

Chapter Three

Strategies for Evangelism and Growth in Three Denominations (1965–1990)

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The story of mainline Protestant membership trends since World War II is well known and much discussed. For the twenty years following World War II, riding on the crest of prosperity, suburbanization, a “baby boom,” and all-time high church participation levels, the denominations of the Protestant mainline grew vigorously. From the mid-1960s onward, however, the graphs charting membership trends began to point downward rather than upward, at times to a frightening degree. The literature describing and analyzing these trends is voluminous; yet, there is a paucity of literature on the response of these same denominations to their decline. This is puzzling because since the mid-1960s, significant changes have occurred in mainline Protestant evangelism and new church development programs. In addition to these changes, the emergence of the “church growth movement” in the 1970s added a new dimension to church outreach and extension. Such salient developments undoubtedly are related to the membership decline that disturbed mainline Protestant leaders throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s.

This chapter examines the evangelism, church growth, and new church development programs of three historic, mainline Protestant denominations—the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. (ABC), the United Church of Christ (UCC) and The United Methodist Church (UMC)—and compares them briefly with the experience of a fourth, the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (PCUSA). All four denominations occupy an important place in American religious history. Each has been an integral part of the nation’s religious establishment. Each experienced significant numerical decline in their white constituencies since the mid-1960s and responded in various ways to the decline through programmatic efforts in evangelism, church growth, and new church development. And, each is seeking to find their niche in a changed American religious marketplace (see Roof and McKinney, 1987:229-51 and Berger, 1967:137-47).

The findings of this study are based upon thirty face-to-face interviews with past and present national level denominational executives and staff in the ABC, UCC, and UMC. In addition, numerous books, articles, reports, and archival materials—most of which are not cited—were reviewed. “Informants” in each of the three denominations, each having worked in high denominational positions over a significant span of time, provided especially candid and useful insights about the theological and political nuances of their denomination. The interviews and materials reviewed point out striking similarities between the three denominations, and equally striking similarities between them and the PCUSA. From the findings of this study, a number of conclusions about evangelism, church growth, and new church development in the Protestant mainline are offered.

The American Baptist Churches

Unlike the other denominations examined in this study, the ABC is not the result of a series of mergers. It is, for the most part, a repository of more moderate Baptists, the result of two centuries of sifting through an unwieldy and fractious Baptist movement. Perhaps the most celebrated sifting of Baptists occurred in 1845 with the separation of northern and southern Baptists, primarily over slavery, a division that has never been overcome. Later schisms were more pointedly theological in nature. By the 1920s, the ABC had coalesced into three distinct theological categories: liberals, a large middle group of conservatives, and fundamentalists (Torbet, 1973:433). Caught in the middle of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the ABC lost members to separating fundamentalists in the first half of this century. Despite the departure of most fundamentalists from the ABC, making its median theological position more moderate, theological conflict continues.

Evangelism

Few positions of leadership in the ABC are the focal point of the continuing theological tension more than the Director of Evangelism. From 1936 to 1991, the ABC has had only three: Walter Woodbury (1936–56), Jitsuo Morikawa (1956–76) and Emmett Johnson (1979–91). Each one has had a significant impact on the ABC and served as an “antidote” to the emphases of his predecessor, dramatizing the dilemma of a denomination caught in the middle of an ongoing theological tug-of-war.

Walter Woodbury’s method blazed a new path for ABC evangelism. Though he represented the conservative middle of the ABC, Woodbury’s visitation evangelism method rankled evangelical traditionalists who were com-

mitted to clergy-dominated, revivalistic mass evangelism. Used for years in the ABC, his method involved going door to door to present the gospel to unchurched people through the use of flip charts, a method spawned in an era when door-to-door sales were commonplace. Though some in the ABC refer to the Woodbury method as simplistic, it was effective in three ways: (1) it enlisted lay participation, (2) it was meant for the local church, and (3) it kept close to the historic, evangelical roots of the ABC. Criticism of the Woodbury approach was tempered by the "theological correctness" of his goal: to "save" people from their sins and bring them into the faith and fellowship of the Christian church. The work of his department was described as "soul winning," a phrase near and dear to ABC evangelicals (Woodbury, 1956:299).

Both Morikawa's theology and method of evangelism were a quantum leap from Woodbury's, and altogether averse to the long-standing tradition of revivalistic mass evangelism. In the span of twenty years, the arena for ABC denominational evangelism would shift from tents, auditoriums, and churches to living rooms and the institutions of American society. Morikawa believed that evangelism that aimed solely for individual conversion was too narrow and simplistic, failing to challenge all of society with the full claims of the gospel. Morikawa pressed for a more comprehensive definition of evangelism. Evangelism is (1) God's mission and not the church's, (2) social, not simply individual, (3) sending the church into the world and not winning the world into the church (Morikawa, 1963:8-12).

Given this definition of evangelism, the ABC program moved in bold new directions. Evangelism meant Christians disbursed as leaven in the secular world with clergy (as "worker-priests") and laity alike ministering *within* secular institutions. The goal was to transform all institutions to the point of acknowledging the Lordship of Christ and participating in the kingdom of God. Evangelism became "evangelism planning," an "action-reflection" research model by which the church listened to the secular world—through the arts, and the social and behavioral sciences—before engaging in mission. Evangelism became everything the church did, and the evangelism department's job was to assist the ABC's Board of National Ministries (BNM) with strategic planning for mission.

Morikawa maintained a headlock on ABC evangelism until "Key '73," a major interdenominational evangelism emphasis for North America. Through this event, ABC conservatives who were alienated by Morikawa's theology and methods had an opportunity to advocate their form of evangelism. Though Morikawa reluctantly supported Key '73, he tailored it to his theological taste with a follow-up program called "Evangelistic Life Style." Despite the alleged failure of Key '73 (see Newman and D'Antonio, 1978), it

reopened the evangelism debate in the ABC and Morikawa's critics were legion. In the words of one ABC leader, Morikawa "attempted to integrate his cosmic view of the role of the church into a church which had emphasized personal salvation and revivalism." "You can't baptize General Motors," was the criticism of another ABC leader. The conservative evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry criticized Morikawa's approach as "a 'contextual evangelism' which plays down gospel proclamation and emphasizes social action" (Torbet, 1973:479). On the other hand, most agree that Morikawa succeeded in generating serious debate on the meaning of evangelism (Hine, 1982:20).

