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Spring 1996

*Someone To Care An Ethnographic Study of Full Gospel Christian Church*

Introduction

This paper provides an in depth ethnographic analysis of a small religious ministry. Full Gospel Christian Church, hereafter Full Gospel, is a "spirit-filled" ministry in Bloomington, Illinois. The members of the church believe in a living Christ who will "bring more peace, joy, and happiness in your life than you have ever known" (Full Gospel Christian Church literature, n.d.). Full Gospel is a ministry actively recruiting souls to Christ and spreading the Good News of the Word to all who will listen.

I became interested in studying this ministry while taking a class on social organization, having been drawn to the religious tapestries in the window of this storefront church. Simply from this observation, the church seemed to hold a lot of potential for an interesting sociology project. As time passed, I continually came back to my original curiosity of how this ministry functions and the organization of the congregation. I began to ask the typical questions of social organization: what were the demographic characteristics of the parishioners, what was the culture of the group, in particular the norms of the ministry, what were the commitment mechanisms and rituals that bound the members into a cohesive group, who held the power, how was the authority established and what was the nature of the leadership style. These questions were of particular interest as this church appeared to be outside the boundaries of mainline Protestant denominational churches.

While most studies have focused on documenting small groups which have grown and become successful (Kephart, 1976) or provided anecdotal evidence from individual parishioners (Gillespie, 1982), this study is unique in that the focus is on a small ministry which has struggled to survive for nearly two decades. Unlike other groups of note, this group has not prospered but has remained viable despite a lack of community support. The

Full Gospel ministry is outside the mainstream religious community and has not established conventional ties to the community. This group is interesting because they have build inroads into under-served and often overlooked populations. Full Gospel serves the poor, the disadvantaged, the elderly, and the incarcerated. As a ministering body, they have found their niche. The nature of this niche, however, may be a cause for their stagnation. This study will focus on conditions which might account for this stagnation highlighting non-mainstream and uncompromising beliefs and the nature of the leadership style.

### Methodology

Given the focus of my interest, I felt that to truly understand the inner workings of this ministry, data could not be collected through standard survey measures. I believed that small churches of this nature were much more intimate than mainline churches and therefore, such an impersonal survey would taint the results. Religion and spirituality are deeply personal identities. For this reason, answers to a survey may have only shed a glimmer of light on a vast area of questions. Thus, I decided to conduct my research in the form of an ethnography (McCarthy-Brown, 1991). I felt that by attending services on a regular basis, I could earn the trust of the congregation which would allow me to ask open-ended questions and absorb and document the nature of the group and its affect on the people. I also felt that conducting a participant observational study would be dishonest and misleading to the congregation given my religious background. I was raised in a United Methodist home and was very active in my church youth group. Since coming to college, however, I now consider myself an agnostic. For this reason, I decided to be an overt observer of the church service.

During the services, I took extensive notes on the order of the service, the songs sung, and their words and meanings. I noted with great detail the content of the sermon and the manner in which it was delivered. I also paid particular attention to how the congregation members interacted with the pastor and with one another. I tape recorded personal interviews.

Additionally, I kept a personal journal. Because the group's beliefs are so contrary to my own, I found it necessary to record my feelings and thoughts. I subsequently have found them to be incredibly useful in bringing sociological issues to the forefront.

### Religious Terminology

It is critical to understand the nature of the religious terminology used in this paper. Many of the sociological questions raised in the study of this ministry are answered in the historical teachings and practices of two religious movements. While Full Gospel does not align itself with any denomination, I have found that all beliefs which have been related to me during my ethnographic study derive directly from either the Fundamentalist or Pentecostal movements.

Fundamentalism has been a named religious concept for nearly a century. The term fundamentalism derived as a descriptor for a particular set of people who followed the basic tenets of the Bible. These tenets were gleaned from the original text and published separately in a book titled The Fundamentals which was circulated between 1910 and 1915 (Evans and Berent, 1988). It listed basic "fundamentals of belief." These included the focus on evangelicalism and the process of "being saved," biblical inerrancy, premillennialism, and a separatist perspective (Marty and Applebee, 1991), as well as the common belief that "Jesus Christ is God, that he was born of a virgin, that he died for all sin as God's substitute for man, that he rose bodily from the dead, and that he will return in bodily form" (Evans and Berent, 1988:2). These are also the expressly articulated views of Full Gospel. "That Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, shed his blood on the cross of CALVARY [original emphasis], died, rose again the third day and will return for the church" are the stated fundamental beliefs of the Full Gospel ministry (Full Gospel Christian Church, n.d.).

Fundamentalism arose as a reaction to twentieth century modernism. Modern culture was unsettling to early Fundamentalists because they felt the nation was moving towards a

preference for secular rationality, an adoption of religious tolerance which would lead to religious relativism, and a focus on individualism. These views held by early Fundamentalists are not unlike the views held by the Puritans. Indeed, there is a great similarity between the Puritans and Fundamentalists, especially with regard to the focus on community and the defense of tradition. Community was viewed as God's creation and hence, must be held up to the precepts of faith. Faith did not reside in rationality and self-interest but in belief and working for the common good in reverence to God. One could not survive on his/her own but through godly grace. Thus, the modern movements viewed by early fundamentalists were of concern to the Puritans two hundred years earlier (Lechner, 1989).

Fundamentalists have always been wary of intellectualism and science. Their belief in biblical inerrancy appropriates all of life's management and questions to the authority of this text. Such a common-sense approach provides clarity, order, and unity to the questions intellectuals raise. The need to interpret comes from a need for order and is, thus, a religious impulse (Boone, 1989). Fundamentalism is possible because it provides for a religious need. It simplifies the world into a dualistic view. Truth is truth and God is God; anything else is obviously false or is Satan. This unquestionable dichotomy provides individuals with meaning (Lechner, 1985). This is also professed in the Full Gospel literature, "that the world is looking for answers to the many problems of life and that the true and lasting answer is in the Word of Jesus Christ" (Full Gospel Christian Church, n.d.).

These are some characteristics of North American fundamentalist groups. As there are a number of different sects which hold some but not all of these characteristics, a definition of Fundamentalism is needed. Martin Marty and R. Scott Applebee, the coordinators of the Fundamentalism Project, offers this definition: "[F]undamentalism is a religious way of being that manifests itself as a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group" (Marty and Applebee, 1992:34). It is important to

understand that fundamentalism is not a denomination. It is a term used to describe a host of beliefs and actions held by a variety of sects.<sup>1</sup>

Pentecostals, while holding many of the same beliefs as Fundamentalists, are among the sects which have not wholly embraced the term 'fundamentalist' (Marty and Applebee, 1992). Pentecostalism returns the primal to its followers. Pentecostalism gives credence to primal speech, primal piety, and primal hope. The return to the primal aids in leveling the hierarchy. Everyone has the same opportunities in the primal stage of development. All are endowed with similar abilities. It is a paradigm of true equality.

Primal speech is refreshing in an era of contrived rhetoric. This is a language of the heart and one in which speech is inspired by the Spirit. Primal piety is manifest through visions, divine healings, and dreams. Durkheim called these the "elementary forms of religiosity" (Durkheim, 1963). It is a universal spiritual syntax which transcends ethnic boundaries and speaks to all. Primal hope focuses on the millennia and promises an age in which the proud will be brought low and the humble exalted. These emphases have drawn a devoted following from the urban and rural poor and is quickly becoming the preferred religion (Cox, 1995).

Pentecostals place a great weight on spiritual gifts, referencing this belief to the book of Mark.

And he [Jesus] said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

-Mark 16:15-18 (AV from Daugherty, 1989).

Although some of these precepts were spoken about in The Fundamentals, they have not been as widely accepted by Fundamentalists as by Pentecostals. While Pentecostals and Fundamentalists both believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, Pentecostals recognize that the Holy

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<sup>1</sup> A sect differs from a church or a denomination in that it survives on a sub-level. "The sect--the form of fundamentalism--can survive as an enclave as a sub-culture or as a sub-society, but it can not become a church" (Bruce, 1990).

