
1. The Case of Wiltshire Church: A Narrative

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The case study in this chapter and in Chapter 2 is the true account of a series of events in the life of a specific congregation. However, the names of persons and places involved have been disguised to protect the privacy of those who shared their story.*

To the pastors, lay leaders, and members of the congregation of "Wiltshire Church" we extend our deep appreciation for their willingness to share their visions for the church, but also to share their problems and personal struggles. Their ability to risk, to be vulnerable, should be seen as a gift to the wider church.

Working closely with the researchers who have contributed chapters to this volume, the case writers initially identified a main-line congregation that showed signs of basic health but was dealing with significant problems. Wiltshire Church became the object of a four-month intensive field study in the winter and spring of 1981. We conducted more than sixty hours of taped in-depth interviews with church staff, lay leaders, congregational groups, judicatory executives, and town officials. Maps, newspaper articles, census data, real estate brochures, historical books and articles, and local photographs were gathered. We attended town meetings as well as church board meetings, retreats, church school classes, seminars, and Sunday worship. Official church documents gathered included conference records, annual reports, personal letters, announcements, bulletins, newsletters, and sermons. A number of question-

* The case and background statement were prepared as a basis for discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of the situation. They are drawn from material available through the Association of Theological Schools, copyright © 1982 by the Case Study Institute.

naires were also distributed to the staff and congregation as a whole. Some of these we designed; others were specifically requested by the researchers. Though not all of the researchers had the opportunity to visit the congregation, each had access to all of these data.

When we refer to a "case," we mean a "slice of life"—a factual account of an event or series of events that climaxes in a decision of import. The decision must be one about which reasonable people would disagree. As a check on the objectivity of conflicting viewpoints, the final case was read and released by the pastor and selected lay leaders of the Wiltshire congregation. Their additional suggestions were absorbed into the narrative of Alan Hyatt and the background statement.

Subsequent chapters of this book use this case as a common focus to model their distinctive approaches to the local church. As you read the case, we urge you also to "enter" Wiltshire Church during this period of its life. We suggest a structured process to fix the case in your mind and to provide comparisons with the approaches in other chapters. First, you might want to list the important persons, the characters in the story, and note information contributed by each. Second, a time line of the story might be helpful, listing dates and significant events in the life of the congregation. Third, and most important, you might make a priority list of the forces and factors that contribute to the present problems of the congregation. Finally, you may wish to consider specific recommendations for Reverend Carlson, Mr. Hyatt, the administrative board, or even the bishop. The reader who has written a perspective on the issues of Wiltshire Church prior to working with subsequent chapters will have a base that may be affirmed, expanded, or challenged by each of the later approaches.

An additional consequence of entering the case through personal study is to experience the potential use of the case as an instrument of education and consultation. As a relatively nonthreatening instrument for reflection and discussion, cases like Wiltshire can allow congregations to gain objectivity about their situation and insights about themselves. Although this case is written as if it were a Methodist church, the prominent factors are not at all unique to the Methodist denomination. Lyle Schaller notes in his

chapter that the Wiltshire Church should have been named Legion, "for there are many churches that resemble this one very closely." As you draw out the "universal" elements evident in Wiltshire, you may be better equipped to move from the specific approach of each chapter to the more general principles that concern congregations everywhere.

ALAN HYATT shook his head and smiled to himself as he hung up the phone. This was the second call he'd had tonight from other members of the administrative board of the Wiltshire Methodist Church. How naive and eager he'd been to accept one of the five annual openings on the fifteen-member church board. Now only three months into his three-year term, he was faced with voting for or against a building plan. Though the plan had initially seemed very straightforward, Alan was aware that the vote was much more complex than he had ever imagined. Alan now saw a string of accumulated and unresolved problems. These ranged from housing for the senior pastor and staff conflicts to divisions among board members and grumbling about "no spirituality" and "too-weak lay leadership." Most disturbing to Alan was the undercurrent of rumors that was tearing at the heart of the congregation.

Alan opened his study door, called to his teenage son and daughter upstairs to turn down their competing stereo sets, went into the kitchen to pour another cup of hot coffee, then retreated again to his desk where he had been studying the minutes of the two previous church board meetings. As he sought to put things into perspective, Alan turned his thoughts to the town of Wiltshire. He had become increasingly intrigued with the idea that the history not only of the congregation but of the town of Wiltshire was relevant to the issues the church was now facing.