The selection of Emmett Johnson to be the next Director of Evangelism made good political sense to the committee that labored for over two years to find a successor to Morikawa. The potential candidate had to emphasize traditional pietism, personal evangelism, and grass-roots programming suitable to the conservative middle of the ABC. The new director had to be able to communicate with "traditional people," meaning a more conventional, less controversial approach. Coming from the conservative, primarily Swedish, Baptist General Conference, Johnson had the right credentials as an evangelical. Both a successful pastor and evangelist, he described himself as a "left wing evangelical" committed to peace, civil rights, and conciliar ecumenism. In other words, his credentials would please two ABC constituencies—liberals and the conservative middle. His charisma and approach to evangelism found many supporters.

Johnson sought to reclaim personal evangelism, which had been neglected by the ABC's evangelism department for years. In doing so, he did not advocate a return to an old restrictive piety or old methods. He did, however, seek to maintain the long-standing ABC commitment to social witness. His task, as he saw it, was to fashion a "holistic" approach to evangelism, calling people to personal faith *and* mission in the world. Johnson's vision for evangelism was given a theological framework by the late George Peck, an influential ABC theologian and seminary president. In seeking to create "a theological environment for effective evangelism," Peck responded to Morikawa's theology of evangelism with six evangelistic objectives: (1) to make the gospel known, (2) to encourage the worshipping community, (3) to promote the growth of the church, (4) to ensure the quality of the church, (5) to prepare for service and action, and (6) to seek the conversion of individuals (Peck, 1983:21-29). Though affirming the importance of Christian witness through social service and action, Peck stressed the importance of personal evangelism.

During the Johnson era, evangelism was literally redefined with the assistance of the American Baptist Evangelism Team (an elite group of primarily

national and regional staff) and officially adopted by the ABC. Evangelism was also vigorously promoted. National convocations on evangelism were held. Several seminary conferences on evangelism were offered at ABC seminaries, even those that did not offer a course on the subject at the time. Evangelism and church growth were key program components at the ABC's 1983 Biennial Convention, and new church development was highlighted at the 1985 Biennial. Academies for Growing Churches were held across the nation. Other related conferences were held on prayer, "old first churches," and "faith faces the issues." New program materials were made available to ABC churches. These conferences and resources stood in sharp contrast to what had been offered under Morikawa.

In summary, the evolution of ABC evangelism is clearly illustrated by the names given to its evangelism department: the Division of Evangelism (until 1969); the Department of Evangelism Planning (1970); the Office of Planning and Organizational Development (1972); Evangelistic Life Style (1974); Personal and Public Witness Unit (1978); and, the Division of Evangelistic Ministries (1991). In the post-war years, when churchgoing was the social norm and mainline Protestantism the cultural standard, ABC evangelism focused on visitation evangelism, as well as child and youth evangelism. With the tumult of the 1960s, evangelism became "the church in the world": strategic planning for mission to institutions and social structures, as well as social service and action. The latter half of the 1970s and the 1980s brought an attempt to balance "personal and public witness." By the start of the 1990s, evangelism emphases had seemingly come full circle to "evangelistic ministries."

Church Growth

Like other mainline denominations, ABC leaders had to contend with the impact of the "church growth movement," spawned by Donald McGavran and championed by disciples such as Win Arn and C. Peter Wagner. While one ABC executive found the movement to be "powerful, positive and practical," another described it as "glitz, theories and consultants." Most found something useful in it, but felt the need to make it more theologically "holistic." Thus, the ABC responded with *Church Growth—ABC Style* (Johnson, n.d.), and the "Grow by Caring" program. ABC leaders rejected two aspects of the church growth movement's "doctrine": the homogeneous unit principle and the negative view of social action in the local church. The homogeneous unit principle suggests that churches grow most effectively when believers evangelize their own kind of people (see McGavran, 1970 and Wagner, 1979). ABC leaders advocated, instead, an approach that sought

social and cultural heterogeneity. According to one ABC critic, the "danger" with the homogeneous unit principle is that it works. By focusing on homogeneity, growing churches replicate modern society by fostering an enclave mentality, whereby people associate only with their own kind (Elliott, 1982:56).

To counter church growth movement doctrine, *Church Growth—ABC Style* (Johnson, n.d.:28-35) advocated a multidimensional understanding of church growth. Drawing upon the missiological work of the late Orlando Costas (1974, 1979), Johnson wrote that church growth should include numerical, organic, conceptual, and incarnational growth. Numerical growth occurs through evangelism by reaching out to uncommitted people. Organic growth involves the internal growth of the local church by deepening its faith and fellowship. Conceptual growth is "the degree of consciousness that a community of faith has with regard to its nature in mission to the world" (Johnson, n.d.:32). Incarnational growth is the growth of the church in its service to the world. Church growth, rightly conceived, should involve these four aspects. Otherwise, the church is out of balance and growing improperly.

The programmatic outcome of this church growth policy was the "Grow by Caring" emphasis, launched with great fanfare at the 1983 Biennial Convention in Cleveland (see Millar, 1989). Nine marks of the "growing, caring church" were identified and resourced: (1) personal witness, (2) social witness, (3) discipleship, (4) leadership, (5) congregational growth, (6) service, (7) stewardship, (8) [ecumenical] cooperation, and (9) [denominational] identity (Jones, 1989:165). The "Grow by Caring" program was the incarnation of the holistic approach advocated in *Church Growth—ABC Style*. "Numerical growth" is represented by Marks 1 and 5 of "Grow by Caring": personal witness and congregational growth. "Organic growth" is represented by Marks 3, 4 and 7: discipleship, leadership, and stewardship. "Conceptual growth" is represented by Marks 8 and 9: cooperation and identity. "Incarnational growth" is represented by Marks 2 and 6: social witness and service. The focus of the "Grow by Caring" program was on quantitative and qualitative growth, not just numbers alone.

