This is to certify that the

dissertation entitled
RIVERVIEW COMMUNITY CHURCH
and
GREAT COMMISSION INTERNATIONAL
as
REPRESENTATIVE OF POST-1960s EVANGELICALISM
presented by

Lance R. Miller

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

The Doctor of Philosophy degree in Interdisciplinary Studies,
College of Arts and Letters

W. Fred Graham
Major professor

Date July 11, 1991

RIVERVIEW COMMUNITY CHURCH
AND
GREAT COMMISSION INTERNATIONAL
AS
REPRESENTATIVE OF POST-1960s EVANGELICALISM

by

Lance R. Miller

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Interdisciplinary Studies
College of Arts and Letters

1991

ABSTRACT

RIVERVIEW COMMUNITY CHURCH AND GREAT COMMISSION INTERNATIONAL AS REPRESENTATIVE OF POST-1960S EVANGELICALISM

By

Lance R. Miller

This doctoral dissertation profiles an Evangelical church in East Lansing, Michigan, (Riverview Community Church) and the national organization to which it belongs (Great Commission International). The purpose of examining these organizations is to view post-1960s Evangelicalism from a national and local level and to follow the development of a conservative religious body from its campus origins to its establishment in the community.

Although Riverview Community Church designs its own agenda in response to the character of its membership, it also follows and anticipates national trends of Evangelical membership through its mother organization, Great Commission International. RCC has targeted the baby boomer population and addresses the needs of this specific generation through small group programming. The small group programs function as support groups for the membership. This study examines the small group process in this church. It also describes how RCC taps into an Evangelical network of small group support programs.

National trends of church membership are discussed. The growth of conservative churches and the declining membership of mainline churches are addressed. Reasons for such membership shifts are provided by sociologists who have surveyed this phenomenon.

Riverview Community Church is described as a Neo-Evangelical church, and criteria for this particular designation is discussed. This dissertation concludes with the direction of Neo-Evangelicalism and how this movement perceives its future.

PREFACE

A "new style" of religion has been developing in America during the past twenty years. Changes in the American religious scenery have been noticeable to those who are not affiliated with organized religion, but the changes are especially noted by those who are. These changes began quite subtly during the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the basements of churches and homes where young people gathered to explore an alternative to their "parents' religion." As a member of such a group twenty years ago, I felt a counterculture bond with my compatriots as we spoke about the difference between Christianity and "churchianity." We thrived on informality; it was relied upon to cleanse us from the institutional religiosity that we rejected. We intended to find the "primal" Christianity which the church had made opaque with all of its doctrine. We would cut through all of the doctrine that the "human church" had piled up for two thousand years and look directly to the words of Jesus for our direction. After all, Jesus was also a counterculture person in his day.

During the following two decades, the religious counterculture groups were examined, scrutinized, and highly documented by social scientists. I watched the movement from a personal point of interest even though I no longer belonged to any religious group or church. The most visible aspect of some groups was the way in which they evolved into large ecclesiastical organizations. The institutional setting

was no longer anathema to such groups, but they did maintain the ideal of doing it differently from parents' churches. If anything, our parents' generation actually accepted some traits from the "weird kids" who sang "Jesus songs" set to rock music in the basements of years ago.

Another dimension surfaced as the new style churches developed. As one who worked in social services, it became apparent to me that the churches and the social service agencies were providing similar services. The churches were addressing the psychological and social needs of their people. In itself, that is not unusual, because the established churches had been providing pastoral counseling for a long time. However, on a large scale, the degree, the method, and the focus was without precedent.

During the period of 1987 to 1991, the leadership of Riverview Community Church (especially Pastors Steve Sommerlot and Paul DenHerder) opened their church to me, introduced me to people of their congregation, and provided me with every piece of information I requested. The fact that they put no restraints on my "investigation" is an indication of their candor, and the confidence they have in their work. Few organizations or people would be willing to submit to an objective examination; they have my sincere appreciation.

I also thank my committee: Dr. Robert Anderson, Dr. David Bailey, Dr. James McKee, and a special thank you to Dr. W. Fred Graham for paving the way.

Only my wife Lauren knows the gratitude I feel for her in supporting me in every way through this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The intent of this study is to examine an aspect of post-1960s Evangelicalism, by presenting a church that represents a form of Evangelicalism, that developed on American campuses during the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this period, small groups of students met on campuses throughout America to study and preach the Bible in an Evangelical context. Although this was not a previously unknown endeavor on college campuses, it was quite novel on many of them.

Most of these groups were as transient as the students, leaving the campus after a brief stay, blending with other groups, or dissipating and finally disappearing. Some groups grew and became viable enough to remain on campus to this day, where they maintain a stable campus ministry as a steady stream of students come and go every few years. However, a significant number of Evangelical campus groups developed and organized into church bodies off campus. Riverview Community Church of East Lansing, Michigan, belongs to this genre. Although Riverview Community Church established itself off campus in the East Lansing community, it continues to operate its campus ministry at Michigan State University.

RCC is a blend of several facets found within post-1960s Evangelicalism. It is a campus ministry, it is a community church, and it is part of a "mother" organization, Great Commission International. RCC is also connected to an Evangelical system; a

national network of ideas and plans that are realized through programs, publications, marketing analysis, and marketing techniques. In this sense it can be stated that RCC is no longer a local campus/community church; it is a national church. Information generated by Evangelical churches and groups throughout America is pertinent to the function of RCC in East Lansing.

This study will trace the development of Riverview Community Church from its inception in 1977, into its fourteenth year. The profile of the church organization will be presented with the most important element of any organization: its people. With the exception of the church leadership, all names used in this study are pseudonyms. The use of pseudonyms is a decision of the writer. Many of the people who offered information about themselves and their church were open to the use of their names.

The profile of the church and its programs will be related to historical, theological, and social influences. The church will be viewed in the context of Evangelical as well as national trends. The intent of this study is to provide a view of post-1960s Evangelicalism on a local level with its "grassroots" programs, demonstrating how it functions in the daily lives of individuals. In doing so, the objective of the study is to also place the local church in the "big picture" of American Evangelicalism.

There is no comprehensive written history of Riverview Community Church and its parent organization, Great Commission International. The major portion of the organization's history was assembled from interviews with church leaders who were with the organization from its earlier years. Other information was obtained from

church records, annual reports, brochures, pamphlets, promotional material, and church statements.

CHAPTER 1
ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Jim McCotter and Dennis Clark met in the army during the late 1960s. After their discharge from the service they maintained their friendship while Clark toured with the Campus Crusade musical group, "New Folk." Campus Crusade For Christ was established in 1951 on college campuses in California. Today this evangelical organization has chapters on campuses around the world. The New Folk performed on college campuses throughout the country, especially those with established Campus Crusade chapters. In 1970 McCotter and Clark teamed with Herschel Martindale as they began to organize students on campuses in Colorado for small informal Bible studies. They gathered high school and college students for a "gospel blitz" of college campuses in the western and mid-western United States. The group travelled on a bus from college to college as they formed church "starts" on each campus. After a campus Bible group was established several students would visit other colleges, especially during school breaks, to form another group. In 1972, a Bible study group from a college in Kansas City initiated another at Iowa State University. The Iowa State University Bible Study in turn sent "planting teams" to other college campuses.

In 1977 the ISU Bible study had three hundred and fifty members. That year, twelve members of the ISU group moved to Michigan State University to begin the MSU Bible Study. The ISU group sent two of its pastors, Larry Clemente and David

MS

Bov

rec

Cla

that

loca

com

orga

hea

orga

dive

orga

East

Grea

com

Rive

Bible

minis

which

River

his ch

MSU Bible Study. The ISU group sent two of its pastors, Larry Clemente and David Bovenmyer, to lead the MSU group. The MSU Bible Study became an officially recognized MSU student organization and was allowed to meet in campus buildings. Clark, McCotter and Martindale were considered the national leaders of the groups that were formed from their initiative. Under the direction of the three founders the local churches agreed upon a centrally organized network to further unify their common origins. Great Commission International was formed in 1983 as an umbrella organization which encompassed all of the local churches. The GCI national headquarters is in Washington, DC. Dennis Clark became president of the organization, with McCotter, Martindale, and Bovenmyer (from MSU) as directors.

Following the lead of its parent organization in 1983, the MSU Bible Study diverged into a campus/community organization, then following the lead of its parent organization, the community group adopted the name Great Commission Church of East Lansing. In 1988 GCI encouraged local churches to change their names from the Great Commission Church to a name that would identify more with the individual communities. Thus, The Great Commission Church of East Lansing became the Riverview Community Church, and continues to function on campus as the MSU Bible Study.

The 1983 decision to concentrate on a community ministry apart from its MSU ministry was in part due to the urging of the national Great Commission organization which had already begun to target off-campus communities for church development. Riverview Community Church Pastor Steve Sommerlot recalls that the new focus of his church was also a "natural movement toward growth" of the congregation. As the

MSU students of the church graduated and moved off campus, they began to identify less with campus life. Their employment, homes, and families were developing in the non-student community, and they wanted to associate with a church that reflected their new interests. It was prudent for the church to follow its founding membership off campus, but terminating the campus ministry would have truncated the access point of new membership. One of the drawbacks of a campus oriented church is the "revolving door" transience of the membership. The congregation changes every few years and it is difficult for a campus church to establish stability. A campus church must focus on the "here and now". Long range direction and planning is largely speculative. Consequently RCC was able to circumvent these drawbacks when it moved off campus into East Lansing.

Nora has followed the transition of Riverview Community Church from the campus to the community. A member of the church from its inception on the MSU campus, Nora remains active in church functions, especially in organizing groups. She believes that the metamorphosis of the church will eventually necessitate a permanent location in the community. She sees the changes in the church and its development as a reflection of the personal changes with its individual members. "Years ago we were all students. We graduated, moved into the community, we became parents, bought homes, have professions. We've brought others that we met into the church; this church has grown far more rapidly than if it had remained student supported." Nora points out that her lifestyle today is in contrast to the transience of her years as a student, and that people in her age groups are more inclined toward stability in the institutions to which they belong. The church has reached the position that it can now

be assured of the continued support (in personal as well as financial resources) of the members that have established themselves in the community.

Unlike many campus churches RCC is able to provide its congregation a sense of continuity, from campus to community. Albeit, it is typical for students to move away from the area after graduation, and RCC does notice the effects of attrition. However, the church is also aware that the possibilities of a student parishioner remaining in the area are increased if that student has developed meaningful social contacts and relationships during his/her few years on campus.

The development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships is emphasized by church leadership. When church members are asked about their reasons for belonging to the Riverview Community Church, the response of "personal relationships" is most often mentioned before theological considerations. Sally, a single woman in her mid-twenties, returned home "temporarily" after graduating from college in Indiana. A friend introduced her to RCC where she cultivated several new friendships. She has remained longer in the Lansing area than she had intended and she indicates that it is not her present employment or her family that is the reason for doing so. "I found a place where I really fit" she says about Riverview. Sally was raised in a Presbyterian family, and because church is important to her, she attempted to remain with the Presbyterian church but socially she felt that she could not comfortably belong to it. "It seemed like the church was geared for the families." She left the church in search of another mainline church, but did not find them satisfactory. "I'm post college, yet I'm pre-marriage and pre-family. I couldn't find one that had many people like me that I could associate with." The major attraction

of Riverview for Sally is that she has a group of people within the church that have a similar *sitz im leben*. Bonds are fostered within the group via activities that the people of the group initiate among themselves.

Ann also found people at RCC compatible with her life style as a single person. A graduate of MSU in her mid-twenties, Ann established a day-care. Her business is licensed by the state and she cares for five to ten children. She would like to expand, taking in more children and hiring child care workers. Ann regards her family and her background as "traditional" and wanted to join a church that offered a "traditional Christian message," yet offered her the type of personal relationships that she feels are most compatible with her. She does not care to meet people through some of the more popular means for single people in her age group, e.g., night clubs. It is also important for her to know that the people she does meet can communicate with her on a spiritual level.

CHAPTER 2
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

During the mid-1980s GCI developed a "hub city" strategy. Church planting teams were sent into major American cities, e.g., Detroit, Denver, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Kansas City, San Diego. The college campus was no longer the single focus of church organizers; the development of "community" churches was central to the hub city strategy. GCI developed six regional offices in 1987-88, each with a regional director under the auspices of the national office in Washington, DC. The objective of the regional office is to act as the administrative "hub" of a demarcated area in the country, covering several states. East Lansing belongs to the Columbus, Ohio, regional office. Local church leaders meet with regional and national leaders quarterly.

GCI describes itself as an "international church." Currently GCI functions in twenty-eight states with sixty-eight churches. GCI has also established churches in the following foreign locations: Guelph, Ontario, San Salvador, El Salvador, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Valencia, Venezuela and three churches in Honduras,. Thirteen churches were established in the USA during 1988-89. The national office publishes books and a college-targeted feature magazine. The Washington, DC office sponsors

national projects including a summer project that sends students overseas to evangelize.

Although GCI is more of a centralized organization today than it was a decade ago, it regards its structure as an "association of evangelical churches." The congregational model is stressed. Apart from basic theological tenets (refer to GCI *Statement of Faith*) that the local churches maintain in common, each church chooses its own leadership from within its group. The method of conducting services, the type of small group activity, and administrative/business affairs, are all determined by the individual church. This allows each church to customize its function in accord with the character of each community. Besides the two pastors of RCC, the administrative structure includes deacons, group coordinators, and team leaders. The pastors make all final administrative decisions.

As previously mentioned, David Bovenmyer was the first Senior Pastor of the MSU group who brought a team of twelve people with him from Iowa State University to East Lansing in 1977. Bovenmyer has since moved to a Board of Directors position in Washington, DC. Jeff Moore succeeded Bovenmyer as Senior Pastor, then in 1988 Moore moved to Novi, Michigan, to develop a Great Commission church there. Steve Sommerlot assumed the duties of Senior Pastor of Riverview Community Church, with Paul Den Herder as Associate Pastor. Sommerlot and Den Herder are the only remaining members of the original twelve from Iowa State University.

Pastor Sommerlot became involved with GCI at Iowa State University where he graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Farm Operations. When Pastor Sommerlot is

asked about the initial motivation to begin a Fundamentalist church in East Lansing (where there exist a number of Evangelical and Fundamentalist churches) he answers,

> Yes, there are other Fundamentalist churches that we could have easily joined as a group and not have gone through the effort of starting a church here. But as part of Great Commission we see ourselves as a new denomination of churches. In some ways there might not be much difference between a Lutheran church and a Methodist church. But Lutherans will begin a church in an area where there is none, even if there is a Methodist church there. We are expanding; I suppose you could say that it is the American way. We have a vision to multiply; that's why we call ourselves the Great Commission. We take the great commission words of Jesus in *Matthew* seriously.

Membership

In 1990 the Riverview Community Church membership was approximately two hundred and forty people. This figure applies to those who regularly attend church functions and support the church. This does not include those who attend Sunday services only (which would dramatically increase the number, especially during the school year). Reviewing the growth rate of Riverview, the approximate number of members per year are listed as: 1977 = 20, 1978 = 50, 1979 = 80, 1980 = 120, during the period 1983 to 1986 the membership rose gradually from one hundred and fifty to one hundred and seventy, 1987 = 230. There was a slight loss in membership during 1988 due to migration of members to the Chicago and Novi development of new GCI

churches. In 1980 two-thirds of the members were students. In 1990 the figure is reversed with two-thirds of the members as "community people."

Nationwide the GCI churches counted approximately 10,000 people in regular attendance during 1990. The size of the churches range from less than one hundred to more than eight hundred members (the Maryland church and Minnesota church each has approximately 800 members). Outside of the U.S., GCI International maintains a level of approximately two thousand five hundred members, the concentration of which is in Central America.

Financial Structure, Support, and Interaction Between Local Churches and GCI

Each local church is self-supporting and creates its own programming according to the needs of the individual congregation. Each church determines the salary of its personnel. The local church donates 10 percent of its revenue to its regional office. In turn, the regional offices give 10 percent to the national office in Washington, DC.

The development of a new church is guided by the regional office when it determines the feasibility (based on its own demographical studies) for a particular area. The regional office works with an established church within the region during the developmental phase. A pastor from a church within the region is sent to the new location. The regional office and the "mother" church provide support to the fledgling church until it is able to function on its own. For example, in 1988 a group of Riverview people left with Pastor Jeff Moore to begin a church in Novi, Michigan.

Moore began by holding services in a Junior High School auditorium and renting office space. At about the same time that Moore and his group left Riverview for Novi, another group left RCC to "plant" a church in suburban Chicago. Each church was supported by RCC for the first eighteen months, receiving approximately $80,000 per church. After stabilizing their memberships to support themselves (the Novi church numbered ninety in 1990), the two churches became independent of Riverview.

Developing New Campus Ministries

Great Commission International continues to initiate ministries on college campuses and relies upon the local GCI churches to develop them. In 1985 GCI evaluated various campuses in the U.S. to determine the possibilities of success in establishing churches. Western Michigan University was chosen as one of the colleges to which a small "team" from Riverview Community Church was sent (GCI had previously established a ministry in the Ann Arbor/University of Michigan area). However, the demographical information revealed that the Kalamazoo area was "highly churched" (especially with conservative Christian churches, and nearly twenty campus ministries) and therefore GCI did not consider Western Michigan University as a priority campus for establishing a ministry. Nevertheless, the GCI regional office requested that Riverview Community Church provide volunteers to determine possibilities of a campus ministry at WMU. RCC sent four members of its congregation to WMU.

Steve Duisterhof is the only member of the original team remaining in the Kalamazoo area and is still attempting to form a ministry. He describes the first

months after arriving on the WMU campus as "fairly successful." As with the MSU Bible Study, an encouraging number of students attended the bible studies at WMU during the first months. The WMU group reached forty students in regular attendance for its meetings and activities. However, the WMU group met resistance from "the liberal church groups," as Duisterhof recounts.

> We were definitely not welcome, other groups did not feel comfortable with a fundamentalist group on campus. We didn't realize until later that some individuals passed around some flyers about us. We got some bad publicity. They claimed we were coercive. The number of students attending our meetings fell off after that.