Company Town—Company Church

Wiltshire, a historic Massachusetts town, was founded in the late 1600s and is almost as old as Springfield, some sixteen miles away. At one point in its history Wiltshire's central employer was the Adams Company, a textile firm that had moved to the commu-

nity from England in the 1800s. It was Alan's understanding that the company had had two primary operating principles: one was a strong paternalism that dictated hiring workers for low wages but "took care of them." This was evidenced by more than two hundred small mill-type wooden houses still in town built originally for Adams's workers. The other principle was adherence to primogeniture. In each generation the eldest son or son-in-law gained operating control of the company. Other family members were also in significant administrative roles.

It was at this point that the history of the town and that of the Methodist church merged. Alan could hear Sidney Carlson, the senior pastor of his church, retelling the story. "In 1836 a Methodist circuit rider preached revival services in Wiltshire. He converted Joseph Adams, one of those early Adams Company owners. In 1840 that converted man, the individual Joseph Adams, built the first Methodist church. It was a gift and cost him three thousand dollars. Then in 1907 one of Adams's descendants, Harold Blakely, and his wife, Sophia, made a grand tour of England. They worshiped one Sunday in a quaint historic church with which Sophia fell madly in love. When they returned to Wiltshire they hired an architect to go to England and draw up plans to reproduce the building in Wiltshire. It was completed in 1909. Harold Blakely paid for the whole thing—fifty thousand dollars. Parishioners were not involved. The only significant difference was that, rather than the gray English fieldstone, the church's exterior was constructed out of the same New England sandstone as that of the main Adams Company buildings."

Alan Hyatt had also heard the Methodist district superintendent refer to it as "a big, lovely old church standing in the middle of town." He continued, "If you hadn't known it, you would assume it to be an Anglican church out of the 1700s. Most often our Methodist presence in this part of the country has been a struggling wooden church on the edge of town."

Alan Hyatt had learned from Sid Carlson additional historical facts that had fascinated him. For this reason Alan had saved the notes on Sid's presentation at the "new members seminar" he had attended just four years ago. In 1950 Ralph Adams, a descendant of Harold Blakely, paid for the construction of the fellowship hall.

Alan's notes on Sid's comments continued, "Adams challenged the congregation to match his gift, and if you want a visual picture of the mentality of the Adams Company employees, look at the two structures. Fellowship Hall, built by Adams, has cut stone, leaded glass, and oak wainscoting. The matching Sunday school wing is the cheapest form of cinder block and industrial sash."

Alan knew Adams was chairman of the church administrative board for thirty-five years. He had heard Sid say that the church pattern, before he came, was for the trustees to "meet in the Adams home on High Ridge once a year in November, just before Adams and his wife departed for four months in Florida. The officers would add up the projected disbursements, and Ralph would write out a check for the deficit—approximately five thousand dollars a year—to balance the church budget. The last year Ralph did this was 1969, when the budget was thirty-nine thousand dollars. He died that fall of a sudden heart attack. Within six weeks three other board members died. The church was in trauma."

Sid Carlson Appointed to Wiltshire

It was at this point, Alan knew, that the bishop notified Sid, who had had success with helping other congregations grow, that he was considering sending Sid to Wiltshire. Alan recalled Sid's story of first coming to Wiltshire in a February snowstorm to "check out" the town. He had gone to the town clerk and gathered a tremendous amount of information by introducing himself as a Mr. Mueller, representing a corporation considering moving to Wiltshire. He then went to the big Congregational church at the other end of town that would be his "major competition." He asked for directions to the high school and was given a grand tour of the church building and a good sketch of their program.

Sid found a town that had more than quadrupled in population in twenty years. In 1950 it was a town of 4,500. By 1960 it was 10,000, and by 1970 the population had jumped to 18,000. Once tied to farming or employment in the Adams Company, Wiltshire residents by 1970 were predominantly young upper-middle-class families whose sources of income were Springfield-based businesses and professions. Though other churches in town were

growing, this tremendous growth in population was not only *not* reflected in the Methodist church, the records indicated net loss in membership between 1960 and 1970. In Sid's opinion too many of the previous pastors had been "older men, ready for retirement, whose basic duties were to preach on Sunday morning, visit the sick, and bury the dead."

