not only works today to satisfy people’s contextual needs but has done so for thousands of years. The church, however, does more than fill a void. Christian staying power allows members of a church to realistically understand sin and hardship but also maintain confidence in God’s eternal presence.31 Christian faith provides hope that does not take believers away from but rather welcomes them into their context. In its genuine and intended form the Christian faith, unlike militias, cults, violence or drugs engages people to confront and overcome hardships in a constructive manner. More importantly though, the Christian church teaches members not only to survive but to thrive in the radiant love which permeates every event of life.

The next chapter serves as a guide for churches working to answer the public call. It will provide both examples and a summary of the information gathered thus far in the thesis.

31 Wogaman, Philip J. To Serve the Present Age (Abingdon Press) 104.
Chapter 4: MAKING IT HAPPEN

In the discussion of wedding faith life with public life this thesis focuses on the role of the church. The first chapter described need. It outlined the damaging social disunity between facts and values, public and private. Chapter two examined the public call of tradition and Scripture. Both make clear the mandate for the practice of faith and the revelation of faith in the public. The third chapter highlighted the church’s gifts, those characteristics of a church community that make it ideal for bridging the public/private gap. This final chapter is a tool and a guidepost for churches and lay people who use their gifts to respond to the need and the call to live a public faith.

The existence of the church as an institution is important. While it is true that spiritual experience can be achieved without formalized guidance, the structure, education and gathering of a Church cannot be lost to freelance spirituality. This is because the Church serves a greater function than merely exposing people to their spirituality. Christians are called into community where their faith and spirit are strengthened. Community is also a place where, together, people become aware of and can address public issues. The church also acts as an organizing body to coordinate faith life with public occurrences and make a cohesive and congruent Christian response with Christian values. A united voice is more potent than separate though similar voices.

Two predominant themes in Christianity are internal transformation and discipleship. These two themes guide the functions of the Church. The Church must find a way to supply and balance the two, a task which can prove quite challenging. Balance
requires that the church incorporate each entity into their teaching, structure and outreach. Scripture must not only be taught but also made relevant to the listener's life, transforming the way she or he perceives and acts in the world. The organization of the church must involve and be equally distributed amongst laity who, through involvement, gain skills and knowledge. People who attend church need not only to learn about their faith in the joys and concerns of the world, but also are invited to participate in those joys and concerns. Another challenge in balancing internal transformation and external discipleship is that these two facets of faith have multiple tiers. The church does not move in and out of internal transformation and external discipleship as one cohesive unit. Some church members need to be nurtured before they can genuinely serve the world around them. Others are an untapped wealth of potential outreach in need of opportunities to serve. To add to the dynamism, no one person remains in the same spiritual state. Those who serve and work for justice will need to return back to the community for affirmation, and those who find internal growth will one day fly from the nest. Like anything in life, especially faith life, the balance is dynamic and ambiguous but God calls the Church community to trust and serve anyway.

St. Paul's

One example of a church that exceptionally meets the challenges of balance and responds in full to its public call is St. Paul’s United Methodist Church. The example of St. Paul’s will be used to demonstrate how this one church has recognized its gifts, resources and the needs around it and responded to its call. St. Paul’s, rich in history, has established itself in the hearts and minds of individuals, public institutions and peers.
Each Sunday at the beginning of three worship services St. Paul's re-dedicates itself to its proclamation: *We welcome all people to live and grow in God's love.* This proclamation permeates all the services that St. Paul's provides. It acts as the rudder of the church and sets the stage for St. Paul's fundamental reason for existence—*to change the world through the compassion of God.* This statement does not hold back God's grace and it does not place human limitations on the potential of God's creation. In its proclamation and purpose St. Paul's jumps heart first into the reality—the unpredictable joys and pains—of life.

**Mission**

In order to change the world through the compassion of God St. Paul's has identified five core values to direct it along the journey. The first of these values is *joy.* The church community seeks to find joy: "in worship, through the arts, by our laughter and play, we celebrate all life as a gift from God. The hope of our faith is profound joy."

