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Exurbanization and Rural Churches in Wright County, Minnesota

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Abstract

The population of many rural communities in counties adjacent to metropolitan areas is increasing through the process of exurbanization. This study used structured interviews, documentary and secondary data, and direct observation to examine the impact of exurbanization in one nonmetropolitan county – Wright County, Minnesota – on the county's churches. The characteristics of natives and exurbanites were compared, their relationships examined, the impact of exurbanites on the county's congregations explored, and implications for church, denominational, and community leaders offered.

Introduction

Suburban population growth and its related development continue in most American cities. However, rather than migrating to suburban developments on land contiguous to existing suburbs, some urbanites have opted to commute to more distant, rural communities. This process, known as exurbanization, brings the newcomer exurbanites into contact with the long-term, rural residents and their social institutions. This study examines some of the perceived characteristics of these two populations, how they relate with each other, and their impact on the institution of the rural church.

The population of many rural communities has been in

decline during recent years. However other rural communities' populations have grown, particularly those in counties adjacent to metropolitan areas (Johnson, 1999). Exurban counties are among the fastest growing types of counties in the U.S., accounting for 30 percent of the population growth between 1960 and 1985. Nelson (1990) noted that exurban areas accounted for 20 percent of all new jobs and 61 percent of new manufacturing jobs created between 1965 and 1985.

During an era of dispersion of central city residents, Spectorisky (1955) defined "exurbanization" as population growth in rural areas outside of suburbia. Patel (1980) defined the exurb as "a discrete, a really organized subdivision with an internal street pattern, located in a rural setting. It is located far enough beyond the frontier of suburban development that it will not be engulfed by the expanding city within the foreseeable future, and thus is an urban island in a rural setting" (p. x).

Although rapid suburban growth occurred during that time, Spectorisky observed the beginning of a trend toward residential relocation in the rural areas beyond the suburbs, the full force of which was not documented until Beale (1982) described the "non-metropolitan turnaround" of the 1970s (also see Ballard and Fuguitt, 1985). Since that time research has focused on two areas: a comparison of the characteristics of exurbanites and native residents and the impact of exurbanization on the rural communities' social

institutions. The current status of that research is described below.

Comparison of the Characteristics of Exurbanites and Natives

Both population change and the differences between the characteristics of the exurbanites and natives can affect the dynamics of a rural community. Grabler (1974) conducted one of the first studies comparing the characteristics of exurbanites and natives in the rural mountain community of Georgetown, outside of Denver, Colorado. She found that the newcomers had higher levels of education, were more likely to commute to jobs outside of Georgetown, and were somewhat younger. Her results were similar to those of DeJong and Humphrey (1976) who found that migrants leaving metropolitan areas in Pennsylvania were typically younger, of higher socioeconomic status, and had smaller household sizes than those entering metropolitan areas.

Schmidt (1981) compared the orientations and expectations of natives and exurbanites in central New York and southern Vermont. He found that exurbanites had greater economic prosperity and higher residential mobility than did the natives. Their attitudes reflected those of urban and suburban residents, which resulted in political clashes.

A study by Sofranko and Fliegel (1980) noted that exurbanites' characteristics can be affected by their place of origin. They compared the characteristics of rural residents, rural

newcomers, and urban residents in the North Central region of the U.S. They found that the newcomers were younger, better educated, somewhat more affluent, and more likely to hold upper white collar occupations. Although they found differences among the three groups' attitudes toward economic development, taxes, and governmental services, the differences were most pronounced between the urban and rural newcomers, with urban newcomers' attitudes more similar to those of the rural residents.

Nelson and Sanchez (1997) used the Annual Housing Survey data from 22 metropolitan statistical areas to compare people who moved to suburban areas with those who moved to exurban areas. They found that exurbanites' and suburbanites' socioeconomic characteristics were quite similar. A study by Davis, et al. (1994) in Portland, Oregon yielded similar results, but they also noted that suburbanites and exurbanites differ in lifestyle preferences, such as the desire for rural amenities, large house lots, and willingness to accept longer drives to work.