In addition, "Grow by Caring" was designed for local churches, adaptable to any local context, and resourced with usable materials. Unlike other ABC emphases in years past, "Grow by Caring" was not heavily staffed with national or regional experts. Through "Academies for Growing Churches" local pastors were trained to consult with their neighboring ABC churches. As a result, more than 50% of ABC churches enrolled in the program. On the negative side, the broad emphasis of the "Grow by Caring" program had no particular cutting edge. It permitted churches to avoid the issue of

numerical growth by focusing on other "growth" areas. Unlike other ABC programs, "Grow by Caring" appears to have been designed to please everyone, a feat not easily achieved by a denomination caught in the middle of theological, racial/ethnic, and regional/cultural divisions.

New Church Development

ABC new church development has followed a pattern similar to other mainline Protestant groups since World War II: significant activity from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, minimal activity from the early 1960s to the late 1970s, and a resurgence of activity in the 1980s. The ABC started 389 new churches in the 1950s, 254 in the 1960s, 168 in the 1970s, and 402 in the 1980s. Two trends in ABC new church development are noteworthy. First, the percent of nonwhite new church starts in the ABC increased from 23% in the 1950s to 67% in the 1980s. Second, 137 "new" churches, which started on their own in the 1980s (mostly ethnic and minority), came to the ABC for membership in the denomination. Only 265 new churches were started with the approval and support of the ABC's New Church Development Council in the 1980s, a total comparable to the 1960s.

The post-war years provided a feast for ABC new church development, particularly the 1950s. The "Churches for New Frontiers" program was implemented by the Home Missions Society (now the Board of National Ministries). Several million dollars were raised for new church development needs: salary support, budget support, and building construction. Churches were started in ABC regions all across the United States. Unlike more recent years in the ABC, these new churches were almost exclusively white, suburban churches. Following the feast of the "New Frontiers" era, a new church development famine ensued. From the early 1960s until the late 1970s other priorities concerned BNM staff, including the political and cultural upheaval of the nation. An additional inhibition to new church development was ABC philosophy regarding declining white, urban churches. These churches were encouraged to remain in their transitional area in order to reach the incoming population and, in some cases, to become urban Christian centers. Thus, relocation to more suitable demographic areas was discouraged and a number of church redevelopment opportunities were lost as a result.

It was not until 1981 to 1982 that the ABC began once again to move forward aggressively with new church development. With the strong endorsement of ABC national and regional executives, and the organizational efforts of the BNM New Church Development Council, the ABC's General Board affirmed new church development as a priority for the denomination. New church development was vigorously promoted, and new church development

committees were established in all ABC regions. With the 1983 launch of "Grow by Caring," new church development gained increasing attention. By 1984, a new church development planner was added to the BNM staff to work with the director of new church development and the New Church Development Council.

By 1985, two significant things happened. First, the "Alive in Mission" campaign was launched at the ABC's 1985 biennial meeting in Portland, Oregon. Of the funds raised, 46% were to be set aside for new church development. As of mid-1991, \$32 million in pledges had been received, exceeding the goal of \$30 million. Second, the "500 More by '94" program was launched, meaning that 500 new church starts would be attempted by the ABC's thirty-seven regions from 1985 to 1994. ABC leaders claim that the "500 More" program is different from the "Churches for New Frontiers" in several ways. First, the entire national denominational apparatus is involved. The Board of International Ministries gave a substantial cash gift to the program. The Board of Educational Ministries offered free church school materials. The Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board offered substantial support towards pastors' pensions. The New Church Development Council developed a "structured interview process" to identify the characteristics of effective new church pastors. The hope was for a more effective program than Churches for New Frontiers. Through mid-1991, the 78% survival rate for the "500 More" new church starts was encouraging. Out of 265 new churches, 206 had survived.

The United Church of Christ

The United Church of Christ (UCC) was formed in 1957 by the union of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (E&R) and the Congregational Christian Churches (CCC), the former rooted in the Calvinist and reformed traditions of continental Europe and the latter in English Puritanism and the American restorationist movement. Reinhold Niebuhr described the E&R as a tradition of "liberal evangelicalism" while the CCC expressed a "modern liberalism shading off to Unitarianism" (as quoted by Gunnemann, 1977:23). With this heritage it is not surprising to find the UCC to be the least evangelical of the three denominations under consideration. In fact, the UCC may be one of the least evangelical of all American denominations if "evangelical" is defined by sectarian attitudes and behaviors oriented to the conversion of "non-Christians" and Christians whose beliefs and practices are considered incorrect. Ironically, evangelism is the only specific assignment given to the UCC's Board of Homeland Ministries (BHM) in its constitution.

Evangelism and Church Growth

One empirical study of forty-seven U.S. and Canadian denominations supports the notion that the UCC is among the least evangelical of denominations, given the above definition of "evangelical." In this study, UCC church leaders (laity, parish clergy, church leaders, theologians, and seminarians) scored low overall on four measures of evangelicalism: assertive individual evangelism, precedence of evangelistic goals, "born-again" Christianity, and evangelistic witness. On those measures, only Jewish and Unitarian clergy were more disinclined to evangelism. UCC laity, on the other hand, were as equally disinclined to evangelism as Disciples of Christ, Episcopalians, Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and United Church of Canada members (Schuller et al., 1980:126-27, 130-31, 172-73, 216-17). Though the Schuller study was conducted more than a decade ago, little has happened to suggest that the ethos within the UCC has changed very much. There has been considerable interest in membership growth for more than a decade in the UCC; however, such an interest does not necessarily mean a fundamental change in attitudes toward a conversionist type of evangelism.

UCC evangelism, as promoted by the BHM, has experienced "five clearly identifiable periods marked by several major turning points, or shifts," according to R. Alan Johnson. These include: the "years of consolidation" (1957-59); the "years of ferment" (1960-71); the "years of rebirth" (1972-79); a "transition period" (1979-80); and the "years of challenge and change" (1981-87). Anticipating the future, Johnson refers to the years following 1987 as "years of reintegration" (Johnson, 1987:1-2).

When the UCC was formed in 1957, the E&R and CCC each had different emphases in evangelism. The E&R Church emphasized relatively conventional evangelism programs, such as the "teaching, preaching, reaching missions" (TPRM): to teach the church, reach the unchurched, and preach the living Word (Johnson, 1977:3). In contrast, the CCCs were engaged in experimental evangelism under the leadership of Robert Spike, who was more interested in the emerging fringes of culture, such as the "beat generation," rather than the ecclesiastical status quo. The stage was set for a continuing tension within the UCC as to the substance and style of their evangelism program. Was the evangelism program of the UCC supposed to engage "the cutting edge" of American culture, however the spirit of the times may define it, or was it supposed to resource the constituent church's membership growth concerns? The latter emphasis has prevailed of late, but this tension is unresolved.