Spirit has the power to guide a believer to a decision. Fundamentalists believe the Bible stands alone and is sufficient in guiding all decisions (Marty and Applebee, 1992). Probably the most characterizing difference in the Pentecostal movement is, "[p]entecostals took the objective authority of scripture for granted and accentuated the experiential" (Marsden, 1980:73).

Full Gospel is probably correct in its self-classification as non-denominational in that they are not purely Pentecostal. There is a serious concern among the church members that denominational labels have severed the body of Christ by creating in-fighting. Society mocks Christians because it sees hypocrisy within the body. If the body were unified in mission, more souls could be brought to Christ. Not feeling comfortable with a denominational label, the church members refer to their church, rather, as "spirit filled." This is perhaps a more accurate identification. The link, however, between a Pentecostal church and a spirit-filled church is very strong. "Pentecostals insisted that true heart religion be evidenced by unmistakable signs of the Spirit's radical transforming power, especially the Pentecostal signs of faith healing and speaking in tongues" (Marsden, 1991:43). These practices were critical to the restoration of the teachings of the New Testament and were essential to the "full gospel" (Marsden, 1991).

### The Building of a Ministry

In the late 1970s, Pastor Shirley Cunningham was called by God to begin Full Gospel Christian Church. She had not studied theology; she simply studied the Word of God diligently. She prayed nightly in her "trailer get-away." With only gospel music cassettes, her Bible, and solitude, she retreated into her camper, soaking up the presence of God which filled her special place. On the night in which she received the calling, she had spent hours in her trailer, in the presence of the Lord. As she was about to get up it was like the Spirit said,

'Wait a minute,' and I knew it was God speaking to me and I fell on my knees right there. And when I did, I looked at my hand and He<sup>2</sup> put a rod in my hand . . . and I just knew He had placed a mission on my life.

She spoke passionately about the Spirit pouring over her, anointing her with praise. She began to sing in tongues. She was communicating in the universal language of God. This was her calling. She was to go out and preach the Word of God (personal interview, October 6, 1995).

The ministry has not always been located in the building in which the congregation is currently worshipping. The ministry first began in a small room in downtown Bloomington. The rent was \$150 a month. Although the ministry was just beginning, they were able to pay the rent and soon outgrew the space. The ministry then moved down the road to an unlikely location: a building which had previously been a tavern. There was quite a few in attendance at this place but then an opportunity arose in which the ministry could be moved to an even larger facility on Main Street in Bloomington. Each of these consecutive moves resulted because of an increased interest in the ministry. At some point, after investing in fixing up the basement of the building on Main Street, the rent became too expensive. With an increase in attendance, the need for a larger facility was apparent. Revenue intake was, however, at best, uncertain. Because of financial burdens, the ministry was forced to move on. The ministry moved between the Cunningham's home and local hotels. Finally, the ministry located in the building which I am familiar.

On my first visit, I spent most of the service taking in the surroundings. I had never been to a church without pews. I sat in my cushioned metal chair that first Sunday with some hesitation. The church is essentially one large room that has had an office partitioned into it. The remaining worship area is the size of many families' living rooms. Upon entering, one finds an overstuffed chair and small sofa. This provides relaxed seating during Sunday School. There is a table to the immediate right, holding all sorts of information about Full Gospel and its activities. Behind the table in the other front corner of the room, a drum set is

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<sup>2</sup> The Full Gospel ministry believes God is the holy father of Jesus Christ. Therefore, all references to God will be written in the masculine.



positioned. Along one wall, arranged lengthwise, are cushioned metal chairs, lined in long rows of twenty which constitute the seating. There is seating for approximately sixty people. The seating arrangement reminds me of seating at a large lecture. At the front of the room is the lectern. The lectern appears to be an old music stand with imitation fur on it. Behind the lectern is the piano facing the south wall, the tapestry of Jesus feeding the lambs tacked to the backside visible to the congregation. There is a structure which looks like a pulpit. It is rarely used. Since there is no formal altar, the pulpit serves the purpose of being the centerpiece. There are plastic and silk flowers that have been donated to a thrift shop, which is another distinct realm to the ministry. All proceeds from the Someone to Care Thrift Shop are used to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to non-believers in other areas of the world. Still, some donated items are used to beautify the church. These donated flowers adorn the side of the pulpit. This makes the pulpit look even more like an altar. There are musical instruments lining the walls, along with other religious banners. One of these banners continues to speak to the necessity of mission work and bringing souls to Jesus, "Perfecting the Saints in the Work of the Ministry. -Ephesians 4:12 NEPAL, 1995."

The community is subjective in creating their own surroundings. Realizing their status is not commensurate with the status of mainline churches, they have designed their church according to their own religious ideas. There are none of the traditional iconic objects displayed. The cross, the most cherished of all Christian religious symbols, is not ostentatious. Everything visible has been either given to the church and/or purchased by church supporters. Pat, the store manager of the thrift shop, and Shirley find creative ways to spruce up the church with donated items. They take regular home items and recreate these objects in ways which better enable them to be used for the ministry. In this way, there is a sense of ownership in the physical surroundings of the church. By having a hand in shaping the physical adornment of the church, there is a feeling of community which radiates through the physicality of the church. It is this feeling of community and personal investment in even

the physical structure which helps tie people to the ministry. Although I took a keen interest to the physical surroundings of the church, I was more fascinated by the members of the congregation.

### Embraced with Open Arms

There is a tremendous feeling of community at Full Gospel. This is interesting in that it is not a closed community in which visitors are hesitantly welcomed. Quite the contrary, regular members and visitors, alike, are warmly received at Full Gospel. From the first moment I walked in the church, I was accepted and taken into open arms. The members of the church were friendly and Shirley immediately invited me to contribute to the community. Everyone is valued in this atmosphere. There is a strong sense of love and caring in the air. Visitors are made to feel at home. Any time there has been a visitor, Pat has made sure that the visitor is introduced to everyone. I believe this allows for the experience to be more personal to the visitor. When one is on a first name basis with others, one can empathize and rejoice more fully. Beyond this function, feeling a sense of belonging helps to create a willingness in the visitor to return. Full Gospel is actively trying to expand its base of members. They are steadfast in their duty to bring souls to Christ.

There is an interesting mix of people who constitute the regular membership of Full Gospel. There are men and women, young and old, white and African-American members. While the membership seems to span the demographic plane, the one underlying constant is that these people are all hard-working people of a modest income. As Sam Cunningham said, "[t]his has always been a ministry to poor people . . . . to people who have had some problems" (personal interview, April 3, 1996).

This supports a major theme which emerged during my literature review. The working class and the poor are warmly accepted into Pentecostalism. "This is not a rationalist, intellectual, ecclesiastical movement" says Vincent Synan, dean of the divinity school at Regent

University in Virginia and one of the leading Pentecostal historians. "It's so loose that it gives incredible opportunity for poor, uneducated . . . people to build their own churches with their own ethos" (Lattin, 1995:85). This finding is also supported by Marsden who found Pentecostalism to be attractive to the socially disinherited (Marsden, 1991).

Shirley Cunningham began this ministry as an answer to her calling from God. After being born again at age 32, she is in her mid-fifties and works full-time in her ministerial position. She ministers to nursing home residents and most recently extended her ministry into the local jails. She has been heard locally on Christian radio programming but has since had to give up that part of the ministry as it did not have enough local support. Neither she, nor the other pastor, receive monetary compensation for their efforts.

This is a small and tight-knit congregation, commensurate to the size of the facility. There are only a handful of regular members. The pastor's family is very supportive of the ministry. Sam Cunningham, a church elder and lay leader, usually performs the Call to Worship and the benediction prayer. He is a gravel pit operator and a general handyman in his late fifties. He is one of the rare people who I have met who can honestly say he enjoys everything he does. When not performing parts of the church service, he takes care of his grandchildren who come to church nearly every Sunday.

