What religious programs do best is reinforce what is taught at home by encouraging lasting friendships with people who reinforce the religious story and demonstrate gospel living

THE PARADOX OF ORGANIZATION

By Marie Cornwall

WHILE ON MY MISSION, I MET AND TAUGHT A couple who were looking for a church that would help their family. They had three difficult children—all three had some behavioral disorder or another. They were desperate for help and thought they could find it in religion. The Mormon family that lived across the street seemed to have it all together. Perhaps Mormonism could do the same for them, they told me. We taught them the discussions and invited them to attend our church meetings. I was transferred within a few weeks, but I heard from other missionaries that they had spent many weeks associating with the Church, trying to decide whether to join. Finally, the ward mission leader had a plan: Challenge them to live like Mormons for one week. It was a disastrous plan. The husband went home teaching; the wife went visiting teaching. The children attended Primary, and the wife went to Relief Society. They even helped on a welfare project. They went to the ward activity on Saturday evening. This, of course, was before the consolidated meeting schedule. By the end of the week they were exhausted. No thank you, they said. We wanted a religion that would help us as a family. We haven't had an evening together all week. We just can't do it.

It was a great disappointment to me. I wanted them to come to Christ and to be a part of my religious community. I wondered what we might have done differently. What if we had simply asked the couple to forgive their trespassers, love the Lord, and join in fellowship with other Latter-day Saints? Or what if we had given them more help with parenting skills? What if we had taught them how God helps make our burdens light?

Several years later, I was party to another incident which fed my concern that the organizational imperatives of Church programs sometimes get in the way of the more personal and eternal aspects of religion. One Sunday as I was returning home from church, I passed a friend, a Church member, in the parking lot. I could see she was upset and asked if I could help. She was on her way to the hospital—her granddaughter had been hit by a bus. I got into the car with her, knowing that her daughter was a single mother of two and that someone would need to care for the other grandchild. At the hospital, as my friend talked with her daughter and the doctors, I took the other child and helped by making some necessary telephone calls—my friend wanted someone to come give the child a blessing, and she wanted the bishop to know what had happened.

I was sitting in the waiting room when the missionaries arrived to give the child a blessing. I explained the situation to them. After a few minutes of discussion, one missionary asked if I was the visiting teacher. When I said no, he asked, "Then, why are you here?" I explained that I was the grandmother's neighbor, available to help when the emergency arose, and that I wanted to be there. That evening the Relief Society president called to apologize for not being on top of the situation. I assured her everything was taken care of, emphasizing that I was glad to help and had no ill feelings toward her. She felt guilty for not fulfilling her responsibilities. The next morning the visiting teacher called to apologize for not coming to pick up the other grandchild. I assured her that the child was well taken care of, that I wanted to help as a neighbor and Church member, and, again, that I had no ill feelings toward her for not fulfilling her duties. I realized that we were acting from two different paradigms. I wanted to respond as neighbor and friend, as part of the religious community. The Relief Society president and the visiting teacher wanted to magnify their callings, to live up to the expectations of their position in a religious organization. These two paradigms are always with us, sometimes to our benefit, sometimes to our dismay. I remember a friend's definition of a good ward: "The neighbors are there to offer food and help before the Relief Society president has time to organize it."

IN my sociological research I have focused both on the

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nature of organizations and the factors which influence the development of religious faith in individuals. I am constantly made aware of the inadequacy of bureaucratic rules and regulations with regards to nurturing individuals.

Mormonism grew up in a time when the bureaucratic form came to dominate the organizational landscape. The impersonal bureaucratic organization was far superior to more traditional and irrational forms which wallowed in nepotism and inefficiency. The bureaucratic form, it was thought, would introduce efficiency, control subordinates, and was consistent with the trend toward a more rational society. Today we know that while bureaucracies are very good at producing stable and controlled organizations, they also introduce unintended consequences. They alienate workers, they often misalign means and ends, and they always produce red-tape useful only to individuals who want to control.

