

# The Congregation Development Program: Data-Based Consultation With Churches and Synagogues

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The potential for successful consultation between psychological and religious communities is illustrated through one forum, the Congregation Development Program (CDP). A data-based consultation program, the CDP is designed to help churches and synagogues define their strengths and weaknesses and plan for their futures. Congregation life is assessed through participant observation, interviews with clergy and leaders, and a battery of survey instruments designed specifically for congregations. This information is interpreted in collaboration with clergy and leaders in a consultative feedback meeting. The authors describe the phases of the consultation process, from entry and assessment to intervention and evaluation/termination. Illustrations are drawn from work with over 50 diverse congregations. The CDP points to churches and synagogues as sites of challenging opportunity for professional psychology.

Local religious congregations represent significant institutions in the United States today. As of 1986 there were over 344,000 congregations and over 520,000 clergy in this country (Jacquet, 1986). Gallup and Castelli (1989) estimated that 65% of the population are members of a church or synagogue and that 40% attend church or synagogue in a given week. Religious

institutions generate 3 times more philanthropic dollars than any other social institution, including education, social services, and health (Jacquet, 1986).

What these figures do not reveal are the many purposes religious institutions serve for their members and the larger community. Churches and synagogues can function as sources of meaning, control, intimacy, and values for their members (Maton & Pargament, 1987); means of challenging or sustaining social stability (Glock, Ringer, & Babbie, 1967); markers and facilitators of critical transitions in life (Pargament, 1990); sources of social status, symbols of continuity, and welfare institutions (Carroll, Dudley, & McKinney, 1986); mediators between private and public life (Roozen, McKinney, & Carroll, 1984); and sources of hope and power to minority and disenfranchised groups often neglected by traditional human services (Maton & Pargament, 1987).

Empirical evidence also underscores the functional significance of religious groups for the mental health of members (Galanter, Rabkin, Rabkin, & Deutsch, 1979; Roberts & Thorshiem, 1987). For example, in an intensive 2-year analysis of a nondenominational Christian fellowship, Maton and Rappaport (1984) found that congregational involvement was associated with a greater sense of personal well-being and increased personal competence. Studies also show that many people prefer to go to their church or synagogue for help and report less stigma in turning to the congregation than to the mental health professional (Chalfant, Heller, Roberts, Briones, Aguirre-Hochbaum, & Farr, 1990; Gurin, Veroff, & Feld, 1960).

Psychologists have underestimated the significance and diversity of organized religious life, perhaps because they are less religious as a group than the general population in this country (Beit-Hallahmi, 1974) and, in some instances, antireligious (e.g.,

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Ellis, 1986). The religious institution comes to the attention of many psychologists only under dramatic or unusual circumstances such as the trials of televangelists or concerns about the activities of religious cults. For a complex set of reasons (see Gorsuch, 1988, for a review), those professional interactions that have occurred between psychologist and religious system have often been characterized by biases and stereotypes on the part of the psychologist (e.g., see Kilbourne & Richardson, 1984). Churches and synagogues have been viewed as "quasi-mental health centers," with clergy as quasi-therapists and congregation members as clients (Rappaport, 1981). Although psychologists seek and receive referrals from clergy and train religious leaders in pastoral counseling, they rarely make referrals back to the clergy (Carson, 1976). There are, however, signs in the theoretical and empirical literature of a growing rapprochement between psychological and religious communities (e.g., Bergin, 1983; Gorsuch, 1988; Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985).

Nothing in the character of congregations excludes them from being understood or assisted through psychological methods, because churches and synagogues are similar to other systems in several important respects. They are open systems, both affecting and affected by their members and their larger social context. They have organizational structures (e.g., programs, leaders, facilities, and members) and organizational processes (e.g., decision making, communication, socialization, and assimilation). And, like other organizations, each congregation has its own "personality," including a special history, identity, language, purpose, structure, process, and social context.

This is not to say that churches and synagogues are identical to other organizations. They are *religious* systems, "vehicles for the knowledge and service of God" (Carroll et al., 1986, p. 7). Of course, congregations vary widely in the ways they define knowledge, service, and God (Maton & Pargament, 1987). However, they share a common point of reference; some sense of the divine lies at the heart of their diverse theologies, practices, and missions. It is this orientation to a greater power that distinguishes the religious from the secular institution.

The similarities of congregations to other organizations suggest that work with churches and synagogues does not have to be alien to the psychologist. Because they are, in several important respects, like other systems, they can be approached through similar concepts and methods. However, the uniquely religious nature of congregation life also suggests that psychological work with churches and synagogues will involve some special considerations.

Consultation is one form of psychological practice well-suited to religious systems (Malony, in press). Churches and synagogues present the full range of problems typically brought to consultants, from the mental health concerns of individual members, the conflicts of leaders and clergy, and questions about particular programs to issues of organizational survival, direction, and growth. However, as institutions historically "set apart" from the secular world (Smith, 1968), congregations are often unaware of psychological consultation as a potential resource. Although religious institutions have their own history of skepticism and mistrust of the psychological profession, the picture has begun to change. Clergy so often called on to be "all

things to all people"—theologians, administrators, educators, counselors, crisis workers, and community leaders—increasingly welcome psychological help built on respect for their professional competence (Weber & Wynn, 1986). Consultation, which assumes a basic level of resourcefulness among its client systems, offers just this kind of assistance.

The Congregation Development Program (CDP) illustrates one type of consultative approach, a data-based consultation program designed to assist religious systems at an organizational level. Like any consultation program, it is not appropriate for all systems. However, many congregations have found it useful. In this article, we present the CDP as a worthwhile program in its own right, and as an illustration of the significant role psychologists can play as consultants to churches and synagogues.

## The CDP: Overview, Background, and Development

### *Overview*

The CDP is a data-based program designed to help congregations assess their areas of strength and weakness and plan for their futures. Toward this end, we systematically collect information about the congregation and use a collaborative process of consultation, with clergy and leaders as consultees, to interpret the data and to consider their implications for congregation life. This collaborative process represents the intervention. It assumes that many churches and synagogues are resourceful enough to implement the findings without additional consultative assistance.