Although the WMU project received some support (in terms of financing and human resources) from Riverview Community Church and from the regional office, the support was not provided in the same degree and on the same level that priority areas received. The WMU group did not recover from its early setback and finally moved off campus. The group is no longer student oriented, and Duisterhof describes its future as "uncertain." A group of fifteen people still meet weekly in their Kalamazoo area homes, but there is no projection of significant growth beyond the present arrangement. The members of the groups have families and careers that they tend to, and no one in the group devotes full time to the endeavor of the church project. "Time and people are limited at this point. We've taken a realistic attitude about this. In the New Testament, Paul tried to begin churches in areas that he wasn't accepted, so he moved on. Even businesses are successful in some areas, but can't get off the ground in others. There are a lot of factors involved. We'll go where we can

best preach the Gospel." One of the options for the future of Duisterhof's group is to combine with another church in the area. However, Duisterhof would like to become more involved with GCI and is considering a move to Dallas for youth ministry training.

Ordination and Training

Formal theological training is not a prerequisite for ordination at Riverview Community Church. However, some of the church leadership have attended Moody Bible Institute. Pastors are chosen from among the church membership after a period of "lay" training and "character development." Only adult males are eligible for training and ordination (this is a GCI policy that local churches must follow). The decision of the congregation to grant ordination is primarily based upon the person's character, leadership skills, and how suitable the individual is for the specific church. Passages from the Bible are used for reference regarding the desired character of a pastor (1 Tim. 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9). Twenty such qualifications are delineated by RCC, most of them directly concern the character or personality of the individual, e.g., blameless, self controlled, free from excess, uncontentious, good reputation. The church leadership insists upon having an "intimate understanding" about an individual's life before ordination is considered.

Those who pursue ordination are provided with experience in the various facets of church life, e.g., administration, preaching. There is no set sequence or timelines for training; the leadership and congregation determine when a person is ready for ordination.

Small Groups

Because small group programs are such a vital part of the Riverview ministry, only a brief outline description will be provided in this section. Small group programs will be discussed in depth later in this study.

Both men and women church members can volunteer and are trained to lead specialized small groups. Small group programs encourage members from diverse backgrounds to find a compatible milieu within the organization. Consequently the pursuit of individual interests becomes possible. Some of the groups that RCC offers include: College Singles, Career Singles, Couples, Single Parents, Mature Singles, Seniors, Mothers of Young Children, Professional Business People, and various support groups. The campus ministry groups meet on campus and the community ministry groups meet in the homes of members.

The campus MSU Bible Study maintains the same small group format as it did during the 1970s. Mid-day Bible studies, study circles, and social activities (drama and musical productions) are emphasized for the on-campus ministry.

Group leaders are trained by coordinators. Each coordinator monitors five group leaders, and in turn, the church pastors monitor the coordinators. The group leaders are trained in the topics that they will address, in group leadership roles, character development, and in evangelizing. An emphasis is placed on fostering personal relationships between group leaders and group members. Incorporation of the small group approach into the community programming is a result of the success of the small group approach during the 1970s when RCC functioned as the MSU Bible Study.

The Sunday Service

The Sunday service presented by the Riverview Community Church is designed to accommodate any person, regardless of religious (or non-religious) predilection. The church leadership designs Sunday services specifically for the non-member or those who are "investigating" (usually referred to as the "unchurched"). RCC regards a person from an orthodox religious tradition the same as it does a person who has no religious beliefs or background. Both are "investigating" and both can be "unbelievers" in the sense that they have yet to find the "one way" to salvation. "Our focus in the community church is to unbelievers," Pastor Sommerlot explains.

Since 1987 the Sunday services have been held at the MSU Kellogg Center (prior to that, the services were held in various buildings on the MSU campus). The Center provides free ramp parking which allows easy access to the auditorium where the services are held. The capacity of the auditorium is approximately 300. Because the capacity is met for most services, RCC is considering holding two services on Sundays. The modern auditorium provides an atmosphere that can be described as non-traditional and informal. Cushioned seats face the stage where the service is conducted. Clerical robes, altar, candles, or other items found in a "typical" church are not present.

The design of the Sunday service is a local decision made by each GCI community church and is not prescribed by the national or regional organizations. This allows the flexibility of each church to determine the character of its community and its congregation. Therefore, the style of RCC might not be appropriate for

another community that is demographically different from the East Lansing/MSU community.

The majority of those in attendance are singles or young couples, generally about the age of thirty. Many of the couples have young children. Those in the undergraduate student age range (18 to 22 years) do not appear to comprise the bulk of those present, although by observation it is apparent that RCC is a campus affiliated church. Nor are there many attending who would be considered "seniors" in age range.

There is time before the service for visiting as people freely introduce themselves to one another in the aisles. The service begins with entertainment. A variety of musical instruments perform quick tempo songs. Humor plays an important part in the service as members perform upbeat and thought-provoking skits. The service is progressively paced with no lull periods.

The flow of the service is not interrupted by liturgy or sacraments. Although RCC practices baptism and the eucharist, they are not referred to as "sacraments" and are not performed during Sunday services. The Eucharist ("breaking of bread") is observed among members at will and informally, possibly during small group meetings. It is not necessary for a pastor to attend such occasions. Baptism is often performed in the backyard pools of church members, or in lakes during retreats. The major stipulation for baptism in the church is that it be an "immersion" baptism.

Pastor Sommerlot delivers a contemporary "message" (which is not referred to as a "sermon") related to the Bible. Unlike traditional Fundamentalist formats, the RCC Sunday service does not challenge the newcomer with guilt-evoking themes and

Edwardsian coercion. Instead, the message is one of "believe in God and believe in yourself." The message is more reminiscent of Robert Schuller or Norman Vincent Peale. The difference here is that although the message stresses the unlimited potential of each individual, that potential can only be reached by consecrating oneself to Jesus via repentance and faith. For Schuller or Peale the "power of Christ" bolsters and assists the individual in the endeavors of life. However, the RCC message is that a person is unworthy and helpless without totally submitting his/her life to Jesus. Self-esteem is an important part of the message, but genuine self-esteem comes only through Jesus.

The lives of Old Testament and New Testament figures are used as literal examples of how people should or should not live. Pragmatic advice is offered for daily living. The message remains buoyant as it is interlaced with humor and personal experience. Systematic theology plays no part in the message.

In lieu of an "altar call" which is often used in Evangelical churches, at the end of the service Pastor Sommerlot recites the "Sinner's Prayer." This prayer calls upon those who have not given their lives to Jesus and those who do not feel that they are "saved" to repent and ask Jesus to come into their lives. The Pastor asks those who would like to have a personal relationship with Jesus to write their name and phone number in the bulletin, return it, and they will be contacted.

What does Pastor Sommerlot believe Riverview Community Church offers that other (especially mainline denomination) churches do not offer? "From a marketing perspective, our product is relationships. Relationships with God and with people. A major attraction is our Sunday service. We try to attract the unchurched. The service

is not what you'd find in most churches in music and in entertainment. That opens the way for people to listen to the Gospel message. Our church is relevant, the message is relevant. The message is centered on the question 'what are the everyday needs of people'. We make the Bible relevant."

The Facility and Location—A Mobile Church

The RCC arrangement with the Kellogg Center as its Sunday worship location works well for the church during the present stage of its development. The location is accessible to the campus and the community. However, the logistics of preparing the facility for a Sunday service are "more difficult than if we had our own building" says Pastor Sommerlot. For example, all musical equipment must be brought in, set up, dismantled, then stored again each week. This is also true of the Sunday school equipment which is set up in rooms adjacent to the auditorium. For this task the church has appointed "set-up teams" which rotate with an on or off Sunday schedule. The church has a large van for transporting the necessary material. RCC members refer to their church as "mobilized". The "mobilized" church is set up each Sunday morning and dismantled in the afternoon.

The church leaders and members see positive and negative aspects of not having their own church building. "The most obvious problem is not having a home base for everybody," says Pastor Sommerlot. The church leases office space in East Lansing for its administrative functions. Because it is a campus organization, the university allows the church groups to meet on campus. However, by "homebase" the leaders and members mean a stable central location for all church functions. A

member in her late twenties who is a former MSU student and now owns a small business comments, "I'm single and it would be nice to rely on a place that I could go anytime and meet with people who have the same interests as me. I won't go to singles bars or clubs to meet people."

The advantages for RCC's having its own building revolve around cost. Pastor Sommerlot finds that the present situation is "cost effective." Few resources are spent on maintenance for a mobilized church. The resources that are saved are realized in terms of financial commitment and in human commitment. For example, few members are needed to form maintenance committees and few technicians (electricians, carpenters) are needed to maintain what the church does own. All maintenance projects are cared for by those within whom the church has established leasing contracts. RCC does not need perpetual fund raisers, e.g., bake sales, to maintain a physical plant.

Most importantly, a major advantage that a mobile church enjoys is its ability to locate in relation to the congregation. It maintains the possibility and flexibility of shifting to central locations. Presently, the Kellogg Center is an optimal location for a church for the same reasons that it is optimal as a convention center. It is located near the freeways, allowing easy access for surrounding regions. The East Lansing location makes it readily accessible to the Lansing metropolitan area. It is located on the MSU campus which not only makes it accessible for the entire campus community, but also allows students who do not have cars to reach it. Because administratively RCC has two phases (the campus and the community) the Kellogg location easily mediates both aspects.

Another positive factor of the mobile church is that it is not a neighborhood church; it does not depend upon a specific neighborhood. An important element that determines the success and longevity of a church is the surrounding neighborhood. This can be a positive factor or a negative one. Some neighborhoods contribute greatly to the success of a church, especially if the neighborhood remains vibrant. However, with demographical shifts, a church (or any business for that matter) is vulnerable to changes. A stationary church building relies upon the strength of the neighborhood to some degree. It relies upon the neighborhood for support, and in turn the church provides the neighborhood with programs and activities specific to the needs of the local people. In effect, this makes a church the focal point or center of the neighborhood.

In his book, *The American Catholic Experience,* Jay Dolan (a scholar of American Catholicism) presents a primary example of neighborhood churches by citing the role of the American Catholic, neighborhood parish (1985). Some of the dynamics of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Catholic neighborhood parish can apply to churches and neighborhoods today. Dolan discusses the interchange between church and neighborhood, which relied upon some homogeneity and common identification. Ethnic pockets of Catholics formed their own brand of local Catholicism based upon the need of the neighborhood. The local identification was so powerful that it occasionally challenged the hierarchy of the church when the hierarchy attempted to impose controls over the local parish. However, when the ethnic and demographical nature of the neighborhoods changed, the parish lost its influence in the neighborhood, and in turn lost its support. Today

the vacated remnants of once flourishing neighborhood churches (not only Catholic) dot the urban landscapes, especially in struggling cities like Detroit.

Location is also important to the longevity of a stationary church. Methodists on the East side of town can generally be expected to attend the east side Methodist church and do not generally travel to the Methodist church on the west side of town. Also, the locus of activity in a stationary church is the Sunday morning service. A member attends the church on Sunday for an hour or two, and unless there is a specific activity at the church during the week, the member will probably not return to the church until the following Sunday. It can be said of such a church and its membership that there is little "engagement."

Later in this paper, the way in which Riverview Community Church "engages" its membership will be discussed at length. For now it is germane to mention that RCC utilizes an approach to engage its members which is far more extensive (and effective) than the means discussed above in the stationary churches. RCC does not rely upon any particular neighborhood for its support. Rather, it reaches into the many neighborhoods from which it draws its membership. Such a design allows the church to extend far beyond what could ordinarily be described as local church territory. It does this through the small group programming that meets in the homes of its members. In one sense, this design actually takes the church back into the neighborhood where people can come to know one another on a very interpersonal level, in each others homes. An RCC member who works as a computer consultant and regularly attends the church's small groups remarks that he has made several friendships through the groups. "I really don't have many friendships through work or

in my neighborhood, but I've found some people in the group that I can relate to. It's like having neighbors, we exchange information, even business information, and some of the people help each other out like with babysitting or other things."

Another point to be made here is that the RCC Sunday service is not the central activity of the church. Although Pastor Sommerlot does not discount the value of the Sunday service, it is, as he says "really more for the unchurched who attend" on Sundays. For many of the members the core activity and the church cohesion occurs in the homes (which will be discussed later). However, one of the important functions that the Sunday service does provide for the congregation is a "rally point" in which the members of small groups can come together, be a part of something bigger, and be affirmed by a large group. It offers a connection to the main body which keeps the members from developing a sense of alienation from the church as a whole. The Sunday service can serve to keep the membership whose focus is in small groups from drifting off as wayward satellites.

CHAPTER 3
THEOLOGY AND TEACHINGS OF RCC

The founders of Riverview Community Church have tapped into the Michigan State University student body as its primary support and developed their church in an academic milieu. Although today the organization reaches into the surrounding metropolitan community as the church body expands, it is no less in contact with college students and academia. The casual observer might expect that a college oriented organization would utilize an academic approach, at least marginally, in communicating the more abstract ideas or tenets of the church. This would especially be the case in dealing with theological ideas. However, the church does not present its congregation with complex theological notions. Rather, theological principles are communicated in a direct and rudimentary fashion. This characteristic is also observed in how the church defines itself.

Senior Pastor Steve Sommerlot describes RCC and its theology as "fundamentalist and evangelical." A common perception among students on the MSU campus of RCC is that the church belongs to the charismatic or pentecostal genre. However, Sommerlot positions the church as the "opposite of charismatic or pentecostal." One of the primary partitions between evangelical and pentecostal theology rests upon the interpretation of the "gifts" or "gifts of the Spirit." These

divergent views are consistent with the difference between RCC and Pentecostal groups. However, the difference lies in how the "gifts" function.

Typically, in the charismatic and pentecostal movements, the gifts apply to speaking in tongues (glossolalia), laying of hands (healings), prophesy (word of knowledge), or other overt ("miraculous") gifts that a believer can employ under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Fundamentalists do not depreciate the importance of the "gifts" in their theology; however, they do not practice the more salient demonstrations of the gifts. Pastor Sommerlot states that he would admonish a person who demonstrated "tongues" during an RCC service. Although the church does not promote the use of "gifts," it has few reservations about members who choose to use them privately and without self promotion. To RCC, "gifts" are an expression of the individual blessings or talents that each person can utilize for the benefit of evangelism, e.g., teaching, assisting others, administration, hospitality (RCC cites: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, and Ephesians 4). As a campus church, the RCC leadership is aware that many students and others in an academic milieu are skeptical of "gifts" as a valid phenomenon.

Soteriology

The salvation theology that RCC teaches is direct and one dimensional. Salvation depends on faith in Jesus as the only mediator between God and humanity. Jesus is able to mediate because he lived a sinless life, yet he assumed the sin of humanity and suffered the retribution that humankind was destined to suffer. For one to be saved by the death of Jesus, one must repent, ask Jesus for forgiveness, and

accept through faith that Jesus is the only Son of God. The alternative is to suffer everlasting damnation in hell. In its teachings on salvation RCC cites the "Four Spiritual Laws" which were first published by Campus Crusade in 1965. The "laws" are:

1. God loves you, and offers a wonderful plan for your life.

2. Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.

3. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.

4. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

(McDowell, 1972:383-384)

Pastor Sommerlot explains, "Jesus died for the sins of anyone who ever lived and as God his death is relevant today because all men are in a fallen state, separate from God. Someone must pay a penalty for sinfulness. Jesus was the sacrificial lamb. He was the ultimate sacrifice and sin offering."

Although the soteriological doctrine of "sacrifice" is well developed in the New Testament (most notably in the book of Hebrews) it is not well developed in the Gospels. The Gospels draw attention to the crucifixion, but do not expound on the significance of the death of Jesus (Jonge, 1988: 133-148).

A surface acceptance of the sacrifice theology does not take into account the many non-Gospel perspectives that influenced its development over centuries following the death of Jesus. For example, the theology of Pope Gregory 1 ("Gregory

the Great," 540 CE to 604 CE) on salvation had a marked influence upon Christendom. As Theologian, Reinhold Seeburg states in his exhaustive work on church doctrines, "All the Middle Age theories of the atonement find their prototype in Gregory" (Seeburg, 1977: Book 11, 21).

A surface acceptance of the sacrifice theology does not allow for the impact and an understanding of older traditions to be realized. Jaroslav Pelikan, a Yale University historian, speaks about early influences.

> There are certainly liturgical echoes audible in some language of the church fathers describing Christ's death as a sacrifice, which was a term borrowed from pre-Christian worship, both Jewish and pagan, and adopted very early for Christian worship. Just how early the idea of sacrifice was applied to Christian worship, specifically to the Eucharist, is the subject of controversy" (Pelikan, 1971: 146).

In addition, other soteriological theologies were developed in the early church under external influences, most notably, the Gnostic notion of a "conquering force" (good over evil, light over darkness). Furthermore, a well-rounded perspective must take into account the possible influences of the resurrection and redeemer mythologies which preceded Christianity.

Christology and Trinity

As Christianity developed into a world religion it attempted to define its position on the identity of Jesus, just as it needed (earlier) to come to terms with the death of Jesus. In order to be a coherent and unified organization, the church needed

to systematically and rationally deal with inquiries about its most basic premises. The questions regarding the divinity and humanity of Jesus were the most rudimentary, yet complex inquiries set before the church councils.

The christology of Riverview Community Church can be encapsulated in a few direct statements which the church holds as unmitigatable facts. Pastor Sommerlot asseverates that "Jesus is God in the flesh." Under this tenet, the church holds that the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the near future return of Jesus are unquestionable. Pastor Sommerlot cites the Gospel of John to support the divinity of Jesus. "Jesus was God before time. He was born human, and lived as one hundred percent God and one hundred percent human on this earth."

The RCC christology is ambiguous in that it attempts to hold two precepts that are in diametrical positions (equally God and human). Although the RCC christological statement might be accepted on a rhetorical level, upon further questioning, it is not theologically viable. This is precisely what the early church discovered when it attempted to formulate and explain its christological positions. A number of councils (and a few centuries) were required for the church to arrive at a christological position that was somewhat satisfying to itself.

A major problem that the early church faced in developing a christology was its attempt to define the nature of Jesus both ways: divine and human. For example, Docetism emphasized the divine nature of Jesus. It was rejected by the church because it tended to diminish the humanity of Jesus. Conversely, Nestorius intended to maintain two natures of Jesus, but in doing so it appeared to the Council of Ephesus

that the Nestorian theology implied two separate beings. For this, the Nestorian formula was condemned as heretical in 431 CE (Pelikan, 1971: 261-262).

