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A Comparison of Rural Churches and Ministers in Missouri Over a 15 Year Period

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A Comparison of Rural Churches and Ministers in Missouri Over a 15 Year Period

INTRODUCTION

It has become commonplace to point out the rapid social change in American rural society since World War II. However, a comparison of rural churches in Missouri made covering a 15 year interval from the early 1950's to the late 1960's shows great consistency in number, size, resources, and programs of congregations and in characteristics of ministers. This is not what we had expected to find to say the least. Our expectations were for a substantial decline in the number of churches along with changes in programs and organization which would bring remaining congregations into organizational molds and thoughtways of urbanized society. There were good enough reasons to expect these trends. The population of the rural areas of the state was stagnant or declining and other rural institutions, in particular trade centers and public schools, were adjusting to massive changes. This involved the dual process of decline and loss of some units and a parallel growth and dominance of others. In the case of trade centers, many small places lost primary commercial status while other places became centers and dominated the commercial-professional activities of a wider area. The consequence was a new kind of community which is frequently referred to as a "larger community" (also a growth center community or a functional economic area). Rural schools as a principal organizational component of the community changed in ways quite compatible with the concept of a "larger community." The process most apparent was the massive reorganization of school districts in the state which now has eliminated the one-room open country school and reduced the number of districts from more than 8000 at the beginning of the 1950 decade to about 500. Obviously the bulk of the reduction has occurred among rural school districts and for many youngsters the site of education became the urban school, and all public schools have moved toward common curricula and standards.

Similar concepts of reorganization are not foreign to religious groups and program sites. Some denominations have encouraged consolidation through mergers and cooperative arrangements in the form of larger parishes, federated and community churches.¹ And concern is expressed about the quality of program and leadership in the rural church.

As a result of these general societal developments, we had expected to find a reduction in the number of churches with evidence of greater program and organization complexity and clergy professionalism in surviving congregations. We refer to these expectations as resulting from a hypothesis of urbanization.

Another general trend which had led us to expect certain kinds of changes in rural churches is a strain toward homogeneity in the institutional system. Commonly we conceive of the effects of mass society in terms of leveling of differences among social categories.² This includes, of course, leveling of rural-urban differences but also involves leveling of organizational differences within rural areas in response to com-

mon extra-local pressures of the mass society. Specifically, we had expected the distinctions in church-type and sect-type congregations to diminish over time. We refer to these expectations as resulting from a hypothesis of organizational leveling.

These expectations (manifestations of urbanization and organizational leveling) form the frame work for our presentation of the changes in rural churches in Missouri as we look at these groups at two points 15 years apart. As we have already indicated, some of our expectations were not confirmed by the data and in the conclusions we shall try to offer an explanation of why rural churches seemingly do not conform well to patterns of other rural organizations.

The Surveys

In the summer of 1952, field work was undertaken on a study of the rural church in Missouri. The original sample consisted of an 8 percent random selection of rural townships (no place as large as 2,500 by the 1950 census) stratified on the basis of size of largest place in the township, number of square miles (Missouri townships are not uniform in area), and number of persons living in the township. This resulted in a selection of 99 townships for the study. Within the townships, the units of observation were active local religious groups. Interviews were conducted with ministers in churches in which there was a regular minister; in those congregations with no regular minister, information was obtained from a lay officer of the congregation. The comparison is based on a resurvey of the same sample area conducted in 1967. Comparative analysis depends on the utilization of equivalent concepts and operations at both times of comparison.³ In order to meet this requirement, we have used the concepts and followed the operations of the original study as far as possible. The same 99 townships were used in the restudy and in general the interviews were conducted in the same manner. Although some modifications were made in the schedule of questions (mostly by eliminating some questions and parts), the original wording was preserved in most cases.

To meet the requirement of conceptual comparability, we have attempted to use the operational definitions of the earlier study. In most cases, these are given or apparent in the text; however, two require statement here because of their frequent use throughout the report.

1) *Local religious group.* An organized group which has regularly scheduled worship services.⁴ The terms congregation and church are used as synonyms for local religious groups.