The CDP is a "system-wide checkup," but one in which both psychologist and religious organization work jointly toward making sense and making use of the findings. The active involvement of the congregation throughout the program increases the likelihood that it will "own" the results and put the data to use, rather than on a bookshelf. It is, in this sense, a program designed to help congregations help themselves. It is not meant for those organizations already committed to a specific course of action, those in the midst of a major transition, or those without the resources to assimilate or make use of the data. These congregations are screened from this program.

Although data-based strategies have only rarely been used in work with local congregations (e.g., Roozen & Carroll, 1982), they have been applied to mental health centers, businesses, schools, halfway houses, and voluntary groups (Attkisson, Hargreaves, Horowitz, & Sorensen, 1978; Chavis, Stucky, & Wandersman, 1983; Fairweather, 1972; Schroeder, 1979). Data-based consultative programs draw on the psychologist's research skills and provide the organization with a systematic way of examining itself and planning for the future. However, data-based strategies are neither completely objective nor value free. The choice of methods, interpretation of findings, and planning process are partly subjective and intuitive and sometimes emotionally charged. According to Schein (1969), "as long as organizations are networks of people, there will be processes occurring between them" (p. 9). An ability to understand and work with these processes is as important to data-based consultation as it is to any other psychological intervention. Thus, data-based approaches require organizational awareness, pro-

fessional sensitivity, tact, and interpersonal skill as well as proficient research skills.

### *Background and Development*

The CDP began about 10 years ago when we raised a number of questions about congregations. How do more effective religious congregations differ from their less effective counterparts? What aspects of church and synagogue life are particularly salient to the well-being of members and the larger community? How do congregations develop and change? Several approaches were taken to answer these questions. Members of the CDP team observed and participated in a variety of religious congregations. In-depth interviews were conducted with clergy, leaders, and members of these churches and synagogues. Relevant literature was reviewed in the areas of organizational theory, needs assessment, program evaluation, consultation, congregation development, and the psychology and sociology of religion.

This exploratory process led to the conclusion that, although there is no single model of the ideal congregation, effective churches and synagogues have several attributes in common with other effective organizations (Katz & Kahn, 1978):

1. They are able to maintain themselves as viable systems. As voluntary organizations, congregations have no guarantee of survival.
2. They deal constructively with changes from both within and outside of their systems.
3. They communicate their goals, priorities, values, and beliefs clearly throughout their systems.
4. They provide opportunities for involvement and growth of their members.
5. They contribute to the well-being of the larger community.

Our next task was to develop a method for systematically assessing churches and synagogues—a task far more complicated than it sounded. Attending a church service or talking with a rabbi cannot, in itself, reveal the full identity of the congregation any more than a snapshot of a family can reveal the dynamics of family life. Congregations are “living, breathing” systems, complex and multifaceted in nature, and require equally diverse methods of study. Thus, we developed a *multi-modal* approach to measuring congregational functioning: participant observation of services and activities, interviews with the clergy and leaders of the congregation, paper-and-pencil questionnaires of a representative sample of congregation members, and consultative feedback meetings with the clergy and congregation leaders.

Because few psychometrically sound instruments existed, we developed our own measures of key aspects of congregation life: the climate or personality of the congregation, satisfaction with several dimensions of the church or synagogue, the personal mission of the congregation, and the priorities of the religious system. In addition, measures of the social mission of the congregation and the roles of the pastor were adapted from the work of Roozen and his associates (Roozen & Carroll, 1982; Roozen et al., 1984). In a study of diverse congregations and religious organizations from Hartford, Connecticut, they found that members discriminated in their perceptions of the social

missions of their religious systems (Roozen et al., 1984). For example, one group of young Jews took a social activist stance, integrating Jewish tradition with efforts to create social and political change. Another Assembly of God congregation emphasized its responsibility “to bring the lost to Christ” through a variety of programs to evangelize the unchurched. Still others served civic roles through their contributions to human service programs. And some focused inwardly on the needs of their members, providing them with a sanctuary from the concerns of the world.

Reliability and validity of the newly constructed scales have been established through work with more than 50 diverse congregations, including White, Black, rural, urban, Protestant, Jewish, Catholic, large, small, thriving, and declining churches and synagogues. Estimates of internal consistency of these scales have been acceptable (coefficient alphas > .70). The instruments have also evidenced validity. For example, in one study of congregation climate, small Black Protestant churches were distinguished by greater expressiveness, stability, and social concern, underscoring their central roles within many Black communities. Larger White Catholic parishes manifested lower expressiveness and sense of community, and a higher level of church activity. Moderate-sized White mainline Protestant churches revealed the lowest levels of stability, openness to change, social concern, and order/clarity. Members' climate scores were also associated with measures of self-esteem, trust, coping skills, and life satisfaction (Pargament, Silverman, Johnson, Echemendia, & Snyder, 1983). Another study established support for the convergent and discriminant validity of the congregation satisfaction scales through use of the multi-trait-multimethod matrix. Moreover, the satisfaction scales discriminated among churches and related to the level of member involvement in the congregation (Silverman, Pargament, Johnson, Echemendia, & Snyder, 1983). The measures of congregation life have also discriminated between conservative and mainline churches (Pargament, Echemendia, et al., 1987). (A technical manual describing the psychometric properties of these scales and the CDP in more detail is available from Kenneth I. Pargament.)

Finally, it is important to note something of the background and training of the members of the CDP team. Over 20 faculty and graduate students in psychology have served as consultants to churches and synagogues over the past 10 years. Team members have come from clinical, industrial, and social areas of psychology. Each area has contributed its own expertise to the development of the program. Furthermore, CDP team members have represented a variety of religious traditions, from conservative Christian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish to liberal Christian, Roman Catholic, and atheist. Rather than a source of contention, the ecumenical nature of our teams has been a distinct advantage because we have been able to draw on the insights of both “insiders” and “outsiders” to a variety of religious traditions. Both perspectives have been helpful, providing a check on the other. Insiders have the advantage of familiarity with the language, mores, and traditions of the particular religious system. Outsiders have the advantage of greater distance, detachment, and, perhaps, perspective on that system. Although the CDP could be implemented by a single practi-

tioner familiar with data-based consultation methods, we recommend this team approach to consultation.