Randall and Travis, ages seven and twelve, are Sam and Shirley's grandchildren. I suspect that they spend Saturday nights with their grandparents and then go to church the next morning. It seems frustrating for them to sit still for that long. Frequently, Sam has had to reprimand them. Once, Shirley reprimanded them from the lectern. She asked them to please sit on the chairs. Church was no different than school, "just a little bit better" (December 3, 1995).

Pat Fishel is not related to Shirley but they think of each other as sisters (Fishel, personal interview, October 1, 1995). Pat is the manager of the Someone to Care thrift store and at age 64, gives 100% to running the shop. Pat serves many functions in the ministry

outside of her job as the store manager. She also serves as the church secretary, reminding Shirley of speaking engagements and special offerings. Pat was the first person I spoke to when I first made contact with the ministry. I will never forget how she answered the phone, "Jesus is Lord. How may I help you?" Additionally, Pat accompanies Shirley on local speaking engagements and is called on to help with leading "praise" during the church service. Pat lives above the shop and finds that serving this ministry is her life (personal interview, March 31, 1996).

Fern Rathbun is the most vibrant woman of 85 years who I have ever seen. She has worked in laundries, as an office worker, in high speed electronics, and most recently making ceramics. She is incredibly active. She walks everywhere, claiming that walking is the best thing for blood circulation. Fern also stays fit by yodeling. Evidently, yodeling is a great breathing exercise. Fern primarily serves the ministry by accompanying Shirley on local speaking engagements. She goes to the nursing homes with Shirley and entertains the residents with her yodeling and puppets. Fern makes creative knickknacks out of regular household items. One Sunday evening, she brought a doll rocker which she had made to illustrate the point of the importance to feed on the Word but also to take rest in its meaning. The rocker had a build-in tray from which to feed but also reclined so one could rest (March 31, 1996). Fern never passes up an opportunity to testify because there are never enough opportunities to thank and praise the Lord.

Roger Holmes is the Associate Pastor. He is in his late forties/early fifties and only recently took on this position of leadership within the church. He was ordained by the congregation through their vote of confidence on October 15, 1995. Roger is an extraordinarily caring man and has a wonderful rapport with the congregation. He has broadened the mission scope of Full Gospel by initiating a jail ministry. He has been very successful in bringing new souls to Christ. He has a remark book which holds the testimonies of many newly converted Christians. Roger was the first person to ask me of my own

personal religious beliefs. He was very accepting when I explained to him that I was content in my personal faith journey and my purpose at Full Gospel was as a researcher. His kind-heartedness extends into all areas of his life. He works at the MARC Center and is very gracious with those whom he helps.

Some of the other regular members whom I have noted during my observation have been Mary, Sandy, and George. Roger's wife, Mary, has begun recently to come to Full Gospel. It is possible that she has been coming for as long as Roger but I have only seen her in attendance since Christmas. Mary seems to be a reserved woman but will participate in conversation if engaged. She initiated a major spring cleaning before Easter. She took all the draperies and table coverings and washed them. It gave the church a fresh look for Easter Sunday.

Sandy is a woman whom I have seen sporadically during my observation. She lives in the public housing complex nearby and has been coming to the church for twelve years. I believe she may have some health problems which may keep her away from Full Gospel. When she does attend, she is treated like she has been a continuous contributor to the ministry for a number of years.

George was the only regular African-American member. He appeared to be in his mid-thirties. He had an incredible knowledge of scripture and was always very warm and friendly. While he attended Full Gospel, he was working intermittently. He has since found a steady job and has consequently left town. There are other people who have visited Full Gospel, none of whom I would consider 'regulars.'

The population examined in this study does not correspond on the same theological premise as those profiled in other survey researches. However, my observations support much of the demographic data utilized in analyzing the composition of church attendees. Joan D. Chittister and Martin Marty conducted a survey in Minnesota, questioning 2000 church members and pastors representing all denominations. My observations have found women to

slightly outnumber men in the Full Gospel ministry. This supports Chittister and Marty's findings that women more than men (83% to 76%) felt God to be an active role in their lives. Additionally, women more often than men (53% to 47%) were more inclined to rely on church as necessary to having a relationship with God. The slight differences found in the survey validate the slight differences which I observed in my case study of Full Gospel. With regard to the class standing of the Full Gospel congregation, Chittister and Marty's findings hold that lower income more than higher income people (87% to 77%) felt God to be actively present in their lives, directing it, and guiding them in their decisions (Chittister and Marty, 1983). My observations, however, do not coincide with those of Harvey Cox. In his book, Fire from Heaven, he noted how many young people he saw in Pentecostal services nationwide. This is in marked contrast to Full Gospel where there are relatively few young people who are regular attendees. Those who do come on a regular basis seem to have some kinship ties to the pastor.

The regular members have been brought to Full Gospel because of some distinct commonalities. They hold beliefs which run counter to those held in mainline churches and have sought refuge in the open atmosphere at Full Gospel. They seek a place where their beliefs will be honored and not belittled, where their voices will be heard, and their contributions valued. I will now focus on the norms and the commitment mechanisms of this particular ministry.

### Common Beliefs

The strongest norms which I observed during my time at Full Gospel was holding a common belief system. It was the most obvious mechanism which distinguished a believer from a non-believer. Although I felt very accepted at Full Gospel, I was always an outsider on some level because I did not subscribe to their religious views. These common beliefs can be distilled to the basic tenets of Fundamentalism. Beyond the religious fundamentals, these central facets are biblical inerrancy, importance place on being saved, a premillennialist

disposition, a separatist view, a skepticism of secular rationality, contempt for religious relativism, and a cynical view of individualism.

The members of Full Gospel are strict adherents to the belief of biblical inerrancy. On October 1, Shirley preached that everything in the Book is true. By believing in the Word, one will see that God will do it all. A week later when Roger was relating stories about miracles, he mentioned that miracles are repeatedly present in the Bible. He addressed the disbelief held by many mainline churches with regard to the miraculous healing power of Jesus Christ. He pointed to passages in the Bible in which these stories are told. He found it hypocritical of mainline churches to peruse through the Bible and choose the sections which they want to believe as truth. It is all truth. Believing in God's Word is an all or nothing enterprise. Either one is a believer or a non-believer (October 8, 1995). Belief in the Bible and its teachings is not a cafeteria style line in which people can choose doctrine to follow and pass on the others. Sam maintains that Full Gospel retains members "who have the same basic attitude toward the word of God or the Scriptures, as we do. That it is fact and that it is non compromising" (personal interview, April 3, 1996).

The strength in the belief of biblical inerrancy as a norm for Full Gospel membership runs counter to the survey results yielded by Chittister and Marty. They found 95% of their sample felt the Bible was in some authoritative sense the Word of God. However, only 41% felt that the Bible was inerrant in its teachings (Chittister and Marty, 1983).

Full Gospel places a great importance on the experiential act of being saved. Shirley has preached from Matthew and has used the verse which details how paramount the act of being saved is to ensuing spiritual life. "Good for you, Simon son of John!" answered Jesus, 'For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven' -Matthew 16:17 (Good News Bible). One can not accept God simply through the head but through a spiritual revelation (October 1, 1995).

Pat related a story about a time when she had an extraordinary experience which changed her life. Pat spoke about how she had already been saved technically but was upset with the direction of her life. Although she was not fond of Shirley at first, she kept going to Full Gospel [at that time, it was called the Sheep Fold] because they invited her to return. Pat told me of her experience one evening when Shirley prayed for her.

That evening I was sitting in the church there and all of a sudden, there was a big angel. And I had never seen an angel before. There was an angel on the side of the . . . standing right there beside the wall, big enough his head almost reached the ceiling. So I thought, oh my Lord, I better listen because something is going on here. My attitude kind of changed. (personal interview, March 31, 1996)

This emphasis on the experiential supports Marty and Applebee's assertion that fundamentalists feel that "religion ought to be extraordinary. It ought to upset our expectations" (Marty and Applebee, 1992:23). No one expects to see an angel but it makes the experience of being saved all the more memorable.