A number of factions were established in the early church, each based on its christology. The councils of Nicaea and Constantinople attempted to mitigate the different positions and settled upon the term *homoousios* (of one substance) to describe the relationship between the divinity of "God the Father," and the divinity of Jesus, "God the Son." However, the term was not accepted throughout Christendom. Those who were wary of the term felt that it did not allow for the true humanity of Jesus to emerge; if Jesus is of the same substance as God the Father, then Jesus could not be human. They reasoned that the humanity of Jesus was overlooked in attempting to preserve the divinity of Jesus. The questions remained; if Jesus has a dual nature, how can the human nature be on parity (or at least not overwhelmed) by the divine? Or, from the other position, how can the human nature not compromise the divine? The combination of the natures theologically resulted in forfeiting either one or the other unique quality. The conclusion of the Council of Chalcedon (451) maintained the two natures, without confusing them, without changing one into the other, without contrasting them according to area or function; and both natures concur in one person. Truly the orthodox scheme requires great subtlety in its understanding and exposition, something the RCC does not provide its members.

Similar to its position on christology, the RCC interpretation of the Doctrine of the Trinity is direct and rudimentary. Again, it does not refer to any of the various Trinitarian doctrines that emerged from the early church. Pastor Sommerlot condenses

the RCC

are toget

A

through

Trinity b

appear ir

century (

the funda

the first

biblical c

experienc

W

tension, c

Holy Spir

one God

the doctri

formulas e

a trinity (e

uniform ag

Küng does

tends to en

divisions w

that tension

the RCC teaching on the Trinity with the statement "The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are together as one God. This is what we believe through biblical authority."

Although fundamentalist churches support their doctrinal position on the Trinity through "biblical authority," the early Christian church struggled with the notion of the Trinity because there is no definitive "biblical" position, nor does the word "Trinity" appear in the Bible. As Theologian Paul Tillich points out, it wasn't until the third century CE that a cogent system concerning the Trinity emerged. "Tertullian provided the fundamental formula for the trinity and christology." Furthermore, Tertullian was the first to provide the term *Trinitas* or Trinity (Tillich, 1967: 41-42). The lack of biblical clarity on the subject led to more controversy in the early church than it experienced in regard to the subject of Christology.

With the relationship between God the Father and God the Son in a state of tension, church leaders, councils and theologians set about to clarify the position of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father and Son. The theological task was to maintain one God without undermining the identity of the triad. Yet, in establishing a trinity, the doctrine needed to avoid a connotation of three separate gods. Some of the formulas erred on the side of one divine being and tended to negate the significance of a trinity (e.g., Sabellianism, Modalism). The issue was not completely resolved with uniform agreement between the major bodies of the church, but Theologian Hans Küng does not feel that it carries vital importance today. Presently, the Eastern church tends to emphasize the unity of the Trinity, while the Western church stresses the divisions within the Trinity. However, because of the difference, Küng does believe that tension still exists between the Eastern and Western churches over this and other

issues.

which h

largely

means t

that cha

the Trin

the Trin

Faith vs

A

ignored,

Fundame

and acce

"fundam

Apostle

appears

church, t

that atten

Jesus' int

organizat

was alwa

live by th

Th

and is not

issues. He states that it is a "controversy between the Latin and the Greek Church which has not been officially settled up to the present time....Today this controversy is largely seen to be concerned with a merely apparent problem....But this is by no means the end of the problem" (Kung, 1976: 474-475). Even today, not all churches that characterize themselves as Christian, or even Fundamentalist, accept the idea of the Trinity and state that there is not enough biblical evidence to support teachings on the Trinity (e.g., The Church of God, and the United Pentecostal Churches).

Faith vs. Reason

A case can be presented that when traditions which influence a doctrine are ignored, then the doctrine (or belief) itself is undermined. However, it is a common Fundamentalist notion that, regardless of historical factors, going directly to the source and accepting the source at face value is the true meaning of what it means to be "fundamental" about a belief. In addition, fundamentalists frequently state (as the Apostle Paul did) that one must have faith in that "which is not seen," even if it appears to be foolishness because the "foolishness of God is wiser than men." The church, throughout the ages, attempted to remain close to the teachings of Jesus. Yet, that attempt did not preclude the need to systematically formulate an understanding of Jesus' intent. Churches throughout history have found that on the way to organizational development, they needed to define what their statements meant. There was always a point where it was no longer effective or meaningful to simply state "we live by the words of Jesus."

The dichotomy between faith and reason has been explored throughout the ages and is not the purpose of this study. However, it is a pertinent issue in regard to the

campus

accepts

variegat

of the E

attempt

some Fu

(

the chur

significa

proceede

instructi

method

skills of

individua

authority

S

higher ed

following

MSU, and

family. Th

As his sib

his parent

campus ministry of Riverview Community Church. Although RCC states that it accepts and teaches only that which is "biblical," its teachings do not allow for the variegations of socio-historical perspectives and their influence upon the development of the Bible. The church does not present its principles in academic vernacular or attempt to provide empirical support for its principles, but it does occasionally refer to some Fundamentalist notables (e.g., Falwell, Dobson, McDowell, Criswell).

Considering the origins of RCC, the leadership, and the academic milieu that the church functions within, the schism between faith and reason is remarkable. A significant portion of the church membership have attended college and many have proceeded to graduate school. There is of course a difference between the instructional methodology of a college, and that of a conservative church. The college method rests upon empirical investigation and encourages the individual to develop skills of inquiry. Conversely, the method of a conservative church rests upon the individual's acceptance of information which has been interpreted and dispensed by authority figures.

Some of the church tenets are accepted by parishioners with experience in higher education without question, regardless of possible personal ramifications. The following example illustrates this point. Dennis is a member of RCC, a graduate of MSU, and is currently employed in the field of high technology. He is from a large family. The religious background of the family is, as he states, "old style Catholic". As his siblings became adults they left the Catholic Church which greatly disappointed his parents. "My older brother left the church in the early 70s, and I couldn't relate to

the Catholi

through the

Der

that, althou

sister who

older broth

The dread

those who

are not "bo

He does ho

mean for h

his belief).

Eschatolo

In

Riverview

teachings

one of "pr

perspectiv

Sa

Fundamen

Sandeen t

Millenaria

the Catholic Church anymore with all the ritual and liturgy. I felt like I was going through the motions. After I left the church I became saved."

Dennis unquestioningly accepts the soteriological position of RCC to the point that, although it disturbs him, he is willing to concede that his parents and younger sister who remain Catholic will spend eternity in Hell. He is also concerned that his older brother no longer believes that "Jesus is God" even though he did at one time. The dread of what eternity in Hell means to Dennis does not influence his belief that those who refuse to accept Jesus as God are going to Hell (along with Catholics who are not "born again"). Dennis does not question the teachings of his present church. He does however deal with the predicament regarding his belief and what it must mean for his family by attempting to "save" his family members (converting them to his belief).

Eschatology

In alignment with the basic characteristics of Fundamentalist churches, Riverview Community Church takes a position that supports the eschatology and teachings of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). The eschatological stance of RCC is one of "pre-tribulation rapture", states Pastor Sommerlot. From an historical perspective, Ernest Sandeen's work is helpful in clarifying Riverview's eschatology.

Sandeen has investigated the development of British and American Fundamentalism, and holds that Fundamentalism is the progeny of Millenarianism. Sandeen traces the roots of Fundamentalism into the early nineteenth century British Millenarian movement. In America the movement was influenced by John Darby and

American

combined

nation—th

Du

Millerites

American

counterpa

eschatolo

"dispensa

Darby, th

removed

Millennia

in which

Darby w

and thos

at any m

(Sandeen

T

Millenni

Lord."

Darby's

Millenar

tremendo

American culture. The American brand became distinctly nationalistic. In time it combined apocalypticism with the Puritan notion that America was God's newly elect nation—the "new Israel," harbingers of the coming Kingdom of God on earth.

During the mid-nineteenth century Millenarianism was embarrassed by the Millerites who gained much attention over their prediction of the *parousia*. However, Americans remained more inclined toward such predictions than their British counterparts. The American Millenarian movement designed a variety of eschatological schemes and timetables. One of the most popular designs was Darby's "dispensational" timetable. Darby's plan included two returns of Jesus. According to Darby, the first return would be a "rapture" in which all Christians would be secretly removed from earth before the time of the "tribulation" (pre-tribulation rapture Millennialism). Darby's "second" appearance of Jesus is the major public appearance in which the forces of light will defeat the forces of darkness. With this scheme Darby was able to assuage those who claimed that the return of Jesus was imminent, and those who claimed it was not in the near future. For Darby, the rapture could be at any moment, yet the second coming of Jesus would occur in the distant future (Sandeen, 1978: 63).

The most popular form of Millenarianism before the Civil War was "post-Millennial" which optimistically relied upon the faithful to usher in "the day of the Lord." Following the Civil War, post-Millennial thought went into decline and Darby's dispensational version gained acceptance among the most influential Millenarians (e.g., Dwight L. Moody). Although Millenarianism experienced tremendous cross-denominational popularity, it did not solidify into a denomination of

its own

primary

literal (

bonds b

late nin

Northfi

emerge

articles

Scofield

views.

structure

social a

Fundam

Fundam

decade

church to

obligated

its own. During the latter nineteenth century when scientific analysis became the primary means to determine "truth", the Millenarians reacted by grasping on to a literal (inerrant) interpretation of the Bible. Millenarians sought to strengthen internal bonds by giving more attention to a systematic presentation of their position. In the late nineteenth century they held a series of conferences (in Niagara, New York and Northfield, Massachusetts) from which creeds, statements of faith, and literature emerged. In the early twentieth century the *Fundamentals* were published (ninety articles concerning Millenarian faith, between the years 1910 and 1915) as was the Scofield Bible. The conferences and the literature supported Darby's dispensationalist views. It was clear at this point that Millenarianism had formed into a definable structure. A Millenarian-Fundamentalist theology was shaped in an adverse reaction to social and religious "modernism". Thus, Sandeen sees an earlier foundation to Fundamentalism than does George Marsden who tends to focus more upon the Fundamentalist controversy of the 1920s. The dramatic social changes during that decade had a profound effect upon Millenarianism. Sandeen describes this era:

> Indeed, millenarinaism survived and, in its strongly pretribulationist style, made a considerable impact upon American Protestantism during the 1920s. But the movement had changed—changed in both doctrine and strategy. That difference was so decided and prominent that a new name was coined for the movement—Fundamentalism (Sandeen, 1978:23).

What is the relationship of Riverview's late twentieth century Fundamentalist church to the traditional eschatological position of a century ago? RCC is not obligated by its parent organization (GCI) to support any particular type of

eschatol

church l

Althoug

dispensa

church c

questior

Inerran

historic

them.

disciplir

rejects

claims

"inerran

conserv

eschatological model, nor does RCC require its members to ascribe to any model. The church leadership does state that it stands with Darby's dispensational paradigm. Although the model is not formally taught, the church infrequently offers classes on dispensationalism. Pastor Sommerlot describes his church's approach; "Although our church officially takes a pre-tribulation rapture position, we leave eschatology and the questions surrounding it for the individual to decide."

Inerrancy

The way in which Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism deal with socio-historical information is a significant manifestation of the major differences between them. The liberal realm of Evangelicalism attempts to maintain a dialogue with the disciplines of socio-historical analysis. The conservative element (Fundamentalism) rejects "secular" biblical analysis and information about the Christian tradition. It claims a direct line to the Bible. The doctrinal cornerstone of Fundamentalism is "inerrancy." This position is the dividing line between liberal Evangelicalism and the conservative Fundamentalism. Sociologist, James Hunter explains:

> At the heart of the defense and maintenance of conservative Protestantism in the past century has been the tenacious insistence on the intrinsic faultlessness of the Bible as the word of God. In the disestablishment of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism into liberal and Fundamentalist factions, few issues were more important to the Fundamentalist self-identity than the belief in the inerrancy of the biblical literature (Hunter, 1987:20).

histo

cons

twen

trial

mean

conse

bastio

retool

"secul

Evange

"inerra

liberal

"infalli

Theolo

so he d

revealin

to defe

"inerran

qualify

autograp

In his book *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, George Marsden (an historian of American religion) delineates the gradual separation between the conservative and liberal wings of Evangelicalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The major shift between the two factions occurred after the Scopes trial (Marsden, 1980: 184-189). The court ruled against Scopes (later reversed) which meant that conservative Christians won the battle; but they lost the war. The conservative Evangelicals who endorsed *The Fundamentals* retreated into their own bastions: "intellectualism" had tarnished their image. However, liberal Evangelicals retooled and fortified their position against "modernism" (later to be known as "secular humanism"). A pronounced separation between liberal and conservative Evangelicalism emerged at this point. Fundamentalism adamantly stood on an "inerrant" Bible, which for them was the last word on all matters. Conversely, the liberal Evangelicals were willing to explore empirical information and relate it to an "infallible" Bible.

There is a difference between an "infallible" and an "inerrant" Bible. Theologian Karl Barth described a Bible that "becomes" the Word of God. In doing so he did not diminish what he believed to be sacred scripture. For Barth, the revealing nature of the Bible is infallible. With an infallible Bible, Barth did not need to defend each nuance in biblical literature (which "literalists" who present an "inerrant" Bible must do to defend their positions). Frequently, Fundamentalists qualify the term "inerrant" by stating that the Bible is inerrant in its "original autograph." This is curious since an original manuscript of the Bible or any of its

books is not known to exist, and therefore it is difficult to determine exactly what an "original autograph" would actually be.

Because Fundamentalism claims a direct line to the Bible as its sole and inerrant authority, it overlooks two millennia of Christian tradition which wrestled with the very questions that Fundamentalism so easily answers. Paradoxically, while claiming to be the true "keeper of the keys to the Kingdom," Fundamentalism stands outside of the multi-faceted interplay of ideas which is inherent to the Christian tradition. While denying the importance of the historical development of the Christian heritage, it claims to be the only advocate of the true (and original) Christian heritage.

Riverview Community Church follows the basic theological statements of the Great Commission International. Alterations or digressions from these guidelines would be considered "heretical" and the Matthew 18 method of excommunication would be followed. At this time, the situation has not arisen for RCC in which one of its teachers, group leaders, deacons, or pastors has been removed for variant teachings. This may be the result of the "mentoring" relationships that develop between established members and new members of the church (in which new members are gradually instructed in RCC theology).

The structured conservative teachings of Riverview Community Church are presumably acceptable to a largely college oriented membership. This may be due to a number of reasons. The church does not teach theology as a systematic method to present a rational understanding of Biblical literature. In the Sunday services and in the special groups, the teachings from the Bible are commonly presented as a means to address lifestyle issues (which will be demonstrated later in this paper). Apparently

this approach is acceptable to a congregation that is more inclined toward addressing personal issues than it is interested in theological investigation.

Personal issues seem to be of primary importance to many members of the church. The following example illustrates this point. As with the members discussed earlier in this paper, Don describes his background as "traditional". His family is Baptist and he attended the Baptist church until he began college at Michigan State University. He graduated in the early 1980s with a business major and is currently in the process of setting up a small retail business. His first contact with RCC was through its campus group (MSU Bible Study) while he was living in an MSU dormitory. A roommate introduced Don to the Bible Study and immediately Don felt an affinity with the teachings of the group. "There was no theological culture shock for me. I was a Baptist and I didn't find much difference between them." When Don graduated and moved into the East Lansing community he remained with RCC. He has established friendships with other members and is comfortable with Riverview's theological message which he finds kin to the beliefs of his early years. He does not feel that he has rejected the Baptist church, but neither does he feel the need to return to it.

The Fundamentalist theology of Riverview Community Church is also of primary importance to Robin who describes her personal background as "conservative and traditional." Robin graduated from MSU and teaches in a Lansing High School. She accepts the theological teachings of RCC without reservation and believes that most Christian churches "are not Biblically based, they don't teach directly from the

Bible." She feels that RCC "keeps the Gospel alive" and reinforces the traditional views that were instilled in her at an early age.

Both Don and Robin are representative of RCC members who have left their background denominations for a church that allows them to maintain contact with a progressive college community, while maintaining their conservative/traditional theological background. Their social affiliation needs are met in their new church. However, their new church does not disrupt the belief systems and ideals of their early years. Riverview offers them an alternative ("an alternative" is stressed in RCC's promotional materials). Ironically, the alternative that Riverview offers claims to be novel, but also claims to be the most traditional form of Christianity modeled after the early Christian communities. In essence, for people like Don and Robin, the Riverview style is new, but it is not too new to be unfamiliar.

The above observation agrees with Tipton's work with "sixties youth" who committed themselves to "alternative religious movements." Because of their ages (mid-twenties) Don and Robin can be described as post-sixties people. Although their "alternative" religion is not as radically alternative as the people Tipton cites in his work, Don and Robin are germane to Tipton's findings.

> Alternative religious movements have not overturned tradition and replaced it with something entirely new. Rather they have drawn out strands from traditional moralities and rewoven them into a fabric that ties into American culture as a whole yet differs in pattern from any one of the traditions....These movements sustain expressive ideals by recombining them with moralities of authority, rules, and utility. Neo-Christian groups recombine the expressive

people"

"doper"

childho-

family.

"things

sees the

1991) h

that Car

Commu

the very

ethic of hip culture with the authoritative ethic of revealed biblical religion.... (Tipton, 1982:232).

The above words relate well to Carl who is quite reminiscent of the "sixties people" found in Tipton's work. Carl is in his early forties and describes himself as a "doper" and an "anti-war hippie" during the 1960s. However, in describing his childhood he reveals a quiet and secure life on a farm, raised in a strict Methodist family. He speaks about the complexities and dangers of life in America today, "things have really changed for the worse since I was growing up." He especially sees these changes in the schools and in the area where he was raised. Currently (in 1991) his son is with the military serving in the Persian Gulf. It is clear to the listener that Carl finds the security and the traditions of his childhood at Riverview Community Church. In this sense, he has travelled the full circle, because these are the very traditions which he rejected during the 1960s.