The 1960s began with the TPRM emphasis evolving into the "Mission on Renewal and Evangelism" program (MORE); nevertheless, the crises within

American society increasingly captured the attention and energy of UCC leaders. MORE became less as evangelism was more and more oriented to social action and less and less to the resourcing of local churches. While the "Local Church in God's Mission" emphasis tried to bridge the gap between social issues and local institutional concerns, the movement toward social action prevailed.

By the late 1960s, the work of the UCC evangelism division centered around personal interaction and human potential. One executive recalled that "evangelism had simply gone off into the stratosphere and was not providing the local church with any useful resources." Another recalled an alleged attitude held at the time that "you weren't being faithful to social justice if you were thinking about growing." Both the substance and style of UCC evangelism were found wanting by many at that time.

The early 1970s, or "the years of rebirth," proved to be a turning point for UCC evangelism emphases. "It was time to reform the work of evangelism by once again going to the definitional level. . . . Expectations were high for a fresh, theologically grounded, socially relevant, and biblically based understanding of evangelism" (Johnson, 1977:5). Two unrelated events in the early 1970s are noteworthy: the UCC publication of *Evangelism for a New Day* (UCBHM, 1972) and the emergence of Key '73. *Evangelism for a New Day* represented a rapprochement between evangelism as deed (i.e., social action) and word (i.e., invitation to faith) and was attempted through "action evangelism," the theological framework of which came from UCC theologian Gabriel Fackre (see Fackre, 1973, 1975). It also was more oriented to the needs of the local church for membership recruitment. Evangelism was affirmed by the UCC's 1975 General Synod, which declared that the UCC "has a Gospel to proclaim" and that "membership be strengthened in numbers and spirit" (Johnson, 1987:7).

In the meantime, the precipitous decline of UCC membership from 1965 until the late 1970s caused increasing concern. Some rationalized that the church risks numerical decline when it is "faithful to the gospel" (i.e., engaging in unpopular social action). In trying to be "an open and inclusive communion" committed to rectifying social problems, the UCC "has paid the telling but not unforeseen price" (i.e., loss of members). Others in the UCC, equally committed to social action, suggested that they had "failed to invite friends and neighbors to share with us 'the cost and joy of discipleship'" (Gunnemann, 1977:104-5). Concern for social relevance was tempered somewhat by the realities of institutional survival. Some UCC leaders were increasingly concerned about generating sustained commitment to steps necessary to reverse membership decline. By 1979, they had succeeded in making church growth a highly visible issue in the UCC. They also enlisted the

services of Lyle Schaller, the most widely read church growth consultant in North America (see McKinney and Olson, 1991). Having Schaller in this capacity helped to give church growth issues even greater visibility and credibility within the UCC.

The UCC's continuing membership decline and the increased interest in church growth, pushed the denomination toward more conventional "evangelism" programs (read: membership growth). One executive claimed that "from 1980 to the present, there has been a deepening, enriching, empowering, exploding affirmation of evangelism and membership growth in this denomination that . . . is like a tidal wave. [It] is reawakening the denomination." Translated, this enthusiastic denominational "execspeak" means that a particular understanding of evangelism—obviously advocated by that executive—has received the support of many UCC people. Indeed, the changes in UCC evangelism emphases since the early 1970s have been significant. The ferment of three decades led the UCC's 17th General Synod to vote 86% in favor of making evangelism a priority from 1989 to 1993 (see United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, 1989:1). As one executive commented, this required persistence and commitment on the part of a growing number of people who recognize that if the UCC is to have a viable future and be faithful "to what the Gospel calls us to be about in word and deed . . . we must be reaching out to people whose lives have not been claimed by the Gospel. And through this persistent effort, we are today at a place where we were not 12 to 15 years ago."

New Church Development

Trends in UCC new church development are similar to other mainline Protestant denominations. Vigorous post-war church extension was followed by a drought of new church development from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. The difference from one decade to another is stark. Between 1958 and 1961, the UCC started an average of forty-four new congregations per year; between 1969 and 1971, an average of only three per year were started. From the late 1970s through the 1980s, however, the UCC has experienced a significant resurgence in new church development.

During the new church development drought there was little interest in starting new congregations. At the time, BHM money was more often used for experimental ministries than for the development of more traditional congregations. In a 1975 letter to an executive, one UCC lay leader complained that UCC new church development was too focused on "a romantic search for the new form [of congregation]," such as house churches. Not only was UCC new church development skewed in the direction of experimenting

with new church forms, few saw it as a priority in the first place. For example, the UCC conference in southern California identified thirty-two mission priorities in 1973 to 1974 and new church development came out dead last. A UCC conference in one of the fastest growing areas of the U.S. was not, at that time, the least bit interested in new church development.

From 1972 to 1979, when new church development was at a low ebb in the UCC, the foundation for New Initiatives for Church Development Program (NICD) was laid. There were some "vague yearnings" to re-engage in new church development among church leaders at the time. There was no ground-swell movement pushing for it, however, the above-mentioned southern California case being an example. The impetus came from within the BHM itself, from its top executive leadership. After seven long years of study, discussion, and preparation, the NICD program was approved by the 12th General Synod of the UCC in 1979. A total of \$6.4 million was received toward the campaign goal of \$8 million, all of the funds raised committed to providing leadership subsidies for sixty-eight new and thirty-four "renewed" churches. Fifty-nine of the NICD projects were "Anglo" and forty-three racial/ethnic minorities (black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American). Of the 102 projects, 39 were in the Sunbelt and the remaining 63 in the Frostbelt.

