

# *An Examination of An Official Board in Terms of Group Work Theory*

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JUST as the worker must be aware of the purposes, overt and covert, motivating the people and groups with whom he works, so must he be mindful of the value-assumptions that underlie his use of techniques to deal with what he feels to be pathologies, maladjustments, and opportunities to help people realize their highest potentials as persons. In this paper, we shall attempt to relate the assumptions and concepts of group-work to a particular situation. We shall begin with some comments on what group work is and what its assumptions are—we shall make some note of the present state of theory (which will be expanded somewhat in the notes). We shall then turn to an analysis of the situation of the Official Board of the Church in Elmwood. Stress will be laid on the constitution of the group, its various sub-groupings, the task—and morale—and maintenance—interactions of the group, its place in the institution, its relationship to the minister there (the author; hereafter, "W"—worker), the dynamics/process of its development since W's arrival, and the skills which—in relation to its strengths and weaknesses—seem to show promise for the constructive development of the group. Obviously, we cannot present the totality of material available to us, but must be selective in presenting the most important or that which is typical (an incident characteristic of a class). Because there are certain problems motivating the selection of the group by the writer, we shall indicate the relation-

ship between the skills selected and their projected effect upon the group as it develops from its present stage and situation.

As is the case with modern approaches to the problem of community organization<sup>1</sup>, work with groups is concerned with the needs of individuals within the group to develop the potentialities that they have within themselves.<sup>2</sup> Unquestionably, the group

<sup>1</sup> William W. and Loureide J. Biddle, *The Community Development Process: The Rediscovery of Local Initiative* (New York, 1965). And Lyle E. Schaller, *Community Organization: Conflict and Reconciliation* (New York, 1966). Note the emphasis in the Biddles' on the role of the individual in the process of community development—the realization of his potential. Schaller adds also an emphasis on the place of conflict in the organizing of a community. Both treat community development as a process—so is group organization.

<sup>2</sup> Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory* (White Plains, New York, 1953), p. 81, 93. Harleigh B. Trecker, *Social Group Work: Principles and Practices* (New York, 1948), p. 10. Trecker treats it as an "experience." Also, Trecker, p. 163 *et seq.* Gisela Konopka, *Social Group Work: A Helping Process* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963), p. 29. Konopka defines here "Social Group Work" in a way that has application: mentioning both the therapeutic and expanding character of group work. Also, Konopka, 72f., 167ff. In the latter, Konopka discusses the basic assumptions and values that underlie the entire process of social group work—note the stress on the development of the individual. Michael S. Olmsted, *The Small Group* (New York, 1959), p. 64. Freud considers good functioning to be "Love and work"—the internal and external of the group perhaps? W. W. Meissner, *Group Dynamics in the Religious Life* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1965), p. 131 *et. seq.* Meissner distinguishes alternative values that must be weighed in group work within a society of the religious (Roman Catholic)—note that there are parallels with what Konopka indicates if one follows one of Meissner's alternatives.

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offers the opportunity to have certain experiences that are valuable as such, and participation in the group is dependent in part upon the feeling of the involved person that the group is "fun"<sup>3,4</sup>, but there is the point that social group work, whether therapeutic or developmental, is concerned with developing the ability of the individual to share his strengths (and weaknesses) with others, to pool resources, and to learn to share leadership externally (toward a goal or task) and internally (with respect to the feelings and sentiments, the cohesion, of the group).<sup>5</sup> The individual has an opportunity to grow by discovering who he is in the context of discovering who discrete others are, by discovering possibilities of co-operation and constructive difference with these others, and by critically analyzing attitudes and ideas in the context of conflict and discussion with persons who, through the group process, have become for him significant others.<sup>6</sup> In other words, this maturing process involves both capacities with regard to definite, concrete goals and with regard to capacities of emotion, sentiment, and feeling.