CHAPTER 4
PLACING RIVERVIEW COMMUNITY CHURCH: IS IT FUNDAMENTALIST?

George Marsden is concise in his definition of Fundamentalism. Fundamentalism "is what its proponents most often said it was—a response to the spread of what was perceived as false doctrine" (Marsden, 1980: 159). This remains as true today as it was in the days following World War I when Fundamentalists rallied against post-war vices. Its mission was primarily religious, but its message was wrapped in diatribes against society. Its targets were alcohol, schools (which no longer relied upon the Bible as the absolute measure of truth), the spread of Darwinism, the casual treatment of the Bible, science/intellectualism, scientific/textual analysis of the Bible, and anything else that could be placed under the heading of "modernism" (secular humanism).

Although Fundamentalism of this particular era was permeated by pre-millennialism, it fought against the perceived social evils as if the "Kingdom of God" depended upon it. "The battle for the Bible was a battle for civilization" (Marsden, 1980: 164). This fact is highlighted in Marsden's observations that Fundamentalism was

> ...militantly anti-modernist Protestant Evangelicalism. Fundamentalists were Evangelical Christians, close to the traditions of the dominant American

revival

militan

modern

Althou

independent ch

denominations

modern Funda

Reformed chur

traditional Fun

There is

nature of religi

necessary to us

distinguished fr

aware of how d

Evangelicalism

century. Unlike

denomination.

churches that be

"Evangelical."

theology. The te

Mark No

Evangelicals, an

it

> revivalist establishment of the nineteenth century, who in the twentieth century militantly opposed both modernism in theology and the cultural changes that modernism endorsed (Marsden, 1980: 4).

Although Fundamentalism was a "separatist" movement and formed independent churches, its influence upon American culture was spread through denominations that adopted some Fundamentalist notions. Marsden speaks of some modern Fundamentalist forms found in the Lutheran, Methodist, and Christian Reformed churches, but these churches do not technically meet the criteria of traditional Fundamentalism, nor do they wish to "wear the badge of Fundamentalism."

There is a danger when applying labels to religious movements due to the fluid nature of religious precepts and the blending of religious genres, but at times it is necessary to use labels as a point of orientation. For example, Evangelicalism can be distinguished from other forms of Protestantism, but in distinguishing it one becomes aware of how difficult it is to actually define. Historically and theologically, Evangelicalism has had various meanings from continent to continent, from century to century. Unlike church denominations, Evangelicalism does not claim to be a denomination. Rather, Evangelicals unite by means of associations. However, some churches that belong to mainline denominations consider themselves to be "Evangelical." The term has been used as an umbrella which encompasses diverse theology. The term has also been used to draw specific theological boundaries.

Mark Noll is the Advisor of The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, and he offers a "beginning" definition of Evangelicalism by stating that it

> ...1. holds a high view of canonical scripture as the inspired word of God, 2. believes that God can act and has acted in history, 3. affirms the Lordship of Christ and the centrality of his salvific work, and 4. believes in the importance of a personal experience of grace (Noll, 1986: 2).

Sociologist, Randall Balmer has studied Evangelicalism from within various churches and groups throughout America. He points out that the term "Evangelical" has acquired many connotations since Luther challenged the papacy. Balmer would accept Noll's definition and criteria, and adds that Evangelicalism "transcends mere doctrine or belief; in greater or lesser degrees, evangelicals place a good deal of emphasis on spiritual piety" (Balmer, 1989: x).

Does Riverview Community Church function within these definitional boundaries? As mentioned above, it is not difficult for many churches to fit comfortably into the Evangelical realm, and RCC can easily be described within general Evangelical guidelines. However, a church would be more restricted in describing itself as Fundamentalist. Marsden follows Fundamentalism through changes, from the early twentieth century form to the features of contemporary Fundamentalism. Many churches with Fundamentalist tendencies could not be accurately described as Fundamentalist if we rely upon Marsden's criteria. That is, some do not "militantly" oppose modernism and "cultural changes."

Does Riverview Community Church adhere to the basic qualities of traditional Fundamentalism? One particular set of criteria can be used as a template to determine if RCC conforms to what the church leadership claims RCC to be "Fundamentalist Evangelical." That criteria is the Niagara creed which Sandeen holds as "one of the

most significant documents in the history of the Fundamentalist movement" (Sandeen, 1978: xviii). The Niagara creed predates the Fundamentalist "five point declaration" and the series of writings known as the *Fundamentals*. The creed was constructed at a conference for Fundamentalists and Millenarians in 1878. Rather than presenting all fourteen articles of the document, the following is a condensed summary of the document's major affirmations. The creed consists of statements that are considered an index to the concerns of millenarians. It speaks of the "verbal inerrancy of the original autographs." It delineates some of the events of the "premillennial second advent" of Jesus (but does not commit to any particular persuasion within premillennialism). It demonstrates a "Calvinistically oriented" attitude toward "human depravity," and calls for the need of "personal holiness." It states that the Bible is a practical guide to living, and the entire Bible, including the Old Testament, centered on Jesus (Sandeen, 1978: 141). Commenting on the Niagara creed, Pastor Sommerlot affirms that RCC does support the articles. However, the fourteenth article (on premillennialism) is left open by the church leadership to interpretation among the congregation.

Riverview Community Church does present the basic qualities of Fundamentalism in that it practices and proclaims the inerrancy of the Bible, it is pre-millennial, and it is theologically exclusive of variant faiths or beliefs. However, considering this, can RCC then be described as "traditional" in its Fundamentalism?

For Marsden and Noll, the major distinguishing factor between early twentieth century Fundamentalism and modern Fundamentalism is the separatist nature of the early form. Riverview Community Church cannot be described as "separatist." The

church could not function on the campus and in the community to the degree that it does if it was by nature separatist. With its heavy emphasis upon campus and community evangelism, RCC would fit more comfortably within the Evangelical fold. In its teachings RCC walks a fine line between modernism and anti-modernism. As a Fundamentalist church it cannot fully endorse the elements of modernism (e.g., secular humanism, evolution) nor can it rail too vehemently against some of the products of modernism (especially intellectualism) within the milieu that it functions. Traditional (early) Fundamentalism had no such reservation or compunction about vilifying modernism which led it to withdraw from modern society. Contrary to this, Riverview (and GCI) is very much a part of a modern "high tech" milieu. In addition, RCC does not attempt to enforce some of the prohibitions that characterized early Fundamentalism (e.g., against alcohol, dancing).

Mark Noll suggests a particular term that seems more compatible with the nature of Riverview Community Church: "Neo-Evangelical." He writes:

> The term was presumptuous, but nonetheless useful for describing a general phenomenon. A certain number of northern fundamentalists, trained at the movement's schools and nurtured in its separatist denominations, seem to have come to the realization nearly simultaneously that the intellectual boundaries of fundamentalism were too narrow. Without giving way on the "fundamentals of faith," this group nonetheless found the sectarianism, the anti-intellectualism, the combativeness, and the world-denying character of their inherited religion too confining (Noll, 1986: 94).

Prot

Func

worl

badg

the c

Noll applies the term "Neo-Evangelical" to those who aligned themselves with Protestant orthodoxy, scholarship, and are active in society. This description allows Fundamentalists to retain theological conservativism while operating in the modern world. Although Riverview Community Church meets the criteria for "wearing the badge of Fundamentalism," the term Neo-Evangelical is more accurately descriptive of the church, even though scholarship is not a salient characteristic of RCC.

CHAPTER 5
EVANGELICAL APPEAL TO VALUES, FAMILY AND LIFESTYLE

This section will explore the concerns and themes that flow through Evangelicalism on a national level as well as on a local level. Through its mother organization (Great Commission International), Riverview Community Church is connected with national information regarding trends that are active within the American culture. Neo-Evangelicalism, Great Commission International, and Riverview Community Church, are bonded in a network or a system that effectively communicates between national and local America. Basic to the ideals and concerns of Americans are the values that form the "mind set" of America.

Values Confusion

Through observation on a national and local level, Evangelicals have assessed a major need regarding the values of the transitional 1960s generation. This generation reflects the values of the pre- and the post-1960s; it has one foot in each world. It witnessed its parents' investment in American "Civil Religion" to which sociologist Robert Bellah speaks (Bellah, 1975). The religio-political-economic systems of the

pre-1960s were synchronized to make America the "city upon a hill—the New Israel." However, after the turbulent watershed era of the 1960s and early 1970s, the grid of American values was left in disarray and a generation was left in confusion. This confusion is a major theme in Steven Tipton's work, *Getting Saved From The Sixties.*

> With the storm of event that swept across America in the 1960s—a bitter war, racial strife, student protest—there occurred an underlying disaffection from traditional convictions of what this society and its way of life were about. This occurred among greater number of Americans than ever before, among the socially privileged as well as among the relatively deprived. An attitude of frustration and disillusionment with the society's seeming failure to enact its own highest ideals began to grow, particularly among the young. By many measures it has continued into the 1980s, spreading to an entire generation of youth and beyond, although expectations of radical change and actions of overt protest have diminished. The cresting wave of the counterculture has passed, but the currents of America's meaning still remain confused in its wake (Tipton, 1982: 2).

The sixties generation remembers when America was the world's premier economic power, and pivotal in world affairs. Within a couple of decades America was challenged by highly competitive foreign economies. Subsequently, there exists a pervasive apprehension that America is losing its place in the world. Domestically, there is fear that Americans are losing the values that made America strong and unique. The changing ethos brings changes in attitudes about the future of the nation as the degree of optimism among young adults diminishes. This is most clearly

illustrated by the preoccupation with the economic ground gained by other nations, most notably the Japanese. Howard Dayton, an Evangelical author, summarizes this point:

> America's basic industries are losing the business they once enjoyed to aggressive foreign competition. This has contributed to massive U.S. trade deficits with foreign countries. Shockingly, America fell from its position as the world's largest creditor nation to the world's largest debtor nation in only four years. Experts are also warning of a serious instability in our banking system and the inadequacy of governmental agencies designed to insure them. Other problems such as our growing dependence upon oil from the Arab petroleum-exporting nations, our national preference for consumption instead of saving, and persistent inflation all are potential threats to our economy (Dayton, 1979: 13-14).

The threat that Dayton speaks about is readily communicated between the national and personal levels. The national threat becomes a personal threat, the national anxiety, a personal anxiety. When a way of life is disturbed, the disruption is felt throughout society. The traditional institutions lose their ability to comfort because they too are disrupted. Yet, a latent need for the traditional ideals and values remains.

Values Clarification

Evangelicals have attempted to specifically fill the "values gap" that exists within the post-1960s generation. Many of the programs that Evangelicals use to

address the prevalence of values confusion were developed during the early 1970s when the effects of the 1960s on American society were not fully realized. As early as 1970, the founders of Great Commission International accurately assessed the needs of a values-disoriented population and focused their efforts where a significant potential for a future organization existed—college campuses. Other Evangelical organizations like the Navigators concentrated on the college campus (the Navigators originated on military bases). Campus Crusade for Christ flourished on college campuses. American Evangelical organizations shifted their attention to a population of people that the traditional institutions ("the establishment") dismissed as a "lost generation": college and high school-aged people. These people are currently the balloon of the American population and are quickly becoming the power base behind America's institutions, economy, and political system. This group of people has expectations unlike those of previous generations. The Western Michigan University Collegiate Representative of the Navigators says, "We had to change our whole approach. We haven't changed what we believe in, but the pre-1960s Billy Graham kind of mass rally where people came to be saved doesn't work anymore. College students today want something more intimate, something that is more personal."

A front-line approach of Riverview Community Church is to address the needs of those who struggle with uncertain values in transition. RCC especially focuses upon the needs of those who feel the anxiety of having their values challenged by a world that moves too fast for one to settle upon a sense of security. The top paragraph of a RCC brochure reads, "Riverview Community Church is a fresh, contemporary

Christian Ch

changing an

The

needs of co

career years

the inherent

change that

interactions.

Human serv

order for se

his/her pers

Succ

service orga

especially v

lifestyle. Th

gains an und

assesses the

the individu

challenging

acceptance

DenHerder

here."

Christian Church created to meet the needs of people living in a fast-paced, ever-changing and sometimes impersonal world."

The above description of RCC indicates that it is a church that targets the needs of contemporary (young) people who are likely to be moving toward their peak career years and are already "in the thick of it." That is to say, those who experience the inherent demands of achieving career success, a fast-paced world, one of constant change that requires personal adjustments, and one that is full of impersonal interactions. The approach is pragmatic and gives special attention to daily affairs. Human service organizations often refer to this as "service delivery." However, in order for services to be effectively delivered, the approach must meet the person in his/her personal milieu.

Successfully to implement a service delivery program, the church (or human service organization) must not impose external values upon the people it deals with, especially values that would be difficult for a person to synthesize within his/her lifestyle. The optimal approach first determines what population is to be addressed, gains an understanding of what is important to that target population (values), then assesses the needs. The organization must be able to speak with pertinence to what the individual holds as important. This cannot be effectively accomplished by challenging and forcing the individual to defend existing values, but rather through an acceptance of the individual on a personal level. On this point, Associate Pastor Paul DenHerder summarizes his church's approach by saying "We're not about judgment here."

More than any other institution, the ecclesiastical institution is known by its imposition of values upon society. The church has long been actively involved in the area of values judgment. The leadership of Riverview Community Church is keenly aware of this and has digressed from a feature that is synonymous with Fundamentalism: judgment. A key phrase found on the printed material of RCC is "You'll love the difference!" The difference that RCC alludes to is the difference between itself and the mainline denomination churches (as well as early Fundamentalism).

There is a notable difference between RCC and what Pastor Sommerlot refers to as "old style Fundamentalism." For example, the way in which the subject of "sin" is treated at RCC is different from the "old style" as represented by Billy Graham. Graham relies on the sin/death approach, which is what some would term a "scare tactic." During several appearances of his 1990 Crusade Graham stated "Eight people in the world die every second. Where is your heart with Jesus? Can you say you are saved if you die tonight?" In contrast, although Pastor Sommerlot does not avoid the subject of sin, it is not a primary topic, and it is clear that he prefers a more positive avenue. He speaks about the beneficial effects that the church's small groups have upon the individual. "The groups change lives, they build self esteem without judgment."

The church leadership does not use a "hellfire and damnation" tactic and it is careful not to theologically corner its membership. This can be seen in the way it treats a major characteristic of Fundamentalism: millenarianism and the teachings of dispensationalism. Although RCC takes a definite position among the many

controversial

beliefs and

debated a

church d

the part

the most

birth con

A

and *enforc*

the RCC p

is a conscio

meet the inc

a doctrinal

The

"consumers'

observed th

that churche

interest of t

churches.

Insof

are s

stand

orient

controversial millennial designs, the leadership states that the church is open to other beliefs and opinions on the matter. Recognizing that millennial schemes are highly debated and that diversity on this issue is likely to occur within the congregation, the church does not alienate itself from its membership. Unpopular doctrinal positions on the part of a church hierarchy can result in cynicism among the membership. One of the most salient examples of this can be seen in the Catholic Church on the issue of birth control.

A church like Riverview Community would likely find it difficult to impose and enforce values upon a college-educated, young, upwardly-mobile membership. As the RCC promotional material states, the church "meets the needs of people" and there is a conscious effort to connect with people within the world in which they reside—to meet the individual, and not demand that the individual meet the church's position on a doctrinal level.

The need for churches to be "competitive" and sensitive to the needs of "consumers" was discussed by sociologist Peter Berger in the latter 1960s as he observed the dwindling influence of churches in the lives of Americans. He predicted that churches would eventually adopt more of a secular approach to maintain the interest of their congregations as "consumers" become more selective in choosing churches.

> Insofar as the religious "needs" of certain strata of clients or potential clients are similar, the religious institutions catering to these "needs" will tend to standardize their products accordingly. For example, all religious institutions oriented toward the upper-middle-[sic] class market in America will be under

> pressure to secularize and to psychologize their products; otherwise, the chances of these being "bought" diminish drastically (Berger, 1969: 148).

Family

The effects of changes since the 1960s are especially noticeable in the dynamics of the American family. The gender roles of parents have changed, along with sexual mores among parents and children. Families have become more mobile, and with the mobility families gravitated away from their roots. The extended family which was already on the wane since World War II became even more outmoded. Single-parented families increased as divorce rates dramatically increased. Post-1960s women have commonly left the home to work, not only because they want to work, but in many cases they need to supplement the family income in order to maintain the lifestyle that took only one of their parents to maintain. The Public Broadcasting Station recently presented a program that reviewed the changes of the American family from the 1960s to the 1990s. It stated that during the 1960s, 70 percent of American families had a "breadwinning father, and a stay-at-home mother." Twenty-five years later, less than 15 percent of the American families have maintained that structure (Strange, 1991).

Within a generation families dramatically changed in size and shape. Consequently, values were remolded. The new mold includes conflicts unfamiliar to families of previous generations. In January of 1991, a United States Senate Subcommittee on "Children, Family, Drugs and Alcoholism" convened in Washington, DC. Committee Chairman, Senator Dodd (D.-Conn.) opened the committee by

remarking, "Despite the surface prosperity, the 1980s were a tough decade on American families." The Cox News Service reported:

> The American family is entering the 1990s as an endangered institution, witnesses told a Senate subcommittee. The hearing began a congressional look at the status of homelife in the 1990s and what the federal government should do to strengthen the American family. The first session stressed the problems. The Ozzie and Harriet household—working dad, housewife mom and well-adjusted kids in a comfortable suburban home—is almost as rare as a black and white TV set. Domestic reality now is children alone at home while both parents work long hours, divorce, single parents, money problems, absent fathers and stressed out kids. More families lost their health insurance and fewer could afford the down payment on a house. Real wages fell, and families kept up with rising costs by sending mothers and children into the workforce. About one-fourth of all children found themselves living with only one parent (Dart, 1991).

It is no coincidence that Evangelicals have focused much attention upon the family during the past couple of decades. Sociologist James Hunter points to the voluminous amounts of Evangelical literature on the family, in addition to the films, workshops, seminars, and Evangelical political coalitions that target the family structure. Hunter also challenges the Evangelical model of the "traditional" family. Hunter's historical profile of the American family indicates that there is nothing traditional about the "traditional" family, nor is the Evangelical model supported by

historical documentation. He sees the Evangelical model of the family as a "symbolic reality."