Once the NICD program was completed and evaluated, a new ten-year commitment (1986-95) to new church development was proposed to the 15th General Synod in 1985 and approved. The goals: a national strategy for UCC new church development; leadership development for new churches; 150 new church starts, 50 of them being ethnic/minority; adequate funding for subsidies, site acquisitions, and construction costs; and multiple models for new church development. Six models have since been proposed: (1) new churches initiated by conferences with ministerial leadership subsidy from conference and BHM; (2) new churches started with multiple covenant partners including conference, BHM, and strong, established UCC churches; (3) new churches resulting from conference efforts and covenants; (4) churches with "renewed vision" (i.e., renewal of an established church, presumably in a state of decline); (5) newly affiliated churches (i.e., pre-existing churches that join the denomination); and (6) new churches as a result of "relocations" of established churches (United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, 1991:3-5).

As of the 18th General Synod in 1991, fifty-seven new church starts were reported out of seventy-one approved at that time. In the meantime, a ten-year national UCC strategy (1992-2001) was developed by a national new church development committee involving conference ministers—a "new kind of partnership" between the BHM and UCC conferences. In spite of all

this activity in new church development, funding has been a problem. In the words of one executive, there are "more opportunities than resources available." For the current wave of new church development the BHM has provided the major funding. Other fund-raising efforts, such as the "Strengthen the Church Offering," have been disappointing: \$310,776 was received between 1988 and 1990 against an expected income of \$880,000. Over \$2 million was projected from that same offering for 1991 through 1995. Given the offering's 1988 to 1990 track record, optimism about such income is guarded at best. "Too many hands in the pot" and "poor promotion by the Stewardship Council" were offered as reasons for the large shortfalls. There is, in addition, the politically volatile issue of having special fund-raising efforts for new church development when other national instrumentalities and conferences may want to fund projects of their own.

The United Methodist Church

Like the UCC, The United Methodist Church (UMC) is the product of mergers. The 1968 merger creating the UMC combined The Methodist Church (formed in 1939 out of three Methodist bodies) with the Evangelical United Brethren Church (formed in 1946 by a merger of the Evangelical Church with the United Brethren). (See Norwood, 1974:406-25.) This merger created the largest U.S. Protestant denomination at the time, with 11 million members and 42,000 churches located in 97% of the counties of the U.S. Since then the UMC has faced two unique challenges. First, the UMC is a national church, unlike most denominations, which tend to be more regionally concentrated. Its geographical breadth means a regional diversity that is difficult to manage. There may be "seven churches" in the UMC: the Yankee Church, the Industrial Northeastern Church, the Midwest Church, the Church South, the Southwest Church, the Frontier Church, and the Western Church (Wilson and Willimon, 1985). The exact number and boundaries may be arguable, but few doubt that regional religious cultures exist and include different understandings of what it means to be a Christian, and a church.

Second, the UMC's size and structure make it difficult to compare with most denominations. It has more than seventy annual conferences (regional judicatories), which form five large jurisdictions: Northeastern, North Central, Southeastern, South Central, and Western. Each jurisdiction could be a denomination of its own. The seventeen conferences of the Southeastern Jurisdiction, with about 13,000 churches and 2.9 million members, almost equal the combined size of the ABC and UCC. The UMC's sheer size is complicated by its decentralized bureaucracy, with national agencies located

in Dayton, Evanston (Chicago), Nashville, New York, and Washington, D.C. Unlike the ABC and UCC, the UMC has no chief executive officer or any particular "corporate culture." Its general boards function autonomously under the direction of the Church's General Conference and Council of Bishops. National UMC leaders refer to their Church as a "confederation of conferences," which raises the question of how "united" the UMC really is in ideology, culture, and structure.

Given these characteristics—its geographical breadth, regional diversity, size and structure—it is difficult to generalize about evangelism, church growth, and new church development in the UMC on the national level. Granted, emphases from the general boards can and should be studied; however, United Methodism's experience of decline and response to decline varies by annual conference and regional jurisdiction.

Evangelism and Church Growth

Prior to the 1968 merger and 1972 restructuring, the Methodist Board of Evangelism had a professional staff of nearly fifty, headed for twenty-six years (1939–65) by Harry Denman, a dynamic lay preacher. The Denman era was for some the golden era of Methodist evangelism in the twentieth century: a vigorous program that promoted visitation evangelism and preaching evangelism. Since Denman's retirement, the evangelism program experienced major structural, leadership, and financial changes. In 1972 the Board of Evangelism became the Section on Evangelism of the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD), and its staff was reduced to eight people. From 1965 to 1990, eight executive secretaries served the evangelism section, the longest tenure of any being only six years. Evangelism in the UMC lost both the status and visibility of board stature within the denominational structure. UMC evangelism leaders found themselves buried within another agency and much less visible to the General Church.

Changes in board membership policy also had their impact. Before 1972, representatives on UMC general boards were allegedly appointed for their expertise. One executive doubted that the staff knew more than Board of Evangelism members did, recalling that semi-annual board meetings were "incredibly vital experiences because of the competency in evangelization that our board had." After 1972, the general boards were required to be age balanced and divided equally by clergy, laymen, and laywomen. In addition, at least 25% of a jurisdiction's membership on each general board should be racial and ethnic minority persons (Johnson and Waltz, 1987:52). One UMC executive felt that the evangelism program suffered as a result. "When [the evangelism staff] met with its section of the [GBOD] for the first time, the

first thing we did was spend two days talking about evangelism and defining it because virtually every board member was a non-specialist in evangelism."

Financial changes affected evangelism as well. From 1975 to 1986, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased 123% while the UMC's World Service and Benevolence Funds (WSBF) increased 83%, from \$52.5 to \$96 million. The net result was a 40% loss of purchasing power (or \$21 million) over the decade. Meanwhile, the GBOD fell further behind the CPI with expenditures increasing 60% from 1975 to 1986, from \$2.5 to \$4 million. To keep pace with the CPI, GBOD's 1986 expenditures should have reached \$5.6 million, \$1.6 million more than they expended. GBOD Evangelism Section expenditures increased by only 8% from 1975 to 1986, from \$416,300 to \$450,345, far below the CPI (123%) and well below the WSBF (95%) and GBOD (60%). Had expenditures for the Evangelism Section kept pace with inflation, expenditures should have been about \$930,000 in 1986, more than double what was actually available (see Holsinger and Laycock, 1989:23-25).