When Sid, his wife, and two daughters moved to Wiltshire Church in June of 1970, he immediately made several changes. The listed membership was over 700, but Sid found a regular Sunday worship attendance of only 140. These were divided into two services in a sanctuary that could seat 270 people. He moved to one service the week after his arrival. Both the longtime secretary and the choir director left within four months.

Sid had told Alan that the only significant "uprising" came from the choir. Sid had learned that about twenty choir members, spouses, and friends were meeting to consider petitioning the bishop to have Sid removed. Sid drove over to the meeting, walked in, and offered to dial the bishop's number for them. The group dissolved.

At the first annual meeting the following January, Sid made additional changes. At this meeting, which lasted five hours, Sid cleared the rolls of 221 out-of-town or "lost" members. Each "removal" necessitated a congregational vote. The official church roll then went from 751 to 530 members. Alan also remembered Sid telling him that when he came to Wiltshire he found an administrative board of fifty-five members, most of whom had served for countless years. At this same annual meeting Sid challenged the entire administrative board literally to "vote itself out of existence" by adopting two new administrative principles: that no one would be in a job for more than three years, and that no one would have more than one job at a time. Since church discipline made no contrary provisions, these decisions were retroactive and passed by majority vote at the annual meeting. Alan smiled as he recalled Sid telling the story. "My attitude was that I was going to push for what I thought was correct—and if people didn't like it, I expected them to push back. And if they didn't push back they should shut up." Sid attributed his successful intervention to his own style of "pure brass," the strong support of his bishop, and

the awareness of lay members that "changes needed to be made." After the positive vote Sid worked with the newly elected nominating committee to select a slate of fifteen members for the administrative board.

Alan recalled another major change that Sid brought about during his first year. This was, in Sid's words, "to get the church into debt." Sid had found the church with a \$400,000 portfolio of stocks and bonds on which the church was depending for a substantial part of its income. He also found many members contributing an average of twenty-five cents a week. In the spring of 1971, with Sid's urging, a called congregational meeting voted to renovate the church building, completely rewire it, and bring the church into compliance with the fire code. The following year the parsonage, built in 1790 with additions in 1831 and 1870, was gutted and rebuilt with a design to provide adjunct meeting space and a possible apartment for an associate minister. The renovation work then tied up the endowment income for ten years in repayment of a bank loan.

Growth in Wiltshire Church

Over the next few years Wiltshire Church grew substantially, averaging nearly a hundred new members a year. With transfers out of the community, the net gain was about sixty members annually. Alan attributed the bulk of this growth to Sid's influence. Sid had once discussed with Alan the basic concepts that shaped his ministry in Wiltshire; much of his thinking was based on his analysis of the community. He saw Wiltshire as "a highly transient community" with as much as one-fifth turnover in population in some years. It was also a highly select group of people, most between 35 and 50 years of age, with relatively few older people. They were "for the most part upwardly mobile middle-class executives" moving to the suburbs to find a place to retreat, with good schools for the children.

Based on this analysis, Sid placed high emphasis on a strong church school, on youth work, and on the Sunday morning worship service. He saw the key components of worship as being an excellent music program and a sermon that addressed relevant contemporary issues and met, in some ways, the needs of the

congregation. Sid saw “highly transient, articulate, intelligent” people, but “folk who are not biblically literate, people who wish that they could believe the message of the Christian church but really find this difficult to do, people who are disillusioned with the American dream of the two-car garage and the house in the country—divorce—kids drinking and using pot—job conflicts—the plumbing leaking and your husband in San Francisco—the family needs as monumental. I look upon myself on Sunday mornings as addressing a congregation of wistful hearts. I am not preaching to the saints, many of whom sit in our church; I am basically addressing a secular, agnostic congregation of people who are drawn to the church because they find themselves with children and suddenly begin to sense that they want to give their kids some kind of background. This leads to our emphasis on church school and directly informs both my subject matter and the manner in which that subject matter is preached.”

As Alan thought of the congregation, he agreed that a substantial number of those who became members had been attracted by both the church school and Sid’s sermons. Alan had been a nominal Christian a few years ago—seldom attending church until the family moved to Wiltshire. He and his wife had brought their children to the church to Sunday school. Sid’s sermons and Tom Forbes’s music program had kept him coming. Alan also felt that Sid’s unorthodox style had appealed to him—clearly not your typical minister. Sid certainly wasn’t averse to tossing in a few four-letter words, and he would often be seen in town in tennis shorts with a racket slung over his shoulder. Alan found Sid to be a man “who knew how to take charge of a situation in the best corporate sense.” Alan also agreed with his wife’s description of Sid as one who “could charm your socks off.” This had certainly been true when Sid called on them the week following their first visit to the church. Equally impressive, Sid didn’t forget who they were. Alan had heard from other people that Sid was also a real “rock” for people at times of personal crisis.