Although there are a number of different paradigms that have been suggested for organizing group behavior, these paradigms involve considerations of the nature of the task/goals, the social and cultural contexts, the abstract symbols and ideas which tie the group together, and the concrete expressive and morale factors in the

group.<sup>7</sup> There are differences between individuals—in roles, leadership and power, status, kinds and distributions of abilities, physical factors (age, sex, e.g.)<sup>8</sup>. There are the skills of the worker—originating the group, assessment, participation, program, resource-utilization, evaluation, communication, leadership development.<sup>9</sup> Frequently, as in this context, there is the problem of relating the concerns of the group to those of the sponsoring agency or institution.<sup>10</sup> Our analysis of the Elmwood situation will be informed by the utilization in part of Trecker's check-list for the analysis of groups. Because of the nature of the institutional relationship and the period of time over which the group has been developing with W, we shall make some definite departures from it.<sup>11</sup>

The Elmwood Church is 102 years old. There is no contact in the church with members of more than 50 years' standing. The Official Board is composed almost exclusively of people who have been in the community for less than fifteen years, or who have returned after some years elsewhere. The community has a comparatively low cost-of-living rate so it attracts elderly retired people and blue collar workers. The Elmwood

<sup>3</sup> Trecker, p. 10. Olmsted, p. 47. Olmsted analyzes certain typical cases in group dynamics to show that there is more than just "fun" going on in groups.

<sup>4</sup> Trecker, p. 163 *et. seq.*

<sup>5</sup> Konopka, p. 29. Roland L. Warren, *The Community in America* (Chicago, 1963), pp. 140f. Mason Haire, ed., *Modern Organization Theory* (New York), 1959), p. 73. Olmsted, p. 139. Note similarities between Warren and Olmsted although they are supposedly concerned with slightly different phenomena.

<sup>6</sup> Cartwright and Zander, pp. 81, 93. Trecker, p. 163 *et. seq.*

<sup>7</sup> Olmsted, p. 139. Haire, pp. 73, 156ff. Warren, pp. 140ff. Philip Selznick, *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (White Plains, New York, 1957), pp. 91 *et. seq.*

<sup>8</sup> Olmsted, pp. 120f. Josephine Klein, *The Study of Groups* (London, 1956), pp. 23f. Meissner, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> Haire, p. 67. Trecker, pp. 53f. Dean C. Barnlund and Franklin S. Haiman, *The Dynamics of Discussion* (Boston, 1960), pp. 278 *et. seq.* Walter M. Lifton, *Working with Groups: Group Process and Individual Growth* (New York, 1961), p. 98. There are here various checklists that the leader of a group could well use to some advantage in examining what it is he thinks he is doing. They range from a fairly direct one that everyone needs to ask himself (Trecker) to one that is quite psychologistic and intended for use in directing group therapy (Lifton).

<sup>10</sup> Trecker, pp. 36f.

<sup>11</sup> Trecker, pp. 66ff.

Church's membership tends to include those in the community with more education and status—although some with the highest statuses are nominal members. The age-spread is fairly even except for the total absence of young adults, though not younger married couples. The Official Board is the administrative body of the church—it is self-perpetuating by church law and denominational law. It is not wholly representative (see below). The Board functions formally and informally to deal with the plans and problems of the church—meeting mostly informally following church. Attendance at formal meetings is sporadic. The Board is divided according to the requirements of the Methodist **Discipline** into various subcommittees, which as a matter of fact are inoperative, to deal with the different functions of the church. The constitution of the Official Board has changed radically in the past five years. In 1963, the people united behind a student minister in the effort to prove to denominational officials the financial and institutional soundness of the church by meeting all conference obligations, in order to secure a full-time pastor. Almost as soon as this had been done, the older leadership began to leave the church. When the appointed man proved quite outspoken (to the point of preaching against actions of church members in their presence), more joined the exodus. After two years, this minister took a chaplaincy at the state penitentiary and moved some eight miles away. He transferred his membership (but not his interests) to a near-by community. He has represented a significant "outside" factor. Replacing the lost leadership on the Board were people from approximately the same social group and community status, who served under an essentially autocratic system where the minister was chairman of the Board and directed most task activities. Into this situation came W.

The Board is divided into four sub-

groups. Members of the Board and of the church have closer associations with these groups than they do with the Board (which represents the leadership core of the church), both within the church and socially (within the community). Because of the small size of the church, the Board constitutes a nascent group—people cannot help but know one another well—but their loyalties are with the smaller groups. So much so, in fact, that it is difficult to unite these groups to the support of the church and to mobilize the full resources of the Board except under emergency conditions.