2) *Church-type and sect-type.* "The church-type [is] characterized by the tendency to adjust to the secular society, and the sect-type [is] characterized by the tendency to revolt or withdraw from the secular society."⁵

Church-type denominations are sometimes referred to as mainline or established denominations. We propose that church-type and sect-type congregations represent different organization sets and thereby exhibit different criteria for adequate program and organization.⁶

Operationally, congregations of the following denominations were classified as church-type by Hepple: Southern Baptist, Congregational Christian, Disciples of Christ, Protestant Episcopal, Evangelical and Reformed, Federated and Non-denominational Community Churches, Lutheran, Methodist, and Roman Catholic. Congregations of all other denominations were classified as sect-type.⁷ The same classification was followed in the restudy. During the interim a union had taken place between the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church to form the United Church of Christ.

CHANGES IN NUMBER OF CONGREGATIONS

Changes in number of rural churches. The nature of the sample allowed us to determine changes in number of churches in the sample area for the period 1952-1967. Since we had a defined area (99 rural townships), we could determine the additions as well as the losses over time.

In the course of the interviews in 1967, we obtained information on every local religious group that was identified in the original sample. Some of them, of course, were no longer in existence, but we found people who could provide information about the closing of these churches. At the same time, we found 29 churches in the sample townships which had not been included in the original study, but which were definitely proved to have been in existence at least a year prior to 1952. This represents a loss in the original sample of about 5 percent; apparently only a small proportion of these were refusals. In this assessment of gains and losses of congregations, we have included these 29 local religious groups in the 1952 total. However, since data were not collected for them in the first survey they cannot be included in the comparison of characteristics and programs.

For the reasons given previously we expected a substantial reduction in the number of rural churches since 1952. The data from the restudy do not support this expectation. Of the 534 local religious groups in the 1952 sample of townships, 69 had ceased to exist by 1967. In the same period, however, 46 new groups were established in the sample areas yielding a net loss of only 23 groups or 4.3 percent (Table 1). The counting of churches of course does not indicate changes that are taking place in the organization of religious groups and the characteristics of ministers of rural churches. Nor does maintaining the status-quo indicate success in meeting the organizational requirements of a changing society. We will deal with some of these considerations later in this report.

Table 1. Gains and losses in religious groups, 1952-1967, by church-type and sect-type

Gains & Losses	Church-Type	Sect-Type	Total
Number in 1952	391	143	534
Losses (1952-1967)	47	22	69
Additions (1952-1967)	18	28	46
Number in 1967	362	149	511
Net gain or loss	-29	+6	-23
Percentage net gain or loss of 1952 base	-7.4%	+4.2%	-4.3%

Chi-square = 9.4, d.f. = 1;
Significant at the 5 percent level

Processes in Losses of Local Religious Groups

The two ways in which losses in religious groups occurred were through mergers and disbandment. In about two in five (41.2 percent) of the losses, the congregations involved were reported as having merged with other churches. Almost all of the mergers (24 of 28) were with other congregations of the same denomination. Although merger may be a strategy for strengthening local congregations, it may also be the

final act of a dying congregation. Merger, in fact, may simply be a form of orderly closing and transferring of resources and members to another congregation. Such a strategy may be more feasible among centrally organized denominations. This appears to be the case in that mergers accounted for 47.8 percent of the closings among church-type groups and 27.2 percent of the closings among sect-type groups. Also in support of this contention, there were relatively more mergers accounting for closings of congregations among Methodists, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic groups (church-type denominations of more centralized structure) than among Southern Baptist and Disciples of Christ (church-type denominations with less centralized structures). In any case, it appears that the majority of churches lost through mergers were marginal in that 75 percent had fewer than 30 members at the time of merger.

We inquired into the decision which led to closing and to activities which might have extended beyond the time of closing. Churches were closed formally in 81.2 percent of the cases; this included all the churches lost through merger. In 15.9 percent, there was a definite but informal agreement on the time of closing; and in 2.9 percent (only 2 cases) the church had ceased to function without informal or formal notice. About one-quarter of the closed churches had ceased to hold worship services and/or Sunday school at least one year prior to the data given for closing, and for some, the time lapse was much longer.

We next inquired into activities which might continue after the closing of churches. What we have in mind is that an inactive rural church may be used at irregular times for special activities or services. By definition, none had regularly scheduled worship services. In addition, none had any regularly scheduled group activities such as Sunday school, prayer meetings, Sunday evening services, or Bible study. Only scattered and occasional other activities were associated with the churches' closings, such as revivals, homecomings, weddings, and funerals.