CDP members are trained through readings on consultation, data-based change, organizational behavior, and the structure and process of congregation life. Group discussions in which the members share some of their religious backgrounds and religious orientations are equally important. In this process particular attention is paid to misconceptions, fears, and stereotypes of different religious traditions (e.g., fears of being proselyted or persecuted and stereotypes of religious rigidity). Once again, the advantage of an ecumenical team is apparent here, because often the religiously heterogeneous group can correct the biases and misunderstandings of team members and allay some of their concerns. Training in the data collection and the hands-on consultation process comes through a pyramid model in which less experienced members work as apprentices to more experienced members until they are ready to take on a larger share of the responsibility for the consultation themselves.

**The Process of Data-Based Consultation With Churches and Synagogues: Implementing the CDP**

Data-based consultation with congregations proceeds in a set of stages common to work with any system: entry, assessment, intervention, and evaluation/termination (see Altrocchi, 1972; Galliesich, 1982; Schein, 1969). The critical tasks and processes that take place in the stages of data-based consultation are summarized in Figure 1. In the following sections we describe the process of the CDP as it progresses through each of these stages. It should be noted, however, that these stages are only a general guideline to the consultation process; often, the tasks within different stages are performed simultaneously.

*Entry Into the System*

Initial contact with religious systems occurs in a variety of ways. Usually, congregations inquire about the CDP after hear-

ing of it from other participating congregations. In other cases, congregations are referred to the CDP through a denominational office that is familiar with the program and concerned about the well-being of a particular church or parish. Occasionally, referrals are generated from talks to religious groups or descriptions of the CDP in denominational newsletters and other publications.

There are a number of reasons why churches and synagogues participate in the CDP. Many congregations are not experiencing immediate difficulties but seek information about potential problems and areas for improvement to maintain themselves as healthy systems. Other congregations turn to the CDP for assistance in dealing with specific problems. These problems range from a decline in membership and tensions between various factions within the congregation to uncertainty about specific aspects of congregation life, such as the religious education programs or the religious services.

After the initial contact, we provide an opportunity for both representatives of the congregation and CDP team members to clarify their expectations of each other and decide whether data-based consultation is an appropriate means of addressing the congregation's needs and concerns. Toward this end, the pastor of the prospective church or synagogue completes an initial survey about the background of the congregation and the reasons for its interest in the CDP. After reviewing the survey, CDP team members arrange an exploratory meeting to discuss the program with the pastor and leaders of the congregation. In this meeting we explain the different phases of the program in detail and what their participation will require of them. We also review the type of feedback the congregation will receive in the data-sharing process. Finally, we address potential misconceptions of the program by discussing what the CDP is not. Data, it is stressed, do not contain magical answers. Neither are the CDP team members magicians. From the outset, we avoid the role of outside expert and, instead, define ourselves as consultants who work in partnership with the leaders and clergy to enhance the life of the congregation. Because they know their system much better than we can ever hope to, they must work

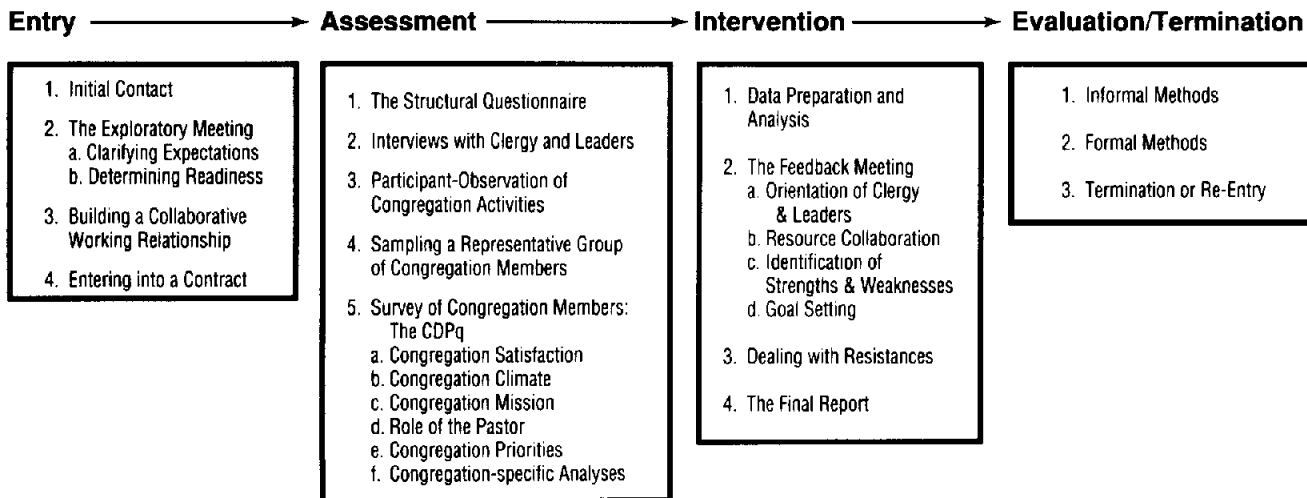


Figure 1. Stages of data-based consultation with churches and synagogues.

closely with us in all phases of the program. An openness to the insights and impressions of the leaders, clergy, and members is critical to the development of this collaborative process.

During the initial contacts and exploratory meeting, CDP team members also assess the appropriateness of the congregation for data-based consultation. Why is the church or synagogue interested in the program? What do they hope to gain from it? How will the information be used? Is there commitment to the program at all levels of the system—members, leaders, and clergy? Does the congregation have the organizational resources to conduct the program? Is it in a position to profit from the results?

Depending on the answers to these questions, the CDP team may discourage a congregation from participation. We will not work with congregations whose values and goals are inconsistent with ours, such as the system whose leaders and clergy are unwilling to share the results of the program with the entire congregation, the organization seeking only support from the CDP for a particular project, or the church whose leaders are looking to the program to help them implement a predetermined change. In these situations, other forms of consultation may be more appropriate.