The members of Full Gospel all believe in the Second Coming. They believe we must prepare for Jesus' return to Earth. When the day comes, those who believe will be exalted and the non-believers will have no choice but the fiery pits of hell. This belief system does not give purgatory as an option. This is tied directly to the belief of biblical inerrancy. God provided for two ends in Revelations, one is deliverance into the Father's Kingdom and the other is damnation to the fiery pits of hell. If one believes that these words are the inerrant truth of God, it is evident why purgatory is not possible. There is a sign on the door to the church office which sums up the belief of the church members, "Jesus Christ is Coming Soon. Are You Going to be Ready?"

Shirley has taught various times about the Second Coming. Perhaps the most vivid sermon was October 22, 1995. Shirley began the sermon by saying that when Jesus returns he will pour out his love on his people. The question is, are you going to have made yourself fit to receive his spirit? One must truly be one of his children in order to receive the grace. There will be a beautiful age to follow for those who have accepted Christ's goodness. Are you



going to be part of the beautiful age to come? Or will you be banished to live with Satan in Hell?

This focus on the millennium supports the original story of Pentecost. A group of followers were mourning the crucifixion of a rabbi whom they believed to be the Messiah. They were gathered together to celebrate the Jewish holiday called Pentecost which occurs fifty days after Passover. This band of followers were taken by surprise when from on high a mighty rush of wind came down and filled them with the Spirit. They began to speak to one another in strange tongues, yet everyone understood the other. They were speaking the universal language of God which transcended their original language barriers. This was a fulfillment of prophecy in which the Spirit was being poured out on the believers in anticipation of the Last Days (Cox, 1995). The members of Full Gospel are awaiting the day in which this same spirit will be poured out onto them as they prepare for the last days of life in the earthly kingdom.

Another foundational belief is one of separatism. Separatism can be interpreted as requesting 'religious honor.' Religious honor is the assertion of "the excellence of one's own customs and the inferiority of alien ones" (Bruce, 1994:231). I am not comfortable in stating that Full Gospel's belief rests in superiority, per se. In following fundamentalist teachings, it is the role of the believer to follow Jesus by not attacking error but by simply teaching truth (Marsden, 1980). By following the belief of biblical inerrancy, it is understandable as to why the members of Full Gospel claim to know the only way to heaven. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the Life; No one goes to the Father except by me" (Good News Bible). One can only get to heaven through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's personal Lord and Savior. This is the reason for mission projects. It is critical to reach out to populations who have been taught to believe in a dead God. The God who will bring one Eternal Life is a living God and is the God upheld by the members of Full Gospel.

Shirley spoke about a time when she was speaking to two young women who were visiting the shop. They were remarking about all the items from India. They asked if she went to India to learn of their religion. Shirley said 'No' and continued to tell them that her mission is to lift up to them a living God, one which can replace their dead gods (October 22, 1995).<sup>3</sup> We also received a prayer calendar instructing believers to pray "through the window." The 10/40 window is an imaginary belt between 10 degrees north to 40 degrees north of the equator, and extending from Western Africa across the Middle East and Asia. Shirley characterized this area as a severely impoverished region which includes the majority of the all Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in the world. The goal behind the prayer calendar is to pray that these non-believers will embrace the living God. Full Gospel is separatist in that they believe they know the true way to heaven. They are not separatists who are also isolationists. The members of Full Gospel are actively recruiting souls to Christ.

The members of Full Gospel also share a concern for secular rationality. There is an undeniable skepticism of higher education. Shirley has strongly implied that education beyond that which is in congruence with the Word is dangerous to one's faith. She spoke about her nephew, who while away at college, almost lost his faith because he was being taught to question. Shirley specifically singled out the religious institutions, which profess to serve Christ, but employ professors who do not believe. Shirley has asserted that she has the B.A. which is most important for life. Through her diligent study of the Word, she has earned the "Born Again" degree (September 24, 1995).

Roger has shared the same reservations about higher education. He was in seminary and was devastated by the disbelief of one of the chaplains who did not believe in the Second Coming, miracles, or the virgin birth. He found this religious education to be testing his faith in an unhealthy way. He has remarked how lucky the Asian-Indians whom Shirley saves are.

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<sup>3</sup>The idea of dead Gods lies in the fact that one can go to India and see the tombs of where Buddhas are laid to rest. The Christian living God, Jesus Christ, rose from the dead and his tomb lies empty. He is alive.

"[Asian] Indians don't have the seeds of doubt. They don't question the goodness of Christ. They simply accept him into their hearts" (personal interview, February 15, 1996).

There is also a prevailing belief concerned with religious relativism. This belief is grounded in a similar fashion as separatism. Religious relativism is on par with religious tolerance. By tolerating other religions, those people who do not know Christ will never get to heaven. All religions are not on equal ground. Some believe in dead gods. These religions can not be viewed as equal to the one legitimate religion in which acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord will save your soul. Such tolerance only perpetuates the loss of souls and the needless suffering for those who were not introduced to Christ.

There is also a common rejection of individualism. Individualism asserts one can get to heaven simply on the merit of performing good works. The common belief held by the members of Full Gospel denies this assertion. The only way to get to heaven is through Christ. Individualistic beliefs will not deliver the person to the gates of the Kingdom. One must learn to depend on the support from Jesus Christ. As the song says, "I'm finding more power than I've ever dreamed. I'm learning to lean on Jesus" (December 3, 1995).

Beyond the unfathomable amount of support which Christ gives, the congregation actively supports one another. There is a true effort in building and sustaining the community. Marty and Applebee have recognized that fundamentalists are actively engaging in community building. Fundamentalists are progressive in this regard, although historically, community has been a place of tradition. Fundamentalist groups are pro-actively engaging in developing the communal aspects of the faith whereas scholars are still debating the merits of community and the market still focuses on the individual (Marty and Applebee, 1992). There are many examples of times when the congregation has formed a solid support community. I would argue that this support always exists. But sometimes when requested, special needs and prayers are offered to the Lord. The congregation prayed for Pat when her sister was in the

hospital. The congregation has surrounded Shiela<sup>4</sup> and Shirley, both of whom are in India, preaching the gospel with a buffer zone of prayers. There is a real recognition that no one can make it on his or her own. There must be communal support.

The other most distinct norm at Full Gospel is the concept of tithing. Tithing is referred to in the Bible and is practiced by setting aside ten percent of one's earnings for the church and the work of God. Shirley has preached about the importance of giving God His share. One Sunday, the sermon dealt with Joshua fighting the battle of Jericho. Once Joshua and his followers successfully brought the wall down from around the city, they were instructed by God to gather all the gold, silver, and other precious metals and transport them to a cave. One of Joshua's followers fell prey to the temptation of the devil and later went back and stole some of the Lord's treasury. He had robbed the Lord, our God. Tithing, according to Shirley, is very similar. By not tithing, one is robbing God of His rightful treasury (October 29, 1995).

Although tithing is important, Sam has acknowledged that tithing is not required.

We don't ask anybody. We let people know that we have needs. But we don't say 'All right, come in and sign a pledge card. Or you got to give us so much here or there.' We have never done that and never will. A person that don't have a dime can feel free to come in and join in with the services and be a part of the ministry. (personal interview, April 3, 1996)

One must realize the difficulty for members of Full Gospel to tithe. It appears that no one has an income that can really afford them more than the basic necessities. But tithing is a message to God of your true belief and trust in Jesus Christ. Therefore, God will provide. "It is only with the Holy Ghost, however, that they find the sustenance to survive" (Daugherty, 1989). God's sustaining power gives the members to triumph over any adversity. "I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me" -Phillipians 4:13 (Good News Bible).