> Transcending the concrete and taken-for-granted reality (the medium in which ordinary people live their lives) the family has in recent times become a symbol to Evangelicals, a symbol of social stability and traditional moral virtue. And as a symbol it is commonly reduced to a slogan. The so-called traditional family has generated tremendous passion, and its survival in the modern world has become perhaps the highest priority on the Evangelical social agenda (Hunter, 1987: 76).

To Hunter the Evangelical model of the family is a "symbolic reality which is seen as being in a state of crisis" (Hunter, 1987: 78). Hunter's description of the Evangelical family model may be valid but it does not negate what Evangelicals are addressing. Even though Evangelicals may bolster their symbol of the traditional family, in practical application they are likely to be addressing something very real. It is not the symbol that receives the attention in the Evangelical grass roots programs. It is the anxiety. The anxiety and the stress is not merely symbolic; it is quite real. The problems and the stresses that Senator Dodd's subcommittee have identified are the very ones that Evangelical groups address.

The group programs that Riverview Community Church uses reflect the debilitating problems that middle-American families face. For example, Evangelicals are now open to the issue of divorce. Evangelical group programming confronts the lifestyles of divorced people rather than rigidly focusing upon the morality of divorce, as it tended to do years ago. The family phenomenon known as the "blended" family

has become commonplace. A series of Evangelical publications have group programs designed for "blended families." Rather than demanding that a "broken" family make itself suitable for the Evangelical church, Evangelicalism now extends itself toward the family. The programs address such topics as single parent families, life after divorce, substance abuse, overwork, families with two working parents, and topics on sexuality. A working mother who attends a couples group states, "Being out among other couples that experience the same things we do is good for us as a couple. But what we really find helpful is that it is a designated time each week that we're not distracted, we talk to each other abut meaningful things, not about jobs and business matters, we talk about things we don't normally have time to talk about." This is a concrete need found in contemporary families. While the government is presently evaluating the problems and needs of American families, Evangelical programs have been designed, set in place, and have been functioning for years.

Lifestyle Anxiety and Financial Management Programming

A predominant expectation among young adults has been to surpass the lifestyle of their parents. Children, especially since World War II, were raised with the notion that they would exceed their parents in the comfort and luxury to which they were accustomed. In reality this meant more education, more income, less time at home, two career families, daycare for the children, less financial cushion in savings, all of which raises stress and anxiety levels. Until recently, home ownership was regarded as an indispensable part of the "American Dream", one that was actually perceived as an entitlement rather than a dream. The expectation that America is the

land of limitless possibility remains relatively unchanged. However, the expectation competes with the reality in that such possibilities are far more difficult to achieve, and for some, impossible to attain. The emergent stresses influence the lifestyles of Americans. To close the gap between the expectation and the reality, debt is often incurred (which was especially true during the 1980s). This in turn raises stress/anxiety levels, and the cycle repeats itself. Evangelical author Howard Dayton describes this cycle of anxiety:

> The problems facing American families today seem insurmountable. For the first time Americans are feeling that they cannot enjoy the "good life." [For example] The average house costs almost $100,000. It is evident that the single-family house is becoming unattainable for millions of middle-income families who traditionally have considered a house to be a part of the American birthright. Housing experts predict significantly fewer Americans will be able to own their own homes in the future. For people who do not want to reduce their standard of living, the loss of purchasing power caused by inflation must be made up in other ways. The most common way has been for people to spend more than they earn, then borrow to make up the difference. In fact, the average American family spends $400 dollars a year more than it earns. Debt in the United States increases more than $1,000 a second (Dayton, 1979:14-15).

Dayton's Crown Ministries, in Longwood, Florida, has tapped into the lifestyle and debt anxiety of middle-class Americans. He developed a "Biblical Guide" to money management in response to the lifestyle and financial stress referred to above. Riverview Community Church is one of the Evangelical churches that utilizes the

Crown Ministries money management program. The RCC leadership regards this as an important program offered to the church membership, and Pastor Sommerlot would like all members to become familiar with it. "Eventually I'd like to see everyone in our congregation go through the money management program."

The Money management program is oriented to a small group format. The money management support groups are intended to bridge the cognitive dissonance between the familiar values that the members would like to maintain and the demands of their lifestyle. The Crown Ministries approach is highly detailed in its application by utilizing concrete and itemized budget records and guides. Some of the predominant issues that the program undertakes are financial solvency, getting out of debt, taxes, litigation, and financial responsibility to the family. Many of these topics are clearly exercises in values clarification and the development of different attitudes in regard to money. As with all of the RCC groups, the topics are presented under a Biblical umbrella, seeking guidance for a problematic area through Biblical interpretation. Although religion is the medium that topics are filtered through, the practical application is achieved via small group dynamics and relationship building.

The author of the program, Dayton, highlights the Bible's teaching on money by stating that the Bible has more teachings about money than on any other subject. He claims that one of every ten verses in the Bible relates to money and possessions. He states, "There are approximately 500 verses on prayer, fewer than 500 on faith, but more than 2,350 verses on how to handle money. Moreover, Jesus Christ said more about money than any other subject....How we handle money impacts our fellowship with the Lord" (Dayton, 1989: 1/2).

book, a

leader

groups

he/she

The lea

Leader

"consu

discusse

develop

the Cro

training

build re

the leade

of group

The forty-two dollar Crown Ministries package includes a financial studies book, a workbook, and Dayton's paperback book on money management. The group leader receives a Leader's Guidebook which outlines the approach for leading small groups. One of the most important rules that the group leader must follow is that he/she must be careful not to become separate from the group in a leadership role. The leader is instructed to remain on an equal level with the group members as Leadership must be subtle (Psychosocial models refer to this methodology as "consumer driven"). The Leader's Guide states:

> The leaders establishes the tone of the study. The leader's attitude should be loving humble and caring, not critical or a "know it all" in attitude. We are students among students....After a student answers a question, encourage, affirm and thank them. If an answer is incorrect, be careful not to discourage the student by responding harshly or negatively. Maintain good eye contact and be attentive (Dayton, 1989: 9).

This methodology is parallel to psychotherapeutic small group methodology (as discussed later in this paper) and is basic in technique for a small group counsellor developing optimal group relationships. As with psycho-social treatment modalities, the Crown Ministries small group approach emphasizes "relationship building." The training material encourages the leader to initiate personal contacts with members and build relationships among them. Such contacts are recorded on a "Care Log" which the leader privately keeps. This serves to build an atmosphere of caring and a sense of group affiliation, which is an objective of small group dynamics.

and bi

corres

Bible

The st

weakr

actual

index

and a

biblic

you p

princi

Dayto

the ir

not re

the 1

outlir

conte

friend

group

The Crown Ministries' financial management material is a blend of budgets and biblical values. Each week's lesson on money is related to Bible verses that correspond to the topic. For example, on the subject of debt, several verses in the Bible that speak about debt are read. The emphasis remains on values clarification. The student answers several questions that relate to character values, e.g., "What weaknesses in your character need to be addressed?" With this, the central topic is actually character development, and Dayton writes, "Scripture regards money as an index to a person's true character" (Dayton, 1989: 3/10).

The ultimate purpose of the financial management group is character building and attaining personal contentment. "The purpose of this book is to teach you the biblical principles of handling money and possessions. The book is designed to give you practical ways of integrating these principles into your life. As you learn the principles and practice them, the result will be contentment" (Dayton 1979: 16). Dayton stresses that the only way to reach financial contentment is through relief of the inherent stresses (e.g., debt) related to unfulfilled material expectations. This does not require more money. Dayton states that it was the rush toward affluence during the 1970s and 80s that diminished the value of contentment. The remedy that Dayton outlines is a fundamental change in values which will then allow the person to feel contentment. Such fundamental changes in a person require support, support from friends and those that demonstrate caring. This is where the dynamics of a small group are most effective.

A Money Management Group

The members of the Money Management group at the Riverview Community Church have weekly assignments to prepare (e.g., budgets, detailed financial statements, financial planning, investments, estate itemization, and wills). However, the topic of the group, money, is not focused upon with single-minded intensity. The topic acts as a springboard for other matters. Money is a catalyst for introducing adjoining concerns such as job-related matters, marriage issues, how to spend one's leisure time, how to present oneself as a Christian in the work place, and dealing with "unbelievers" in business.

The study guide suggests that this type of group would be appealing to those who struggle with typical twentieth century issues such as stress, burnout, lack of time with family, overwork, frustration, need of purpose, regardless of profession. These are issues that many Americans (especially babyboomers) confront. Herein lies the common denominator of the group; not income level, or job, or marriage status. Rather, the preset group bond is the frustration that middle class Americans struggle with over the myriad of problems related to expectations, financial concerns, and the surrounding values. Dayton's approach to the character of the individual is via money, which he believes is a manifestation of the individual's character.

> Scripture regards money as an index to a person's true character. All through Scripture there is an intimate correlation between the development of a man's character and how he handles money. You have heard the expression "Money talks." And it does. You can tell more about a person's character by

person

spoke

was gi

twelve

mainta

her pr

financ

questi

her na

situat

previ

her st

think

built

mem

Eller

info

abou

psyc

examining his checkbook than by listening to him talk. We spend money on the things most important to us (Dayton, 1989: 3/10).

The support system within the group is enhanced through the sharing of personal conflicts. For example, during a financial management group meeting Ellen spoke of her problems working on a medical/surgical ward as a Registered Nurse. She was given a permanent ward assignment against her will. She finds herself working twelve hour shifts, and she is exhausted. She is concerned that she will not be able to maintain this schedule for long because she is pregnant. She planned to work through her pregnancy but might not be able to do this, and this would in turn affect her financial situation. As Ellen spoke, the group listened attentively, asked her probing questions, then offered her suggestions and empathy. The group then agreed to write her name in their workbook prayer log. Each group member would then pray for her situation daily. Ellen thanked the group and told them that their prayers from the previous week helped her get through a very difficult week. She stated that God gave her strength through their prayers, and she is aware that others do care about her and think about her situation during the week.

The above is an example of relationship building. The relationships that are built in the group setting are not just once a week relationships. The individual group member (Ellen) feels that the group is with her, praying for her throughout the week. Ellen's group has achieved an important small group objective. Although her group informs her that they will be praying for her, she also knows that they will be thinking about her through prayer which is an extension of their caring. This is not unlike a psycho-therapeutic group that maintains a sense of affiliation among the members on

days when the group is not in session. This is often accomplished through the members expression of care at the close of a session, that they will be "thinking" (praying)) about each other until the group convenes again.

Here, we will briefly digress to compare the Riverview Community Church small group format with the dynamics of a professional social service small group. Liz is a social worker in a state of Michigan-supported human service agency. She conducts small groups, and through her background she believes that an overt expression of caring is vital to the cohesiveness of small groups. "It's important among small group members to foster the idea that we care about one another. As a group leader I'm always sure to tell the members of my groups that I'll be thinking about them until I see them again. I think it's important to foster the idea that we are still a group, that we do care about one another and have our own identity as a group, even when we are not together."

Establishing an atmosphere of caring is not just a by-product of healthy group interaction. Caring is a definite objective for group leaders to pursue regardless of whether the group is sponsored by a church or a social service agency. The Crown Ministries program understands the positive effects of a caring atmosphere. The Leader's Guide instructs the leader in "loving the students." The leader sets up a "Care Log", which is unknown to the students, for tracking contacts with students each week outside of class. The Leader's Guide states "The purpose of the care log is to insure the leaders contact their students each week to encourage them and love them" (Dayton, 1989: 8).

Follow-up is another important element in establishing group continuity and cohesion. Psychosocial group therapists routinely use "follow-up" for monitoring matters in the lives of small group members. Although the financial management group did not refer to their prayer logs as a measure of "follow-up", nevertheless the prayer log does function as a concrete application of follow-up. For example, after reviewing the prayer log the leader of a financial management group asked Tom about a problem he brought before the group weeks earlier. Tom was experiencing difficulties at work due to what the group determined was an "attitude problem" of his. The group made it a point of discussion, then offered feedback and suggestions which Tom implemented. He subsequently reported that he was feeling much better about his job situation. He gave credit to the group for identifying the problem accurately, especially in terms of his responsibility and how he had contributed to the situation.

Follow-up was also offered by the group to a member who previously discussed a car problem. Prayer logs include all types of matters, even minor ones. Group members ask each other to remember them with prayers over matters that include yard work, and parents who are visiting for the holidays. "Problem solving" is a vital function of small groups, and it clearly functions in the Riverview Community Church groups, which results in drawing group members into supportive relationships.

Relating Twentieth Century Lifestyles to the Bible

A major topic of discussion that arose in a particular small group meeting was in regard to women (especially mothers) working outside of the home. The group was

interested in this question because it wanted to relate the teachings of the Bible to their twentieth century situations. In other words, the group wanted values clarification on the matter. The group was in agreement that the ideal situation is for the woman to be at home with the children during their developmental years. This meant that she would give deference to her husband's career by postponing her own. After child rearing, it should be left to personal discretion for the woman to pursue a career, provided that the husband agrees. The group noted that today it is necessary for women to help their husbands set up finances, at least initially, and to prepare the budgets for future children and household needs. Most of the women present at the meeting were college educated professional women, of child-bearing age, pursuing careers.

How did the group synthesize its Fundamentalist orientation (which traditionally denounces women pursuing careers outside of the home) with the contemporary economic reality that women might need to work outside of the home? Ironically the group looked to the "ideal" woman as described in Proverbs 31, a woman whose "candle burns all night long" (doing household chores). It was determined by the group that women were as industrious and hardworking (as illustrated by the Proverbs' woman) as men. The point of the Proverbs example was that whatever work women choose to do for the benefit of their family, they are to do it whole heartedly. By this interpretation, the group developed a theological position that adhered to their twentieth century needs and was compatible with the theological position of their church. This is a characteristic of the Neo-Evangelical style of Riverview Community Church.

As previously mentioned in this paper, RCC maintains a Fundamentalist orientation, but does not dictate a specific theology on matters that would preclude the needs of their members. On such matters, theology is formulated on a grass roots level within small groups where the theological message can be directly applied to the individual's life. This allows the membership to synthesize the Biblical teachings that do not comfortably coincide with twentieth century realities. In this way, modern Evangelical churches like RCC demonstrate a willingness to live with modern realities. The world of secular reality is not avoided—neither is the dichotomy of claiming to be fundamentalist in faith while functioning pragmatically within the twentieth century.

This can be stated from another perspective. The question can be asked "How many young, college educated, professional women would belong to a group that prohibited them from working outside of the home after they became a wife and mother?" In this instance, the values of the church and the needs of the individual were maintained. At Riverview Community Church, lifestyle decisions and values clarification are conceived within and sanctioned within the structure of a Fundamentalist theology. The members of the small groups arrive at orthodox, protestant doctrine which allows them to maintain a late twentieth century lifestyle. A "cognitive dissonance" between what was and what is becomes successfully bridged when the gap between old values and new values are harmonized. The characteristically Fundamentalist "anti-modernist" view can be synthesized with a lifestyle that is in reality progressively modern. This is not a digression from Evangelicalism. This is late twentieth century Evangelicalism adapting to modern America.

Social

concer

persona

church

toward

about s

ninetee

active a

the soc

meet th

lacking

questio

that Ch

enough

in the

the ne

but w

We le

or bu

Social Concerns (Social Gospel)

The concerns examined in the above section can be described as "self concerns" in that individuals are attempting to address the needs and conflicts in their personal lives. They are doing this through their church. However, it is fair to ask a church or any human service oriented organization about its perspective on service toward others, especially others who have dire social needs. A church can be asked about social concerns in the context of the "social gospel". The social gospel of the nineteenth century has taken on new forms in the late twentieth century. It is still active and vibrant in many American churches. Many churches continue to adhere to the social gospel through their cultivation of social awareness and by attempting to meet the earthly needs of humankind.

A sense of the social gospel at Riverview Community Church is not completely lacking; however the attitudes exemplify a social gospel turned inward. When the question of giving to charity was introduced to a group, the group leader suggested that Christians should only give to Christian charities because secular charities have enough support from the secular world. This response is advanced by literature used in the financial management groups (Dayton, 1989: 7/17).

RCC presently has no community outreach program or agenda for outreach in the near future. Pastor Sommerlot states that "We don't have organized fundraisers, but we do make available financial assistance to people in our church who need it. We leave fundraisers open to anyone in the church who feels that they have a ministry or burden to do a special project like that. At this time, no one is doing that." On

this issue, RCC is out of step with many contemporary Evangelical churches which have revived social benevolence activities (Hunter, 1987: 40-46).

Riverview Community Church is demonstrably concerned about the financial welfare of its own membership to the degree that financial management groups are considered an important part of church programming (as discussed elsewhere in this paper). This is indicative of an organization that looks toward a future of financial viability. It is in the interest of an organization that depends upon the support of its membership to help its members achieve and maintain solvency. The interest of the church in generating financial freedom among its members can also serve to legitimize the concern and drive among members toward financial success. Financial prowess is in effect sanctioned by the religious body with a possible by-product of ignoring those in need and ignoring benevolence activities to which churches have customarily given attention. During a small group discussion that included a casual mention of the homeless, a young mother voiced "If they sleep in the street, they can sweep the street." Although her remark was met with one mitigating comment, several members nodded in agreement with her.

An often heard comment among RCC members is one of appreciation to Jesus for financial success and material blessings. A young accountant extrapolated upon his future as one that would be abundant with financial blessings because the "Lord wants those who have given themselves to Christ to prosper." This is a fairly generic statement and one that reflects Max Weber's observations in his time-honored book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 1930). Weber's work connects the ethos of the Puritans in early America with the twentieth century notion

that apparent success was and is a distinction of a "visible saint". Weber points to the Puritan work ethic as central to the mind and the motivation of the Puritan. If work is ordained by God and pleasing to God, then successful work is rewarded by God. This reward is made obvious through the attainment of wealth. Wealth is a fruit of labor and a sign of God's blessing. God becomes visible in one's life through one's lifestyle. The question can also be asked, will affiliating with the "right" religion (or church) help one attain the "right" lifestyle? If so, then having the "right" religion is parallel to having the "right" product.