We do not work with congregations lacking organization-wide support for the program. Although some resistance to outside forces can be a sign of organizational strength (Altrochi, 1972), more intense reactions of hostility or suspiciousness to the CDP from the clergy, leaders, or other levels of the congregation are a warning sign. We have encountered these reactions more often when the congregation has been referred to the CDP from a denominational office.

Because we must be very cautious about identifying problems among congregations that are not in a position to solve them, we screen out churches and synagogues lacking the resources to profit from the program. For instance, we turned down the offer to work with a clergyman who was co-pastor to two small independent rural churches, neither of which had the necessary leadership, human resources, or organizational structure to put the CDP to good use. For the same reason, the CDP is not appropriate for congregations in the midst of a major transition, such as a change in clergy or a move to a new facility.

When an agreement is reached to proceed with the program, two CDP team members are designated as contact people for each congregation, and a member of the clergy or leader is appointed as a contact to the CDP team. Through this structure, questions and concerns about the program can be addressed efficiently. Finally, a contract is signed by either the clergy or president of the congregation and the director of the CDP. This contract details the services to be provided by the CDP team and the requirements and fees for participation in the program by the congregation. The contract formalizes the working relationship and ensures the commitment of all parties to the program. By the end of the entry stage, the congregation should have clear, accurate expectations of what the CDP will and will not offer, and more of a "common diagnostic frame of reference" (Schein, 1969, p. 7).

#### *Assessment*

The assessment process actually begins with entry into the religious system. From the first of our interactions, we try to

understand congregation life—its structures, dynamics, and values. But once a contract between the congregation and the CDP has been formed, several formal assessment tasks are initiated. First, the congregation's pastor or leaders, or both, fill out a detailed structural questionnaire that addresses the congregation's history, neighborhood, facilities, demographic characteristics, decision-making processes, programs, and staff. This questionnaire provides the CDP team with a fairly broad contextual picture of the congregation and can help identify special needs, problems, or developments. For example, the critical issue facing one Lutheran church located in a once flourishing inner city was identified through the structural questionnaire. The neighborhood had become increasingly impoverished and crime-ridden. Most members commuted from the suburbs, but membership had dwindled over the previous 20 years. The church was 90% White; the neighborhood was 90% minority. The key question facing the church was whether to become more a part of the community, move to the suburbs, or close its doors.

To provide a qualitative flavor of congregation life not easily captured through quantitative measures, we conduct in-depth structured interviews with individual pastors and leaders. We discuss tensions in the congregation, how decisions are reached, the goals for the congregation, problems that have arisen in the past, changes that are anticipated, and other difficult, potentially sensitive material. When possible, team members also attend and observe congregation activities such as worship services or committee meetings. At times, this participant observation process provides information unattainable through any other method, as in the case of a church that was still reeling from the effects of an affair the previous pastor had had with a member of the church.

While we are conducting these interviews and the consultees (clergy, leaders or both) are completing the structural questionnaire, a sampling committee from the congregation begins the process of selecting members to complete a congregation life survey. We attempt to sample both more active and less active members, using frequency of attendance as the criteria of activity. To obtain a representative picture of the church or synagogue, it is important to include less active members in the sample. Therefore, the committee creates a list from its membership roster of more active members (those who attend services more than once a month) and less active members (those who attend services once a month or less). Prospective participants are solicited through telephone calls by the committee. The congregation attempts to get 50% of the sample from the list of more frequent attenders and 50% of the sample from the list of less frequent attenders. The total number in the sample is based on the size of the congregation. Typically, the sample ranges in size from 100 to 200 members.

These members complete a questionnaire about the congregation (the Congregation Development Program Questionnaire) at their church or synagogue in group sessions. To ensure participants' anonymity, the CDP team administers and collects the questionnaires, members generally do not sign their names to the surveys, and group information, rather than individual responses, is reported to the clergy and leaders of the congregation. We assess the representativeness of the sample

completing the questionnaire by comparing their demographics with those of the entire congregation, which were gathered on the structural questionnaire. In cases of less representative samples, the data are interpreted cautiously and with sensitivity to the over- and undersampled groups.

### *The Congregation Development Program Questionnaire (CDPq)*

The CDPq was developed to provide a comprehensive picture of the congregation as the members view it. Scales on the CDPq explore several dimensions: members' satisfaction with the congregation, perceptions of congregation climate, missions of the church or synagogue, tasks of the pastor, and priorities of the congregation. The items in the CDPq also assess the demographic characteristics and religious practices of the sample, such as the amount of time spent in prayer and the number of friends the member has in the congregation. The language of the CDPq is tailored to the religious terminology of each denomination. The CDPq is structured, systematic, and a central part of the program. We will discuss the elements of the CDPq and their use in the program in more detail.

*Congregation satisfaction.* Members complete scales of satisfaction about seven dimensions of congregation life: weekly religious services, members, leaders, programs, religious education for children, religious education for adults, and facilities. Because these scales are made up of items descriptive and evaluative of specific aspects of congregation life, the results have practical value. Psychometric information on the scales is provided by Silverman et al. (1983).

A general picture of members' satisfaction with the congregation is developed by examining the means and standard deviations for the scales. The means across the scales are then compared to identify relative areas of strength (high means) and areas for improvement (low means) in the congregation. Finally, within each scale, items with exceptionally high or low means are examined to pinpoint concrete sources of greater and lesser satisfaction in the church or synagogue. Each congregation's data are interpreted independently for two reasons. First, norms have not been established for use across congregations. More important, because each congregation is in some ways unique, we have found it more helpful to focus the church or synagogue on its own special strengths, weaknesses, and circumstances. The following is a summary of the satisfaction data for one church:

St. Johns is a Presbyterian church located in the downtown area of a moderate-sized city. The members, White and middle class, do not live in the immediate neighborhood. The pastor has been with the church for 25 years and is close to retirement. The church has a formal leadership structure that provides the general membership with only limited input into church decision making and program development.

Members report relatively high mean satisfaction on the Services and Facilities scales. The mean satisfaction ratings for the Members and Leaders in the church are relatively lower. Thus, services and facilities represent relative strengths and members

and leaders represent relative areas for improvement in the congregation.