Impact of Exurbanization on Social Institutions

Exurban growth can have an impact on a rural community's social institutions, such as the economy (e.g., Woods, et al., 1997), government (e.g., Green, 1982), planning (e.g., Nelson and Dueker, 1990), and schools (e.g., Hobbs, 1994). Exurbanization can also

impact rural churches and the complexion of local religiosity. For example, Freymeyer and Workman (2000) used 1998 General Social Survey data to compare residents of the southern U.S. and immigrants to that region. They found few differences between immigrants and southern residents in rates of church attendance and prayer, however immigrants were less likely to be Protestants or to hold as conservative religious beliefs as southern residents. They concluded that in migration will not likely change the distinctiveness of southern religious practices, but may have some impact on religious affiliation and beliefs.

Exurbanites from an urban or suburban background who begin to attend a rural church are likely to have more formal expectations of local church politics and dynamics than do the natives. The congregation may feel "'invaded' by persons from a large church world, who can't understand why things work (or don't work) they way they do" (Kail, 1998:1). Exurbanites include newcomers to the community or former residents who went to an urban area and have recently returned. "Family chapel" types of churches may not warmly receive the exurbanites, who may not be sought out or who may be shut out (Farley, nd).

Just as exurbanites are likely to commute back to the city for work, they may also commute back for church services. Large megachurches have been an attractive magnet for exurban

commuters and rural residents alike, pulling attendance away from smaller, rural congregations. A series of case studies by Eiesland (1997) showed that the presence of a megachurch forced some smaller churches to develop specialized growth or survival strategies. Competition from city churches can result in greater openness and better services by the smaller local churches.

Based on these studies, we anticipate, first, that differences between the exurbanites and the rural natives will be noted in the north central U.S. as well. Second, we expect that the differences in characteristics and expectations of these two groups will negatively affect their relationship with each other. Third, we anticipate that changes in their relationships will occur over time in a step-wise order whereby more positive relationships will result. And fourth, the kinds of differences observed between the two population groups will impact the dynamics the rural communities' social institutions.

The following descriptive study examines the impact of exurban population growth on the rural churches in a county near Minneapolis-St. Paul. The study has three objectives. First, clergies' and lay leaders' perceptions of exurbanites and natives are compared. Of particular interest are comparisons of personal, family, and occupational characteristics, religious and spiritual formation, what each group wants from church, preferences for

how the church should operate, and their levels of contributions to and participation in the church. Second, clergies' and lay leaders' perceptions of the impact of exurbanization on the churches are examined. And third, perceptions of the relationships between exurbanites and natives are explored.

Methods

Data Used in the Study. Data were collected from a variety of sources. First, in-depth, structured interviews were conducted in Spring and Summer 2000 with 11 clergy members (two Catholic priests and nine Protestant ministers) in six Wright County communities experiencing the largest population increases. Each interviewee was contacted in person, and a follow-up questionnaire was mailed or e-mailed later. The interviews and questionnaires addressed the characteristics of the natives and the newcomers, the perceived impact of exurbanization on the churches, the relationships between the natives and the newcomers, and the pastoral responses to exurbanization.

Second, up to four visits were made to these communities by the research team in Summer 2000. The visits consisted of observations and informal interviews with clergy, lay persons, residents, business owners, and local government officials. Observations and informal interviews were recorded as field notes.

These data were used to provide greater context to the clergy interviews.

Third, secondary data were gathered from sources such as the local Chambers of Commerce, denominational judicatory, and the U.S. Bureau of the Census. These data were used to determine changes in the population, demographic characteristics, churches, and businesses.

Fourth, documentary data were collected from the churches, local libraries, and media sources. These included local histories, maps, directories, and church bulletins and newsletters.

A process of triangulation was used to compare the data from these various sources. This process allowed the researchers to double-check the validity of observations, provide broader context, and to fill in incomplete information.

Reasons for Selecting Wright County. Wright County, Minnesota was selected, first, because of its location to a major metropolitan center, the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, and because of the population growth in several of its previously rural communities. The area meets the qualifications for the definition of "exurbanization" listed above. Second, the county seat (Buffalo) and communities along the Interstate-94 corridor (Albertville, St. Michael, and Monticello) experienced population growth and migration from urban areas. Each of these communities

had previously met the Census Bureau's less-than-2,500-population definition of "rural," which is part of the qualification to be a community experiencing exurbanization. Third, the area appears to be similar to other areas experiencing exurbanization making generalization possible.

The population of Wright County, MN was relatively stable between 1900 and 1960. However, the population grew from 29,935 in 1960 to 38,933 in 1970, to 58,681 in 1980, and to 68,710 in 1990. The county's estimated population in 1998 increased to 87,864, a 27.9 percent jump over the 1990 population. A substantial proportion of this increase resulted from net-migration into the county, particularly from the counties that make up the Twin Cities – Anoka, Carver, and Hennipen counties (see Table 1).