Recent Changes

In the four years since Alan and his family had lived in Wiltshire, Alan felt there had been some changes both in the town and

in the congregation. Between 1975 and 1980, the population of Wiltshire had only increased from about 21,000 to 22,400, not the dramatic jump of previous years. In those same years, property values had skyrocketed. One friend in the church who had bought a home for sixty thousand dollars in 1976 sold it for over a hundred thousand in 1980. On top of that, interest rates had gone from 8.5 to 16 percent. Alan found fewer families moving in and out of Wiltshire. Several, like himself, had been transferred to executive positions in main offices in Springfield and would stay there. From observations made by longtime residents, Alan also learned that the current "commuter" residents were assuming a stronger role in local issues. A few months earlier, resistance from the town council and the zoning commission, in response to a vocal landowner coalition, had led the Adams Company to withdraw a zoning change proposal. The company had planned to develop a large wooded tract of company-owned land for multi-family units. In the past the council had had the reputation of "rubber-stamping" Adams proposals.

Alan wondered how these changes were affecting the congregation. He remembered talking to Beth Wilbanks, who had served on the church board from 1972 through 1974. Beth commented that during her tenure there was an "exciting upward movement" in the church. "We moved from a dwindling, elderly congregation to a young, vibrant, denominationally diverse membership. We had a good thing going, and we were eager to follow Sid's strong lead. In 1974 we needed to go from one Sunday service to the two we have now; we were simply too crowded. We established neighborhood parish groups to maintain a feeling of closeness. In 1974 our couples club had over fifty members. Now both of these have fizzled out and no longer meet at all. We seem so big with eleven hundred members, I feel Sid is the only one who knows everybody."

Alan also reflected about a change he had seen in Sid. Though it was hard to define, this had been confirmed by other friends who had known Sid much longer. In 1978 Sid turned 50. At the time, members of the church gave him a party and a check for a thousand dollars. A smaller group of friends gave him a rocking chair. About this same time he entered the doctor of ministry

program at a theological seminary. The church, through a special grant, gave Sid the funds to cover the cost of travel and tuition. In Sid's words, he entered the program "to keep the grey matter active." Alan had heard friends say that Sid had become much more anxious about retirement and that he had even shared privately that he was considering a nonclergy profession.

Maybe he was closer to the center of things now that he was on the board, but Alan was also aware of expressions of frustration in the congregation he had not heard before. Joyce Henry was a good example—a solid, devout Methodist who taught in the Sunday school. Not long ago Joyce had laughingly commented that she had been able to adjust to being served wine rather than grape juice at Communion, but it really distressed her that this was the only church in the district with no group of United Methodist Women (UMW). The only thing close was one remaining circle composed mostly of elderly women. "Maybe that's just a sign of the times with so many women working. However," Joyce added, "I think Sid is really turned off by Methodism; he sees it as bureaucratic and cumbersome. Sid even said from the pulpit that he never stays more than one day at the week-long annual conference meeting with the bishop. We're the largest church in our district, but no one in the church serves on any of the regular conference committees. We pay our annual conference apportionment, but that's about all."

In considering the other disgruntled comments made lately, Alan thought about Jill and Hank Edwards, who, according to the church "grapevine," were no longer attending Wiltshire Church. Their primary critique was that Sid simply was not "spiritual" enough. He "never opens meetings with prayer," and on Sunday morning he "gives an excellent speech" but one Jill says she could hear at the Junior Women's Club. "We've had to form our own group outside the church for fellowship and support. There's not even any Sunday adult education." Jill added that this is a "country club" church where people are "all on the surface."

Alan realized that the Edwards were representative of several other members who had not left the church, though he was not sure how many. At the time, however, he had replied that "a

pastor can't please everyone. Sid attracts a wide diversity of folk and the church can't change to please everyone."