Turning to the individual items, within the Services dimension, high item means are reported for the items of "interesting, not too long, and well planned." The Facilities are described frequently as "pleasant to be in, neat, attractive and well lit." On the Members scale, members are often described as "close-minded, hard to meet, and uninvolved." Similarly, Leaders are commonly depicted as "too set in their ways, cliquish, and not receptive to new ideas." The satisfaction data present a picture of St. Johns as structurally sound, but interpersonally distant and resistant to change.

*Congregation climate.* As is the case with people, every congregation seems to have its own unique personality or climate. Congregations may differ in their openness to change, their stability over time, their interpersonal flavor, and in other ways as well. The CDPq assesses five dimensions of congregation climate: openness to change, activities, stability, organization and clarity, and sense of community. Information on the development of these scales and their psychometric properties is provided by Pargament et al. (1983).

The climate data are interpreted in the same way as the satisfaction data. The overall levels of climate are examined, differences among the scales are inspected, and items with higher and lower means are identified. An illustration of the climate data from another church follows:

Emmanuel Baptist is a suburban church of 300 mostly working class members. Over the past year, the church has lost 34 members, but it is not actively pursuing more membership. The leaders report that another clergyman is needed. Structurally, the church includes three boards and 55 leaders. Decisions are made almost exclusively by the clergy and the leaders.

The highest mean ratings are reported for the Organization and Clarity, and Sense of Community scales. The Stability, Openness to Change, and Activities scales are relatively lower. Analyses of items within the subscales indicate that the members perceive a sense of fellowship within Emmanuel Baptist and see the church as well-organized. However, they also perceive the church to be unstable and unwilling to adopt new solutions to problems. These perceptions are consistent with the actual decline in membership as well as their passive response to this problem.

*Congregation mission.* Every congregation has some type of mission or vision, whether it is formally stated or not, and within a congregation, members may have differing opinions about what the mission of the church is currently and what it should be. Two broad classes of missions can be distinguished: personal mission—the vision of how the congregation should relate to its own members—and social mission—the vision of how the congregation should relate to the world around it. The CDPq includes personal and social mission scales.

Personal mission is assessed by four scales defined as follows: (a) *Growth*—the congregation encourages personal improvement, development of talents and skills, and willingness to examine oneself critically; (b) *Maintenance*—the congregation provides help for personal problems, support in the face of life's stresses, and hope, self-esteem, and personal identity; (c) *Discipline*—the congregation encourages ritual and tradition, reliance on the foundations of the congregation (clergy and Bible teachings), and a belief that the way to serve God is through following his rules and teachings; and (d) *Relationship with God*

—the congregation encourages a close personal relationship with God, forgiveness of sins, and emotional certainty of faith.

Social mission is also defined by four dimensions and scales (Roozen et al., 1984): (a) *Action*—the congregation encourages social change and justice, involvement in world or community problems, and involvement in public policy issues; (b) *Civic*—the congregation encourages an affirmation of existing rules and structures, personal decisions on moral and social issues, civil harmony, and avoidance of conflict; (c) *Evangelistic*—the congregation encourages sharing of the faith, strong openness to the Holy Spirit, and active witnessing to others in the general community (this dimension is not appropriate for synagogues); and (d) *Sanctuary*—the congregation provides a refuge from the world where one is accepted, comforted, and loved.

On the mission scales, members rate each item in terms of the degree they feel it currently is emphasized in the congregation and the degree they feel it should be emphasized. The discrepancies between the mean “now” and “should be” responses of the members are then analyzed. Smaller discrepancies are interpreted as greater satisfaction with the current mission of the congregation. Larger discrepancies are interpreted as more dissatisfaction with the congregation’s mission. Information on the development and psychometric properties of these scales and the scales that follow is presented in the technical manual of the CDP (Silverman, Pargament, & Falgout, 1990). The mission data from one church are summarized below:

St. Luke’s is a large, prosperous, fundamentalist Protestant church located in an affluent suburb. Its 750 members represent a spectrum of ages and backgrounds. The church has excellent facilities and minimal financial burdens. However, the church has been described by leaders, clergy, and members as “like a country club”; people know each other at a surface level but there is not much depth to their relationships.

The members perceive the present personal mission of the church as emphasizing the importance of the individual’s Relationship with God. They also see a greater proportion of energy spent on continuing religious traditions through rituals and Bible study (Discipline) than on members’ personal problems in daily life (Maintenance). As they look to the future, it is clear that they would like to see a more even balance among the four types of personal mission. A larger difference between “now” and “should be” scores for the Growth and Maintenance scales suggests that they would like the church to become more invested in helping members grow personally and supporting them as they cope with the stresses of life.

Specific items in these scales underscore these general trends. For example, within the Personal Relationship with God scale, members are satisfied with the emphasis placed on “knowing that by faith in God, sins are forgiven” and “encouraging a deep feeling that there is a life beyond this one.” On the other hand, within the Personal Growth dimension, they would like more emphasis on “encouraging members to improve themselves and understand themselves better” and “helping members to improve their relationships with others.”

Turning to the social mission scales, members appear to be satisfied with the relative lack of emphasis on Social Action in the church. However, they would like to see the church more involved in bringing new members into the congregation (Evangelistic) and in providing members with a refuge from daily stresses (Sanctuary).

In comparing the levels of personal and social missions, the

members report higher “now” and “should be” levels of personal than social missions. Thus, the primary goals of the church appear to be more personal than social. Interestingly, the pastor of St. Luke’s has quite a different view of the ideal mission of the church. He prefers an emphasis on social outreach rather than on personal mission goals. These data identified an important but previously unarticulated difference in visions for the church.

*Role of the pastor.* In most churches and synagogues, the clergy play a key role in defining the character of congregation life. In the CDPq, we assess how well the pastor meets the expectations of the membership through a survey adapted from Roozen and Carroll (1982). Congregation members are asked to select the most important parts of the pastor’s job from a list of 15 duties. Members are then asked to rate their satisfaction with the pastor’s performance on the tasks they have chosen. In short, this scale has two components: important tasks and satisfaction with task performance.