Table 1. Migration into and out of Wright County, Minnesota, 1985-1990.

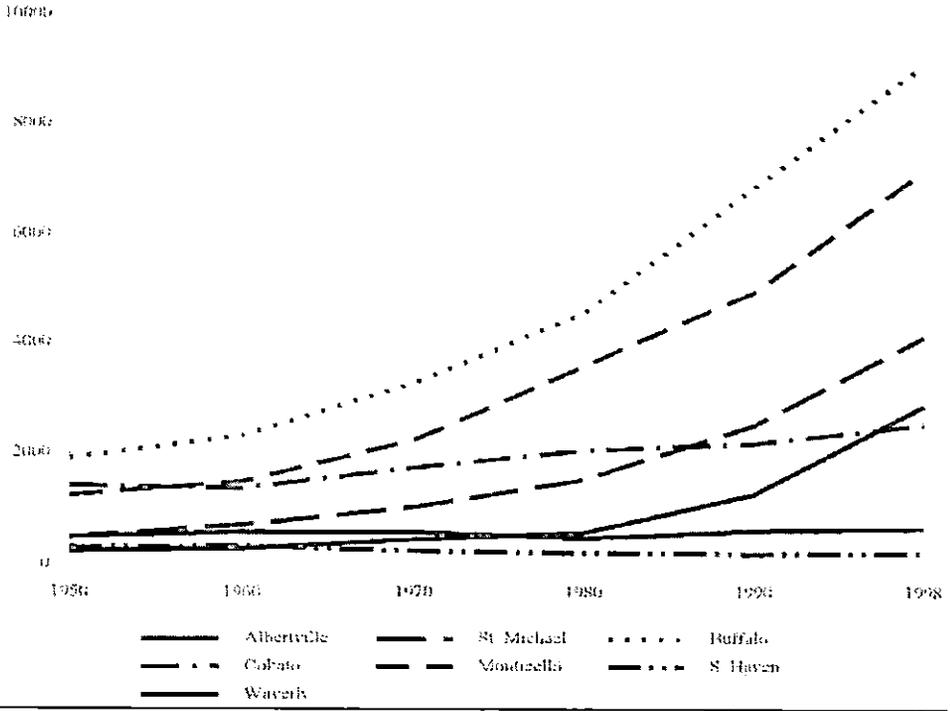
Adjacent County	Wright County In-migration	Wright County Out-migration	Wright County Net-migration
Anoka (MSA)	725	449	1,174
Carver (MSA)	406	212	618
Hennipen (MSA)	5,363	3,018	2,345
McLeod	236	257	493
Meeker	255	263	518

Table 1 Cont:: Migration into and out of Wright County, Minnesota, 1985-1990.

Adjacent County	Wright County In-migration	Wright County Out-migration	Wright County Net-migration
Sherburn	964	1,415	2,379
Sterns	639	729	1,368
Total	14,160	11,126	3,034

Source: County-to-County Migration Flows, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Special Project 312 (SP312), CD90-MIG-01, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Data User Services Division, Washington, DC 20233, January 1995.

None of the communities in the county would have been defined as urban (2,500 or more residents) in 1950. However, by 1998, substantial growth had taken place in most of the communities. Today, Albertville, St. Michael, Buffalo, Cokato, and Monticello have populations above 2,500; only Waverly and South Haven have experienced relatively little population growth (see Figure 1).



Clergies’ and Local Leaders’ Descriptions of the Exurbanites

Clergy, lay leaders, and other community residents were asked to describe the various characteristics of the newcomers. Their responses were aggregated and analyzed according to the following categories of characteristics.

Personal, Family, and Occupational Characteristics. The exurbanites’ lives, family involvements, and occupations are somewhat disconnected from the local community. Most of them

work outside of the local community and they commute to work in the city. Although some are hourly workers, most tend to be white-collar professionals, workers in skilled trades, computer specialists, medical doctors, lawyers, counselors, and school teachers. They have more education than the average resident.

The newcomers are typically dual-income families. Two incomes were seen as a necessity for their chosen life style. There are very few stay-at-home mothers. They tend to be affluent and upwardly mobile. One pastor noted that the newcomers are "making good money. The husband makes over \$40,000 and the wife makes over \$20,000." Much of their income is spent on making house payments. They may pay higher taxes than if they resided in the city, but the cost of comparable housing is somewhat lower.