Group I represents the now Old Guard of the church. These people have position, status and economic security in the community. They are older (fifty-five to seventy), and tend to be rather conservative in terms of activity (not theology or politics)—taking considerable amounts of time to reach decisions on church program and goals. These people meet frequently socially, usually through the community's more prestigious social organizations. Aaron and Vona own a small retail outlet under franchise for a hardware and furniture chain. Both have remarried following the deaths of their partners. Aaron is a Mason and Vona belongs to the Eastern Star and PEO. Like the others in this group, they hold the most important positions in the church. Aaron is Treasurer and a Trustee, past head of the Pastoral Relations Committee. Vona is secretary of the Quarterly Conference (the biannual inspection of the Board by the District Superintendent). Barb is the wife of a contractor known for building high mountain roads. She is the "head" of the Southside ladies, the wives of ranchers in a small community ten miles south of Elmwood. A Trustee, Barb also directs the choir and is a past president of the woman's society. Alice is another Southside lady who is a high school teacher (head of the cheer leaders—a most prestigious organization), a Steward and Director of

the Vacation Church School. Andy and Dot are Elmwood stalwarts who have grown up in the community. Andy is Boy Scout District Commissioner, and works for the Post Office (one of Elmwood's "higher" occupations). He is institutional Representative for the church; Dot heads the Education Commission. Martha is a retired widow—her position is secure financially and she is part of the "unofficial Board".

Group II represents the Young Turks. They are the married couples with children who are upwardly mobile in the church and the community. They are afraid of the status of the Old Guard and will oppose them privately but never in a meeting of the Board. They range in age between 22 and 50. They are strongly desirous of getting the church more active, with setting aside some of the traditional and conservative practices of the church for those which are more modern and accepted. They hold positions of definite responsibility and status, although their net status is lower than that of Group I. We should include here Fred and Sandy, assistant mortician and his wife, who are very active in the community (especially service clubs). Fred heads Methodist Men and the Pastoral Relations Committee; Sandy, the Commission on Christian Social Concerns. Sandy also teaches Sunday School. Ed and Tina, an industrial technician and his wife, are active in the church—he is a Trustee and Steward; she is Sunday School Secretary. John and Jo ran a grocery store that closed—he is now a semi-skilled laborer. He is a Trustee; she, Sunday School Superintendent. They have dropped in community status since they closed their store and left the community service clubs. Everett and Cynthia are isolates<sup>12</sup> (I believe both are divorced), but are akin in spirit to this group. She can play the organ, but church attendance drops steeply when she does—when she had to fill in for some months recently, the

church finances were seriously affected. Her suggestions are ignored on the Board, although she has been its secretary. Everett is Lay Leader and a Lay Speaker—mostly because of his personal interest. He is a skilled laborer; she has taught school and writes the society column for the local paper (others' fear of which no doubt increases her isolation—she is fiercely independent).

Group III consists of those who left the church in recent years but hold no strong feelings against it. They come once or twice a year and support it somewhat financially. There are two postal workers in this group (both Masons) who are Trustees and one of whom is on the Pastoral Relations Committee. The head of the Commission on Membership and Evangelism is also in the group with her mother. Her husband is a laborer. A well-known electrician is also in this group—he supports the church generously and is part of the "unofficial Board."

Group IV is composed of the retired people in the church. They are on fixed incomes; most of them are not secure financially. The women get together socially through the Woman's Society and their primary responsibilities for the church, aside from being stewards, is to do calling on the sick and bereaved. They have little policy influence except to support Group I insofar as its conservatism means the maintenance of understood traditions. Only one representative of this group has ever been at a Board meeting at any one time since W arrived. Most of these people are women; many are widowed; they are all over 70.

There is little social interaction between these groups. Elmwood has a large number of social and fraternal organizations that tend to separate these people almost automatically. Group II does many of its dealings through school organizations. It finds its interest and morale centered in the children and the school. Group I re-

<sup>12</sup> Konopka, p. 56.

lates through commercial and fraternal connections and associations (especially the OES, Masons, PEO). Group III is not a social unit as such—it is usually a dissenting group within Group I or II organizations. Group IV relates through church services and the Woman's Society above all.