God will provide sustenance to His believers but sustenance does not always cover the other requests for donations. For example, Shirley was participating with other pastors in a golf tournament to raise money for the local Christian broadcasting channel. She asked that

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<sup>4</sup> Shiela is a Pentecostal pastor with a ministry in Fairbury, Illinois. She has recently accompanied Shirley to India to be part of the mission.

everyone sponsor her for a certain amount per hole. She did not want to play golf with pastors from large churches who would have an extensive list of sponsors. She did not want to be embarrassed by presenting a noticeably small contribution from the Full Gospel ministry. Also, there are always special offerings which support Shirley in her missions to India and Nepal. Beyond the special offerings, sometimes there are "love offerings." These gifts are not considered as part of one's tithes; rather, they are donations which "come from the heart." One of the love offerings was initiated by Roger. It was to benefit a man whose father had recently passed away and the family did not have the money to cover the funeral costs. Roger asked us to simply reflect and to ask God what was an appropriate amount to give. I believe all these additional offering requests must be financially challenging to the church members who are already from a modest means.

Harvey Cox has also noted a heightened emphasis on monetary donations in some Pentecostal churches. This emphasis derives from the gospel of health and wealth. There was a proliferation of this teaching as evidenced by many in the televangelist ministry. The philosophy is that God will give to His followers in abundance if first they have enough faith to appropriate some of their wealth to Him. This gospel strays from the biblical text which illustrates the apostles giving up all worldly possessions to follow Christ. The gospel of health and wealth interprets the scripture as saying that one gains the whole world when coming to Christ. I do not believe the Full Gospel ministry is advocating the gospel of health and wealth to the material extreme as the televangelists. I do believe that they advocate the position that one gains the eternal world by giving to and following Christ. Because of these gifts, the Lord will provide for those who have taken him into their hearts and provided in some way for Him. In support of Sam's observation, this may take the form of monetary gifts or other types of contributions to spreading the word.

#### Commitment Mechanisms

The greatest commitment mechanism which I found to have an influence on maintaining the membership at Full Gospel was an overarching feeling of serving a purpose. Members do more than warm a pew at Full Gospel. They are active contributors to the service. When Shirley asks a rhetorical question, unlike most churches where it is done for effect, she gets an answer. Everyone participates and is encouraged to do so. As Pablo Deiros states, "[t]he strength of the structure of Pentecostalist churches is that it allows the full participation of almost everyone and a gradation which depends largely on function rather than background" (in Marty and Applebee, 1991). This is the main reason members offered for their worshipping at Full Gospel.

Pat has been a member of the congregation the longest, outside of those with kinship ties to the pastor. In addition to her experience of seeing an angel, her bond to Shirley and the ministry runs deeper.

So then I worked second shift down at Eureka and she would come up from the daytime and I would get to spend a lot of time with her. And one time, we was up there and I was praying one day and she put a tape on and it was somethin' about intercessor prayer. She gave me a tape of her singing and I would go home and play it and I don't know why but I would cry, I would just hear that singing and I would just cry. And the Lord really absolutely filled my heart with love for her, with a special love. And because that's the only way I could save. And I felt right then like I was being called to be her intercessor and help and whatever I could do to help her. And I was definitely going to go ahead and go to that church because it was here and I rededicated my life to the Lord. And I said Lord, 'I really don't want to go back off the other way.' So I rededicated my life. (personal interview, March 31, 1996)

Even though Pat has dedicated her life to the ministry, she has not been immune to feeling discouraged. There were times when she, too, looked for another spiritual outlet. "There was a time or two, I got kinda discouraged and stuff and I kind of took off, you know, but you can't run away from yourself. I came back" (personal interview, March 31, 1996).

One of the difficulties in a small ministry in which all members contribute is the inevitable feelings of pressure to do more. Pat was not immune to having such feelings of pressure. During the time that she left Full Gospel, Pat was visiting a larger church.

I was part of a bigger church and you know you sometimes think you don't want the responsibility anymore. You just . . . you can go to a bigger church and just kind of

not be seen. And then I came to the decision, I had the choice to make. Go ahead and go like that to where it doesn't matter. And I don't think people care that much either. Or come back and come where you are loved, and come where you are needed and come where you are used. In opposition to just going and doing your own thing, go sit, go if you want to and don't go if you don't want to. And that I felt like it would be . . . I just thought I should come back. The Lord called me here in the first place. The Lord called me here in the very first place. And I felt my life would be more useful if I was here where I could be used and was needed and was loved. (personal interview, March 31, 1996)

Still, it was the sense of purpose which brought Pat back to Full Gospel. The ability to contribute in a significant way is critical to Full Gospel's retaining members.

Not only does the opportunity to serve a purpose help to retain members, it is a means to recruit new members. Roger had been active in a number of churches before he came to Full Gospel. He had been a lay leader and had initiated the jail ministry when attending another church. At that time, in the other church, he had inquired about the confirmation process to become a recognized member. When he was told that he would not be able to go through the process to become a member, the pastor tried to soften the news by saying, "you don't have to be a member." Roger, however, recognized his need for a true sense of belonging and decided to leave the church (personal interview, February 15, 1996). He came to Full Gospel because he liked the fact that it was a "spirit-filled" congregation. Additionally, he saw the opportunity to truly get involved.

Roger became heavily involved soon after his arrival at Full Gospel. He was readily accepted by the congregation as evidenced by offering him the position of Associate Pastor after only months of regular attendance. He has been able to continue his jail ministry under the auspices of Full Gospel Christian Church. He has learned to play an instrument to aid in the leading of the music. He truly believes that God wants him there. Roger has said, "doing things for the Lord is quite satisfying" (personal interview, February 15, 1996). It is again the sense of purpose which has recruited and solidified Roger's membership at Full Gospel.

The importance of witnessing and providing testimony is as important today in the ministry at Full Gospel as it was in the revival tents on Azusa Street in 1906 (Marsden, 1980).

The members of the congregation are encouraged to tell one another of the wonderful ways in which God is working in their lives. "Witnessing was an important way in which these communities build themselves up and provided emotional support" (Marsden, 1980:45). Sometimes these stories derive from hardship. In the end, by the grace of God, the burden has been alleviated. The members depend on each other for support and encouragement. It uniquely strengthens the bond between members and their individual ties to the ministry.

While it is not unusual for people to speak about their spiritual lives with others, Chittister and Marty found that 63% of their respondents maintain it is common for them to do this. (Chittister and Marty, 1983). Simply speaking about one's spiritual life, however, can remain in the abstract. Spirituality in the abstract is not nearly as threatening as telling others specifically about the effects of Christ on one's life. Testimony allows for the Word and its application to one's life to be communicated from one person to another. Testimony is a "personal story that reveals God's power and grace. A testimony is meant not to exhort or instruct the congregation--that would be preaching--but simply to praise the Lord" (Covington, 1995:80). The time for testimony comes in the beginning of the service and seems to set the mood for glorious praise and study of the Word. I believe it is a convenient transition into the sermon. Once people have the opportunity to revel in the goodness which Christ has brought to their lives, they are more apt to listen and gain new insight into the teachings of their Savior.

Shirley often testifies on Sundays of the souls who have been brought to Christ in the preceding week. Recently, she had preached a powerful service at Woodhill, a local retirement community. She testified about two people who had accepted Christ for the first time. One of these people was a man whom they had been working with and talking to for a long time. One is never too old to learn the goodness of Jesus Christ (March 3, 1996).

This was a particularly powerful day for testimony. Although Pat generally testifies about the people to whom she has spoken in the store and their response to her telling them of the Word, this Sunday she thanked God for watching over her 84 year old sister who was



recouping from quintuple bypass surgery. Additionally, Roger testified about breaking up a poker game at the jail. He walked in and found a group of inmates engaged in a heated poker game. Roger began passing out his "funny" money. The money was really bible tracts. Once the men knew what they were holding in their hands, Roger began to share Christ with them. Three men accepted Christ that day. Giving testimony unites the members as they share in each others triumphs of winning souls to Christ and support those who need words of encouragement. This is a powerful mechanism which anchors members to one another and the ministry.