The second value is *safety.* "We welcome all people, as they are, to explore their relationship with God. We are hospitable, inclusive and affirming of diversity." In this value the church re-affirms universal acceptance and the commitment to meet each person where they are in their spiritual development. The third value is *service.* "We carry our faith into the fullness of our lives. In our church, homes, work, community and world, we are the bearers of compassion and justice."

The fourth value is *healing.* "We are made in the image of God, who is love. Life wounds us. By our faith we are healed and become healers, restoring life to divine wholeness." Lastly, the fifth value is *growth.*
which states, “Faith inwardly and outwardly transforms us. It calls us to cultivate and use our gifts wisely for personal growth and as ministers in the world.”

The values and mission of the church take flesh in the teachings and opportunities St. Paul’s provides. St. Paul’s has committed itself to becoming a church of small groups. By doing so the ever expanding congregations can maintain vital personal contact ensuring that each member is healed, nurtured and then challenged to give out of their own gifts. Small groups also build social capital because they require the leadership and involvement of many. Each member of a small group provides or acquires communication skills, networking relationships and other things like understandings of group process.

Structure: Small Groups

Small groups are able to unite individual passions into unified movements. In the book Quickening of America Frances Moore Lappe refers to this gathering of interests as uniting the Nimby’s (Not in My Back Yard). Nimby’s are individuals who quietly oppose societal events. As examples, individuals may disagree with the formation of militias, the trend towards home schooling or the construction of a gold mine. While they disagree, these individuals do not gather with like-minded individuals or make their opinions publicly known. Instead, the majority stays silent hindered by the impression that one set of personal values has no bearing on outcome. The fact/value split also feeds the mentality that personal values should go no farther than one’s back yard. Though negative in its concept, the uniting of Nimby’s points out that negative
concerns, or positive visions for that matter, do not often move from the private mind on to the public palate without the momentum of others with a similar interest. St. Paul’s recognizes this as the means of changing the world and is the reason the church commits itself to becoming a church of small groups. But any endeavor, be it changing the world or the local speed limit, requires the gifts and energies of many committed people. By creating the opportunities of peaceful group formation the church provides an invaluable service to the public and for that matter the government.

Small groups, through their size and depth of prayer, insure well-thought actions and positions. Prayer is an essential component of any church group. It allows a group to say, “What is God calling us to do?” rather than “What are our needs and desires?” Parker Palmer writes that when people gather or interact with others they should always invite God to be the third person. In addition, because of its size and focus a small group can hold the church, government and itself accountable to the values it promotes. The development of small groups is thus important not only for society but also as a means of fostering the church’s gift of accountability. As of January 1999 there are 525 small group opportunities at St. Paul’s. The opportunities are divided into four categories: Classes and Studies, Administrative Teams, Ministry or Serving Groups, and Support Groups.

All four categories provide opportunities that unite the participants of faith with their public life. Classes and studies include Christians and Money, Discovery (of your

1 Quickening of America 42.
2 IBID
3 Twelve Keys to an Effective Church xix.
personal gifts), Myers-Briggs and Spirituality, and Money Matters. Administrative teams incorporate and depend upon active lay members to direct all facets of the church. Some of these groups include: Staff Parish Relations, Stewardship Team, and Linking Ministry Team. St. Paul's also provides a safe and sought after environment for support groups. Among them are St. Paul's groups like Walk to Emmaus 4th Day groups, Healing Circle and Women's Spirituality Group as well as groups not directly tied to St. Paul's like the Twelve-step groups (AA, Al-Anon, OA, Alateen.) The last category of small groups is Ministry or Serving groups that are all very active in building social capital and acting for justice. These teams include: Creative Worship, Religion and Race, Children and Poverty, Church and Society, Intermountain Children's Home Connection, Hospital Ministry, and Legislative Action Tree.