At the time of closing, five of the groups did not own a church building. Of the remaining groups, 48.4 percent had not disposed of their buildings; in 37.5 percent of the cases, it had been sold or given to private individuals, who may have been the original landowner. In only two instances (3.1 percent), had the building been sold or given to a non-religious community group. In most cases (62.5 percent) the building was unused or had been demolished or removed. Among church-type groups, 56.5 percent had officially disposed of their building compared with 38.9 percent of the sect-type groups.

Losses and Additions by Church-type and Sect-type Groups

Earlier we identified the denominations whose congregations were classified as church-type and sect-type. Of the 69 local religious groups lost between 1952 and 1967, 47 were church-type and 22 were sect-type. This was from a base of 391 church-type and 143 sect-type groups and represents gross losses of 12.0 percent and 15.4 percent respectively. Of the 46 additions between 1952 and 1967, 18 were of church-type and 28 were sect-type congregations. Additions represent 4.6 percent of the church-type 1952 base, and 19.6 percent of the sect-type base. The net change, then, was a loss of 7.4 percent for church-type congregations and a gain of 4.2 percent for sect-type congregations.

Among church-type denominations for which there was a sufficient base to compute percentages, loss was highest among Presbyterians (24.0 percent loss; 6 of 25) and Methodists (21.1 percent loss; 20 of 95). By contrast, 4.9 percent (6 of 123) of the Southern Baptist Conventions congregations in the area were lost during the period.

Among the church-type groups, additions were highest for the Southern Baptist Convention which had 9 of 18 church-type additions. There were no additions among Methodists, Disciples of Christ or Presbyterians, which, along with the Southern Baptists had the most congregations in the church-type classification.

Because of the large number of different denominations classified as sects, meaningful base numbers for percentage computations were not available. The largest number of losses was among the Freewill Baptists and the Pentecostal church, which lost six each. Three Church of Christ groups were lost and two Assemblies of God. The largest number of additions among sect-type groups was five each Assemblies of God and Pentecostal, three each Church of Christ and Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and two General Baptist. Other sect-type denominational designations had no more than one addition.

Losses and Gains by Size of Congregation

In the vast majority of cases, it is clear that the demise of a congregation resulted from failure to maintain a membership sufficiently large to provide a minimal program—that is, to function as an organized group. At the time of closing, 87.9 percent of the now defunct local churches had fewer than 50 members; in fact, 80.3 percent had under 25 members; and 34.8 percent had memberships of 10 or less. The ability of sect-type churches to maintain their groups intact seems quite remarkable in view of the fact that in 1952 over one-half of them were in the high-risk size category (under 50 members), whereas, only one-quarter of the church-type groups were in this category.

Religious groups added in the area during the fifteen year period were also small; only 7 of the 46 additions had reached 50 members by 1967. The others were about evenly divided between those under 25 members and those with 25-49 members. Among additions, a larger proportion of sect-type groups than church-type groups were in the smallest category.

Losses and Gains by State Social Areas

Cecil Gregory divided the state of Missouri into four principal social areas on the basis of a large number of demographic, social, and economic areas.⁹ We have reduced, by combination, the social areas to three: The Northern and Western Commercial Agricultural Area, the Ozarks, and the Mississippi Delta Area known as the Bootheel.

The Commercial Agricultural Area is characterized by mechanized farming, a declining rural-farm population and a concentration of elderly people in small towns. Church-type groups predominate in this area, constituting 84.7 percent of the congregations in 1952.

On the other hand, much of the Ozark Area is agriculturally marginal. It may be characterized as an area of low income and one which Gregory thought exhibited relatively more folk society characteristics than the Commercial Farming Area. In some parts, recreational development has taken place and there is some evidence of a black migration to the area. Local religious groups were more likely to be sect-type in this area than in the Commercial Agriculture Area in 1952.

The Mississippi Delta Area (Bootheel) is highly productive agriculturally, cotton is among the principal crops. The area tends a two-class system, with a substantial lower class Negro population. The area includes only six counties and the number of churches from this area in our sample is quite small. However, the area is distinctive and hard to combine with any other. In 1952, the sect-type congregations out-

numbered the church-type congregations by two.

As has been pointed out, a net loss of religious groups occurred in the total sample. Relative losses in the Commercial Agricultural Area and the Bootheel were similar, but the Ozark Area showed a net gain in religious groups (Table 2). Each of the areas showed a net loss in church-type congregations but it was smallest in the Ozark Area. This area was also the only one to have a gain in sect-type groups, an increase of 16 percent.