The CDP team examines two pieces of data to interpret the scale. First, the percentage of people endorsing each item is reviewed. Items endorsed by more than 75% of the members are singled out as very important and items endorsed by less than 25% of the members are singled out as not very important to the congregation. Second, the members’ level of satisfaction with these tasks is examined. The following is a summary of the results from this scale in one church:

First United Church is a small, fairly new Methodist congregation located in a small city. A growing church with a relatively young membership, First United has no trouble attracting new members but its facilities are cramped and its programs and activities are limited.

The members of First United expect a great deal from their pastor. Eight of the 15 tasks are endorsed as important by over 75% of the members. The members are looking to the pastor for administrative leadership as well as ministerial support. Only one task, improving the financial well-being of the church, is seen as clearly not important. Although the congregation is satisfied with the performance of the pastor on almost all of these tasks, the members are expecting their religious leader to fill too many of the roles in this understaffed church. The long-term success of the church will depend on its ability to generate additional resources for its development.

*Congregation priorities.* The CDP identifies many areas for development within the congregation. However, the resources and energies of any congregation are limited, so it is important to identify the issues of highest priority. To accomplish this goal, the CDPq presents members with a list of 15 diverse priorities and asks them to indicate the three areas where they feel the congregation is currently focusing its energy (“now” priority) and the three areas where they would ideally like to see it focus its energy (“should be” priority). Thus, members are forced to choose where they would put resources, just as their congregation must eventually decide. The percentages of members endorsing each of the priorities are tallied and the discrepancies between the current and ideal priorities are analyzed. Attention should be focused on the most highly valued priorities. Within those, energy should be shifted away from priorities endorsed more frequently as “now” than “should be” and toward priorities endorsed more frequently as “should be” than “now.” A summary of the priorities of one church follows:

St. Mark's is a Lutheran church of 550 members located in a large city. It is an older church; 40% of the members are 66 years or older, and the average length of membership is 35 years. While the church has excellent facilities and education programs, its neighborhood is becoming more unsafe and membership is declining.

The three most important "now" priorities in the church are "encouraging new members to join," "encouraging more active involvement of members," and "improving religious services." The three highest "should be" priorities are "encouraging new members to join," "encouraging more active involvement of members," and "improving social programs for young adults." These results suggest that members believe the church is directing its energies appropriately in recruiting new members and encouraging present members to become more active. However, they also feel that St. Mark's should place greater emphasis on social programs for young adults and deemphasize changes in the religious services. The members appear to be responding to changes in their community, particularly the increases in drug use among teenagers and the urgent need for services for church youth.

The responses to the priority of "moving the church" are interesting to note. While the absolute levels of "now" and "should be" on this item are rather low, the "should be" level is much larger than the "now" emphasis. If the neighborhood becomes increasingly unsafe, this priority may escalate over the next few years.

*Congregation-specific analyses.* The CDP team can tailor the CDPq to meet specific needs of a particular congregation by adding open-ended and closed-ended questions to address particular concerns. The open-ended questions are content analyzed and can yield interesting information not detected by the standardized questions. For example, the majority of members in the choir of one church spontaneously voiced dissatisfaction with its director and membership regulations.

Once the data for the entire congregation sample have been tabulated, they are analyzed for group differences between clergy and members and among members varying in gender, self-reported leadership, active involvement in the congregation, and age. In some congregations, additional group analyses are conducted for particular circumstances:

A suburban Episcopal church in a growing community has three Sunday morning services. The services vary in their membership and "personality." Group comparisons of the participants of the three services revealed some interesting findings. The middle service was attended largely by young adults and families. These members report a higher sense of community in the church, and more need for improvement in the facilities because of overcrowding and lack of worship space. The early service attenders, mostly older, more traditional worshippers, report that members are not open to new ideas and change. The pastor characterizes the late service as "the service for those without families, who like to sleep late on Sunday mornings." These members want a more active evangelism program. Without these group analyses, the data would have reflected the views of the middle service attenders since they were the largest group in the sample.

### *Intervention*

Information from the CDPq, structural questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and participant observation is analyzed and prepared by the CDP team for presentation to our consultees, the clergy and congregation leaders, at a feedback meeting.

### *The Feedback Meeting*

We present the data in a roughly summarized form and assist in the interpretation of the data. To facilitate the consultative process, we try to limit the number of clergy and leaders at the meeting to 10 people. The meeting begins with a careful orientation of the participants to the feedback process. They are reminded of the purpose of the program, the methods that were used to assess their congregation, and the goals for the meeting. Here, as in the exploratory meeting, we stress that data are not sacrosanct; they must be interpreted critically but constructively. CDP team members offer suggestions and guidelines to facilitate this process throughout the meeting. We also emphasize that the CDP members are not experts about their congregation. As psychologists, we bring our research skills, organizational knowledge, and interpersonal sensitivity to the collaborative process, and some distance and external perspective on the system as well. But we do not have intimate, first-hand knowledge of congregational life. Members of the congregation are privy to the inner dynamics of their church or synagogue, and their perspectives are invaluable in understanding the data. This is a resource-collaborative process, one in which both psychologists and congregations gain by sharing their different areas of knowledge (Tyler, Pargament, & Gatz, 1983).

One of the biggest dangers in the feedback meeting is data overload. The large amount of information gathered through the CDP must be given to the clergy and leaders in digestible form. Toward this end, the CDP team presents the participants with graphs and figures that clearly summarize the results of the different assessment approaches. We avoid the use of technical language, complicated statistics, or jargon in discussing the findings. Moreover, we encourage leaders and clergy to look for recurrent themes as they sift through this information. Focusing on themes, we have found, diverts the attention of the group from the idiosyncratic finding and the interesting but less important sidetracks. Focusing on emergent themes also provides a convenient form for summarizing the important conclusions of the feedback meeting. These procedures have effectively minimized the risks of data overload in the feedback meeting.

The process of change in congregations is not simple. In the process of addressing one problem, another problem may be created or a strength in the congregation may be undermined. For this reason, we encourage the clergy and leaders to identify the strengths of the church or synagogue as well as areas for improvement. We also encourage the congregation to consider how possible changes may affect desirable as well as less desirable aspects of congregation life. At times, the CDP simply reaffirms congregation life as is.