The newcomers tend to be younger than the average residents, and are often young couples with children. They tend to be very busy people who are going in many directions at the same time. One of the clergy noted that the newcomers "are of a consumer mentality more than of a servant mentality. School activities have a higher priority than the church."

Religious and Spiritual Formation. The religious and spiritual formation of the exurbanites is very heterogeneous. Given the denominational affiliation of the region, it is not surprising that a high percentage are Lutherans or Catholics. A substantial

percentage of new residents have a Catholic background, and were drawn to the community by its strong Catholic presence and heritage. They are looking for a Catholic school to educate their children. Many of the Catholics favor either a conservative or a charismatic mode of religious expression. A variety of other denominations are represented by the exurbanites, including "nature religion," and many are unchurched. One minister noted that, although religious independence is a mark of the exurbanites, many of them "haven't been in church for 10 to 15 years, but are now settling in, putting down roots, and wanting community."

The clergy were mixed in their description of the exurbanites' religious commitments. Some of the clergy perceived that the exurbanites are "usually spiritually grounded having come from a Christian church" and that they are "more church-minded."

On the other hand, other clergy noted that "there is a high degree of biblical illiteracy and some disdain for religious traditions. They become attached to a local church, but not necessarily to a denomination. They tend to ask, "What is best for my family and their needs?" and "Is the church meeting my needs?" They have a limited understanding of Christianity and church. The clergy describe them as "people who have 'marginal' church backgrounds. They know where they have come from, but little more than the name of the church. Their spiritual formation is very weak."

Nevertheless, the clergy recognize a desire on the part of the parents for religious education for their children. The expectation is that the church will provide religious education because there is no time at home to do so. One priest said, "Most (newcomers) seem happy about the opportunities the parish offers for their children."

What They Want from the Church. Clergy from each of the churches emphasized above all else exurbanites' desire for programs for their children. They want the churches to provide quality, active children's and youth ministry programs, including instruction for their children. One minister said, "They want the church to figure out how to assure their children will grow up with moral values."

Second, the clergy observed that exurbanites want an all-encompassing ministry program, which includes dynamic worship, good liturgies, good preaching, good religious formation programs, counseling, and family activities.

Third, they are "looking for community," defined as desiring real friendships, connections with God, identity, hope, a sense of "family." One pastor stated, "They want, first of all, to feel good about coming to and being involved in the church. In our particular setting, being a newer congregation, our people want to be involved and noticed. If they didn't and wanted to hide, they would attend a larger congregation where that would be easier."

Although whereas some exurbanites seek to be part of a church community, others are committed to keeping their schedules clear for themselves.

Preference for How the Church Should Operate:

Exurbanites desire high lay involvement and leadership AND strong, competent pastoral leadership. Their preference is for the church to be open and democratic and listening to their opinions and wants. This is illustrated by one pastor's comment: "Our congregation wants to be involved and have a say in how things operate, but the tension of daily life conflicts with that desire. More often than they want, daily life wins, and the ministry of the church is left to the leadership and the pastor."

The pastor of a newly planted church observed that a new startup church must begin with a core group, leadership, and programming in place because people expect a high degree of programming. Another minister said that they have a strong core of volunteers, however many newcomers prefer to drop off their children for church programs without participating themselves in the program. They want the church to provide programs and not ask for financial or time commitments.

Contributions to and Participation Levels in the Church: A

small proportion of the newcomers in the congregation contribute a large percentage of the offering. One Protestant minister said that

the “80/20 rule applies” in that 80 percent of the contributions are given by 20 percent of the families. A Catholic priest noted that about one-third of these families contribute very little in their offering envelopes, an average of about \$8 per Sunday. Regarding those who do make contributions, the clergy believed that offerings are made whether or not the person attends on a given Sunday. However, some give a small amount when they are in church and do not make up for when they are not in attendance.

Some of the congregations, particularly those starting new churches believe that building programs can often provide focus to stewardship. One minister whose congregation is in the middle of a building project stated, “I don’t see there being a contrast between the people coming into the church from urban areas and the people who grew up in the area as far as stewardship goes. The bigger factor in stewardship is the training they received as children. It takes time to develop stewardship in people just coming back to the church after decades of inactivity.”