One of the reasons which allows for this open sharing of testimony is the open atmosphere at Full Gospel. This is a place where everyone can feel comfortable simply being themselves. It is not, as Sam put it, a "puffed up or stuffed up situation. It's an easy atmosphere" (personal interview, April 3, 1996). After my first Sunday, I realized that I no longer felt compelled to put on my "Sunday best." This was a place where one could simply go in whatever one was wearing and feel comfortable. By checking reservations about physical appearances at the door, people are able to interact more freely with one another. For example, everyone hugs everyone else at the end of the service. People joke with one another during the service. If someone has a question about a scripture during the sermon, they ask their question. There is an undeniable respect for the pastor. But because the members have personally invested so much in the ministry, I believe they feel they can help to create the environment.

A strong unyielding hierarchical power does not exist. One Wednesday night, Roger was preaching and we had been singing for some time and he had been speaking. There had already been the call for testimony when he asked Sam to lead us in prayer. Sam prayed as if he was closing the service. After we were done praying, Roger thanked Sam but said he wasn't done yet. In fact, he was just getting started (February 7, 1996). Because of this open

and friendly environment, we were all able to laugh about the blunder. It did not appear that anyone was embarrassed. Everyone took it in good stride.

While George was in attendance at Full Gospel, I always got the impression that he had some major issues to deal with in his life. Although he was always smiling, there seemed to be a tinge of sadness behind his eyes. Through their interaction with one another, I believe Roger was trying to guide George on Christ's path. There was an unmistakable respect which George had for Roger coupled with a true friendship between the two men. I believe the open atmosphere of Full Gospel is best illustrated by the interaction I witnessed in early October. Shirley was preaching about God's ability to always forgive the sinner, if the sinner has gone before the Father asking for forgiveness. God will pick up anyone who has fallen when walking the path of righteousness. He will dust you off and set you back on your way. After Shirley had said this, George imitated dusting Roger off. This seemed awkward because I would have thought it to be the other way. I would have imagined Roger miming this to George. The atmosphere is so open and accepting at Full Gospel that one can feel comfortable acting out one's role (October 1, 1995).

Communal experiences also serve to strengthen members' sense of commitment. At one service, every person participated in a religious experience in communion with one another. Shirley had been preaching about how even the most devout Christians can be tempted by the devil. She had the congregation stand, as devout Christians, in a suit of armor. She explained the purpose of every piece of armor and what part of the body it protected. I looked around the room to find the entire congregation standing, unified, with a symbolic sword and shield ready to fight the battle for Christ. The entire congregation was holding a symbolic sword in their left hand and a shield in their right (November 5, 1995). Communal experiences similar to this group activity aid in creating a commitment to the community.

I think members are committed to Full Gospel because they like the easy-going atmosphere. They like that they do not have to put on airs. Members of Full Gospel are

supportive of one another simply because that person is a child of Christ. They can be themselves and more. I include 'more' because in this church people can take on roles of leadership and make contributions in ways that they may never have had the opportunity in a larger church. One is not stifled by age, or income level, or past history. Anyone with a willing heart and spirit can fully participate and have a stake in the direction of the ministry. I think the possibility for personal empowerment plays a large role in committing people to attending this church.

Ritual has historically played an important role as a commitment mechanism. The traditions at Full Gospel were none that I had ever before experienced. In fact, it took me some time before I recognized the ritualistic value in various practices. Perhaps this stems from some of the literature which stresses that the denial of the authority of traditions is central to evangelicalism (Marsden, 1991). I conclude that authority of traditions would happen once a tradition becomes so institutionalized, the value and purpose has been lost. In time, however, I realized that much of the ritual stems purely from the order of the service and the emphases placed on particular images.

Sunday services open with the Call to Worship and continues with "praise." Praise consists of lifting one's voice to the Lord in song. "Praise songs" rarely are sung from hymnals. The hymnals owned by the church are very old and do not have many of the standard traditional songs found in a Protestant hymnal. For example, on the first Sunday of Advent (December 3, 1995), we sang "the First Noel." This favorite Christmas song of many was not even among the songs in the hymnal. Besides the fact that the hymnal has limited selections, there are also a limited number of hymnals. Consequently, most songs during praise time are sung from memory. As Cox found in his study of Pentecostal churches, singing from memory or from lyrics flashed on an overhead, "keeps people from sticking their noses in books" (Cox, 1995:270). The lyrics are often repetitious and everyone seems to

know them anyway. Those at Full Gospel are excited about singing praises to their Saviors and I believe feel restricted if they have to follow the verses in a hymnal.

The music at Full Gospel is anything but restricting. Cox articulates the strong ties between the music in Pentecostal churches and jazz. In both cases, there is a strong emphasis placed on embellishment. The basic chords are there but there are also "spirit-filled" riffs (Cox, 1995). The musical spirit is certainly evident at Full Gospel. If there is a particular verse or refrain which has spoken to Shirley during the song, she will continue to repeat it. This repetition of the refrain does not necessarily ever end. Instead, it just leads into another song or is suspended in repeated arpeggios in which Shirley often begins to sing in tongues and Fern sings beautiful cadences.

There is a continual focus on the music on Jesus. I had never really noticed the frequency of His name in church services until I began my observation at Full Gospel. Perhaps this supports the ministry's claim that in many mainline churches the living Christ is dead. It's obvious that in this church it is the reiteration of His name which provides many with daily strength. During the songs which specifically name Jesus as Savior, Fern's voice soars. It's as if singing the name of Jesus boosts her voice in ways that I can not understand. This woman, with hands outstretched, voice lilting over notes so beautifully, eyes shining or closed in a deep peace, she is the personification of how music can cement a person's belief in something.

The music has a spirit of its own. It leads the congregation, as opposed to some mainline churches where the congregation has complete control over musical expression. Full Gospel believes that Satan can't stay in the midst of praise. That is the reason given for extended praise time during the service. Whereas mainline churches hold that Satan can be sung away with three anthems interspersed throughout the service (September 24, 1995), Full Gospel cleanses and prepares for the Lord's presence fully by praising his name at length in the beginning.

Music has always been a powerful tool to establish ties. Ira Sankey, a revival preacher, was extremely effective in building ties to his congregation through the use of music (Marsden, 1980). Shirley does this as well. While playing the piano, she often is asking the Lord just to let his anointing grace pour down. The Spirit covers all who are present binding them to one another and to the ministry. She also speaks to the degree or the intensity of the Spirit as it is present in the service. I believe this aids in members feeling their presence is helping to intensify the anointment.

After praise, there is a call for testimony. Testimony is important in that it prepares the congregation for focusing on Christ and God's Word. Following testimony, there is usually a moment of prayer. This time is utilized in that it provides a break from the highly informal mood of the service to one which is more contemplative. This supports Chittister and Marty's findings: "Prayer is a real communication process, a contact point between these individuals and God. Even in times of transcendental meditation, prayer is not seen as bringing psychological satisfaction. Rather, prayer is presence before God" (Chittister and Marty, 1983:72). Shirley has often stated the importance of just going before the Lord and sitting in His presence. She instructs members to feel the anointing during their prayers. This is a very important time in which members are to prepare their minds for receiving the Word.

Now that all members have been quieted in spirit, the sermon is delivered. The sermon delivery and its contents depend on who is preaching that day. Shirley preaches in a dynamic fashion and uses the Word to highlight the message given to her by God. Roger is more laid-back in his approach. He uses the Word in a more direct way and engages the congregation in something which could be described as a contextual Bible study. Both pastors' deliveries support Marty and Applebee's conclusions of Pentecostal preachers. These clergy members evoke traditional American values in colloquial English (Marty and Applebee, 1991). This is not a ministry which seeks to impress someone with theological discourse. The service is conducted in such a way that people of all intellectual domains can understand. Passages from

the Bible are read aloud and the congregation is walked through the Word and its meaning. By maintaining the service at a basic intellectual level, all members and visitors can feel a part of the Lord's grace.