The UMC's general boards were, like other mainline bodies, heavily involved with social concerns in the 1960s and 1970s. Traditional evangelism emphases suffered, but not because Evangelism Section leadership moved away from it. In fact, most of the eight who served as executive secretaries for evangelism from 1965 to 1990 were evangelical and predisposed to conventional forms of evangelism. One of them, George Hunter (Executive Secretary, 1977-83), was one of Donald McGavran's closest disciples in the church growth movement (see Hunter 1979, 1980, 1987; McGavran and Hunter, 1980). None of these secretaries has commanded the attention of their denomination quite like ABC and UCC evangelism/church growth executives, or has set a particular church-wide tone for evangelism. Given its large size, and the fact that the Section on Evangelism is buried within the UMC's complicated and decentralized structure, gaining the Church's attention is difficult for any evangelism executive, and none of them has stayed long enough to do so.

In spite of the many structural, leadership, and financial changes endured by the Board of Evangelism and GBOD Section on Evangelism, the type of evangelism it advocated remained rather consistent over time. The Council on Evangelism, an auxiliary organization since the Denman era, has continued to conduct biennial congresses on evangelism, although attendance has dropped in recent years. During George Hunter's tenure as evangelism secretary, the Foundation for Evangelism was revitalized to advocate and fund UMC evangelism. One project involved helping UMC seminaries endow chairs in evangelism for their faculties, some named for the Methodist missionary, E. Stanley Jones. As of 1990, six UMC seminaries had either established or nearly established these evangelism faculty positions. In addition,

evangelism and church growth programs were offered consistently. Recent examples include: "Offer Them Christ," "Growth Plus," consultations with large church pastors, church school growth, a telephone hotline to help retain relocating UMC families, special emphases on baby boomers, Hispanics, and Asians.

Though evangelism emphases were fairly consistent since the 1960s, it was during the 1984-88 quadrennium that the UMC's membership decline gained church-wide attention. It began, at least symbolically, with the eleventh hour resolution at the 1984 General Conference to double membership to 20 million by 1992. Though some viewed the resolution as well intended but unrealistic, the ferment that it spawned was quite real.

Following the 1984 General Conference, a membership growth committee was formed by the Council of Bishops and chaired by Bishop Richard B. Wilke of Arkansas. Soon thereafter, a spate of books appeared on the theme of "what's wrong with the UMC and how to fix it." Beginning with Bishop Wilke's book, *And Are We Yet Alive*, six books on that theme appeared between 1986 and 1989 (Wilke, 1986; Hunt, 1987; Johnson and Waltz, 1987; Willimon and Wilson, 1987; Heidinger, 1988; Holsinger and Laycock, 1989). Prior studies of UMC decline, such as Hartman's study (1976) of UMC membership trends from 1949 to 1975, simply did not get the attention of the general church quite like Bishop Wilke. From 1968 until 1984, the General Conference and general boards were too busy getting organized, battling social ills, and celebrating the Methodist bicentennial in 1984 to deal with decline.

New Church Development

The responsibility for new UMC churches lies with the annual conferences. The function of the general boards in the area of new church development is primarily advocacy, resourcing (financial and training), and consultation. Traditionally, the UMC's National Division of the Board of Global Ministries (BGM) had the primary national responsibility for resourcing new church development. Prior to 1970, a staff of six served the church extension department in that board. Their job was to resource conferences at every stage of developing new churches, including providing loans for buildings. After 1970, the church extension department was shut down and new church development resourcing subsumed under other work areas. In 1983, the GBOD added a staff position in new church development to augment the remaining services available through the BGM. For a denomination as large as the UMC, there are remarkably few general board staff working in new church development in 1990.

Like other mainline denominations, UMC church extension efforts declined after the 1950s. Between 1958 and 1961, The Methodist Church started an average of 124 new churches per year (Johnson and Waltz, 1987:39-40). Between 1966 and 1969, this average dropped to 49 new churches per year; and between 1970 and 1974, it dropped even further to just under 20 per year. In 1975 to 1979 the number of new church starts was up to about 34 per year; and between 1980 and 1984, reached almost 66 per year (Johnson, 1986:2). From 1985 to 1987, the UMC averaged just under 60 new churches per year.

When studied by jurisdiction, clearer patterns emerge. All UMC jurisdictions have followed the overall pattern of more new churches in the 1960s, fewer in the 1970s, and more again in the 1980s. Of the five UMC jurisdictions, the Southeastern and South Central jurisdictions have started the most churches. With the exception of Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska, they consist of Sunbelt states, from Virginia to New Mexico. Of the five jurisdictions, these two have not declined in membership like the other three jurisdictions and mainline Protestantism in general. With the exception of 1975 to 1979, they have started the greatest percentage of new churches: 1966-69, 129 of 196 (66%); 1970-74, 67 of 98 (68%); 1975-79, 81 of 171 (47%); 1980-84, 161 of 328 (49%); 1985-87, 105 of 179 (59%).

The percentage of new racial/ethnic, minority UMC churches has changed over time as well. In the 1966-69 period, 7% of all new UMC churches were ethnic. By the 1980-84 period, 43% of all UMC new church starts were ethnic. Of all new ethnic UMC churches started between 1966 and 1984, 65% were Asian, 22% Hispanic, 10% black, and 3% Native American (Johnson, 1986:7). From 1984 to 1987, the percentage of ethnic new church starts dropped to 28% (65 of 232), but this was due to an increase in Anglo new churches rather than a decrease in the ethnic new church starts. The highest percentage of ethnic new church starts have been in Northeastern, North Central, and Western jurisdictions. From 1980 to 1984, for example, 45 of the 54 new churches (83%) started in the Northeastern jurisdiction were ethnic, versus 14 of 80 new churches (17%) in the Southeastern jurisdiction (Johnson, 1986:8).

By 1990, the UMC had neither a national program nor a strategy for new church development. At one time both the ABC and UCC were similar to the UMC in this regard: the primary initiative for new church development rested with the regional judicatory. By 1990, however, both the ABC and UCC had moved toward a coordinated national strategy for planning and funding new churches. The UMC, on the other hand, continued its long-standing policy of initiating new churches at the conference level. The result is that the UMC continues to experience a wide variation in new church

development activity from conference to conference. Availability of funding for new church development also varies widely, from conferences like Virginia, which sought to raise \$20 million in the mid-1980s for new church development, to others that had set aside very little.