Active participation of the exurbanites in the local church may take time to establish. Many may get involved in a local congregation within a year of their arrival in the community. One pastor said that they encourage newcomers to step back for a year and get acquainted with the congregation before becoming extensively involved in the church’s ministries.

Other clergy noted that it seems to take a long period of time for people to actively engage in the church's ministry. One reason for this time period is that some of the newcomers commute back to the Twin Cities to a church where they've been involved. Many of those who attend church in the Twin Cities eventually decline their city church involvement and start to shop for a church in the local community. They will either become involved in a local congregation or drop out and become unchurched.

Busy family schedules have made it difficult for the newcomers to find time to meet and socialize with other people. Many of them are two-career commuters with young children. They have little time to volunteer to the church or community. And, many of the newcomers have heavy mortgage payments which reduces their ability to make financial contributions.

Clergies' and Local Leader' Description of the Natives

Clergy, lay leaders, and other community residents were asked to describe the natives' characteristics. Their responses were aggregated and analyzed as follows.

Personal, Family, and Occupational Characteristics: The natives have a strong German Catholic background. One priest described the older, ethnic residents as "old-style, German -- strong-willed, authoritarian, and domineering." They are strongly family

focused. Occupationally, the natives are a mixture of blue-collar, white-collar, and hourly workers, small business owners, farmers, and teachers. Many of the natives' children who stayed in the community work in the trades – building, carpentry, and excavation. Additionally, they are educationally mixed.

One of the local ministers compared the characteristics of the two groups: "The natives have a greater ownership of what's going on in the community at large. Newcomers only live here, their life is elsewhere, at least for now, but natives are part of the workings of the community, know what's going on, read the paper, and with some fear and trepidation try to maintain control of uncontrollable growth."

Religious and Spiritual Formation: A substantial proportion of natives are German Catholic. One priest observed that "they have a good, traditional Catholic faith. They attend Sunday morning Mass and keep the statues. They are strong on having a priest."

The influence of that tradition continues even for those who joined Protestant churches. The pastor of a small, evangelical Protestant congregation said, "We have a few younger people who left the Catholic church. They are more used to formal services and religious education, but appreciate the spontaneity of worship." They want the "gospel in Word and Sacrament to develop their

faith.” Faith is a salient part of the natives’ life experience. They grew up in the church, and some are “extremely strong in the Word and service.” Various renewal movements impacted these people and they are willing to take leadership in the ministries of the church.

The natives are described as being more rooted and more secure with their religious foundations partly because they know the people who laid them. They are less influenced by the fads of the church, and willing to live for the long run rather than immediate gratification. They have more of a servant mindset than a consumer mindset. They are at a point of discovery because the exurban changes encourage personal growth.

What They Want from the Church: The items perceived by the clergy as desired by natives were similar to those perceived also as desirable by the exurbanites. However, the order of emphasis reversed. The first item was community, identity, fellowship, and a place to be one’s spiritual home. “Family” appeared to be preferred over “consumer” as the model for church.

Second, all-encompassing church programs should address spiritual development, forgiveness and salvation, social activities, Biblical soundness and integrity, meaningful, blended worship, and strong educational experience. Third, a strong children’s program should be provided. The different placement of children’s

programming likely reflects the differences in family lifecycle stages between the exurbanites and the natives.

Preference for How the Church Should Operate: One minister believed that the natives desire lay leadership in all areas, even in the worship services. However, all of the other clergy noted that traditions are hard to forget or change. They said that the natives tend to be more content with status quo than with making things change. Change, they noted, can be frightening at times, and the natives tend to value stability more than change. They often are accustomed to having little input. Many feel the church should operate as it always has operated. One pastor quipped, "The folks in the grave yard next to the church are still voting."

Contributions to and Participation Levels in the Church: Although the clergies' responses varied, most noted that the natives' contribution levels were relatively high. Some noted that the "80/20 principle" applied, as did the "bell curve principle" in that the majority provided average contributions with a smaller number giving substantially more than average or less than average. There appears to be an age distinction in giving patterns. One minister observed that the financial commitment of the older generation to the church is high, although it is largely out of duty. The younger generation's commitment appears to be in name only. They are not as closely tied to the church, its requirements, and

doctrines.

The natives are reported to have a very high level of leadership in their congregations. Clergy reported that between 60 and 70 percent are actively involved in church leadership in one way or another.