W came into the situation after a delay which church officials had not explained to Elmwood Church. He came as an inexperienced bachelor, aware that role-problems would be major no matter what else also became significant simply by virtue of those two qualities. Neither he nor the church had any amount of prior information about the other. W had to break himself in and acquaint himself with the church. Clearly, the church Board expected him to discharge the direct leadership function in the area of task. The Board is quite concerned with the concrete goals and problems that confront it. Part of the reason that it has been so unable to mobilize its resources to meet task problems has been the lack of internal system leadership. No person on the Board discharges this function/role. The previous minister could not have, by the very nature of his relationship with the people in the church. The Board has expected the minister to provide leadership and direction, so conflict and disagreement have been minimal. The usual response to an idea coming from the minister is simply acceptance, even if the idea be specifically presented as such and not as policy.<sup>13</sup> The high degree of organization required by the denomination, the financial and membership difficulties of the church (the solutions to which are at once simple and almost impossible if seen in terms of re-relating the church and some of those who have left it), and the distinct status differences combine to create a situation in which participation in the Board is low and disagree-

ment nil.<sup>14</sup> This situation is not at variance with theory (see notes). The large problems in the area of task directly stand in the way of improving morale because they are seen as insuperable. Further, the crisis psychology only heightens an already all-too-present conviction of futility. The function of the Board has come to be the preservation of the local church—period.

The role difficulties of such a situation require discussion under several different headings.<sup>15</sup> First, W must be a professional worker in the church. When no Board chairman is elected, he must serve. He is expected to present the denominational program to the church, to be an expert on the requirements of denominational procedures, and to provide guidance and direction in the operation of the denominationally-required church organization. In other words, the denomination has so defined the role of the minister that there are certain task and information leadership functions that he cannot delegate nor fail to exercise himself. In a situation where a reduced leadership role (or a changed one) seems in

<sup>14</sup> Olmsted, p. 103. Forms of communication. Klein, pp. 37ff., 74f. Barnlund, pp. 216f. (power), 250ff. (sub-groups). Barnlund points out that silence is often a defense against final rejection or ridicule by a group—a person is threatened by power and status. Klein's principles of communication which are elucidated in the chapters which close with the summaries noted here provide that organizations and problems interact to produce communication or barriers. Organization is fine and usually more efficient, but there are situations when much organization is no blessing. Communication resumes more slowly, e.g., after an interruption, the more highly organized the group. Klein's article is assumed in the course of this entire discussion in the paper.

<sup>15</sup> Haire, p. 45. Erving Goffman, *Encounters* (Indianapolis, Indiana, 1961), *passim*. Amitai Etzioni, *Modern Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1964), pp. 75 *et. seq.* Goffman is very provocative in the latter portion of the book when he discusses role-conflicts using the example of children on a merry-go-round.

<sup>13</sup> Olmsted, p. 41. Barnlund, pp. 195f, 222 *et. seq.*

order, this situation is a serious complication. The church was aware that W would be a student minister—but this could not change the discrepancy between the desires of the Board and what they would have to expect—this problem was increased by the fact that many of the Board had not served with the previous student and had no experience to draw on. They further expected skills to be concentrated in direct leadership and work with individuals, in financing the church program. W was quite well aware that his situation, personality, and inexperience would create role conflict even if there were no other factors at work. W saw the possibility of either being, himself, or being the agent of an *ideal* morale factor for the church and the Board; he did not expect to be an internal system leader. He expected himself to concentrate upon programmatic skills—teaching, preaching, worship—as opposed to directly pastoral—counseling, extensive calling. W quickly became aware that tradition must be kept in the forefront to maintain the support of Groups I and IV (I provides the major financial support of the church) while his bachelorhood and slight male social maladroitness appealed to Groups II and IV. His age (20) tended to alienate him from some of the older people in the church, contrary to his expectations. The situation of being a ministerial student *a fortiori* implied role-confusion for W during his first year or so, which fact was also not exactly helpful. During the first year W was at Elmwood, the church celebrated its 100th Anniversary. That first year was therefore strong in program and financial support, although a decrease from the year before. The second year represented a more serious decline in finances to the point where the continuation of the church was twice threatened. This latter problem motivated W to select this group as the group for analysis.