Steadily declining membership had worried some national executives and bishops, and some conference level leaders as early as the late 1960s; yet, only since 1984 has the matter garnered much church-wide attention. As of 1990, the UMC still did not have any national strategy for evangelism, church growth, or new church development. At the conference level, however, some ambitious emphases have emerged. The annual conferences most active with evangelism, church growth, and new church development have been, for the most part, in the Sunbelt, where an evangelical tradition remains strong. Only recently have some northern conferences engaged in more concerted efforts in these areas. In addition, because of the structure of the UMC, the denomination's general boards have engaged mostly in advocating and resourcing their particular areas of expertise. Given the UMC's susceptibility to regional religious cultures and lack of theological consensus, its decentralized structure and lack of focused national goals, it is no surprise to find that the dream of the 1984 General Conference resolution to have 20 million United Methodists by 1992 remains unfulfilled.

Excursus: The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Before offering any conclusions from the ABC, UCC, and UMC, perhaps questions should first be asked about the uniqueness of their experience with evangelism, church growth, and new church development. Were the changes they experienced from 1965 to 1990 unique among mainline Protestants? Were the similarities between them coincidental or indicative of transdenominational patterns? Two recent histories of Presbyterian evangelism provide an insightful comparison (Walter, 1991; Bullock, 1991). They suggest that the patterns were pervasive across mainline Protestantism. ABC-UCC-UMC experience was not unique or coincidental.

Formed in 1983, the 2.9 million member PCUSA consists of two predecessor denominations: the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (formed by a 1958 merger of two Presbyterian bodies) and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. An overlay of their evangelism and new church development emphases over time onto those of the ABC, UCC, and UMC shows a strikingly similar pattern (see Coalter, 1991; also, Bullock, 1991). Historically, one long-standing Calvinist controversy has been whether one should "await" or "awaken" the divine election of sinners (Coalter, 1991:33-34). Mainline Presbyterians have chosen to do the latter. Following their Armin-

ian counterparts, they have hedged their bets on evangelism to mitigate the harshness of predestination. In addition, the "personal" versus "social" gospel debate has plagued Presbyterians for many years.

In this century, Presbyterians have moved from mass evangelism early on to more interpersonal forms by mid-century. By the 1960s, these methods were subordinated to "social transformation or action evangelism," a difficult shift that "illuminates a serious and debilitating division of Presbyterian evangelical impulses by the late 1980s. The Presbyterian tradition had long-standing parallel allegiances to the salvation of individuals while simultaneously promoting a redemptive transformation of American culture. Events within and without the church have led Presbyterians in the last three decades, however, to view these parallel thrusts as, at best, sequential rather than concurrent means, and frequently even conflicting options, for spreading the evangel" (Coalter, 1991:35). These "dual allegiances" have also created a dilemma within the ABC, UCC, and UMC. Evangelism emphases have tended to be sequential rather than concurrent. Along with their mainline Presbyterian counterparts, they have come to view evangelism as primarily "membership recruitment" rather than Christian witness meant to convert souls and transform society.

Presbyterian new church development has been no different from that of the ABC, UCC, and UMC. At the turn of the century, at the height of the "social gospel" era, Presbyterians engaged in urban mission because of increasing industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. By mid-century, the suburbanization of America prompted a shift in church extension efforts away from the inner cities to the burgeoning suburbs (Bullock, 1991:56-57). It was these mid-century new church development efforts that had waned by the mid-1960s among mainline denominations, including the Presbyterians. After a time of reduced activity, especially in "less promising fields" (i.e., inner city, town and country, experimental), mainline Presbyterians renewed their interest in "conventional" and more promising new church development (i.e., "high potential, self-supporting churches") by the late 1970s (Bullock, 1991:60-61). Spiraling costs, however, have made it difficult for mainline Presbyterians to start new churches at the same rate as mid-century (Bullock, 1991:81).

Future Strategies

The Presbyterian parallels with the ABC, UCC, and UMC are striking. The experiences of these denominations are not unique among the Protestant mainline, and are not coincidental. From the 1940s to the 1960s, they each engaged in conventional evangelism and new church development in an

era when birthrates and participation in traditional religious institutions were at an all-time high, when their niche in a tripartite (Protestant-Catholic-Jewish) religious marketplace was *assumed* to be secure. From the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, each of these denominations sought to bear Christian witness to the social issues of the day while watching their memberships peak, then decline at a rapid pace. From the late 1970s to 1990, each denomination sought to counter membership decline by returning to more conventional personal evangelism and new church development programs, as well as by adding and adapting church growth techniques. Clearly, they have shared similar experiences and challenges: contextual changes, theological dilemmas, ideological battles, identity crises, membership losses, aging constituencies, shrinking financial support, spiraling costs and bureaucracies weighed down by diversified programs, and frequent restructuring.

Looking, therefore, at a period somewhat broader than 1965 to 1990 and delving a bit deeper than "who did what when" in which denomination, the questions are these: How shall changes in evangelism, church growth, and new church development in the ABC, UCC, and UMC be understood? Were their programmatic responses effective? What do these changes reveal about the dilemmas and challenges these denominations face today? Has the ambivalence toward evangelism in these three denominations subsided?

The Context of the Future

Before offering specific observations on evangelism, church growth, and new church development in the ABC, UCC, and UMC, four general observations are important. First, historic theological differences have caused tension and disagreement over denominational priorities in all three denominations in recent years. Evangelical caucuses advocate "historic Christianity," meaning more orthodox theology, a conversionist approach to evangelism and mission, and usually a more conservative orientation on social and political issues. Theological breadth, and conflict, especially within the ABC and UMC, has made programming for evangelism, church growth, and new church development particularly challenging and, at times, politically volatile (see Nash, 1987; Tricules, 1987; Sanders, 1987; and Heidinger, 1987).

Second, denominational programs have, in general, broadened since the 1960s. Until then, denominational boards focused mostly on domestic and foreign mission, evangelism and church extension, Christian education and publication. Since then, staff and funding were added to focus on peace and justice, feminism, minority group concerns, and the environment, among other things. The result is national boards that are larger in scope and scale. In an era of retrenchment, many more programs of con-

siderable merit, from ecology to evangelism, have been forced to compete for a shrinking pool of funds.