Gifts

In addition to small groups, there are other means of incorporating Christian values with public life. One way the Church can incorporate values with public life is through its gifts. Gifts are a form of revelation. If used, the gifts of an individual or institution make real the presence of God. The gifts of the church refer to those characteristics identified in chapter three. They are the things that make the church unique to any social body. Among these are: universal acceptance, which recognizes that the Church is strongest when it reflects the diversity of God's creations; Trust—a delicate quality that the church builds with its members; Accountability—important and maintained when the Church is local and open; and Consistency—demanded by the

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4 The Company of Strangers 134.
church community in liturgy, pastoral presence and teaching. In addition, the Church can and does fill a void particularly for those people in the midst of transiting homes, families, and nation. The Church also has the potential to change the patriarchal definition of power, making power synergistic rather than hierarchical. Much of that potential lies in the Church’s ability to build Social Capital. Each of these many gifts exists and is ready to be vitalized. The task of nurturing them ultimately lies with individual congregations. For church leaders the responsibility is to mediate the gifts and the call and for the members the responsibility is to respond.

**Teaching a Common Humanity**

A second way that a church can incorporate its values with public life is in its teachings. One universal message of the Christian church is the lesson of a common humanity. The teaching of a common humanity lends itself to the formation of identity. Parker Palmer writes that, “Identity is not found in people’s differences or uniqueness but in their humanity.”\(^5\) As mentioned in previous chapters, the power to infuse meaning and give healthy identity to people resonates with the desires of those caught in contemporary social transitions. People sense the need to find themselves, which is a task that Robert Bellah says cannot be done alone.\(^5\) Providing meaning and identity is one of the church’s gifts. Teaching a common humanity like that found in Scripture is one means of giving life to that gift.

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\(^5\) IBID 26
Teaching a common humanity also brings to light the truth that unites people rather than the opinion that divides them.\(^7\) This teaches a form of dispute resolution grounded in consensus. Dispute resolution is an invaluable skill and very much a part of building social capital. Palmer says consensus calls individuals and groups to look for similarities rather than to rebut others' differences.\(^8\) With the understanding of a common humanity, a church is an ideal institution for teaching the practice of consensus because it immediately recognizes the truth that all people are united in the Spirit. God, while linking people through common humanity, is brilliantly manifested in diversity. Members need to be reminded of and provided an opportunity for their shared existence. The church is also ideal for teaching consensus because individuals of Christian faith belong to a diverse group. The church in its diversity can provide guidance for people to see beyond themselves as well as to find value in differences.

The understanding of a common humanity gives reverence to every life. Out of that reverence comes a commitment to every life. This commitment provides the foundation for actions of justice and charity. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist tradition, once said, "If my heart is as your heart give me your hand."\(^9\) This statement expresses that Christians, or anyone for that matter, do not need the same spiritual experience to be ecumenical. It is only important that they recognize the authenticity of the other's experience.\(^10\) In taking another's hand the church makes the first step in welcoming the stranger and hence the first step in the commitment to justice. So often

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\(^7\) IBID 127.
\(^8\) IBID 128-9.
\(^9\) Wogaman, Philip J. To Serve the Present Age (Abingdon Press, 1995) 91.
\(^{10}\)
the stranger is welcomed to a faith community with the premise that he or she will undergo a conversion of belief and absorb the religion of the host. Methodism does not hold that premise.

Evangelization

Here arises the question of evangelization. It is the third and obvious issue in the notion of incorporating values in the public life of the Christian. In its purest sense, the idea of welcoming a stranger is to respect and acknowledge them in whatever their form or mindset. In their value of safety St. Paul’s affirms that “we welcome all people, as they are, to explore their relationship with God. We are hospitable, inclusive and affirming of diversity.” It has been said on several occasions at St. Paul’s that they do not seek out people to be converted but rather, through their public presence and offerings of unconditional love they attract people to the church. For St. Paul’s true evangelizing is a mystery done by God. In evangelization the church itself does not have the responsibility to convert, only the responsibility to uphold its values of joy, safety, service, healing and growth.