The topics of the sermons are wide ranging. They do, however, seem to focus on reaping the harvest of souls. It is common to hear the phrase, "the harvest is many but the workers are few." Although there is always a need for more laborers to do God's work, the workers need to be mature Christians. This maturity does not just come over night after dedicating one's life to Christ. It comes from reading and absorbing the Word. Some new Christians want to tell everyone that they have been saved and they turn people off with their eagerness (Shirley Cunningham, personal interview, October 6, 1996). One must become more refined in witnessing to others. Before one is truly ready to possess the land, one must have let Jesus completely in to possess one's soul (September 17, 1996). Once this done, however, it is time to act as a mature Christian. One must be obedient to the Word of God and realize the power given to a follower of Christ. With this power, one must stand in Christ's name and bring others to Him (November 19, 1995). God wants one to grow the fruit of the Spirit by not only hearing the Word but by *doing* the Word (December 3, 1995).

Some of the sermon topics which end in the need to save souls deal with societal issues. There has been much concern about the moral depravity proliferating in our country. Although it is important to engage in mission work abroad, believers must not forget the need for mission work in our own neighborhoods. Because of local issues dealing with adding sexual orientation as part of the civil rights code in Bloomington, Shirley has preached extensively about the need to show gays and lesbians the path of righteousness. Born again Christians must work to set free the devils living in gays and lesbians. Otherwise, they have no option but to burn in Hell. It is not possible that someone could be born that way. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorra because of their sinful nature. He would never create a human being intentionally to be in sin. He creates us clean. Gays and lesbians are the result of falling

into sin. But there is still hope for them, God hates not the sinner but the sin (October 22, 1995).

Shirley has also preached about the glorification of sex and its tie to premarital sex. Sex has become so glorified in our society that few of our youths are waiting to consummate their love in the holy covenant of marriage. Only sexual relations which occur within marriage can be happy and healthy. All other such relationships will be riddled with problems. Between the rise of sexual promiscuity and the recognition of the gay lifestyle, our cities are wracked with moral decay, causing them to fall into ruin. Soon these atrocities will usher in the worshipping of sex gods like those in India, taking us ever further from the living God (October 22, 1996).

The sermons are constructed so that all can understand the message. The message derives from the Word but has current implications. In this way, the members can see the applicability of their faith on modern day occurrences. The underlying idea of every sermon is to live and to walk the path of righteousness. But to do this, one can not be content to walk alone. One must be constantly striving to bring others to the path as well.

At the conclusion of the sermon, there is always an invitation extended to anyone who is in need of special prayer. Full Gospel provides a support system for its members trials, tribulations, and triumphs. The most unique characteristic of Pentecostalism, however, is providing support through the laying-on of hands. "Support is given to each member through the laying-on of hands in healing ceremonies, through group prayers, and through verbal affirmations, such as 'Bless him, Lord,' and 'That's right, Lord'" (Daugherty, 1989:353).

I witnessed my first laying-on of hands prayer, interestingly enough, the first Sunday that I attended. I had noticed George earlier that morning. He seemed to be very knowledgeable in scripture. During the service, it was inferred that he had been absent from church for awhile and everyone was glad to see him with them again. I do not know why George felt compelled to go up for prayer that day. There must have been something of great

consequence going on his life. When Shirley began the laying-on of hands, it was almost like she disappeared and a different person possessed her body. Shirley is normally a very warm person. But when she began to pray for George, she took on a "hellfire and brimstone" persona. Her hands were waving in a commanding fashion and she began to touch George lightly, demanding that he release the devils inside. He had to let Christ in to do His work. Sporadically, Shirley spoke in tongues, however, it was always a brief episode, sounding like she was not saying more than a sentence. While Shirley touched George, he twitched and swayed, his arms were high above his head, outstretched, receiving the grace of God. Then he began to lose his balance and Sam, who had been prepared to ease his fall, gently laid him on the ground to receive the anointing. George continued to twist and shake. He uttered cries and shrieks of delight, for the annointment of Christ was coming down on him. Pat kept crying out to him in a supportive voice, "you have to believe it to receive it." After the service, George continuously smiled and wished everyone well.

Laying-on of hands is offered every Sunday to anyone who wishes to receive this special prayer. Another kind of special prayer which has happened is divine healing. One of the gifts given to believers from Christ is the ability to heal the sick and lame. The Full Gospel ministry believes fully in this power. It is important, however, to understand that they caution using this power. Shirley has remarked that one must use a great amount of wisdom when healing. Believers must not deny that doctors are also healers of God (October 8, 1995). I do not know of anyone, outside of Shirley, who has used this gift from God.

In one of her reports to the congregation after a mission to India, Shirley wrote of performing an act of divine healing.

I want to share one other testimony that we have on film and has already been shown on some TV stations on the Count to Four program. A little boy was brought to me in his mother's arms completely paralyzed. As I laid hands on him and prayed, I told him to raise one hand and say, 'Praise you, Jesus.' He did what I told him. Then the other hand went up and then he sat up. After that, he began to take some wobbly steps. As we watched, strength came into his legs. The pastor of this church met me four weeks later before I left Bombay, India to return home and let me know that this little boy was completely healed. (Full Gospel Christian Church, n.d.)



These types of experiential prayer are a very important part of the ritual at Full Gospel. This supports the historical change in ritual which Marsden articulates. It was the burgeoning charismatic movement, those who believe God has endowed believers with spiritual gifts that changed evangelicalism and moved it in a more experiential direction with a closer tie to Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Marsden, 1991).

In addition to the service itself, specific images are a major part of the ritual at Full Gospel. These images are those of lambs and blood. Christ has been called the Lamb of God. Shirley has preached numerous times about the Second Coming. When Christ returns to Earth, the Book of Revelations addresses the Lamb coming to open his book and see whose names are written into his Book of Life (October 29, 1995). Roger has also preached about the intelligence of lambs and sheep over people. He spoke about how a shepherd deals with a lamb which has strayed from the flock. A shepherd will break the lamb's leg and then nurse it back to health. The recovered lamb will never stray again. A person, however, is not so intelligent. There are people who will hit rock bottom many times and will have been saved by God but will still stray from His path of righteousness (February 8, 1996). Pat has also used the image of the lamb in her dialogue. She spoke about the church members going out in the neighborhood to witness and invite people from the neighborhood to come to church. She mentioned how going out two by two to save souls is not unlike being lambs out among wolves (October 8, 1995).

It is not by chance that there is such an emphasis on the image of the lamb. This ministry was originally called "the Sheep Fold." It was an appropriate name for the ministry as the purpose has always been to bring lost sheep back into the fold. I was interested as to what would prompt such a name change since the name seemed so fitting and continues to play a role in the physical adornment of the church and the ritual. Sam was able to shed light on why the ministry was renamed.

Shirley made a trip to Colorado and had a radio program out there. At that time, I don't know if she had some friends out there, I think. But anyway, there was a group out

there known as "the Sheep Fold" and they were a cult. So she came back from Colorado and she had someone, had drawn a picture for her, like on the window and had put the Sheep Fold's name on it. They were not quite like they should have been and they put somehow or another into the picture that they drew the number 666. I think all of this came together all at about the same time as her finding out about this other organization. She decided there that the name should be changed. (personal interview, April 3, 1996)

Regardless of the past history associated with "the Sheep Fold," the imagery of lambs and sheep is very important. The imagery of blood derives from the image of the lamb. As Christ is the Lamb, believers are seeking the "cleansing blood of the Lamb" (September 10, 1995).

The image of blood is most evident during praise time. Many of the songs sung are about blood. In fact, one Sunday, Shirley said that since we had started singing one of the blood songs, we might as well sing all of them (September 17, 1995). Believers are saved because of the blood of Jesus which he shed for the world's sins when he died on the cross. Believers can repent their sins because they are under the blood of Jesus (October 29, 1995). One vivid memory of the blood image occurred the first Sunday that it had snowed. Shirley spoke of a scripture which states, "although you may be stained with blood, I will wash you as clean as snow" (November 5, 1995). To the members of Full Gospel, there is power in the blood. On numerous Sundays, they sing with great enthusiasm, "[t]here is wonder working power in the precious blood of the Lamb."