Third, the quota system for appointment to national denominational boards has meant, in many instances, a trade-off of competence for inclusiveness. Though affirming inclusiveness in principle, many denominational executives interviewed for this study felt strongly that the cost outweighs the benefit. However controversial or politically incorrect it may be to suggest that such inclusiveness has its disadvantages, the impact of the practice on national denominational programs such as evangelism cannot be ignored.

Fourth, the importance of regional judicatory executives—executive or conference ministers in the ABC and UCC, bishops and district superintendents in the UMC—cannot be ignored. They can enhance or inhibit, make or break, national denominational emphases. Though ABC and UCC regional executives are not called bishops, they should be for the power they wield (Paul Harrison's [1959] classic analysis of authority and power in the free church tradition still rings true). They know what churches in their regions will tolerate, perhaps even use, and offer resistance when a national program doesn't suit them.

Ideology and Theology in Evangelism and Church Growth

Evangelism is an ideological battleground. Knowing who the critics were at any given time reveals which form of evangelism (i.e., ideology) prevailed. When social action dominated, the critics were alienated evangelicals. Viewed in that context, Key '73 could be seen as a conservative protest movement within mainline Protestantism. Though a disappointment as an evangelism effort, if not an outright failure, Key '73 served as a harbinger for mainline Protestant evangelism. Indeed, since the late 1970s, pietism and personal evangelism have been on the upswing.

With the exception of the UMC, evangelism staffing and funding did not decline from 1965 to 1990. The question therefore, is not how much money was spent on evangelism or how much staff there was from time to time, but how that staff was used and how that money was spent. Those who champion personal evangelism refer to the 1960s to mid-1970s as evangelism's darkest days; whereas, those who champion social action evangelism see the return to more pietistic, personal evangelism as regressive.

Within all three denominations the perennial sociological and theological dilemma persists. What is the church's evangelistic priority? Is it changing social structures in order to redeem all of society, or "saving" souls in order to redeem individuals? How is evangelism defined: Is it everything that the church does, or is it the specific activity of presenting the claims of Christ to

churches started by the ABC, UCC, and UMC since 1980 have increased. The ABC and UCC have been in the process of developing national strategies for new church development; yet, as of 1990, the UMC had none at all. Each has developed national training conferences for their new church pastors. New church pastors and lay leaders enjoy a variety of resources that did not exist a decade ago. In addition, new models of church extension have been developed or explored. A good example is the UCC strategy for the next ten years (1992–2001), which speaks of six “church development models” (see United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, 1991).

The Battle of the “E” Word

We do not yet know what impact the evangelism, church growth, and new church development emphases of the 1980s will have on these three denominations. Yet, the “E word” (evangelism), an anathema for some people in these three traditions, has undeniably found its way to center stage. People at every level of these denominations are talking and learning about a concept and practice that was for many years left to evangelicals and fundamentalists. The word is being reclaimed for mainline Protestant parlance, and the concept is being reconsidered for mainline Protestant praxis. This could not have happened had there not been a concerted effort over the past fifteen years to reclaim personal evangelism, reaffirm new church development, and introduce church growth methodologies. If the three denominations under consideration have done anything at all to “turn things around,” their leaders have seemingly raised the awareness of their constituents. One evangelism consultant has identified thirty-four factors that indicate that mainline Protestant attitudes toward evangelism have indeed changed and “that their now legendary decline can stop.” Among them are (1) willingness of denominational leaders to deal with decline, (2) proactive leadership in mid-judicatories, (3) seminaries interested in evangelism, (4) willingness by denominations to fund evangelism, (5) pressure from “loyal” evangelical caucuses in denominations, (6) determination to plant new churches, (7) more pastors interested in evangelism skills, (8) more lay interest in evangelism and attendance at evangelism workshops, (9) recognition that service and proclamation are equally important, (10) recognition that denominational loyalty has waned and “passive” evangelism does not work, (11) availability of excellent evangelism resources and the willingness to use them, and (12) movement away from the “church growth fad” and evangelism “gimmickry.” These indicators show that mainline Protestant attitudes toward evangelism are changing sufficiently enough to see a “cloud of hope building on the horizon” (Miller, 1989).

Herb Miller's encouraging observations indicating changing attitudes toward evangelism are based upon a particular view of evangelism. He is hopeful because the pendulum is swinging toward a more conventional form of evangelism. This study's findings on evangelism, church growth, and new church development in the ABC, UCC, and UMC support Miller's observations, even his hope, to a degree. On the other hand, Miller is silent about the fundamental ambivalence toward evangelism that confuses and occasionally divides the saints in mainline Protestantism. Milton Coalter makes the point well.

One observation about Presbyterian and mainstream Protestant evangelical impulses can be ventured. The tensions between advocates of social action evangelism and verbal [i.e., personal] evangelism have yet to be resolved. In part, this is because neither can be dissolved adequately into the other. The two options are, in fact, not options in the Reformed tradition or, more broadly, in Christianity. They are instead the twin outgrowths of the *euangelion* proclaimed by Christ, who came to save sinners and to teach them a redemptive transformation of relationships that unavoidably involves Christians in reforming cultures (Coalter, 1991:53).

Advocacy for social action on the one hand, and personal evangelism on the other, remains strong in the ABC, UCC, and UMC, as well as the PCUSA, and the debate they cause remains unresolved. Neither side "has captured the imagination of the . . . mainstream Protestant masses who exhibit in varying degrees significant ambivalence, apathy, and/or discomfort with the topic of evangelism" (Coalter, 1991:54). That evangelism should have to be *voted* a "priority" by the UCC, let alone by any Christian denomination, is clear evidence of "ambivalence, apathy and/or discomfort" with evangelism. Even more, it is evidence of deep-seated confusion as to what the church's most basic tasks are in the first place. Significant changes toward more conventional evangelism, and greater interest in church growth and new church development have indeed occurred in mainline Protestantism since the late 1970s. Yet, without any rapprochement between those whose great commission is Luke 4:18-19, those whose great commission is Matthew 28:18-20, and all those in between, the evangelism dilemma will continue to nag the mainline denominations for years to come. For the time being, however, while creative energies and greater resources are focused on more conventional evangelism, church growth, and new church development, slowing down the membership slippage does seem to be within the realm of possibility.