Some people's frustrations with Mormon culture is the direct result of its bureaucratic tendencies. Mormonism's tremendous growth has encouraged these tendencies. The increase in Church membership during the 1970s was slightly more than the total population of the Church in the 1950s. Demographers project that by 2080 the Church will have 265 million members (that's assuming a 50 percent growth per decade—it has never had less since 1960). This growth means an increase in the number of local units. At the turn of the century there were 43 stakes, by 1950 there were 180, today there are 1700 stakes—that's 15,000 wards and branches. This growth has also been accompanied by expansion in the central administrative structure of the Church and the establishment of a new administrative level of area offices in many of the 128 countries and territories where Saints reside.

Belief is nurtured in relationships. Programs sometimes get in the way of the personal aspects of religion.

It is the irony of any charismatic organization that needed stability requires rationalization and bureaucratization, yet rationalization can destroy the charisma which animates the religious community. In addition, bureaucracies monopolize information, making it difficult for outsiders to determine the basis on which decisions are made. Bureaucracy is among the hardest of social organisms to destroy. As much as we dislike bureaucracies, we do not know how to organize with as much efficiency in any other way. No matter how we attempt to reorganize, we soon discover that for every reorganization or policy change with an intended consequence, there are any number of unintended consequences. Perhaps the most difficult issue confronting the leadership of the Church in the coming decade will be how to control bureaucratic growth and encourage personal and community relations. For example, how do you regulate the organization and also encourage agency and individual initiative? How do you respond to economic inequities which exist across ward boundaries and international borders? The Boy Scout troop from an affluent Salt Lake Monument Park ward that plans a summer camp in Hawaii is not aware of the British ward that cannot raise enough budget to heat its building on Sunday mornings. Without some central regulation or policy, the iniquities that exist across wards cannot be rectified. How do you gather information about the well-being and status of over 7 million Church members without creating statistical reports that tempt leaders to focus on statistics and organizational goals rather than individuals?

Coordinating the work in the stakes and wards in so many countries obviously requires some bureaucratic organization, so the question is how to keep the bureaucratic tendencies to a minimum. One can hear these concerns in talks by the Brethren in phrases like "over-regimentation," people must "act for themselves" and "not be acted upon," "reduction of programs and activities," "simplify," return "responsibility for teaching and counseling and activities to the family," and "better balance between family support of Church activities and activities to support the family." And finally, "we cannot program individual and family prayer, indeed all of the basic human relationships, the emotions and feelings, the bonds that bind man to woman and parents to children, all the quiet influences, the sacred things that are centered in family life."[1]

THE gravest problem facing the core of Mormonism will be how to nurture individuals using bureaucratic forms. We are just now realizing that we cannot create and sustain religious commitment in individuals if our focus is on position, duty, and responsibility. Rather, individuals are nurtured in communities where our focus is on relationships, where we create and recreate a religious story that motivates, improves, sustains, and encourages.

By definition, bureaucracies are not concerned with individuals or their personal growth; they are at best efficient, rational, impersonal systems of administration. In contrast, religious faith is created and sustained through relationships, and families must take responsibility for nurturing faith because families are the most influential of personal relationships. Of all social institutions, families have always been the best at nurturing—but even families have difficulty. So, where do families turn for help and nourishment? The quorums of the priesthood? The auxiliary organizations? Yes, but then we are back to programs, activities, and a complex organization that enlists all our time and energy and distracts us from gospel living. Is there something in between?

We have been handicapped as Latter-day Saints. Our associations and relationships have so centered around keeping the programs and activities of the Church functioning that we do not know how to take action without them. We don't know how to create communities that are not program-centered. There are many things that the Church can provide for us, but the one thing that we need most—community—is something that you and I have to create ourselves. The bureaucratic Church cannot produce community. Community cannot be programmed.