### Power and Leadership Style

Shirley holds a great deal of power in this ministry. Indeed, everyone with whom I have spoken has mentioned her name directly as one of the reasons for coming to this church. Pat saw an angel when Shirley was praying for her. Fern heard Shirley preach on the radio and then began to attend services on a regular basis. Roger came because he believes Shirley "has God's seal of approval. She has been anointed" (personal interview, February 15, 1996). Max Weber wrote at length about charisma in religious figures in Sociology of Religion. Charisma derives either from a natural endowment or is a dormant germ until evoked by some

ascetic means (Weber, 1922). In Shirley's case, I believe her experience is the latter. Her charismatic power came after she had been called by God to do His work. Weber continued by asserting that the spirit is endowed with volition whereupon entering a concrete object endows the latter with distinctive power (Weber, 1922). When God came to Shirley that night in the trailer, He put in her hand a staff which gave her power beyond her imagination.

Shirley is able to wield her power quite effectively within her congregation. One Sunday, she preached about going out to possess the land. She pointed to George in a very commanding way that he would receive a spiritual revelation. She said the Lord God would want to build His church on the foundation of George's belief and faith. George was nearly convulsing with the idea of God building His church through him (October 1, 1995). This is one example of Shirley knowing how to accomplish goals and maintain control over the ministry. Weber stated that the priesthood must accomplish two goals in order to remain in a position of power. Priests must be mindful of the needs of the laity. I believe Shirley knew that George needed to have special recognition of his faith that Sunday. Additionally, priests must enlarge membership. Shirley has now joined Roger in the jail ministry. She has also continued the nursing home ministry. There is a pro-active attempt in gaining members in the immediate community. Thus, she is seeing that both goals are being realized.

It is important to recognize that Shirley does not seek to maximize her power by minimizing the power of the congregation. She consults with the congregation and asks them to participate. Shirley rarely ministers and preaches in outside of the church alone. She is almost always accompanied by Pat or Fern. They, along with Roger, have a strong voice in the ministry. This structural organization of power supports Weber. "As a rule, the ethical and exemplary prophet is himself a layman, and his power position depends on his lay followers" (Weber, 1922:66). Shirley has positioned herself in her ministry as a leader with close ties to the lay followers. By remaining non-hierarchical, the congregation has little reason to feel the power is too concentrated in one individual.

Shirley has mastered the art of pastoral care. As stated by Weber, "pastoral care in all its forms is the priests' real instrument of power" (Weber, 1922:75). Members of the congregation rely on her for spiritual concerns and worldly matters. Pat and Fern both related instances in which they relied on Shirley for improving their health. She prayed for their ills and their health improved. This is one of the major forms of pastoral care. The power derives from a reliance of the followers on the leader.

Others would not characterize Shirley's power or the leadership style at Full Gospel in such a positive manner. Many would argue that Shirley is overly harsh in her criticisms. Shirley has admitted on numerous occasions that there are people who should be in the congregation but have left because she has not told them what they want to hear. She has also confessed that her ministry grew too quickly in the beginning and that she had not grown enough as a Christian. Consequently, the lack of maturity of the ministry and the pastor has remained an obstacle, as people tend to hold on to the past. Shirley admits she has made some mistakes but remains steadfast in demanding that followers who she has helped bring to God must walk the walk, not simply talk the talk. She is known to be uncompromising. Sam stated, "She will not compromise under any circumstances and a lot of people will to gain favor or to gain numbers. She has never done that and I don't suppose that she ever will. I respect her for that" (personal interview, April 3, 1996).

The other obstacle facing this ministry stems from the views held by the other clergy in town. Shirley has been criticized because her lack of formal theological education. The members of Full Gospel believe, however, that much of the criticism is associated with her being a woman pastor. "Number one, there are an awful lot of people who don't recognize women as being a minister or a preacher or what ever you want to call it. And I think probably that in itself is reason for their criticism" (Sam Cunningham, personal interview, April 3, 1996). This was the reason stated by Sam for the scorn given to this ministry by other churches in the community. Pat even mentioned that when she first met Shirley, she didn't like

her. She was very judgmental of her, in part, because she had never had a woman pastor before (personal interview, March 31, 1996). Shirley reconciled this apparent aberration (being a woman of the cloth) from the Bible in following way. This is also the explanation used when fielding such allegations from other pastors.

When you stand in the pulpit, do you stand there in the flesh or do you stand there in the power of the Holy Spirit? And Galatians tells us there is neither male nor female in the Spirit. In the flesh, there is a place for those distinctions. But in the spiritual realm, there isn't. Now if you say, I'm standing in the flesh. Then I would come back and say that they should not be in the pulpit. If you say, I 'm standing in the Spirit. Then my return is I am also standing there in the Spirit of God. Some will use the scriptures. Well, the woman is not to usurp authority over the man. And I don't. The Holy Spirit does that. (personal interview, October 6, 1996)

The attitudes of the other members of the clergy in the community support the findings in the literature with regard to the acceptance of women in ministerial roles. While 94% of those surveyed in the Chittister and Marty study have the understanding that women and men are both created in God's image and thus equal in God's sight, only 64% agree that the statement, "there does not exist among you . . . male or female," refers to not only the Kingdom of Christ but the relationship of the sexes to the church today. Of that 64%, 13% only agree slightly with that statement. It is obvious that the church doors are not wide open and accepting of women in ministerial roles. In this same survey, 53% felt women and men should have equal ministerial opportunities. Fifteen percent of the sample could only slightly agree with that statement (Chittister and Marty, 1983).

Turning to the literature which deals only with future clergy members with regard to this question, the result and the bias against women was not alleviated. In a study of seminarians, James Davison Hunter surveyed students from Talbot Theological Seminary in Los Angeles, Conservative Baptist Seminary in Denver, Wheaton Graduate School in Wheaton, Illinois, Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Massachusetts. Eighty-two percent of the sample either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "[t]he husband is primarily responsible for the spiritual well-being of the

family." Forty-eight percent of the sample 'mostly oppose' ordaining women in the ministry (in Marsden, 1987:308). In light of this data, the low status given to the Full Gospel ministry is not surprising.

#### What the Future May Hold

Regardless of the criticisms from the mainline churches in town, I believe Full Gospel will continue to bring people to Christ. They have a pro-active approach in reaching people. Rather than waiting for curious people to come to a service, they take the service to them whether it be in the jail or in the nursing home. They are just beginning to see the fruits of their labor with regard to the jail ministry. A couple, who both accepted Christ while incarcerated, are eager to begin their new life. This couple has moved into the apartment above the church. The hope is that these people will be powerful witnesses to others facing difficult times.

People with needs and hardships have always been the base congregation at Full Gospel and I think this demographic trend will continue. Those who walk through the door will find a caring and supportive community inside. They will be initiated into the beliefs held by the members and will be encouraged to contribute to the service. The norms of the community will be inculcated into the minds of the members and they will find themselves committed to their new friends and to the ministry.

It will be incredibly interesting to see which direction the jail ministry will follow. Roger is contributing in remarkable ways to sustaining and increasing the membership at Full Gospel. If his influence continues, it could have serious implications on the power structure of the church. Although it is not strictly hierarchical now, it still has elements in which the full pastor maintains the largest power base. A change could lead to a more egalitarian power structure which may change the tenor of the church. A follow-up study on this ministry would be interesting as only time will tell the nature of possible change.

Full Gospel provides people with an experiential based spirituality and interpretation of the Word. It fills a need for many who have not felt accepted in other churches. Part of this comes from the open atmosphere and the ability of members to contribute to the service. By having a sense of ownership, their feelings of acceptance and hence, commitment to the ministry, increases. The strict beliefs in the fundamentals of Christianity bind the members of this church together. This is evidenced in the ritual of the service in which members feel comfortable sharing personal experiences with one another and then together growing wiser in the Word of the Lord. This loving ministry truly is comprised of people who care. They care about the Word and about doing the work of Jesus Christ. Their mission is to bring stray lambs to His flock. In their minds, there is no grander ambition.

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