This understanding of evangelization in many ways contradicts the market evangelization that some churches practice. For them, evangelization is a means of recruiting new members to the church. These churches look to the lessons of capitalism. In capitalism people have choices and decide their own fate based upon incentive; this mentality is applied to church selection. With this understanding, churches try to evangelize through market tactics by doing, saying and supporting the popular. Not

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10 IBID
only does this undermine the sanctity of the church but it also inhibits churches from
taking outspoken stances in the realms of politics and justice.\(^1\)\(^2\) Hence, a church focused
on market evangelization cuts itself off from voicing its values publicly. In their silence
churches of this nature feed moral ambiguity. Chapter one identified that this
ambiguity—the waxing and waning of values—is not what people desire, and that in turn
it feeds public frustration and apathy.

The motivation behind such evangelization tactics is often fear of instability and
lost membership. However, Martin Marty warns that a church must resist the temptation
to measure their integrity by the rate of growth or decline.\(^1\)\(^3\) Churches are afraid that if
they rock the boat, challenge the social milieu, or demand justice members will stop
attending. These same churches assume that what people really want is a neutral place
where they can feel joy and avoid pain, be affirmed but not challenged. This passive
approach to faith, however, establishes no vested commitment nor does it legitimize the
member by engaging him or her in thought and action. Rather, given a sense of purpose
and voice a person will return to the church even when he or she is challenged by it.
Lack of loyalty is more detrimental to a church in this age of spiritual consumerism than
taking a stance and calling church members to grapple with life’s issues. Therefore, the
church must see itself not as an end for itself but as a place for people on their journey.\(^1\)\(^4\)

St. Paul’s Church can attest to the success and attraction of a divinely led form of
evangelization focused on God’s message rather than a human led form of evangelization

\(^{11}\) Marty, Martin E., The Public Church (Crossroad Pub., 1981) 86.
\(^{12}\) IBID
\(^{13}\) IBID 90.
focused on security. It is estimated that participation in small group opportunities at St. Paul’s has grown 30% in the last year. Busting at its seams the church is on the fast track to gathering funds, support and ideas for building a new church. Tentatively, ground is set to be broken in March of 2000. St. Paul’s “success” is not in spite of but because of the fact that it is committed to public involvement and acts of justice.

An important and final part of uniting values with public life involves giving a voice for the voiceless. Giving a voice to the voiceless stems from both the teaching of a common humanity and the Christian commitment to justice. But who are the voiceless—in essence who is the stranger? The stranger represents a variety of people: low-income, minority, children, women, and even the person who is a present but silent member of the church. The strangers of a church typically fall into three categories: the obvious outsiders, the inside strangers who are passive and often intimidated, and the lack of person to person relationships in a church. People are typically strangers to or in a church if they feel out of place. Patrick Keifert begins his book Welcoming the Stranger with the story of a young woman who did not attend church because she feared formalities like sitting in the “wrong” pew, not knowing congregational responses or music, and having little to place in the offering. To habitual church goers these things seem trivial but they are very inhibiting to an outside stranger. Often too outsiders and insiders alike resist the notion of organized religion and reject forced values and condemnation. This reaffirms the need for evangelization that not only welcomes diverse

14 IBID 54.
people but also values their diversity. People want to maintain individual freedoms and be a part of the discernment process rather than mere recipients of it. The third type of strangers exist simply because neither party takes the time or opportunity to meet one another.