To this point we have sketched a number of facts, albeit we have simply

suggested many other points that might be added in greater detail and clarity. But this information is useful only in the context of W's relating himself in the context of the institution to the group. Granted the ambiguous situation at the beginnings, and the problems, how does our analysis of the group and its dynamics affect W's present and future relationship with these people and his role on the Board? To answer this question, we need more carefully to analyze how the situation in the group has developed over these two years.

During the first year, W could hardly fail, if only by denominational necessity, to fulfill at least some of the group's expectations of leadership. Moreover, his own programmatic concern somewhat aided and abetted this emphasis even if he did not directly seek to assume so much leadership. The Board functioned almost solely as an administrative unit. Meetings were every other month at best—this was satisfactory to the members of the group. Informal meetings were relatively infrequent and usually concerned direct programs or problems. Gradually, though, in his second year, W became aware of the possibility of exercising the role of enabler and the need for it at Elmwood church if the Board were to develop indigenous leadership to meet the responsibilities of the church that a student minister cannot fulfill. As the teaching and worship concern became related to this interest, there slowly grew an awareness by group members of the discrepancy of role-expectations because: (1) people who had left the church were not coming back, (2) finances were suffering and we were forced to employ the unpopular organist (which made matters worse), (3) many programmatic activities of the church stopped for lack of lay leadership, and (4) the minister was away on vacation and then hospitalized only two months later, leaving the church entirely dependent on its non-existent lay leadership. Gradually, volunteers

began to take over the most important groups (choir, junior choir, the Adult Class) and membership and attendance started back up. The combination of a financial appeal and organist change bought some more time. These measures represented a growing awareness of some problems but no concrete solution. Leadership appeared to take over both Junior and Senior MYF's when Aaron and Vona were no longer able to carry the responsibility. Much of this new leadership come from Group II—although they were unwilling to take direct issue with group I, nor to jump in and take over, gradually they assumed greater responsibility where it became available. In the past few months, these people who have increased their leadership responsibilities in the church have been much more willing and able to assume them as a direct function of the operation of the Board. When W suggested that the time had come to elect officers of the Board, and for him to step down as chairman, the suggestion was accepted unanimously, with interest that would not have been (and was not, to the best of his knowledge) there six months before. The Board is now asking that worship be made a direct part of the Board meeting—when W came, worship was regarded as peripheral, so W discontinued it. W has been invited to join (and has joined) certain local fraternal organizations—gradually, he is being looked upon without inhibiting professional aura or taint—enabling W to be a member of the group, to support morale and delegate task-leadership. Clearly, the desire in the Board to renew worship represents a new attitude toward the morale function of the Board. While the group members begin to assume task leadership roles, W can direct his efforts to strengthening cohesion through supporting morale. As confidence in leadership abilities grows, the morale and cohesion roles can partly shift to the group as well (though the institutional relationship of the minister probably

implies that there are certain portions of both kinds of leadership roles that he cannot shed however much he would like to). There is a growing tendency for program ideas and planning to originate with the group—e.g., recent planning of an ice cream social and church picnic involved mostly administrative direction rather than direct task leadership by W—something which has not been frequent. Summer offering and attendance have gone ahead of that of the past winter—a most unusual situation. Now that W is more aware of the dynamics of the situation, what directions ought he to move now?

First, his responsibility is clearly to support the growth of group cohesion. The Board is one of the few community groups where these sub-groups meet directly. The Board may function in part to unite the church by forming a network of associations between persons who interact in other widely-varying groups. The growth of leadership on the Board would also imply strengthening of related groups within and without the church. Further, for this suggestion to be realized, the Board must gradually incorporate more people from Groups III and IV. In the case of Group IV, it means breaking the pattern of assigning them the responsibility of calling on their own number and get them into interaction with the other groups in the church—as a beginning, Norma has been made head of the Greeting Committee. One or two commission chairmanships ought to be made available to them, as well as representation on standing and special Board committees. As a symbol of this move, a retired Methodist minister who lives nearby will be invited to preach or help in worship or church activities from time to time. Since he once served Elmwood church, he is symbolic for many in the church.