The above examples are reflections of attitudes as well as lifestyles that are fairly removed from the world of poverty. The population that RCC targets, for the most part, does not belong to the world of the impoverished. This is very clearly illustrated by a prayer at the end of a small group meeting. During the meeting the subject of donations arose due to the approaching holidays and the group wondered if items such as canned goods, should be given to the poor. The group agreed that they should follow up on this but did not know of anyone in particular that needed to receive such goods. The group prayer began with "Lord, please send us a poor person."

It is likely that most churches would say a prayer much the opposite, a prayer that requests assistance in dealing with the overwhelming numbers of poor people at hand. Many poverty stricken people can be found within churches, and if not within, then certainly in nearby neighborhoods. However, the prayer "Lord, please send us a poor person" is indicative of a general direction for Riverview: away from social distress, and toward intrapersonal distress.

It would not be accurate to completely discount Riverview's concern with lower socioeconomic people or with the Social Gospel. In a contemporary way, RCC does give attention to the same issues that the Social Gospel challenged. However, it is not easy to compare Riverview's late twentieth century approach toward social distress with the social ills found in the nineteenth century. Historian Timothy Smith distinguishes between two ways of dealing with social ills, before and after the Civil War.

> The rapid growth of concern with purely social issues such as poverty, workingmen's rights, the liquor traffic, slum housing, and racial bitterness is the chief feature distinguishing American religion after 1865 from that of the first half of the nineteenth century. Such matters in some cases supplanted entirely the earlier preoccupation with salvation from personal sin and the life hereafter (Smith, 1957: 148).

According to Smith, before the Civil War the Evangelical attitude toward solving social problems was "more and purer piety....the fervor for Christian perfection" (p. 154). After Evangelicalism challenged slavery the fervor shifted from personal piety to social responsibility, "...the conviction had become commonplace that society must be reconstructed through the power of a sanctifying gospel and all the evils of cruelty, slavery, poverty, and greed be done away" (p. 161).

Just as early nineteenth century Evangelicals held that the best way to eradicate social problems was through reform of the individual (piety), late twentieth Evangelicals also concentrate upon the individual, but from a different perspective. Spiritual perfection is no longer the center of attention. Rather, all human aspects are

focused upon: spiritual, emotional, and physical. The total development and growth of the individual has become the objective of reform. Some reasons for this can be drawn from Steven Tipton's work.

> In general, the average person is now likely to spend much less of his life within a nuclear family than he was in generations past, and he is likely to undergo more changes in residence, income, job, and marital status with less linearity than before. As the course of work, marriage, and community life turns less continuous, persons grow more aware of themselves as individuals apart from their commitments to job and neighbors, spouse and children. They become more concerned with their own development (Tipton, 1982: 250-251).

Today's Evangelicals commonly speak about the integration of the whole being: "wholeness." The Evangelical series from the Serendipity small group programs include a study titled "Wholeness" and the following words are taken from its introduction.

> Billions of dollars are spent each year by people seeking physical, emotional, and spiritual wholeness. We join health clubs and spas in an attempt to make our bodies fit. Thousands of others pay dearly to have cosmetic surgeons add to and subtract from portions of their bodies. In a similar way, millions use psychiatrists and psychologists to add to and subtract from their "psyches." We are a nation of people seeking purpose - seeking wholeness....True wholeness is elusive - yet it can be found. In the following studies we will consider the wholeness offered by Jesus. He offers us wholeness for our

> bodies, our minds and our spirits. In a world which is frail, fractured, and frazzled, this truly is good news! (Menconi, 1989: 8)

The above words are not unlike those that one would hear from the pulpit of many churches. However, late twentieth century Evangelicals have systematically applied the words to contemporary lifestyles and concerns. The national Evangelical network of support programs and publications functions on a small group level. Not only does Riverview Community Church use the Serendipity programs, but some mainline denomination churches utilize the Serendipity programs as well. This indicates a cross-denominational appeal of Evangelical programs. Today the Evangelical approach is ecumenical. Furthermore, the Evangelical approach extends itself beyond ecclesiastical institutions and competes with the secular world in dealing with interpersonal and social problems. Evangelical small group support programs are used as alternatives to the fields of psychology and counseling. Although programs like Serendipity state that they are not to be used in lieu of therapy, small group members frequently state that they have gained more from such groups than they would gain in counseling or have gained in counseling. The "priesthood of believers" is a support system that does not rely upon secular professionals in the realm of psychotherapy, a topic that is discussed elsewhere in this paper.

Among today's Evangelicals, a new type of social gospel has emerged. This social gospel is not entirely social, nor is it entirely pietistic. However its expression is as assertive as former social reforms, and far more eclectic. It speaks to the concerns that are relevant to a post-sixties generation which is accustomed to having all of its needs addressed—spiritual, physical, emotional, and social.

issue

refoc

comr

be co

huma

self e

Rele

rema

to co

plann

what

group

the gr

metho

Nor w

Howe

utilize

a sens

The R

Although the activism of the 1960s and the fortitude to confront perplexing issues is apparent among the Evangelical babyboomer generation, it has been refocused from the social sphere to the intrapersonal sphere. This generation has commonly been referred to as the "me generation" and its sense of priority seems to be consistent with that description. The priority concern is less upon the service of humanity, and more upon how to improve one's own lot in life, self understanding, self esteem, overcoming personal conflicts and making oneself right with the Lord.

Relevance in Religion

"Relevance" is a term that was very much part of the 1960s vernacular and it remains so within the post-sixties lifestyle. It is emphasized today as churches attempt to connect with their "consumers", their congregations. An important element in planning for rapid and long-term growth is to focus upon a target group, determine what the central issues are for that group, and design viable programs for meeting the group within the milieu that the group functions. In short, assess the group, engage the group, and meet the needs of the group. This of course is not unlike the methodology that successful businesses and human service organizations rely upon. Nor would it be difficult to find a mainline church that employs the same approach. However, Riverview Community Church is unique in terms of the degree that it utilizes this schema.

One needs only to scan the brochures of Riverview Community Church to gain a sense of the church's persona and the population that the church has focused upon. The RCC leadership understands the powerful role that promotional material and direct

concrete messages can play in attracting public attention. Pastor Sommerlot explains "We put a lot of effort into our brochures and published material. We might have one chance to catch the eye of someone and every word needs to be well placed." The objective of promotional material is to connect the needs and ideas of people to an organization. For this, a relevant approach is necessary.

The marketing material is crisp and bright and delivers the message of the church in a quick glance. The pictures on the material are of college-age people and those in the age range of twenties and thirties. The projected images are those of healthy, prosperous, predominately white, singles or young couples, and couples with young children. The images suggest that a major target population is the group which came to prominence during the 1980s, the young, upwardly-mobile people of child bearing age. Riverview's projection of youthful images is not just a promotional spin, it does indeed reflect the substance of the membership. Pastor Sommerlot observes that he rarely does a funeral. "We're not at that stage yet, we're in the marrying and baby stage." Thus the promotional material and message of Riverview Community Church is relevant to its membership.

An ABC interview of Andrew Greeley illustrates different attitudes toward the concept of relevance among churches. Andrew Greeley is a Roman Catholic priest and author. If we can accept Greeley's remarks as a perspective that is compatible with many mainline denominational churches, then it can be compared to the perspective of Riverview Community Church, a perspective that is amenable to Neo-Evangelicalism. In response to the question "What relevance does the church have for Americans today....why should one go to church, what does church offer?" Greeley

responded "People today are attempting to discover the meaning of the ultimate dimension" (ABC, 1990).

Greeley's response differs significantly from the RCC perspective. Riverview's response to the question is evident on another church brochure which speaks directly to the issue of relevance. The promotional advertisement reads "If you think church is boring and irrelevant, Riverview will change your point of view." It goes on to include concrete reasons for why people should choose Riverview as their church:

> ...messages are practical....personal topics like how to build your self-esteem, how to improve relationship with other people, and how to control your time, money and life. Occasional dramas illustrate the messages in powerful and humorous ways...upbeat...a refreshing experience that will help you face the week ahead with new vigor and vitality, and live life to the fullest! (Riverview Brochure)

Between Greeley and Riverview there is an obvious difference, not only in style, but also about the purpose of church and what a church can do for a person. From a marketing perspective, Greeley's abstract philosophical/theological approach is sedate and is unlikely to catch the attention of one who lives in the "fast-paced, ever-changing and sometimes impersonal world" to which the RCC brochure speaks. The RCC answer is tangible, not theological. It speaks to the person who struggles with personal relationships, who needs a boost in self esteem, who feels conflicts arise due to lack of time and money, who needs an upbeat and refreshing Sunday message that will help him/her jump back into another week. This profile fits many twentieth century Americans.

CHAPTER 6
RELIGION AND PSYCHOLOGY: A NEW BLEND

The previous chapters touched upon ways in which Riverview Community Church engages its membership, especially in terms of contemporary needs. As discussed above, a major approach is through small group programming. Considering the emphasis of small group programming by Riverview Community Church (and the national Evangelical network of programming that highlights the small group approach) special attention must be given to the dynamics of small groups. This section will examine the small group process. RCC Senior Pastor, Steve Sommerlot states that the "most successful churches in America have strong small group programs." Pastor Sommerlot's church and many other Evangelical churches ascribe to that premise.

The use of small groups was described earlier in this paper in regard to the Financial Management program offered by RCC. The small group setting is extensively relied upon by RCC in dealing with a variety of personal issues, and it is in this setting that the essence of the church is manifest. The church leadership indicates that some of the overt activities of the church, like the Sunday service, is more important for (and targets) the "unchurched."

Not only are Evangelical churches routinely developing myriads of small groups to address the daily affairs of their members, a national network of Evangelical support systems foster the use of small groups as a means of rooting membership and attracting potential members. One such support system is the *Serendipity House* small group system which will be examined later in this section.

For the purpose of orienting the function of Evangelical small groups, a comparison between Evangelical small group programming and a widely used clinical method will be provided. The inherent inquiry in this examination is, "Have Evangelical small groups assumed the role and borrowed the techniques of secular psychotherapy?"

The Clinical Function of Small Groups

The use of small group models have become increasingly common in clinical settings. Small groups offer certain advantages over large groups, and over "one to one" counseling modalities. The size of a group predetermines the effects that a group will have upon an individual group member. Therefore, structural considerations are important when determining group objectives. In his book *Working More Creatively With Groups*, group therapist Jarlath Benson states "That purposes and needs of the group should determine its size" (Benson, 1987: 27). He emphasizes the importance of designing a therapy group with no more than eight members. The smaller the size of a group, the likelihood that self disclosure, intimacy, and support, will increase. The small group also allows for stronger group reliance and the possibility of intergroup influence on members' behavior and attitudes.

The size of the small group is not the only factor involved with building bonds in small groups. The roles of the group leader and the group members are designed to foster trust relationships through a "self help" model. Self-help groups are not uncommon, nor are they a recent development. Alcoholics Anonymous has used this format since 1935. However, self-help groups have been redesigned and refined since the 1960s.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, mental health centers have become deinstitutionalized throughout the United States. That is, large institutions and large-scale treatment centers have been closed in favor of smaller and local community centers. The responsibility was given to the local communities for providing residential care and treatment programs as institutions transferred their residents into nearby areas. With a change in locus for mental health treatment came a change in focus as well. The old style authoritarian (psychotherapist vs. patient) medical model was replaced with more equitable self-help models.

A commonly-utilized methodology today for psycho-social treatment is the "Psychosocial Rehabilitation" model. The *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal* states "Psychosocial rehabilitation is currently one of the leading approaches of caring for people with emotional disability and is currently gaining wide-ranging acceptance" (Caan, 1988: 61). Because Psychosocial Rehabilitation is not a static or structured model (it is also described as a "philosophy" of treatment) a number of sub-models within this paradigm have developed. The sub-models rely upon the same basic features, although they are designed to meet idiosyncrasies. Psychosocial Rehabilitation is described as a "consumer driven" or "client directed" approach to

thera

for f

thera

depe

indep

direc

the r

P/S/P

supp

amor

poss

profe

Desc

Reha

descr

disab

medi

patho

inten

objec

affair

therapy. That is, those who participate in the group therapy process are responsible for formulating the objectives and the direction of the group, not a professional therapist. In contrast to the authoritarian style medical model which fosters dependency needs within the patient, the consumer-driven approach generates independence.

The therapist assumes the role of facilitator and assists the participants in the direction that they have chosen. The facilitator often finds it beneficial to also assume the role of a "friend" to help generate a "caring atmosphere." It is important to the P/S/R model for the facilitator to create an atmosphere that is non-clinical, warm, and supportive. In such an atmosphere it is likely that affiliation and easy interaction among group members will develop. The environment is to be as home-like as possible, and frequently homes are used for the setting of group meetings rather than professional buildings, whenever possible.

A booklet titled *Psychosocial Rehabilitation: Definition, Principles and Description* which was adopted by the International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services, lists the basic elements of the model (Dincin, 1985: 1/4). The description emphasizes a "wellness" approach rather than one that centers on mental disability. The direction of therapy is toward empowerment, which contrasts with the medical model's penchant for discovering pathological etiologies and treatments for pathologies. The P/S/R methods are designed for the hurting, not the sick, and are intended to augment a person's self-esteem. In addition to self-esteem building, the objectives include values clarification, problem-solving, concrete applications in daily affairs, and relationship-building. All aspects of the individual are taken into account:

mind, spirit, and body. This approach relates well to the *Gestalt* and the *Holistic* movements which received much attention during the 1960s and 70s, of which affiliation and self-esteem are important elements.

The Edison Neighborhood Center provides a variety of human services for physically, emotionally, and mentally disabled people in Kalamazoo, Michigan. One of its programs utilizes the Psychosocial Rehabilitation approach. A Social Worker at the center explains its objectives.

> We try to access the needs of the participants by what we call 'engagement.' Our meetings are conducted in an informal, homey atmosphere so that our group members can socialize, meet people with the same concerns, develop friendships, and support one another. My direct involvement is really minimal in terms of leading the group, and that's intentional. The strength of the group is in what each member does for the other members. The purpose is for each one to care for the others. In order to alleviate their stress they need a sound base of self-esteem and that comes by way of helping others and in feeling accepted through a supportive environment, somewhere that others care. You give to them and they give to you.

Serendipity

Serendipity House offers more than sixty programs, some of which are basic Bible studies. However, the programs that this section will focus on are of the psychotherapeutic [support group] genre. Serendipity House does not disguise its objective of marketing support group programs. It describes itself on marketing

literature as a "publishing agency that specializes in small group ministries" and that its founder "has pioneered some models for support groups." Catalogues advertise the purpose of its programs as "ideal for support groups." Serendipity also states that the programs are designed for a specific population; "While the course is for everyone, the series is primarily written for Baby Boomers" (Menconi, 1989: 5). Serendipity does not present itself as a therapy for emotional disorders, and it does state in its literature that the programs are not intended as an alternative for professional help. It does however state that its support groups are for "hurting" people, which is the same term that Psychosocial Rehabilitation uses to describe its clients. A Serendipity brochure reads "Support groups provide a very powerful and constructive environment in which people can deal with their own struggles while helping others in the process."

Serendipity is distributed by NavPress which is a "ministry of the Navigators", a national Evangelical group discussed earlier in this paper. The authors of the series have combined their professional backgrounds in psychology and theology. One of the authors has served as a missionary dentist and has a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology. His seminary training was accomplished at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. His profile states that he has been working with small groups since the late 1960s and his special area of interest is the baby boom generation. Another author of the series is a professor of communications and media at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. His doctorate is in Biblical Studies and Psychology. He has written for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and is the author of the book, *Small Group Evangelism*. The background of the authors indicates that they are highly experienced in the post-sixties small-group approach to psychotherapy, the same milieu that is

reflected in the Psychosocial Rehabilitation model. However, the Serendipity authors have synthesized this approach with their Evangelical theological training.

Program Methodology

One of the primary characteristics of the Serendipity model is the size of the group; it must be small. It is for the same reason that the P/S/R model insists upon maintaining a diminutive size for groups. Serendipity advises the group leader to divide meetings of more than four people into subgroups of no more than four people. Like the P/S/R model, the intent is to develop an informal or homey atmosphere where group members can relax and feel accepted. This is vital to the development of relationships within the group. The most conducive place to achieve this atmosphere is within the home setting. Many groups rotate the location of the meeting, giving all group members an opportunity to host meetings in their own homes.

The following process is frequently followed for determining the members of a group: the congregation is informed via printed material; if a particular topic interests a person, then he or she contacts the group leader; group leaders often attempt to match potential group members with others of similar backgrounds, e.g., similar age groups; once the group is established, each member purchases a program guidebook.

The topics of the programs are wide ranging, however, most group topics are those to which people from the baby boomer generation can easily relate. Such program topics include the marketplace/business issues, stress, careers, money, success, sexual compulsions, eating disorders, addictive lifestyles, co-dependencies, dysfunctional families, and infertility. The programs are systematically presented in

books that are reflective, but written in the vernacular of the babyboomer. The covers of the program books offer an indication of Serendipity's intended audience. For example, a cover for the "Lifestyles" program displays an illustration of a tiger in a sports coat, standing by a European sports car, and the subtitle reads "Going in Style." The cover of the "Money" program has an illustration of a bull wearing a tuxedo.

Group meetings usually begin with warm-up exercises which consist of non-threatening questions that generate levity, which helps members to relax and become familiar with one another. Because each program topic is related to the Bible, sections of the Bible or pericopes are read and discussed. The program guide presents questions that, as a catalogue states, "offer mischievous choices—and no one is ever right or wrong. Guaranteed to provoke an exciting discussion!" The format elicits self revelation. For example, one question asks: "Judging from your last month's checkbook and datebook entries, in what area of your life do you spend more of your time, money and energy?" The following choices are listed: "physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, relational." Each section has a number of such questions, and taken together, a group member's responses to such questions reveals a self portrait. Like psychotherapeutic groups, the established group rules emphasize confidentiality. A support mechanism is also built into the group rules which is important considering the emotional component of the groups. This rule states, "Permission is given to call upon each other in time of need—even in the middle of the night" (Menconi, 1989: 7).