Liturgy

The welcoming of all strangers involves a well-thought liturgy. Again, St. Paul’s provides the examples of a church which has worked hard to develop an inviting place to worship. St. Paul’s begins its service by re-affirming its proclamation to welcome all people to live and grow in God’s love. The leader, either lay or ordained, then asks the congregation to take a moment of silence in which “we move from getting here to being here.” The silence is a valuable time for releasing preoccupations and fears and welcoming God’s presence. Individuals are invited to greet their neighbors with a grasp of hands and a connection of eyes. Often, in the abundant atmosphere, the stranger lends more than a hand but a full body embrace! Upon entry, each person in the congregation receives a bulletin from one of many greeters at the door. St. Paul’s bulletin includes multiple pages of activities, celebrations, classes and concerns. Each briefing tells the readers what they can do and how they can get involved. The key piece of the bulletin is the attendance slip. It asks for the name and personal information of the participant but also includes a listing of the bulletin’s activities with a place where the reader can check-off any of the opportunities he or she is interested in. Lastly, there is a place for comments. Comments are brought to the attention of church staff who are committed to responding.
The most resisted and guilt-laden portion of the service is the offering. People new to St. Paul's are told, "if you are a guest or visitor today your presence is your gift to us. Offering is a time when members and devoted friends of St. Paul's renew their commitment." As the plates are passed every person, with their attendance form, has a gift to place in the offering. The attendance forms also provide a handy veil for people to fold around their monetary offering to prevent the fears of comparison. St. Paul's also recognizes that people learn, experience and share the gospel in many different styles. To cater to all people St. Paul's integrates drama, music, sermon, video, prayer (silent and public) and sacraments into its services.

In addition to the logistics of a liturgical service the sermon is also a tool for welcoming. One important component of a welcoming message is the sense of trust between a pastor or priest and the listeners. Preachers need to act as if they and the audience are intimates.\(^{17}\) When a pastor applies the gospel to her or his own life the listener learns to do the same. This is important because people project their private life and criteria onto the public worship service.\(^{18}\) A second essential component of the liturgical message is that it demands something of the listener. Davida Foy Crabtree says contemporary American society is in a revolution of declining expectations.\(^{19}\) This revolution manifests itself in the church where members attend yearning for, but not expecting, a powerful experience—yearning for, but not expecting, people alive in their lives.

\(^{17}\) IBID 24.
\(^{18}\) IBID.
\(^{19}\) Crabtree, Davida Foy, The Empowering Church (Alban Institute Pub., 1989) 43.
Crabtree warns against churches that perpetuate this problem by preaching to the lowest common denominator. A message directed to the lowest common denominator does not demand or expect anything from church members. The members walk out of church seeing and thinking the same and possibly feeling a warm but ephemeral “fuzzy.” Crabtree say that ironically, this no strings attached style of worship turns people away because they desire meaning and accountability.

A church should welcome people not only to sit in the pew but also to participate in the liturgical service. Providing opportunity for participation is the first step in building social capital. Patrick Keifert says most churches limit the audience to watching the performance and provide few, if any, opportunities for participation. Typically those few positions are filled by the same families and members who are active in many church and outside community positions. The challenge and intent of a church, however, is to give its gift of social capital to all members, particularly those who do not volunteer on their own or who have not fully developed their social capital. It is a known fact that people are more likely to get involved when they are asked and offered the skills to perform a task. Some of the ways St. Paul’s seeks out and asks members to participate are in leading prayers, giving communion, greeting guests, and running sound equipment. Volunteers need not have taken certain classes or achieved a certain status to participate in any of the volunteer opportunities. The church freely offers to teach the necessary skills.

20 IBID.
21 IBID.
Churches that foster social capital provide the place and develop the necessary skills relevant to politics. Participation in politics requires three things: resources, engagement, and recruitment. Politically minded groups who have the three resources are more likely to succeed in impacting the political process. All three things are, again, gifts that churches have to offer. Churches should not only produce the skills used in politics but raise awareness of and participation in politics. Possession of these gifts and the ability to build social capital further call the church to participate in public discussions of justice and to dialogue with political bodies. The church is concerned not only with the after-life of a person but the present quality of their lives. It makes sense, then, that the church should and is interested in the governing influences of people's lives. In addition to church recognition and action, institutions like the government are also essential in supporting a public church. Support comes through social partnership and reimbursement as well as acknowledgement of the strength churches give to society. For, in the long run, the strengths of the faith community ensure the strength of the public.