Alan's mind flipped back to one of the phone calls he'd had this evening—from Bill Porter, a member of the social action committee. "This blasted building of Sid's has got to be the last straw." Bill had sounded as exasperated as Alan had ever heard him. "What are we doing spending two hundred thousand dollars on ourselves?! When you look at the tremendous unrealized potential in our church, all of the possible clout we could have, and so little of it realized. We've got people who are leaders, persuaders of people, spenders of millions—literally—and people who work with state and federal government. This is a young, energetic congregation. I know that some people—maybe a lot of people—join Wiltshire Church because it's the 'in' place. Because we're a large church, some folks may just want to get lost. But I'm convinced there are people who want and need more out of the church.

"We averaged thirty-five to forty people at the Lenten series that highlighted social concerns. For an evening program that was pretty high attendance. Well, we're not keeping on Stew Collins, our part-time associate pastor who organized the series, and he's been one person who has really expressed some interest in outreach. It was Stew who opened my eyes to the fact that, though we appear to give 6.6 percent of our \$155,000 budget directly to mission and social action, last year we actually gave less than half that amount. Even our weekly dinner-in-a-dish hot meal program for the elderly primarily serves our own members. I know that Sid doesn't give priority to social action concerns, but it's surely not because he's not willing publicly to tackle difficult or controversial issues. I remember his announcement from the pulpit a couple of years ago that he was getting psychiatric help. A lot of people really appreciated that. He even announced to the congregation when he failed his first set of doctor of ministry exams. I've never known anyone that gutsy. Why can't some of this courage be directed to motivate folk?"

Alan had responded, "Look, Bill, you can't mold Sid to your expectations. In the past Sid was instrumental in establishing a housing project for the elderly, in developing a program to bring

promising black ghetto kids into our school system, and in opening our facilities to the Jewish community before there was a synagogue in Wiltshire. For years he worked as a volunteer ambulance driver, and he now serves on the board of directors for the Springfield Catholic Family Services. He just doesn't preach about those things on Sundays. That's why we have you on outreach—to motivate folks if you see it that way." Bill's answer had been, "It's hard to do it alone. I don't even feel I can publicly voice my concerns without appearing in opposition to Sid personally."

Administrative Board Retreat

In rethinking the phone conversation, Alan realized that Bill had initially called about the building plan—but this building thing had been around for over three years. It seemed that recently everything was coming to a head. He remembered his own frustration at his first administrative board retreat three weeks ago. Stew Collins, the associate pastor, had urged them to spend time on describing who they were and then work on goal setting. When they broke up into small groups to discuss their image, Alan heard comments about "professional-centered church" and "the best show in town." Alan felt the lay leader pretty well summed up the gist of their discussion:

I hear us saying we are a community of individuals who profess a belief in Christ, who have a limited or nominal belief in his teachings and the extension of his work, and who pose very limited responsibilities on becoming part of our group. . . . Our primary focus is concerning ourselves with the needs of the community of which we are a part.

Fred Bates, the chairman of the board, asked, "How comfortable are we with this profile?" Alan heard a chorus of responses, both positive and negative. As Fred began to push for focus and goals, Alan heard expressions of confusion. "What are we doing?" "How can we decide who we are in an hour?" "What do we need to work on?" "Let's identify the holes in our total program."

At this point Sid, who had been sitting at the edge of the group and had not entered the conversation that morning, stepped in with some clear needs for staffing in terms of music, visitation of the elderly, and youth work. Sharon Giles was solid as part-time

superintendent of the large K-6 elementary church school program. But the part-time, retired minister of visitation had resigned due to poor health. They would lose in June both Stew Collins, who was going to his own church, and the seminary assistant who had led the youth groups and youth choir. Most of the rest of the morning was spent on staffing questions.

After lunch the building issue was raised. There were clear comments about the need for additional Sunday school space and the responsibility for more adequate insulation in the building. However, there were also expressions of concern about raising money in the current economy or in a congregation where the average pledge was low. Sid's response was strong. "I am utterly convinced we can do this. I've done it before. Our finances are down right now, but this is due to some personal conflicts that will pass." One board member added, "We can rally everyone around the building issue." The only clear decision Alan felt coming out of the retreat was an agreement to vote on the building plan at their regularly scheduled meeting next month.

After the retreat, Alan and Jeff Oates, in his third year on the board, went over to Harry's Pub, a comfortable little place not far from the church. Alan had told Jeff that he was aware of the tension between Fred Bates and Sid, and that he had felt a real feeling of discomfort between several board members. "What's at the bottom of all this?"