For Group III, involvement is more difficult. Simply inviting them to participate in activities of the Board is often not incentive. Since many of these

people held special positions in the church that they left, there would seem to be some potential in trying to fit interest and experience to task. The head of the Commission on Membership and Evangelism is now coming to church for the first time in two years—with her mother, on whom this going to church means something of a hardship. It is possible that working on her interest in youth might have some eventual success. A lay-run newsletter is also under Board consideration—an item known to interest this group. In other words, the Board must expand its circle to some not in the group before it can realize all its potential.

Second, W needs to place more emphasis on the skills of leadership development and goal-determination. The emphasis of the group needs to be taken off its direct task concern and placed on its responsibility to become a representative group (a network group) for the church. With the group assuming its own leadership, gradually it can be led to reassess its goals. Possibly more emphasis can be placed on immediate program (leadership opportunities for members of the Board) and on the fellowship of the group, and less on the long-range task of growth as an institution. W has been making a point which he will expand even more of being available and accessible, personally as well as in a professional role. (Meetings of the Board and other church groups are being shifted to the parsonage; structure, where W must determine it, is being made for more loose and free. Wherever opportunities some for sharing leadership, W is making more point to share it (including encouraging the choir to pick or suggest hymns, seeking suggestions on special worship programs—encouraging lay sharing of the priestly role which may reduce role-confusion some at the same time).

In the context of this particular situation, it is clear that the worker's skills must be directed toward expanding the

group-feeling and cohesion. Only from this strengthening of the group can the ability to meet the larger problems of the church come. This means a concentration on internal mechanisms and inter-actions. This point means concentrating on openness of feeling and personality. In part, W must assume direction of morale-functions so that leadership can grow enough, and cohesion grow enough that morale-building can also be shared in time. From Olmsted's paradigm of the group<sup>10</sup>, we may infer that the symbolic and harmonizing skills and roles are the ones W should seek to emphasize. We should also say, though, that the sharing of evaluation and assessment responsibilities is important—the group needs to determine the nature and level of its own functioning and should assume responsibility for it. Goal-determination is integral to functioning level and quality. It is entirely possible that group strength can utilize the subgroups so that IV can take over some morale functions, I can direct tasks, and II can get satisfaction from exercising concrete leadership (and find approved outlet in the couples' club) while leaving I to determine goals and tasks at the more abstract level.

More could and should be said; we have pointed in this analysis to some central matters, to the exclusion of much. An abstract contemplation is in some respects no substitute for concrete presence in a definite situation—even for the person who is writing about it. One cannot fail to fear that he has let his own ego-defenses and his own ego-strengths and weaknesses determine what is said and what goes unsaid. To what extent we read what we wish to read in life, it is hard to say. I would fear that here as other places it is much—perhaps too much. Yet from such an analysis as this can come some insights into ourselves and the group that will enable us to enable others. Which latter, as we noted at the beginning, is something of what group work is all about..



<sup>10</sup> Olmsted, p. 139. Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn. *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (New York, 1966), pp. 319 *et seq.* N. B.: I would suggest that the interpolative function is the one which is needed at Elmwood. The problem is not per se the charismatic one of establishing an organization—the group and the organization are there. The problem is so to extend, expand, and develop the group that it can set realize the very obvious potentialities that it has. The problem is to see how the sub-systems relate—what the sub-groups are and what groups are primary, what are secondary. What is needed is, from Katz' paradigm,

to get these various groups together and functioning as a unity and a unit. The problem, I would infer, is that of establishing the cohesion throughout the entire group rather than in sections of it. Moreover, I would suggest that until the cohesion and the morale of the group are both strengthened, concentration on the task-function of the group can only be self-defeating since the potentialities for progress and process can only be released by relieving ourselves of a sense of futility and turning toward the group and away from problems as yet too much for us. It is a paradox—you cannot do it until you turn away.

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