A major similarity between the Serendipity small group programs and the Psychosocial Rehabilitation small group models is the nature of the group hierarchy. The objective is that there be no ostensible hierarchy within the group. This is

especially the case between the group and the group leader. In the P/S/R models, the therapist is referred to as a facilitator and attempts to maintain a low profile level of authority by encouraging the group to form its own direction and decisions. This is also true of the Serendipity model which encourages its group leaders to be participants and share decision-making among group members. The programs are designed so that a leader is not necessary; the program guidebook is designed so that it can be relied upon as the group leader. Professional therapists do not lead or facilitate groups.

Evangelicals often refer to this form of self-help among lay people as a "priesthood of believers." This rests upon the notion that each Christian has the potential of assuming a priestly role in leading, instructing, and counseling others. Pastor and author Jay Adams has written several books on counseling, and one of the most popular among Evangelicals is his book, *Competent to Counsel.* Adams bases his book on Romans 15:14, which reads, "As far as I am concerned about you my brothers, I am convinced that you especially are abounding in the highest goodness, richly supplied with perfect knowledge and competent to counsel one another." Adams states:

> ...every Christian, may consider himself at least potentially competent to counsel....Given the qualities mentioned in Romans 15 and Colossians 3:16, plus the proper convictions about counseling, any Christian worker may become a helpful counselor in the place where God has called him to serve (Adams, 1970: 268).

Adams speaks of the priesthood of believers as a responsibility that Christians have to one another in helping to guide the lives of each other. Adams states that a Christian theological education is a more valuable background for a counselor than a medical school degree or a degree in clinical psychology (Adams, 1970: 61).

The priesthood of believers approach is routinely applied by contemporary Evangelical groups. This approach has the same implications as the "client directed" psychotherapeutic group models. Just as psychotherapy has moved away from authoritarian models, Evangelicalism has advanced an approach that removes the pastor from the more authoritative position of pastoral counselor.

Riverview Community Church relies upon its lay people to organize and conduct support groups. For example, Helen is an accountant who has been attending RCC for the past several years after leaving the Roman Catholic Church. She presented a proposal to the senior pastor concerning a closed support group that she wished to organize (closed groups, because of the sensitive nature of the topics and the importance of trust, do not permit others to join the group after the group begins meeting). The pastor agreed that the topic was relevant to the congregation (the topic will not be disclosed here to further conceal "Helen's" identity) and encouraged her to conduct it. Helen advertised at the church to draw interest, and about a dozen people responded. The group meets in the homes of the members. The group problem is something that Helen is familiar with in her personal life, but she further researched the topic (this was her first experience with conducting a group). She chose a book on the topic, written by an Evangelical counselor who relates the topic to the Bible. The book has a ready-made format for small groups to follow.

Although the group follows the book's schema, as they have come to know one another through personal self revelation, they have developed their own direction. "We allow ourselves to express anger, hurt, and mourn the losses in our lives. Then we help each other get beyond it. It's non-threatening, we move at our own speed. I'm the group leader but I'm as much a part of the group as anyone and I'm learning about myself and working with my hurt just like everyone else."

Helen states that the group delves deeper than symptomatic manifestations of the problem, and attempts to understand underlying dysfunctions. "We look at why we do what we do, or why we feel the way we feel. With so much of it the cycle begins with poor self esteem and insecurity, and it's reenforced by society. Once we understand that, we can learn to break the cycle. With the support we give each other, our self esteem can be repaired."

Helen makes a distinction between her support group and professional psychotherapy. "We don't give advice." She also mentions that some of the group members have previously been in professional psychotherapy, or are presently in therapy. However, she finds it interesting that those who have experienced professional therapy often claim that their therapy is less effective and offers less on a personal level than the small support group where they feel more accepted.

Assessing Organizational Needs

The Serendipity programs go beyond an attempt to assess and address the special needs of the individual by offering programs that assess the needs of churches. National seminars are offered by Serendipity to train clergy and lay leaders in

recognizing the special needs and problems of their churches, and to suggest techniques to confront them. A Serendipity booklet delineates some of the questions and topics that are pursued in the seminars: "Why certain churches are growing while others are declining in the same neighborhood. How to motivate and mobilize the 60 percent fringe (Christmas and Easter) people in your church to become leaders of groups for their unchurched friends."

The seminar presenters speak about the "collapse of the traditional support systems in society," which includes the decline of the mainline denomination churches. Reasons are outlined for why churches should offer special needs small groups that address topics that were previously left to secular society's professionals. Part of the seminar is devoted to case studies of "successful" and "outstanding" churches across America which have implemented Serendipity's programs.

One of the churches that Serendipity cites is in Barrington, Illinois, a rapidly growing Chicago commuter community, where many young, urban professionals have migrated. Willow Creek Community Church began as an Evangelical youth ministry in the mid-1970s. During that period it held services for approximately 300 people in rented space. In 1991, it has its own church building and holds three services in which 14,000 people attend on an average weekend, and holds a mid-week service in which 5,000 people attend on average.

In a telephone interview, a Willow Creek spokeswoman stated that the growth of the church "has been phenomenal over the past few years. The four pastors couldn't possibly see to all the responsibilities. We have a large staff and a strong volunteer program." Besides needing volunteers to handle the 1,800 phone calls per

day, the volunteers (approximately 1,000) also assist a paid staff of nearly 250; approximately 175 are full-time, and 75 are part-time. The church has more than 100 subministries that are predominantly specialized small groups.

Special Needs Small Groups in the Mainline Denomination Churches

Serendipity does not regard itself as an organization designed for Evangelicals only. It regards its programming as ecumenical, which can be readily applied to all churches. It sends its marketing materials to a wide array of churches, groups, and individuals. Some mainline denomination churches have adopted its programs and use its materials. Clergy and staff of mainline churches also attend the Serendipity seminars. Reverend Ned is Associate Pastor of a suburban Methodist church. One of his staff people was sent to a Serendipity seminar, and according to the pastor, returned with some positive and useful information and ideas. Rev. Ned is familiar with the small group material, but his church has not used any of the material, nor does it conduct small groups or address issues that are major components of the Serendipity support groups. "We're Methodists—we stick with, we're expected to use Cokesbury." Although Cokesbury is the Methodist instructional material, Rev. Ned alludes to some doubt that it can compete, even within his church, with the popularity of programs like Serendipity. However, he states that the Methodists do not aggressively market their material across denominational lines.

In regard to offering special needs or counseling strategies to his congregation, the pastor and his two associates divide their duties to include pastoral counseling. Rev. Ned is a graduate of Boston University where he was trained in the Danielsen

Institute, a major pastoral counseling center. He and his associates use a one-on-one approach to counseling, and he regrets that they do not have more time to devote to counseling parishioners.

For the purpose of pursuing the question of how widely used the special needs groups in mainline churches are, ten churches of more than five hundred members each were contacted in the areas of Lansing and Kalamazoo, Michigan. The churches that were contacted are Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Lutheran. All of the churches offer informal Bible study classes and have youth groups that provide activities. A Presbyterian church offers a weekly "global forum" in which political issues are discussed. A Methodist church offers a women's group. An Episcopal church has a "home social" group that meets once a month for meals in the homes of members. It also conducts training groups for volunteers who visit hospitals and nursing homes. Another Episcopal church holds a bereavement group in which widows and widowers attend. A Lutheran church holds a young married couples group, and a Methodist church has a divorced people's group. None of the churches described their groups as support groups, but rather referred to them as discussion or activities groups.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions from such a limited and informal survey of the above churches. However, the difference in terms of special needs programming between the above churches and the churches that implement the Serendipity programs (e.g., Riverview Community Church) is obvious. In the aftermath of contacting these particular mainline churches a question must be raised. How common are the intensive, specialty ministries among mainline churches? And,

does the numerical evidence (shrinking mainline churches and growing Evangelical churches) relate to the type of programs that these churches are offering their congregations.

CHAPTER 7
PLACING RIVERVIEW COMMUNITY CHURCH IN THE CONTEXT OF EVANGELICAL TRENDS

This chapter will further examine the point that ended the last chapter: the growth of Evangelical churches and the declining membership of mainline denomination churches, and the trends that can offer insight for this phenomenon. Riverview Community Church needs to be viewed in a framework that allows one to understand the driving influences of recent trends that have shaped the present American religious landscape. In doing so the question is asked, "Is RCC an anomaly within late twentieth century Evangelicalism, or is RCC consistent with contemporary Evangelical trends? In evaluating the trends of American religion, this section will refer to the work of Wade Clark Roof. As a sociologist, Professor Roof has surveyed and interpreted the changes in American religious institutions for more than twenty years.

The *1990 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* is a starting point for statistically scanning religious trends. Although the yearbook qualifies its information as dependent upon the data provided by each denomination or association of churches, it nevertheless provides a reliable indicator of ecclesiastical trends over the years. The 1990 yearbook provides figures through 1988 and shows growth or decline among

certain churches during the last twenty years. Data from the following conservative Christian churches indicates a steady growth: Assemblies of God, Church of God, Church of the Nazarene, Southern Baptist Convention, and the Evangelical Covenant Church of America.

In contrast to the growth of the above conservative churches, the following "mainline" Protestant churches experienced a steady decline in membership during the same period: Episcopal, Presbyterian, United Methodist, and the United Church of Christ.

In order to provide a rounded perspective of why the conservative churches have fared so well during the past couple of decades, an understanding about why the mainline churches have diminished needs to be established. This is especially important in relation to Riverview Community Church because a significant portion of its members were at one time affiliated with mainline churches.

First, however, the term "mainline" requires a working definition. In his book, *American Mainline Religion*, Wade Clark Roof offers a general definition of the term. He states that American mainline religion is "admittedly a vague, somewhat value-laden designation, yet it focuses attention on the religious and cultural center. By mainline, or mainstream, which is a frequently-used synonym, we mean the dominant, culturally established faiths held by the majority of Americans" (Roof, 1987: 6). By this definition, the protestant churches mentioned above qualify as mainline churches.

Although the reasons why dramatic changes have occurred in American mainline churches are complex, the losses in membership are clearly observable. Roof states:

> Of all the postsixties religious changes, none was better documented than the membership declines of the liberal, mainline Protestant churches. Beginning about 1965, many well established Protestant churches not only stopped growing, but actually began reporting significant membership losses. Denominations with records of sustained growth and prosperity, some dating to colonial times, experienced their first major downturns. Many of them continue to lose members twenty years later (Roof, 1987: 18-19).

Religious "switching" has long been observed among American churches. However, prior to the 1960s the switching of members between churches usually followed a pattern from conservative to liberal which paralleled an upwardly mobile, socio-economic direction. This pattern changed in the early seventies as Roof remarks in a journal article.

> The religious trends of the seventies altered the switching patterns. Liberal churches began to lose much of their appeal, and as a result began to receive fewer net members from switching. Conservative churches gained a new respectability, and began to experience net gains in the switching process (Roof, 1984: 282).

Roof's analysis indicates that the churches most closely identified and aligned with the American culture, and the "public faith" were the ones hit most severely by defection. The pre-1960s values were called into question and discounted by the public. The institutions that represented the "establishment," including the established churches, became the object of public anger and disillusion. Roof explains:

> By the late sixties this synthesis of religious and utilitarian cultural faith was in deep trouble. A growing sense of discontinuity between ideals and realities became evident during the Johnson administration, when the country was beleaguered with the domestic issues of civil rights, urban rioting, and crime. There was a feeling of inner contradiction and an awareness of social problems for which there were no easy solutions. America, for all its might and technological prowess, seemed unable to deal with its own domestic life. The single most important catalyst of tension was the Vietnam War, which would come to be seen as morally ambiguous if not immoral by a majority of the population. The war produced an estrangement for the young, both for those opposing it and for those fighting it. Then came the Watergate scandal, which further undermined confidence in the nation and its leadership. By that time the old civil faith embodying national ideals and messianic conceptions of America as an instrument of divine purpose has lost much of its force (Roof, 1987: 28).

The mainline churches that represented the center of American life declined as the center of American life became fragmented. In the movement away from the center, the extreme ends of the religious spectrum received an influx of converts. On one end were the conservative and fundamentalist faiths. On the other end of the spectrum were the "exotic" religions. These included a variety of Eastern religions such as Hinduism, forms of Buddhism, cults, and the personal fulfillment psycho-religions, often referred to as "therapy religions" or "spiritual therapies". However, a

major portion of those who left the mainline churches rejected institutional affiliation altogether and became numbered within the "nones" or "unchurched" categories.

The churches that gained significantly in membership tended to be the ones that stressed boundaries, both theologically and behaviorily. This characterizes conservative Protestant churches. In a feature magazine article, Professor Roof described the appeal of such churches.

> The moral traditionalists want clear conceptions of belief and morality....They look for certainty in an uncertain world, greater moral and cognitive boundaries; this is right and this is wrong. There's also a hunger for the experiential, for religion that deals with the emotive and feeling aspect of life. The fundamentalist and charismatic faiths have responded to that, they also offer strong group commitment (Miller, 1985: 6).

For a linear progression of the changes in American religious life, we need only to look back three or four decades for an understanding of why the recent changes have been so dramatic. Professor Roof's interpretations of the changes are not unlike those of other sociologists cited in this dissertation (e.g., Robert Bellah, Steven Tipton, Peter Berger, James Hunter). In a *Daedalus* article Roof delineates the religious moods from the 1950s to the 1980s (Roof, 1982: 176). He observes that the post-World War II economy, ideology, and upwardly mobile population, amalgamated the cultural values of America with religious precepts. Churches were in the vanguard of civic and public piety during the 1950s. The social norms supported the church as a vital element in the American way of life. Social norms also proscribed against

anything that appeared to be subversive instigation fostered by a godless Communistic way of life.

The American cultural milieu was rearranged during the sixties and seventies. The cultural upheaval not only affected the institutions of the country, but affected the very way Americans thought about themselves. The institutions lost much of their authority to prescribe attitudes toward personal issues such as sexual behavior, marriage, divorce, abortion, gender roles, divergent lifestyles, and child rearing. An emphasis on personal freedom, self fulfillment, and choice emerged. Individuality was reflected in the alternative religious forms that developed.

The fires of the sixties era counterculture movement have long been extinguished. The cultural limits were pushed to the point of instability, and many have retreated in the other direction toward entities that appear stable. Once again, for many, the institutions that offer apparent stability are the ones that offer limits that cannot be compromised: a strong military, a strong capitalistic economy, a strong family, a strong church. As Roof states, these institutions, especially the conservative churches, flourished during the 1980s "By adhering to rigid and absolutist views on belief and morality, they have gained for themselves a distinctive religio-cultural identity that has proven to be attractive to many Americans (Roof, 1984: 286).

It is not enough, however, for a church to stand adamantly on particular theological or political issues. A church must offer something beyond exclusive precepts and guidelines. The growing conservative churches have tapped into the affiliation needs that were left over from an era when the culture canceled its loyalties. Roof's work indicates that the growing conservative churches have replaced a lagging

sense of loyalty to the culture with renewed group bonds, bonds that have reworked cultural and religious themes. "Boundaries are drawn by means of belief and practice, and are embodied in group identity and loyalty. Participation within the institution and a sense of belonging are essential, providing as they do a matrix of shared experienced in which religious meanings take on personal and social significance" (Roof, 1982: 169).

Ironically, one trait of the counterculture era still thrives (even within the conservative churches) in spite of an emphasis on group affiliation. That trait is the demand for individual expression and self fulfillment. The post-sixties American culture inherited an undeniable sense of individualism. In recent years, subjective needs have achieved a priority beyond the level previously known in American life. This creates a tension between regaining the perceived stability of cultural traditions through American institutions, e.g., churches, and meeting the needs of American individualism, which were recultivated in the counterculture movement. Few churches have attempted to synthesize the counter-forces between the desire of individualism and the penchant for conformity. As expounded upon earlier in this dissertation, this has been an objective of Neo-Evangelical churches, and is a clear objective of Riverview Community Church. A church that offers group bonds and group guidelines along with fostering individualism and meeting individual needs is in touch with the most recent American social trends. However, the churches that have lost their group commitment and group loyalty and have not addressed the needs of the individual are likely to be the churches that have also lost their future.

"Privatism" or "private religion" is often associated with the spiritual therapies that emerged from the counterculture era. These therapies such as yoga, mysticism, and Transcendental Meditation, caught the attention of those who rejected American institutional religion, which has been documented by sociologists like Steven Tipton (Tipton, 1982). Although such spiritual therapies have not disappeared, they did lose their power of appeal during the late seventies and were dropped from the vernacular of the eighties (many college students in the nineties have never heard of them). Yet, the driving force behind their popularity has not diminished. It is true that many who left the churches during the sixties and joined the spiritual therapies are today affiliated with no church and have looked to secular therapies for fulfillment. However, there are also those who left the mainline churches, found secular approaches to fulfillment dissatisfying, and have looked to the conservative churches for a blend of old time religion and modern therapy. Ironically, to a large degree, Evangelicalism stepped in front of the line ahead of progressive mainline churches and is attempting to fill gaps in personal fulfillment. What is also ironic is that the key element of the conservative church approach is not found within its theology. It is not a theological model that accounts for the appeal of the churches that are growing. The mix of personal fulfillment and group participation are vital factors in the Neo-Evangelical approach. Roof states that "What is important in judging a method's worth are not theological or institutional standards of evaluation, but its utility. The appeal of the many contemporary religious and quasi-religious therapies thus lies in the explicit attention they give to the benefits to be gained through participation" (Roof, 1982: 167).

In conservative churches, working toward one's personal fulfillment is, of course, phrased another way. It is usually placed in the context of salvation, salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus. Fulfillment is attained by leading a life in the Spirit, and the Spirit deals with each person individually. In a sense, the Puritan notion of salvation is rekindled. That is, the individual is responsible for his or her own salvation. This is privatism, but it is articulated and sanctioned within a strong group format. As Roof states, personal fulfillment is

> seen as a by-product of Christian salvation, something found only in the life and death of Jesus. Whatever their label—evangelical, born-again Christian, neo-Pentecostal, charismatic—they were one in their stress upon wholeness and experience in faith. There was an external authority, but it was to be confirmed in personal experience. Varied and diluted were the many versions of salvation, yet they all held out hope of discovering, or rediscovering, a fuller sense of life's inner riches and possibilities (Roof, 1987: 49).