Table 2. Gains and losses in religious groups, 1952-1967, by church-type and sect-type and social area

Social Area	Church-Type	Sect-Type	Total
Northern and Western Commercial Agricultural Area			
Number in 1952	249	45	294
Losses (1952-1967)	31	10	41
Additions (1952-1967)	7	7	14
Number in 1967	225	42	267
Net gain or loss	-24	-3	-27
Percentage net gain of 1952 base	-9.6%	-6.7%	-9.2%
Chi-square = 3.3, d.f. = 1, not significant at 5 percent level			
Ozark Area			
Number in 1952	116	70	186
Losses (1952-1967)	13	7	20
Additions (1952-1967)	10	18	28
Number in 1967	113	81	194
Net gain or loss	-3	+11	+8
Percentage net gain of 1952 base	-2.6%	+15.7%	+4.3%
Chi-square = 4.2, d.f. = 1, significant at 5 percent level			
Bootheel Area			
Number in 1952	26	28	54
Losses (1952-1967)	3	5	8
Additions (1952-1967)	1	3	4
Number in 1967	24	26	50
Net gain or loss	-2	-2	-4
Percentage net gain of 1952 base	-7.7%	-7.1%	-7.4%

Not enough cases for chi-square test

Losses and Gains by Size of Place

The 1952 study placed religious groups in three categories according to size of place: 1) open country and places under 200; 2) small villages (200-999); and, 3) large villages (1,000 to 2,499). Of the total number of churches in 1952, 64.2 percent were located in the open country, 22.5 percent in small villages, and 13.3 percent in large villages (Table 3). Open country churches showed a disproportionate number of losses, accounting for 81.2 of the total. In large villages there were only three closings

Table 3. Gains and losses in religious groups, 1952-1967, by church-type and sect-type by size of place

Size of Place	Church-Type	Sect-Type	Total
Large Village			
Number in 1952	43	28	71
Losses (1952-1967)	1	2	3
Additions (1952-1967)	2	10	12
Number in 1967	44	36	80
Net gain or loss	1	8	9
Percentage net gain of 1952 base	2.3%	28.6%	12.7%
Not enough cases for chi-square test			
Small Village			
Number in 1952	98	22	120
Losses (1952-1967)	8	2	10
Additions (1952-1967)	3	4	7
Number in 1967	92	25	117
Net gain or loss	-5	+2	-3
Percentage net gain of 1952 base	-5.1%	+9.1%	-2.5%
Not enough cases for chi-square test			
Open Country			
Number in 1952	250	93	343
Losses (1952-1967)	38	18	56
Additions (1952-1967)	13	14	27
Number in 1967	225	89	314
Net gain or loss	-25	-4	-29
Percentage net gain of 1952 base	-10.0%	-4.1%	-8.5%

Chi-square = 3.1, d.f. = 1; not significant at 5 percent level

over the 15 year period. Additions outnumbered closing in large villages while in small villages and the open country losses were greater than additions with net loss in the open country being highest. In each size category sect-type congregations showed greater gain or smaller loss than church-type categories.

A summary of the assessment of changes in number of congregations in a sample of rural townships during a 15 year period, showed a modest net loss of congregations. Losses were greater among congregations of mainline denominations, churches with very small membership in 1952, those located in the open country and in places up to 200 population, and those in the Northern Commercial Agricultural Area and in the Bootheel (as compared with those located in the Ozark Area). The conditions and strategy for survival of the rural church will be explored as we compare rural churches of 1952 and 1967.

CHANGES IN CHARACTERISTICS, PROGRAM AND ORGANIZATION OF RURAL CHURCHES.

In this section we will compare the characteristics, programs and internal organizations of rural churches for the two periods of time. The data come from local religious groups for which interviews were successfully completed in each period. Thus the number of churches is less than reported in the previous section because, as indicated, interviews were not obtained from 29 of the congregations in 1952 and from 6 in 1967. It is only coincidence that the number of churches for which data were obtained was the same in both periods (505 groups).

General Characteristics of Churches in the Samples 1952 and 1967

Two characteristics seem especially important as we compare program and organization of rural churches. They are organizational set as represented by the church/sect distinctions and the size of congregation which in some ways stands for resources of the congregation. Although it was noted in the previous section that sect-type groups were somewhat more successful than church-type groups in retaining congregations, the church/sect division for the two periods was very similar.