The Impact of Exurbanization on the Churches

The number of churches in Wright County increased each decade from 59 in 1971, to 72 in 1980, to 76 in 1990, and to 91 in 2000. The number of Catholic churches (11), Presbyterian churches (4), United Church of Christ churches (2), and United Methodist churches (9) remained the same during the three-decade period. Other denominations planted additional congregations (Baptist General Conference, Evangelical Covenant Church, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). Other Lutheran denominations and the category, Other Denominations, also saw substantial increases in the number of congregations (Table 2).

Table 2. Number of Churches in Wright Co., Minnesota.

Denomination	1971	1980	1990	2000
Baptist General Conference	na	2	2	4
Catholic	11	11	11	11
Evangelical Covenant Church	4	4	5	6

Table 2 Cont: Number of Churches in Wright Co., Minnesota.

Denomination	1971	1980	1990	2000
Evangelical Free Church	na	4	5	4
Evan. Lutheran Church in	13	13	16	16
Other Lutheran denominations	11	12	14	20
Presbyterian Church, USA	4	4	4	4
United Church of Christ	2	2	2	2
United Methodist Church	9	10	9	9
Other Denominations **	5	9	13	15
TOTAL	59	72	76	91

Other Lutheran denominations *: Free Lutheran, Laestadian Lutheran, Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, and Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Other denominations **: Assembly of God, Christian & Missionary Alliance, Christian Church (Disciples), Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, Latter Day Saints (Mormon), Churches of Christ, Episcopal, Reformed Church in America, Southern Baptist Convention, and undetermined denominations.
Sources: Johnson, et al., 1974; Quinn, et al., 1982; Bradley, et al., 1992.

Most of the communities in the county had one or two large, dominant churches -- usually Catholic and/or Lutheran. They often had other several smaller congregations -- usually Protestant denominations. New congregations -- usually Protestant -- were being planted in several communities, particularly those experiencing the fastest rates of growth. Some of the residents' and clergies' observations on the changes brought about by exurban population change follow.

Impacts on Large, Established (Dominant) Churches: Since the largest proportion of the state's church population is either Catholic (39.1%) or Lutheran (ELCA) (29.0%), in-migrants from the state into Wright County will likely reflect these denominational preferences. The clergy from these churches made observations on these changes. One priest noted that the number of families in his congregation nearly doubled and giving had increased over 55 percent during the decade of the 1990s. Pre-baptism programs are held monthly, and the Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) programs typically have about 20 students. There are plans underway to construct a new church building with larger seating capacity. There also appears to be a need to expand the Catholic school, add space for religious education programs, and hire additional staff to address social and family life issues.

Impacts on Smaller, Established Churches: Responses by clergy from these congregations varied. Some received occasional visitors, all of whom were new to the community. They saw a few families join the church, but reported slow growth. Others observed that they had experienced substantial growth such that their facilities were being stretched and had increased need of volunteers to staff their ministries.

Impact on New Church Plants: Clergy noted that their churches would not exist without exurbanization. They were

founded as a direct result of population growth. They attempted primarily to invite newcomers to their churches.

Relationships between Exurbanites and Natives

The clergy described the relationship between the exurbanites and the natives. Most said that the newcomers had been warmly received and were assimilated into the congregation. They described the current condition as cordial and affirming. However, based on their comments, a process or series of four stages occurred to bring them to the current condition. These four stages are resistance, co-existence, inclusion, and integration.

Resistance Stage: Coolness, if not animosity, by the natives toward the newcomers characterizes this stage. Natives were suspicious of the newcomers, and occasional verbal spats broke out among them.

The newcomers had a different worldview or outlook on life. They did not share a common history of the town or each others' views of what the community should look. They differed on whether to stifle or encourage growth, and faced the challenge of how to develop the community without losing its character. The natives faced change in many aspects of their culture as they changed from "cloistered," ethnically and religiously homogeneous communities to a more suburban, diverse environment. There was

little mutual trust or belief in the validity of each others' goals.

Residents in one of the communities told a story with almost mythic qualities that illustrated the resistance of the community to outside influences. Residents described about an individual from a church background other than that of the community's dominant denomination. He purchased a business in the community, but received very little local patronage. They had been warned by the clergy to maintain denominational hegemony in the community. The business did not survive.