The church's gift of building social capital is to be used not only in the internal activities of the church but should also be shared by networking skilled members with external organizations. Networking takes place when the church takes part in a united front. Churches need to unite among themselves on causes that call for immediate Christian response like: housing, environment, migratory workers, and distribution of

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24 IBID 269.
25 IBID 271.
wealth, children, the aged and health care. A united front is multifaceted, however, because the church shares its causes with many other groups. A united front includes not only churches but also other organizations, both public and independent. The church has many things to offer a united front including people with social capital, respectable public status, places to meet and a broad audience of concerned individuals. Members of a united front do not have to adopt or endorse all the beliefs of their partners. They need only recognize a common cause and the synergy of a united voice.

27 IBID.
Conclusion

This thesis critically examines the line that has been drawn between church and state. It does not distort or erase the separation but instead acknowledges the shared border and the proximity of faith and public life. While Christianity is not universally accepted, an emergence of Christian faith into public life is not an assault on diversity. The genuine Christian mission is not a quest to conquer or establish one rigid set of politics, values or ideas. Christian communities cannot even agree on one rigid set of politics, values or ideas. Rather, the purpose of the Christian church is to serve and love. As has been shown, Christianity welcomes and embraces diversity. This is because God is manifested in many different forms, cultures, histories and perspectives. The fullness of God, and therefore the truth of God, is only obtainable through this diversity. The fullness is stifled by one rigid sense of right and wrong like that proposed by the Religious Right. This is not to say, however, that right and wrong is relative. Moral relativism is again and again the source of frustration and fear for Americans. The purpose of reconnecting Christian Faith with public life is to ease fear and frustration through conversation on values and morality. Like all conversations, the discourse on values involves two mutually dependent groups: the public and the church. Christians need the public to reveal God and the public needs Christians for their love, hope and communal strengths.

Christians must share their faith—the faith of love—in the public. Unless values are shared the public realm becomes devoid of morality and values, so relative that the facts of science and government trespass over boundaries of right or wrong. Facts and
values, therefore, must be brought into conversation. Top-down, churches make statements of faith in regards to public life and politics. However, where the conversation is needed is bottom-up, starting with local congregations and Christian communities. It is the responsibility of the local church to motivate this conversation.

The church is a human construct and, like anything human, it is flawed makes mistakes. Much of the church’s inability to be publicly active can be attributed to limiting factors like mindset and insufficient resources. Tradition and fear of the unknown often limit a church to serving the individual soul rather than working to bring about the Kingdom. Lack of resources is also a common difficulty. Staffing, social capital, and funding are all necessary for a church to connect laity with the public.

The need for resources becomes especially critical when the government reduces its social services. When public assistance is reduced problems do not just go away, churches take up the slack. Public institutions like the government need to support the social services that Christian communities provide. Support can take the form of monetary and administrative assistance like that legislated in the 1996 Welfare Bill. It can also come through partnership efforts like inviting faith communities to assist in planning and programming drug prevention, family services, welfare assistance, and other social efforts.

This thesis was written in response to the over-extended separation of values and public life. It is, however, important to recognize that values can be wed too intimately with public life causing another harmful extreme. This occurs when the values of a few
infringe upon the diversity of the whole. Hence, there is a constant dance taking place between meaningless relativity and tyrannical imposition over morality and values.

Part of being public is accepting citizenship in a diverse community. This thesis advocates partnerships and group action, yet, we are a culture of devout individuals. Answering the Christian call to public life requires a reduction of individual pride and reach out to others challenges. Both challenge the well-established glorification of a self-made and independent person. Not only is each person independent, each person comes from a different class, ethnic background and demographic location. For example, the perspectives of this thesis reflect my narrow representation of this diversity. I welcome and recognize the need for others’ views. Despite my limited insight, I feel the separation of facts and values—public and private—is an issue for all Americans.

I would close with a quotation from Ashley Montague found in his work *Man: His First Million Years*:

The individual in society at once feels very close to and very far from other human beings, but always there remains the strongest of desires, to be related to one’s fellow man. (There is) no more successful means of achieving this relatedness than religion.

This thesis does not provide universal, black and white answers. However, it aims to start a conversation on values in public life. What Christian religion can and does do is relate people through love. This love for the world makes inescapable the commitment to its wellbeing.
WORKS CITED