Pastoral Housing Proposal

Jeff said he believed that most of it stemmed from early last fall when a proposal for housing for Sid had come before the board. "I guess it all got started when Sid let it be known the previous spring that he'd had a couple of enticing offers to go elsewhere. Lucie Owens, one of Sid's avid devotees, told me she and a few others were deeply concerned, convinced the church would suffer if Sid left. They were determined to keep him here. Lucie's brother is a pastor and had told her how important owning his own home was. Now when the group approached Fred Bates and the district superintendent, it was told, 'This is just not done in our conference'; 'The bishop disapproves'; and 'A church would have to assume complete responsibility for such a move.' Undaunted,

the ad hoc group proceeded with the investigation, consulted tax experts, and worked out a definite proposal. They then requested time on the agenda to present all this to the administrative board. I must admit I saw their rationale; taxwise it made a lot of sense. Sid is now 53. He is deeply worried about retirement; in this conference retirement benefits are paltry, and he's still paying for kids in college. We would solicit funds to help Sid with the down payment. Then part of his present salary would be applied to housing to cover utilities and begin to build up equity for retirement.

"He and Connie also live a fishbowl existence right next to the church. On off hours any calls to the church ring in the parsonage. Because he is so responsive to people, Sid is virtually on call twenty-four hours a day. Lately I've been particularly aware of the pressure he is under. Now, by conference regulations, a minister must live in the parsonage, but we could hire and house a full-time associate here—which we need and haven't been able to afford—and we could also utilize large areas of the parsonage for additional church school space, which would mean we could scrap the building plan. I feel that Sid was extremely pleased with the whole idea.

"Now when this whole thing outlining a specific house, mortgage payments—the whole bit—was presented to the board, many were hearing it for the first time. Fred Bates was even out of town, as he had been for several of our meetings last year. Sid was not present for the discussion, though he must have gotten it word-for-word later on. There were some, like myself, who thought the housing idea made sense. Questions by some, however, were strong. 'We're considering a building campaign and would be approving this housing group to approach the same people for Sid's down payment that have been selected as major contributors.' 'Does this mean we're tied to Sid for the next ten years?' 'What happens if Sid dies?' 'Isn't the bishop opposed to this?' 'Have we looked into annuities for Sid?' 'I thought that big raise we gave Sid last year was for retirement resources.' 'Is this a personal gift for Sid or would it apply to a future pastor?'

"Marilyn Davis was one of the more outspoken opponents of the housing proposal. Her husband had been approached for funds before the issue ever reached the board. Marilyn indicated

that this kind of extraboard process 'would lead to anarchy.' She continued, 'This proposal also isn't honest. It says Sid earns twenty thousand dollars. That's the highest salary in our district. But with all of the hidden benefits, he's making close to forty thousand. Then Connie works full-time, which gives them a substantial combined salary. Now I'm certainly not advocating that a minister has to take a vow of poverty, but we've got to act responsibly for the whole church.' The housing issue was tabled for further study."

Jeff Oates continued by telling Alan that Sid was "deeply distressed." "I hadn't realized how important it was to him. He felt that after giving his heart and soul to the congregation for ten years, the first time he asks for something for himself, he's slapped down. In Sid's words, 'All this support is only a veneer. They don't give a goddamn about me.'

"Not long after, in a public meeting, Sid sharply criticized Marilyn Davis, whom he had 'once considered a close personal friend.' After this," Jeff continued, "all hell broke loose. Marilyn is in the choir and chairs the music committee. The organist, Tom Forbes, went to Sid, charging Sid was publicly attacking Marilyn, and said he would resign unless Sid publicly apologized to her. Then Fred Bates came on the scene and wrote a letter to all board members canceling further discussions of the housing issue. He also called an ad hoc board meeting at his own home, excluded Sid, and proceeded to share a significant number of complaints he had received about Sid during his term as head of the board."

Tensions Increase

Jeff paused. "I must add that Fred is a long-standing member here, over twenty-eight years. He was on the board that voted itself out when Sid first came. Now I'm not sure what all of the issues were, but it was clear that Fred was deeply concerned about Sid's leadership. In the midst of this meeting, the six-member pastor-parish relations committee (PPRC) said Fred was out of line to have called the meeting and that they should be handling such complaints, not the whole board. The meeting broke up, and I know that Sid and Tom met with the PPRC the next week, but no one else on the board seems to know what was decided. Not too much later, Marilyn Davis resigned from the board.

