

"ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES" PARTICIPANTS from Willis Elliott

11 June 74

Case: "Breakfast for the Hungry Hearted"

My material on this is at home; and, since I'm at the seminary all week, I'll have to get along with the NEW YORK TIMES article and other materials on what's happened in and through this project, which is

1. Just entering its fifth year, without missing a Saturday at
2. 8am, formally closing at 9am, all sessions in
3. Memorial Room, First Congregational Church (United Church of Christ), Chappaqua (Northern Westchester Co.), NY--the town's "central" church geographically and socially--though historically the originating church was the Friends Meeting, which continues to worship in its 1754 building (the congregation having begun the town 20 years earlier). Area: upper middle class, bedroom to NYC.

4. ORIGINATING IMPULSE:

Hunger for unstructured "emergent" "spiritual" experience in a hyperstructured community of hypermaterial preoccupation (avg. family income, \$30,000).

Consciousness-raising on this hunger, through courses taught by my wife Loree, Dorothy Payne, and I. My wife's counseling informally, and being (1 year) formally the Christian education staff person of this church (with 140 volunteers in Christian education leadership).

Loree's idea to try informal breakfast, which worked well in our 10½-year pastorate (where the time was 7-8am and the days of the week Tuesday or Wednesday, in homes-rotation).

5. CLIENTELE:

Heterogeneous, covering virtually all elements in the town. Mainly churched, but most disenchanting with "church"; a few unchurched. Very slightly more women than men. Good mix of singles and couples. Few youth, some young adults, few elderly: chiefly middle-aged (about the constituency of my MidCareer Exploration). An occasional non-white (the town having a few black and hispanic families among Chappaqua's 1,000 residents--the total town of New Castle, including Chappaqua, being 14,000).

6. DISCIPLINE:

"If anybody wants us to get organized, we'll throw him/her out": radical "emergent" ethos....Volunteer each Saturday to bring strictly Continental breakfast....Most Saturdays, starter known because volunteered the preceding Saturday to begin with his/her current "BVR" (basic visceral response, i.e. what at the time is most concerning the person in private or public life)....Silence as you sit, having gotten your drinks (fruit +coffee/tea/cocoa) and bread/cake....Biblical interfacing of the issue....Formal close at 9am, but many stay thereafter.

7. SPINOFFS: (1) Personal counseling (intercounseling); (2) Political action both in initiative (e.g., fall festival) and in support (as moving local politics leftward, now achieved); (3) Adult education initiative (through NYTS and Chappaqua Interfaith Council) and support (with Chappaqua Adult Education).

8. STATISTICS: While scores have passed through (many, by referral to other groups and to individuals), the average number per Saturday is ca.12, which is about ideal. People leave because "I've gotten what I needed" or "This isn't for me" (but something you've told me about may be) or "I'm moving" residence.