In my professional research, I have examined how personal communities influence the development and maintenance of religious belief and commitment. By personal communities, I mean the networks of relations among family members, friends, and close associates, in contrast to the impersonal relationships in organizations. These personal communities or social networks are society's new form of *Gemeinschaft*—small communities, not necessarily geographically bounded, where everyone knows each other in regular face-to-face relationships. Networks are the personal connections by which society is structured and individuals are integrated into it. Sociologists have concluded that the cause of the continuing viability of religion in modern secular and pluralistic societies (a surprise to many scholars) may be primarily due to the persistence of personal moral communities that reinforce religious belief, commitment, and behavior. The survival of traditional religious commitment in modern America is because moral communities regularly integrate new individuals into their networks of personal relationships. For example, in a recent study of Latter-day Saints, I found that being embedded in a network of relationships with active Latter-day Saints is vital to maintaining one's religious belief and commitment. Furthermore, this research suggests that belief in and commitment to the normative order of the personal religious community may be more important in predicting religious behavior than sanctions existing at the institutional level. In other words, individuals follow gospel teachings because they believe in them, not because they are afraid of the punishments which might occur if they do not follow them. However, individuals believe the gospel teachings are worthy of their commitment *because* of their personal relationships with other Latter-day Saints.[2]

Community can't be programmed, it is something we have to create ourselves. The bureaucratic Church cannot produce it.

Obviously, the first and most important personal relationships are in the family. Every person develops a world view or meaning system by which he or she understands and interprets life's experiences. This process, the social construction of reality, depends upon symbols provided by others: parents, siblings, friends, and associates. For the most part, these symbols take the form of "stories" or "conversations." Within these stories are images which represent, resonate, and articulate religious experience. Fairy tales and folk tales, Bible stories and family stories are all equally "true" within the mind of the young child seeking to understand the world and how it works. It is within the family where individuals begin to create their own religious world view. Hence, the more religiously oriented the family, the more likely that religion will be central to the child's personal construction of reality.

But the family is not the only institution that socializes. Until now, we have depended upon religious institutions to also play a significant role. However, experience shows religious institutions *by themselves* are almost completely unsuccessful at socializing children. Research among Jews, Catholics, and Mormons has demonstrated essentially the same result: It is parental religiosity, integration into a network of similarly religious peers, *and* church socialization that cultivate adult belief and commitment.[3] Nevertheless, granting these social distinctions, "Parents socialize their children by channeling them into other groups or experiences [such as schools and marriage] which will reinforce [have an additive influence on] what was learned at home and will channel them further into similar adult activities."[4]

Research conducted among Latter-day Saints, for example, suggests that church and seminary attendance during the teenage years has little direct impact on adult religious belief and commitment. Interestingly, what did have an impact on adult belief and commitment was maintaining a network of religious peers during the teenage and young adult years. In that light, a religious home environment plus church and seminary attendance encouraged teenagers to have a network of actively religious friends. Hence, the primary impact of church and seminary attendance during the teenage years was that it facilitated friendship choices or communal relationships which reinforced what parents were teaching their kids at home.[5] Now, this research is not definitive, but it does suggest that what religious programs do best is reinforce what is taught at home by encouraging lasting friendships with people who reinforce the religious story and demonstrate gospel living.

Similarly, adult Latter-day Saints depend on institutional involvement for their personal community relationships. Serving in a bishopric creates bonding relationships among the couples involved. Friendships form around auxiliary presidencies. Frequently these associations are temporary and not sustained after organizational responsibilities dissolve. Active LDS parents with large families often find it difficult to socialize outside of Church responsibilities. Hence, Latter-day Saints use their organizational meetings for sociability. Most do not particularly enjoy these leadership and planning meetings, but without them there would be fewer opportunities for creating our needed communal relationships.

THIS recent course correction in Mormonism involves new administrative procedures—an effort to reduce programs, and less budgetary freedoms—especially for affluent wards. U.S. Saints will feel the crunch the most because we will feel adrift from the community which was formerly sustained by programmed interaction. We will worry about our children because we do not understand that belief is nurtured in relationships, not programs. The creativity required to create our own religious communities may be more than we can abide, but if we continue to look to the Church to create community for us, we will surely be disappointed. The Church is most able to provide doctrinal instruction, ordinances, and moral direction. The nurturing comes only from ourselves. Those of us who resist the changes do so because what we really want is to be taken care of—to have things to do and places to be, to have direction and structure in our lives, and to feel secure.