We leave time toward the end of the feedback meeting to summarize both the positive and negative themes. In some congregations we have engaged in a more formal goal-setting process, using Kiresuk and Sherman's (1968) Goal Attainment Scaling to help them define their objectives concretely. We also discuss mechanisms for translating these goals and objectives into action, such as program committees or long-range planning bodies. As a rule, the congregations we have worked with have been quite capable of further planning and problem solving themselves. Occasionally, we have suggested additional help



to the congregation for dealing with particular issues, such as mental health consultation or educational workshops on family life concerns. Of course, as with other forms of consultation (e.g., Schein, 1969), the ultimate decision and responsibility for change rest with the congregation.

In some instances, the results of the CDP point to serious problems with the clergy. In these cases, we prefer to meet with the pastor before the group feedback to review the findings. For example, in one church the pastor received extremely negative feedback from many of the leaders and members. The CDP team met with the pastor the day before the meeting to prepare him for the results. This procedure may give the pastor time to “stiffen resistances,” but we feel it is more humane to hear “bad news” alone than in front of a large, potentially unsupportive group.

### *Dealing With Resistances*

As with other interventions, data-based feedback programs can be misused. In our work with congregations, we have encountered a variety of resistances to the effective use of the findings. Resistances are only natural, and they can serve an important function in protecting the congregation from unwise changes. However, they can also interfere with changes necessary for the well-being of the system and its members. Thus, it is important to consider these sources of resistance and the ways the program can be misused. Successful outcomes are more likely to follow when we can anticipate and deal effectively with the resistances that come up. Five of the more common resistances include sidestepping weaknesses, divide and conquer, the “yes, but” syndrome, appealing to higher authorities, and quick fixes.

Occasionally, congregation leaders will attempt to sidestep a specific area for improvement. For instance, in one church the data pointed to a drug problem among the youth. The male leaders at the feedback meeting denied there was a problem. The female leaders did not agree vocally with the data; however, their nonverbal cues suggested that they did see a problem with drugs among church youth. CDP team members kept the focus of the group on this problem and encouraged the female leaders to express their point of view more openly.

Sidestepping weaknesses may also arise in the form of unrealistically positive descriptions of the congregation. For example, on the CDPq (made up of more than 500 questions), some members do not endorse any items critical of the congregation. To deal with this problem, we developed a measure of congregational indiscriminate proreligiousness, consisting of items so positive about the church or synagogue that they are unlikely to be true (e.g., “congregation members never gossip about one another” and “differences of opinion are always welcome in this congregation”). Scores on this measure can be used to adjust the ratings of members on the CDPq either through statistical methods or by dropping the responses of those members who score above a cutoff level (Pargament, Brannick, et al., 1987).

At times, congregation leaders will dwell on details of the data, either because they have difficulty recognizing general themes in the results or in an effort to discount the findings by pointing out minor inconsistencies—a divide and conquer strat-

egy. For example, in one church the leaders grew concerned about how the members might have interpreted an item on the Openness to Change climate scale in a few different ways. Although the CDP team tries to respond to these concerns, we stress the importance of recurring themes in the data, explaining that individual data points can be misleading.

In some instances, we have encountered leaders who agree with the results but claim that the concerns raised by the data are no longer an issue for the congregation. For example, the data in one church suggested that too much emphasis was placed on fund raising. The leaders felt the data reflected the fact that the congregation had recently completed a fund-raising drive and believed that the members would support additional fund-raising activities in the future. In this “yes, but . . .” case, the CDP team focused more on the “but” than the “yes,” pointing out that at the time there was little support for additional fund raising and that leaders should be careful about assuming a change in attitudes without further assessment.

A resistance unique to congregations arises when leaders acknowledge the issues but maintain that the members do not know what is in their best interest. Here leaders implicitly point to a higher authority, such as doctrines of the church or God’s will, that can override the wishes of the members. This is a sensitive issue for the consultant. Although religious authority does indeed underlie critical dimensions of congregation life, appeals to authority can reflect resistance to questions, different points of view, or change. Usually we address this situation with our own “yes, but . . .,” acknowledging religious authority in the congregation but exploring the different ways this authority can be translated concretely into congregation life.

Other difficulties arise when leaders recognize the need for changes within the congregation and propose simple “quick fixes” rather than more substantive solutions to complex problems. A vivid example of this problem arose in our work with a parish whose members reported little sense of community. After considering this problem for a few minutes, the leaders arrived at a solution—a program in which different church members would stand at the door before services to act as greeters for newcomers. Although this was a step in the right direction, it did not address the complex issue of a lack of unity among parish members. We encouraged the leaders to consider more substantive ways to address the issue.

After the feedback meeting, the CDP team assembles a final report in which the results of the CDP are integrated with the discussions, themes, and conclusions reached at the feedback meeting. This report contains no new information or surprises. It leaves the congregation with a convenient summary to refer to when they put the results of the CDP into practice.

Although our work stresses the uniqueness of each congregation, we have found some commonalities in the themes that have emerged through the CDP feedback meetings. The following are six of the more common themes:

1. The congregation is friendly, but the members want something more than a friendly place. They want the church or synagogue to feel more like family.
2. The congregation is facing developmental transitions and is unsure of how to deal with them. These changes include

neighborhoods in flux, increases or decreases in membership, aging facilities, and the anticipated retirement of the clergy.

3. Programs in the congregation need to become better suited to the needs of particular members, such as the elderly, youth, or single parents.

4. Members of the congregation would like to see greater levels of participation among all members. Yet the congregation is a voluntary organization, and some of the less active are satisfied with their level of involvement. Others feel that the congregation is not open to their participation.

5. The clergy and leaders have taken on a disproportionate share of the responsibilities in the church. They may have difficulty finding others to help them or difficulty delegating their responsibilities to those willing to help.

6. Congregation members are interested in finding ways to make their religious faith and practices more relevant and helpful to the problems they face in their lives.