Churches like Riverview Community Church have a priority focus on the experiential rather than the theological. That is not to say that the theological is unimportant, although it does explain why the RCC Fundamentalist doctrine is rarely dissected and challenged by a highly-educated congregation. For the post-sixties generation, the tangible results of making one feel better about one's situation in life is far more powerful and meaningful than offering abstract theological messages. The beneficial aspects of being "saved" in the present have become as important as the benefits of being "saved" in the hereafter.

CHAPTER 8
A NEO-EVANGELICAL SCOPE OF THE FUTURE

Evangelical churches today are keenly aware of the vast numbers of the unchurched population. The unchurched represent the greatest potential for immediate church growth as well as stability for the future. On the local level, churches like Riverview Community Church expend much effort to gain the attention of the unchurched by offering appealing Sunday services, varied programming, and maintaining the attention of the unchurched by anticipating their future needs. On a larger scale, Evangelicalism has analyzed demographical information by evaluating surveys and polls, in accord with creating marketing techniques. It would not be fair to say that Evangelicals alone are utilizing such information and techniques. Some mainline denomination churches have also developed an awareness of marketing practices. However, a December 1990 issue of *Newsweek* states that sophisticated marketing practices are especially relied upon by Evangelicals. In regard to the techniques of polling, marketing, and advertising, the article states, "Evangelical Protestants, who have always been entrepreneurial, take those teachings as their own" (Woodward, 1990: 52).

An important question that American ecclesiastical institutions have attempted to answer is, "How many people can be classified as 'unchurched' Americans?" Sociologist Wade Clark Roof estimates that approximately 41 percent of the adult

American population can be placed into the unchurched category (Roof, 1984: 284). More importantly, in order for churches to gain the attention of the unchurched, they must first be identified. Who are the unchurched? Roof believes that a key to determining who the unchurched are, is to be found by studying the babyboomer generation. In a telephone conversation, Professor Roof indicated that the baby boomer generation will determine the future direction of American churches. The *Newsweek* article cited above states, "Seventy-five million babyboomers have transformed every pasture they have rambled into during their much-studied march toward middle age....Now, once again involved with organized religion, they are altering the nation's churches (Woodward, 1990: 51). According to Roof, "Older babyboomers are returning to organized religion"
(Roof, 1990: 285).

Babyboomers are generally considered to be the Americans born during the period immediately following World War II, until the period of the mid-1960s when the birth rate began to decline. Roof distinguishes between attitudes of those born during the early part of the babyboom, and those born near the end of the generation. Surveys indicate that the younger boomers are much more conservative in their attitudes, in religion and politics. The article states, "...they consider themselves more religious and affirm traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs and practices more so than do older members of the generation. This appears to be the case across a wide spectrum of issues including belief in the Devil and conflict between religion and science" (Roof, 1990: 285). The possibilities for Evangelicalism connecting with this segment of the population is obvious.

Religious individualism is a common characteristic among members of the boomer generation. Religious individualism means that there is less of a penchant toward denominational loyalty. In other words, churches cannot rely upon a homeostatic membership based on previous affiliation with that church or denomination. Religious switching and the trend of experimentation from church to church shows no sign of abating. As Peter Berger predicted, churches will need to become more creative in maintaining the interest of their "consumers" if they intend to anchor their membership (Berger, 1969).

This is especially true among the babyboomer generation. In regard to this generation *Newsweek* states, "They inspect congregations as if they were restaurants and leave if they find nothing to their taste" (Woodward, 1990: 52). This article utilizes the data of sociologists Wade Clark Roof and David Roozen and concludes that "What works best [for a growing church]...is a one-stop church complex that offers an array of affinity groups where individuals can satisfy their need for intimacy, yet identify with a large, successful enterprise" (53). This description accurately applies to the subject of this dissertation: Riverview Community Church, Great Commission International, and a number of Neo-Evangelical churches that have experienced recent and rapid growth, especially among the babyboomer generation. In loose but applicable terms, this is an approach not unlike that of mega-stores which are intent to meet the multi-dimensional needs of consumers by a "one-stop shopping" philosophy. From the perspective of an individual who is caught in the fast track of stress, or struggles to meet common twentieth century demands, the menu of the "mall/church" can be very appealing. This individual need not go in fragmented

directions to satisfy the needs of affiliation, family demands, support and approval, financial or job related anxiety, networking, pragmatic problem-solving, specialty treatment groups, and of course, spiritual needs. With this model, psychological, social, and spiritual direction can be found under one roof.

It is not an accident that many Neo-Evangelical churches have the programs that appeal to the babyboomer generation in place and functioning. Neo-Evangelicals have been tuned into this particular generation because they are themselves a product of this generation. The leaders and pastors of Neo-Evangelicalism, such as the leaders of Great Commission International, were on the campuses during the 1960s and early 1970s. It should be no surprise that the campus Evangelical groups did not remain exclusively on campus serving as a student ministry. Rather, they followed their generation, with its special identity, from the campus into the suburbs. They took some of the tools of academia, e.g., surveys and marketing, reworked the Billy Graham mass appeal, and applied it to their particular ethos. Their worldview would no longer unquestioningly accept the status quo of America's establishment, including the status quo of ecclesiastical institutions. However, they were not willing to completely negate and discard their own tradition. They determined that what their generation wanted was actually quite traditional. Yet, it desired tradition in a new way. The campus leaders of Evangelicalism planned accordingly, and the success of their plans is apparent on the bottom line, by the numbers.

It would be presumptuous to make predictions about the future of the Neo-evangelical churches and organizations that have been examined in this paper. Although the movement is beyond the initial stages, it is still developing. However,

considering the short history of the movement, it is not difficult to observe where it began, and in which direction it is proceeding. Also, considering the fruition of the movement's plans over the past couple of decades, one might be able to make some inferences about its future if we look at its plans for the future.

Some of the leaders of the organizations cited in this paper often refer to the work of Evangelical author and marketing analyst, George Barna. Barna, author of the book *Marketing the Church*, released a book in 1990 titled *The Frog and the Kettle—What Christians Need to Know About Life in the Year 2000.* This book is Barna's roadmap into the next century as it lays out a list of pragmatic plans for churches that intend to stay viable and grow. Barna argues that the church must pursue its consumers much like any organization, and the key to remaining viable is through "anticipation and adaptation." Reminiscent of Peter Berger's prediction that churches will need to court consumer needs, Barna believes that the successful church must become more relevant to its audience, "meeting people where they are" and aim at addressing the "felt needs of the target audience." He states that "Churches that are doing 'business as usual' will fail to capture the attention and stimulate the interest of the average American adult" (Barna, 1990:148).

One of the ways to stimulate attention is to repackage the gospel and make it more appealing to the unchurched. The persona of the church itself must be repackaged and be presented as less threatening to the unchurched.

> We also have to be careful as to how we are perceived by the masses. If we continue to pose as an institution whose position is based on authority (i.e., we ought to be respected and accepted because we have legitimate authority in the

> national social structure) we will merely threaten people and chase them off. If however, we position the church as an educator, or perhaps as a social institution whose primary role is to facilitate relationships between like-minded individuals, then we are meeting a felt need without threatening people. If what we have to offer is viewed as attractive and venerable, we become viable. If we maintain the traditional church posture—i.e., we are the morality police, or we are the judge and jury of mankind—we will be dismissed as an outdated institution (Barna, 1990: 179-180).

Before the above words were written by Barna, some Neo-Evangelical churches like Riverview Community Church, had already incorporated these ideas. This can be demonstrated by reviewing some of the statements made by the pastors of Riverview: "Our product is relationships" and "We are not about judgment here." Unlike their Evangelical predecessors, the Neo-Evangelical approach does not rely upon sin as a primary motivator in addressing values and behavior. Although the term sin has not been discarded, the more positive concept of self-esteem is stressed. One of the most effective ways to build self-esteem is through the development of supportive relationships. Barna sees the church as remolding and replacing the fragmented social institutions that were once depended upon as bastions for building interpersonal relationships.

The success of RCC is not only the result of its ability to anticipate the future in its planning, but also because of its ability to maintain organizational stability. A number of Evangelical and Pentecostal groups that were established on the Michigan State University campus during the early 1970s have since disintegrated. Some of the

more popular groups like Shiloh (New Covenant Christian Community), and the Maranatha Christian Fellowship, have experienced disrupting divisions among leadership and membership. It is apparent that the small group support system in RCC accounts for its organizational cohesion. The RCC leadership is aware of the importance that structure provides, but only to the degree that structure itself does not preclude the personal needs of members (and their lifestyles). Within the small group milieu the most subtle form of structure is present. That is, the structure that is instilled within the peer relationships.

Barna is aware of the data that indicates the importance of the babyboomer generation in structuring the church of the future. He offers ideas on how to catch the attention of this population. The church needs to provide a varied menu for those who are accustomed to a wide array of selections and those who have high expectations. For example, if aerobic dancing is a trend among this generation, then churches should consider offering aerobic classes. If sports enthusiasts spend evenings watching football on a big screen at a local tavern, then churches should consider offering a sports entertainment center. High technology is also an important element of the boomer generation, and churches need to follow this technology. Barna encourages churches to develop media centers, complete with computers and VCRs. Media libraries would provide videotapes and computer software that are purchased not for its theological content, but with the current interests of the general public in mind. Pastor Sommerlot of RCC is in agreement with Barna's recommendations for the future. He states, "In the past Evangelicals always seemed to be reacting to something that had already happened. But that's not the way it is now. Evangelicals have

tapped into a subculture of people, and now its the Evangelicals who are doing the planning."

Barna states that "Building up the numbers of people associated with the local church will require churches to utilize niche marketing strategies. Thanks to the application of single-source and relational databases, Americans will be used to receiving persuasive communications that acknowledge their personal background, experiences and interests" (Barna, 1990:107). In order to do this effectively, churches will need to follow the lead of the marketplace and employ people who are skilled in information analysis and marketing techniques.

Another group that requires special attention is the children of the babyboomer generation.

> Our surveys consistently show that more than two-thirds of all adults who have accepted Christ as their Savior made their decision to do so before the age of 18. Obviously, the best time to reach them with the gospel is while they are young and impressionable, during the period in which they are solidifying their values and key attitudes....We will not have such a large number of youths to evangelize for many years to come (Barna, 1990: 205).

It is very feasible for local churches like Riverview Community Church to connect with the pre-eighteen-year-old population, considering the numbers of that group in the Lansing/East Lansing area. Pastor Sommerlot states that a "special ministry is needed to meet the spiritual needs of Junior High and High School people....less than a few percent of them attend church." Nor should community colleges be overlooked. With an emphasis upon large college campuses, Barna's book

encourages local churches to evangelize the large and growing number of Junior College campuses.

Barna also addresses the need for churches to consider the change in the patterns of financial support among its congregations. He states:

> As Boomers become active in the church, they may be especially difficult to stimulate to significant giving levels....Giving to a church will not be viewed as a priority unless the church works diligently and intelligently to lead them to lift it to higher priority. They will have to see tangible and moving results of such support. Because most Boomers will not think of themselves as affluent, they need to understand the principles of stewardship described in Scripture (Barna, 1990: 108).

It is impossible to determine the proportions of acceptance for future direction that Barna's book receives among Evangelicals. Evangelicalism encompasses diverse elements, as does America. Whatever the direction, it is apparent that Evangelicalism is no less vibrant and innovative today than it was in the early nineteenth century when it stirred the American frontier. It is certain that today's Evangelicalism is anticipating the next frontier: twenty-first century America.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

(Statement of Faith, taken from Great Commission International Ministry Report, 1988-89)

Scripture

The sole basis of our beliefs is the Bible, the 66 books of the Old and New Testament. It was uniquely, verbally and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit and was written without error in the original manuscripts. It is the supreme and final authority in faith and life in every age.

God

There is but one God, infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness and love, the Creator of the universe, eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—each of whom possesses all the attributes of Deity and the characteristics of personality.

Man

God created man in His own image, and man, as he was originally created, was innocent before God. But man chose to sin by disobeying God, and therefore was alienated from his Creator and came under divine condemnation. Thus all human

beings are born with a corrupted nature and without spiritual life, and are totally incapable of pleasing God in and of themselves.

Jesus Christ

God the Father, by His own choice and out of love for sinful men and women, sent Jesus Christ into the world to reconcile sinners to Himself. Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. He is God in the flesh, both true God and true man. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life and voluntarily suffered and died as our substitute to pay the penalty for our sins, thus satisfying God's justice and accomplishing salvation for all who trust in Him alone. He rose from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He lived and died. He bodily ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father, where He, the only mediator between God and man, makes intercession for His own. He will return to earth personally, visibly and bodily, to judge all men and establish His kingdom.

Salvation

Men and women are freed from the penalty for their sins not as a result, in whole or in part, of their own works, goodness or religious ceremony, but by the undeserved favor of God alone. God declares righteous all who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation.

Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has come into the world to reveal and glorify Christ, to convict men and women of their sins, and to impart new life to all who place their faith in

Christ. He indwells believers from the moment of spiritual birth, seals them until the day of redemption and empowers them to live a life pleasing to God.

Assurance

All who are born again of the Spirit can be fully assured of eternal life from the very moment they put their faith in Christ. This assurance is not based upon any kind of human merit, but upon the fact of God's election, upon Christ's complete payment for sins and upon the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who is the deposit guaranteeing their inheritance.

Resurrection of the Dead

At physical death, the believer enters immediately into eternal, conscious fellowship with the Lord and awaits the resurrection of his or her body to everlasting glory and blessing. At physical death, the unbeliever enters immediately into eternal, conscious separation from the Lord and awaits the resurrection of his or her body to everlasting suffering, judgment and condemnation.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Jesus Christ has instructed those who believe in Him to be baptized in water as a symbol of their new birth in Christ. Baptism should be by immersion and is only for those who have personally believed in Christ. The Lord also instituted the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of His suffering, death and resurrection. Neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper have any merit in helping a person obtain eternal life.

The Church

All true believers make up the church worldwide and should assemble together in local churches for worship, prayer, fellowship and teaching, to become conformed to the image of Christ and to become equipped to carry out the "Great Commission" that Christ gave His followers in Matthew 28: 19-20.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Jay. (1970). *Competent to Counsel.* Phillipsburg, NJ. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.

Arnold, Anita and Dincin, Jerry. (1985). *Psychosocial Rehabilitation: Definition, Principles and Description.*

Balmer, Randall. (1989). *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory (A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America).* New York: Oxford University Press.

Barna, George. (1990). *The Frog and the Kettle—What Christians Need to Know About Life in the Year 2000.* Ventura, CA: Gospel Light/Regal Books.

Bellah, Robert. (1975). *The Broken Covenant—American Civil Religion in Time of Trial.* New York: Seabury Press.

Benson, Jarlath. (1987). *Working More Creatively With Groups.* New York: Tavistock Publications.

Berger, Peter L. (1969). *The Sacred Canopy—Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion.* New York: Doubleday and Company.

Cnaan, Ram and Blankertz, Laura. (1988). "Psychosocial Rehabilitation: Toward A Definition." *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal.* Vol. 11, #4; 61-77.

Dart, Boert. "Families Enter '90s in Crisis." Cox News Service, *Kalamazoo Gazette.* 1-17-91.

Dayton, Howard Jr. (1979). *Your Money, Frustration or Freedom? (The Biblical Guide to Earning, Saving, Spending, Investing, Giving).* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishing Inc.

Dayton, Howard Jr. (1989a). *Crown Ministries Small Group Financial Study.* Longwood, FL: Crown Ministries, Inc.

Dayton, Howard Jr. (1989b). *Crown Ministries Small Group Leader's Guide.* Longwood, FL: Crown Ministries, Inc.

Dolan, Jay. (1985). *The American Catholic Experience.* New York: Doubleday and Company.

Hunter, James. (1987). *Evangelicalism—The Coming Generation.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jacquet, Constant, Jr., ed. (1990). *1990 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churchs.* Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Jonge, Marinus. (1988). *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

Küng, Hans. (1976). *On Being Christian.* New York: Doubleday and Company.

Marsden, George. (1980). *Fundamentalism and American Culture (The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925).* New York: Oxford University Press.

McDowell, Josh. (1972). *Evidence That Demands A Verdict—HistoricalEvidences for the Christian Faith.* San Bernardino, CA.: Campus Crusade For Christ/Here's Life Publishers, Inc.

Menconi, Peter, Peace, Richard, Coleman, Lyman. (1989). *Wholeness—Putting the Pieces Together.* Littleton, CO: Serendipity House/Navpress.

Miller, Lance. (1985). "The Surge of Conservative Christianity." *Hampshire Life.* March: 67-12.

Noll, Mark. (1986). *Between Faith and Criticism (Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America).* San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. (1971). *The Christian Tradition—A History of the Development of Doctrine. Vol. I. The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600).* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Roof, Wade Clark. (1982). "America's Voluntary Establishment: Mainline Religion in Transition." *Daedalus.* Winter: 165-184.

Roof, Wade Clark. (1984). "American Religion in Transition: A Review and Interpretation of Recent Trends." *Social Compass.* XXXI/2-3.

Roof, Wade Clark. (1987). *American Mainline Religion—Its Changing Shape and Future.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Roof, Wade Clark. (1990). "Surveys of Religion in American Life: Return of the Baby Boomers to Organized Religion." *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches.* Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Sandeen, Ernest. (1978). *The Roots of Fundamentalism—British American Milenarianism, 1800 to 1930.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Seeburg, Reinhold. (1977). *The History of Doctrines.* Grand Rapids,MI: Baker Book House.

Smith, Timothy. (1957). *Rivivalism and Social Reform—In Mid-Nineteenth-Century America.* New York: Abingdon Press.

Tillich, Paul. (1967). *A History of Christian Thought.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Tipton, Steven. (1982). *Getting Saved from the Sixties—Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural Change.* Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Weber, Max. (1930). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* London: Unwin Hyman, Ltd. (1987 reprint).

Woodward, Kenneth. (1990). "A Time to Seek". *Newsweek.* Dec. 17, 1990.

Televised Broadcasts

Public Broadcasting Service documentary. "Making Sense of the Sixties." Writer/Producer Eric Strange. Aired 1-23-91.

American Broadcasting Company (ABC) "Good Morning America." 12-24-90. Interview with Joan Lunden.