

PREFACE

This handbook grows out of the life of the Project Team for Congregational Studies, an informal partnership of representatives from the Alban Institute, Auburn Theological Seminary, Candler School of Theology, Hartford Seminary, McCormick Theological Seminary, and the research offices of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries.

In the past several years the Project Team for Congregational Studies has initiated a variety of activities aimed at directing new attention to the study of the local church. It sponsored, in 1982, a national conference on understanding the local church, out of which emerged the book *Building Effective Ministry: Theory and Practice in the Local Church*.¹ The team has also published two editions of a directory of researchers engaged in the study of the local church,² and *The Whole Church Catalog*, a collection describing tools and instruments for congregational studies.³ In 1984 it sponsored a Congregational Studies Institute at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City. In addition, the team is giving concerted attention in 1985 and 1986 to the role of the congregation in public life and to the relationship of the congregation to theological education. The team has been supported by the participating institutions with supplementary support from the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

In the course of its various activities the team has become aware of the volume and quality of the work being done across the United States and internationally to enhance congregational self-understanding. The team has also been impressed by the need for more effective sharing of that work across denominational and disciplinary lines. This handbook is one attempt to address that need. It draws on the work of hundreds of persons whose personal and professional commitments are to the strength and mission of the local church. At the same time, the handbook aspires to be more than a compendium of techniques for congregational study: it also offers a framework for an enriched understanding of the nature of the congregation.

The handbook emerges out of the team's effort to

place the congregation itself rather than individual scholarly disciplines at the center. In this sense it is quite different from the team's earlier book, which proceeded from the disciplines to the congregation. Here the focus is on the congregation in its complexity and only secondarily on how particular approaches to congregational study can be useful in its life.

This approach required considerable consultation among the authors, the editors, and the project team. Thus the book is the product of group effort and the individual chapters are unsigned. It is appropriate, however, to identify the persons who worked to organize each of the following chapters. Chapter 1 is an invitation to congregational studies. It outlines the team's commitment to the congregation and offers a framework for understanding the congregation. The organization of the chapters is informed by that framework. Jackson W. Carroll is the primary author of chapter 1, drawing on contributions of the entire project team. Chapter 2 deals with congregational identity; its authors are Jackson W. Carroll and James F. Hopewell. Chapter 3 focuses on the congregation's context; it was prepared by William McKinney and Wade Clark Roof. Chapter 4 turns to congregational processes; its authors are Speed B. Leas and Carl S. Dudley. Chapter 5 deals with congregational program; its author is Mary C. Mattis. Chapter 6 provides an overview and introduction to some of the social scientific methods used throughout the book; its author is C. Kirk Hadaway. William McKinney is the primary author of chapter 7, the afterword.

Of the many others who made contributions to this handbook, several need to be singled out. Barbara G. Wheeler read each chapter and passed along numerous substantive and editorial comments to the editors. Loren B. Mead, H. Newton Malony and the sixty participants in the 1984 Congregational Studies Institute have assisted the project in diverse and important ways. Our respective institutions have provided encouragement and support both for this handbook and for the larger congregational studies enterprise.

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Parish of Trinity Church in the city of New York, which made a generous contribution in support of this handbook and *The Whole Church Catalog*. We are grateful for the support of the Grants Board and the insightful assistance of the Rev. James F. Callaway, Jr., and Mrs. Pamela Stebbins.

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The book is dedicated to James F. Hopewell, who died just before it was completed. Jim Hopewell was a founder of the project team and a stalwart member. He was a friend, and we celebrate and miss his presence among us.

NOTES

1. Carl S. Dudley, ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).
2. Available from the Rollins Center for Church Ministries, Candler School of Theology, Atlanta, GA 30322.
3. James F. Hopewell, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1984).