### *Evaluation/Termination*

To date, evaluations of the CDP have been largely informal, based on follow-up phone interviews, surveys, and visits. Informal as they are, these evaluations indicate that many congregations have been able to put the program to a variety of constructive uses after we have gone. The information gleaned from the CDP is often used to facilitate the long-range planning process of congregations. For example, in one congregation made up of older members in a deteriorating neighborhood, the results prodded the leaders into thinking about where they wanted their congregation to be in 5 years. Did they want it to survive, most likely in a changed form, or did they want it to continue to meet the needs of a dwindling number of members and, within a few years, close its doors?

Within other congregations, the CDP has provided an impetus for further examination of church or synagogue life. In one church, the leaders went on a planning retreat in which the CDP results were presented initially to stimulate in-depth discussion of a crucial point of difference among members—whether to make church facilities more accessible to handicapped members or expand the educational space for children.

Other congregations have used the CDP to implement more basic changes. For example, our work with a synagogue pointed to a lack of programs for older adults. The synagogue leaders responded by appointing several older members to the governing board and by creating a committee to develop programs for the elderly. Members of this orthodox synagogue also reported dissatisfaction with the prescribed separate seating arrangements for male and female members. In response to this concern, the leaders established mixed seating at Friday night services, a change that remained within the guidelines of Jewish practice. In a large Roman Catholic parish troubled by a lack of community among its members, church leaders developed small group activities to create opportunities for closer and more frequent contact among members. Time before and after the services was also set aside for socialization. Another church's members voiced a need for help with their personal problems, and, in response, the leaders explored programs to

train congregation members as lay ministers to others in need. Other specific changes growing out of the CDP have included the development of programs more tailored to family concerns, changes in staffing, building additions, changes in location of the congregation, and greater involvement in social action programs in the community.

The CDP does not always lead to change. Many congregations have used the CDP to provide them with a general check on congregation life. Results of the CDP have provided reassurance to the leaders that "things are going pretty well." After a feedback meeting in one church, the clergyman voiced his relief to a CDP team member on hearing that the members expected so much of him. Until then, he had attributed the stress he felt in his pastor role to personal failings. He was relieved to know "he wasn't crazy after all."

One final indicator of the efficacy of the CDP should be mentioned. We have received more requests for the program than we can handle.

In the future, more formal methods should be used to supplement these informal, qualitative methods of evaluating the CDP. For example, quasi-experimental designs could be used to examine the impact of the CDP. Churches and synagogues participating in the program could be compared with nonparticipating congregations. Life in these congregations could be assessed before and after the program by several approaches: goal attainment scaling methods, changes in red-flagged CDP items and scales, measures of individual and community well-being, and other indicators of congregation functioning including growth, financial status, and clergy turnover.

Our contacts with the congregation generally end after the evaluation of the program. Certainly, we would be obligated to continue our work with any congregation unable to resolve problems that had surfaced through the CDP. However, we have not encountered this problem. The congregations we have worked with have been resourceful enough to handle the findings generated by the CDP on their own. Nevertheless, in some congregations, further consultation might be needed to deal with specific issues raised by the program: conflicts among members, leaders, and clergy; communication difficulties; or the need for new programs. The CDP might highlight the need for other services such as case consultation with the clergy, leader training, educational programs for members, or psychotherapy. Referrals can be made to these resources or consultants can offer additional services themselves. When the consultant reenters the congregation, a new contract must be developed that clearly delineates the changed roles, responsibilities, and relationship of the two parties.

### Conclusions

The CDP is not the last word on consultation with religious systems. Certainly, improvements could be made to this program. The congregation's readiness for consultation could be assessed more systematically (Cherniss, 1978). The effects of the program could be studied more formally and over a longer period of time. Furthermore, our understanding of how data can be integrated most effectively into the continuous flow of

organizational process could be deepened. But even with improvements such as these, this data-based consultation program will not be appropriate for all churches and synagogues. Mental health consultation to clergy (Weber & Wynn, 1986), process consultation (Schein, 1969), or education and training models of consultation (Gallesich, 1982) may be better suited to the problems of some religious systems. Effective screening, then, is an essential part of this program.

One of the first words on psychological consultation with churches and synagogues, the CDP has been presented not only as a valuable program in its own right but as a way to encourage additional thought and practice in this area. Work with religious organizations may represent one of the last great taboos for professional psychology (Pargament, Ensing, Falgout, & Warren, 1988). But there are many good reasons to consider the congregation as another site for psychological practice. As the CDP illustrates, this practice can go beyond mental health consultation to clergy or therapy to congregation members. The religious system itself represents an important target for psychological work, one often open to those who express an interest in congregation life.

We have also emphasized that religious systems are in part unique and in part like other systems. It is important for the psychologist to learn about the special character of churches and synagogues. This task does not have to be ego-alien, because the process of consultation with congregations involves the stages of entry, assessment, intervention, and evaluation/termination common to work with any group. Within each of these stages, the consultant to the religious system faces many of the same critical tasks and issues to be found elsewhere.

Good consultation to religious systems involves the same skills and attitudes as good consultation to other systems—a respect for the system, a willingness to learn from as well as contribute to the system, the ability to conceptualize problems from different vantage points, and the ability to support the system while encouraging it to make significant change. (Pargament et al., 1988, p. 404)

The religious congregation represents an institutional resource that has been long neglected by most psychologists. However, churches and synagogues can be studied, understood, and assisted through psychological methods. In short, congregations offer a new and challenging set of opportunities for professional psychology.

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### Call for Nominations for *Clinician's Research Digest*

The Publications and Communications (P&C) Board of the American Psychological Association is seeking nominations for a new editor for *Clinician's Research Digest* for a 6-year term beginning January 1994. George Stricker is the incumbent editor. Candidates must be members of APA and should be available early in 1993 to start developing material for issues published in 1994. The P&C Board encourages more participation by members of underrepresented groups in the publication process and would particularly welcome such nominees. To nominate candidates, prepare a statement of one page or less in support of each candidate. Submit nominations to

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Other members of the search committee are Karen S. Calhoun, Jerome H. Resnick, Richard M. Suinn, and Diane J. Willis. The deadline for submitting nominations is February 1, 1992.