Co-existence Stage: The natives and newcomers began to tolerate each others' presence in a co-existence stage as numbers of exurbanites grew. There were relatively few neighborhood relationships between natives and newcomers since the newcomers moved into new, separate subdivisions or residential developments. The growth of new, affluent subdivisions outside of or adjacent to the various rural communities contained the homes of the exurbanites, whereas the older, established residential areas within the city limits served as neighborhoods for the natives.

The churches were unable to bridge the gap between the natives and the newcomers since many of the newcomers commuted back to the Cities to worship. Clergy observed reluctance early on by the natives to changes in leadership as newcomers moved into the community and gained influence.

Town leadership remained in the hands of the long-established families. One minister stated, "There was an unwillingness to trust newcomers with an understanding of the heart and soul of the community." Nevertheless, the natives were willing to embrace the newcomer IF the newcomer willingly identified with the issues of the community. They then began the challenge of working together. Over time, suspicion declined.

Inclusion Stage: Several clergy commented that about one-third of the natives were afraid of the changes taking place in their community, one-third were neutral toward it, and one-third embraced it. The two groups found that they shared common interests in and concerns for the community, the schools, churches, and various organizations. A growing number of the newcomers participated in these functions, and relatively few problems were noted between the two groups. One minister noted, "Although we would occasionally hear nostalgic sentiments about the good-old-days from individuals of solidly German ethnic background, the newcomers diluted them because of their greater numbers."

Those who move into the community from the immediate area were already largely integrated since they knew people in the community. The newcomers from the Twin Cities took a longer time to be integrated. As more of the newcomers began to participate in the community, some areas of leadership were

opened to them, particularly on church councils.

Integration Stage: This stage built on an appreciation both groups have for their differences and similarities. For example, both the natives and newcomers wanted fresh, dynamic worship services, quality religious education programs, and contemporary music. Visitors' impressions of church were more likely to include "friendly, receptive, and inclusive." Newcomers reported that they felt welcomed when they visited the church.

At first the natives resisted changes in leadership, nevertheless major leadership changes took place in some congregations. As more of the newcomers were invited to participate in community and organizational leadership, they sometimes became less enthusiastic about seeing the community change. Several clergy noted that in many cases, the newcomers "wanted to slam the door on more development."

One of the clergy stated that about 90 percent of the leaders in his congregation are of the newcomer group, and tended to be younger (between 40 and 45 years old) than many of the other church members. During the beginning of the leadership turnover, some natives did not feel they had a part in leadership. Nevertheless, the change went smoothly; the older members felt respected by the younger members; and the older members were supportive of the new ministries that were developed.

Implications for Churches

Several implications stem from the findings of this study. First, the family and socioeconomic characteristics of the exurbanites differ somewhat from those of the natives. The unique characteristics of the urbanites may suggest needs that could be met by the churches. For example, a substantial proportion of both spouses of exurbanite families commute to work in the cities leaving their children in the local schools. Child care and youth programs are needed for these children between the time they are dismissed from school and when their parents return from work. Such services could be considered by local churches.

Second, many of the local churches perceive themselves as friendly and inclusive places. Yet, not all were perceived this way by the newcomers to the community. Rather, they found them unwelcoming and had difficulty breaking into existing social relationships. The self-perception of friendliness often is based on long-term relationships and family ties. Most are not intentionally unwelcoming, but rather are simply unaware of the need to create welcoming structures such as greeter and visitation teams.

Third, congregations in communities experiencing exurbanization must be intentional about handling the changes they will likely face. There may be increases in membership, increases in the number of children and youth, and demands for more programs

and greater varieties of programs. This can strain their resources, finances, paid and volunteer staff, and facilities. The newcomers' financial contributions and volunteer time may or may not offset the resource strain. Long-range planning is needed to determine if they want to grow and, if so, how they will accommodate the growth.

Fourth, the early stages of exurbanization may be stressful ones for the community given the potential conflicts between the newcomers and the natives. Natives may be disparaging toward each other as they question motives for supporting or resisting exurbanization. Political disputes can erupt between the newcomers and the natives over increased taxes, requests for infrastructural improvements, rezoning for residential and industrial development, and loss of in-town tax base to new schools, churches, and non-profit entities. Conflict may arise as both natives and early newcomers attempt to stem the tide of late newcomers in an attempt to maintain the rural character of the community. The church may play a role in conflict resolution among the various groups.

Exurbanization offers many challenges to the rural community, its residents, and institutions. The church may be positioned to play a key role in helping to address some of these challenges. To do so, the rural church must be flexible, intentional,

and servant-oriented.

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