In these changes we are witnessing a change of organizational emphasis. Those who long for June conferences, week-long MIA camps, and all-Church sports programs may feel lost in the new Church. The new Church will likely be less programmed, less activity oriented, less focused on large stake centers with stages and gymnasiums. We will have to build our religious faith around relationships created out of service to the poor and concern for our international brothers and sisters.

I am anxious that we get on with the work of creating our religious communities in different ways. We will know how much change has occurred and if we have been freed from the bonds of bureaucracy when we no longer evaluate our lives by the number of callings we have and the number of meetings we attend. I look forward to the day when the Christmas letters of Mormonism read:

> We have mourned with those who mourn and comforted those who stand in need of comfort, we have discovered what it means to be in the fold of God and have willingly borne another's burdens.

NOTES

1. Boyd K. Packer, "Let Them Govern Themselves," Regional Representatives address, 30 March 1990, 10. (Reprinted in this issue, page 33.)
2. Marie Cornwall, "The Determinants of Religious Behavior: A Theoretical Model and Empirical Test," *Social Forces*, 68:2 (1989):572-592.
3. Marie Cornwall, "The Influence of Three Agents of Religious Socialization: Family, Church, and Peers," in *The Religion and Family Connection: Social Science Perspectives*, Darwin L. Thomas, ed. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University,1988), 207-31.
4. Harold S. Himmelfarb, "Agents of religious socialization among American Jews," *Sociological Quarterly*, 20 (1979), 447-504.
5. Marie Cornwall and Darwin L. Thomas, "Family, Religion, and Personal Communities: Examples from Mormonism," in *Families in Community Settings: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Donald G. Unger and Marvin B. Sussman, eds. (New York: Haworth Press, 1990), 229-52.

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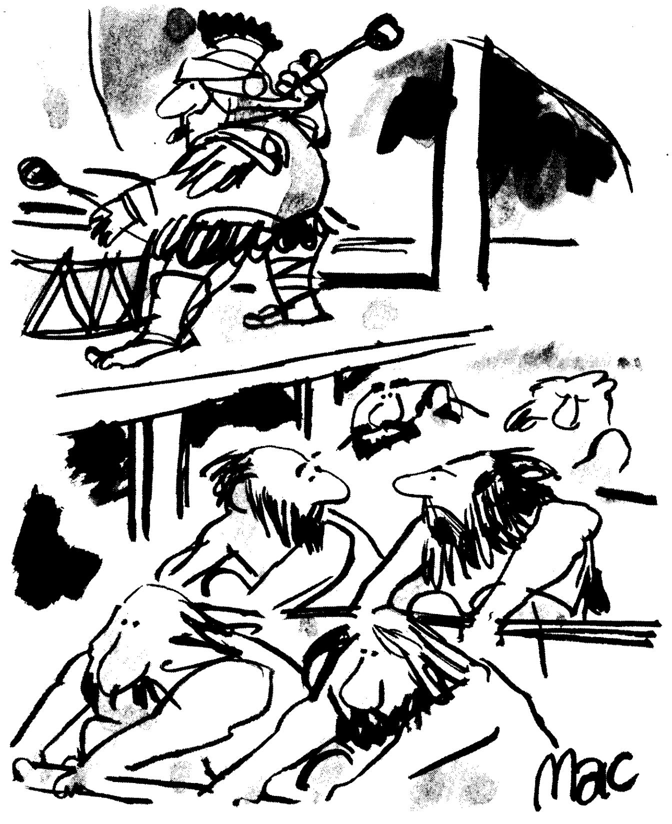

Don't you know something else besides "Put Your Shoulder To The Wheel?"