“Now, Alan, if you detected the tension between Fred and Sid, that background may help clarify things. The fact that you didn’t know about all this hoopla adds weight to my conviction that the majority of folk out there on Sunday morning don’t know anything about it. Some of the board feel we’re better off to bury the whole thing and let the malcontents drift away.

“You also said you experienced a feeling of discomfort between board members. My analysis deals with style. Three years ago, to reflect the size of the congregation, we increased the size of our nominating committee from six to nine members. Not only is our larger congregation more diverse, the same is now true of the board. I think we’ve got more vocal, independent board members than in the past, but I also think this is threatening to people. Now the present style of dealing with this diversity is to put folks down. Did you see some of the raised eyebrows and grins when Jill Edwards’s name was mentioned? We’re meeting controversy with contempt, not dialogue. I hate to say it, but I feel we may be taking our cue from Sid. I even had one board member tell me she had wanted to speak out for Marilyn Davis before she resigned, but that ‘Sid knows so much about me, my story would be all over the church if I did.’ Now I’ve known Sid to break confidences in the past, but I certainly never saw things in this kind of light. I’ve always felt his strengths far outweighed his weaknesses. But I agree that right now he’s under too much pressure without enough help. That’s where the whole staff thing we talked about this morning comes in. Now after hearing Sid’s questions about the music program, I think he feels it needs some re-organization. With the tension between Sid and Tom, I wouldn’t be surprised if Tom resigned as organist on top of everything else.”

The retreat and Alan’s conversation with Jeff Oates had been three weeks ago. In the interim, Alan had heard that Tom was going to submit his resignation as organist and choir director. Alan knew what a close-knit community that thirty-five member choir had become. He anticipated some real expressions of anger if the rumor were true.

Building Proposal

Alan took another sip of coffee and frowned. It was stone cold. He spread out on his desk the building proposal and looked at the

list he had made of pros and cons. It was clear they needed more space. Every room in the education wing was full on Sunday morning, and due to poor construction, the rooms were cold and drafty in the winter. The church rented space a block away for grades 7-12, which Alan felt was adequate but seemed to separate the older kids from the life of the congregation. The only possible room for adult education would be the pastor's study, and this was the only place Sid had to take a breather or meet privately with someone between services. Administrative and office space in general were not efficient. There were also no access ramps for the handicapped into the church, into either the main sanctuary or the church school wing. Emergency exits in the event of a fire were probably also inadequate. Insulation in the whole wing was extremely poor, and heating costs continued to escalate. They ought to build now before the cost of oil and building materials got any higher.

On the other hand, Alan felt the present parsonage could offer additional space if they worked out the pastoral housing thing in the future. Then again, if Sid weren't there as pastor, was there any way they could anticipate the same numbers in the church school? The K-6 superintendent was clear: "On Sundays when Sid doesn't preach, our attendance figures are significantly lower." Population growth in Wiltshire was leveling off. Wiltshire public schools were now averaging an annual drop of two hundred children. So far the Methodist church school attendance records were against the trend. Alan was also uncertain about voting for a campaign while things were so uneasy in the church. The board's ambivalence was evident to Alan as he looked over the past minutes. Last March they had voted for renovation of one area then rescinded this at the next meeting. Then another committee was formed to present this new plan for additional space. Maybe Jeff Oates was right. They ought to get an outside professional church consultant before proceeding with either new staff or the building thing.

Alan leaned back in his chair and thought about Sid's role in the whole situation. Beth Wilbanks had shared with him an image that seemed helpful. "I see Sid clearly as the dominant figure in this congregation. There is a broad range of groups, some of whom have complaints. Sometimes board members don't carry

through on their responsibilities, but because of his visibility, Sid gets the blame. He's like a maypole with all of these colored ribbons attached. Every issue that comes up adds another ribbon to wind tighter around him." Alan felt that in the past ten years the lay leadership had not assumed a strong enough role. He wondered how the board could begin to work as a team to take some of the pressure off Sid.

Just then the phone rang. It was Jeff Oates. "Alan, I hear Fred Bates is resigning as chairman of the administrative board. Since you're new on the board, we'll be looking to you for a fresh perspective and some solid leadership to break through this morass. I'll be glad to help in any way I can. Do you think it's time to look into hiring that consultant?"