	1952 (percent)	1967 (percent)
Church type	74	71
sect type	26	29

The distribution by size of congregations was also very close for the two periods when considered as a whole and separately for church-type and sect-type groups (Table 4). One of the consequences of the similarity of congregations in terms of organizational set and size is that differences for the churches over time cannot be attributed to organizational set and size differences of the congregations. However, we will present much of the data by organizational set and size of congregation in order to determine if changes occur differently by these categories.

As we observed in the previous section, almost all the net loss of churches occurred in the open country and in places up to 200 population while the largest places (1,000-2,500) showed a net increase from 1952 to 1967. As a result, the religious groups tended to be concentrated in larger places in 1967 than in 1952. Even

with this shift most congregations were still in the smallest place size category (64 percent in 1952; 58 percent in 1967).

The proportion of black churches in the sample area remained virtually unchanged with 5.7 percent of the churches black congregations in 1952 and 4.9 percent in 1967.

Table 4. Size of congregations in rural Missouri, 1952 and 1967 by church-type and sect-type

Roll Membership	Total*		Church-type*		Sect-type*	
	1952 percent	1967 percent	1952 percent	1967 percent	1952 percent	1967 percent
	(N=505)	(N=505)	(N=371)	(N=359)	(N=134)	(N=146)
-50	32.1	33.9	24.0	26.2	54.5	52.7
50-99	32.3	29.9	30.2	28.7	38.0	32.9
100+	35.2	36.2	45.8	45.1	6.0	14.4
no report	0.4	--	--	--	1.5	--

*Significant at 5 percent level.

Programs of Rural Churches Compared

Four programs were selected for comparison for the two periods. One of them was the central activity of religious groups, namely, worship services. Two were traditional types of activities of Protestant churches—revivals and weekday religious services (most commonly Wednesday evening services). The fourth was a more educational type of program—the daily vacation Bible school (DVBS) conducted for young people during one or two weeks of the summer vacation. Comparisons of these programs are shown in Table 5.

Weekly religious services. At the end of the 15-year period a substantially larger proportion of the churches were conducting worship services each Sunday than had been doing so at the beginning of the period. In 1952, 45 percent of the congregations had weekly services; by 1967, the percentage was 70. With only one exception, the increase was significant for every testable size and organizational (church/sect) category, as can be seen in Table 5. The change was especially great in middle-sized congregations (both church and sect) and in small church-type congregations. In accounting for this trend we note a decline in the open-country churches where part-time services were prevalent in 1952. The somewhat larger proportion of sect-type churches in 1967 also contributed to weekly religious services because, although church-type congregations gained more than sect-type congregations in having weekly services, they had not achieved equality in this regard with sect-type groups in 1967. This trend appears to be long-term because in 1934 a study of rural churches in Missouri found only 30 percent having weekly worship services.¹⁰

Revivals. According to Coughenour and Hepple¹¹ "The revival consists of a series of preaching services conducted by the minister or a visiting evangelist for a week or more, for the conversion and recruitment of persons who are not members of the religious groups. It also serves the function of reviving indifferent or 'lukewarm' members." Revivals are closely associated with the traditions of emotional Protestantism and frontier religion. One might expect that with the secularization of society this

method of evangelism would decrease. We found that revivals were about as common in 1967 as they had been in 1952 and that the pattern by church-sect types and size had not changed. No category of control showed a statistically significant difference between the two years (Table 5). There appears to be some change in the length of time devoted to revivals; whereas in 1952 the modal period was two weeks, in 1967 it was one week. Furthermore, of course, the nature of the revival may have changed, but we have no firm data on this point.

Table 5. Programs of churches, 1952 and 1967 by church-type and sect-type by size of congregation

Type and size of congregation	Percentage reporting activity									
	Number reporting		Weekly services		Revivals		Weekday services		Daily vacation Bible school	
	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967
Totals	505	505	45.4	70.3*	65.9	64.4	47.1	42.0	45.7	52.1*
Church	371	359	39.1	64.6*	60.4	59.6	37.7	33.7	57.7	60.4
Sect	134	146	62.7	84.2*	81.3	76.0	73.1	62.3	12.7	31.5*
49 members and below	162	171	37.0	54.4*	59.3	53.8	40.1	36.8	20.4	22.2
Church	89	94	9.0	31.9*	46.1	41.5	16.9	16.0	24.7	23.4
Sect	73	77	71.2	81.8	75.3	68.8	68.5	62.3	15.1	20.8
50-99 members	163	151	35.6	68.2*	69.3	68.9	47.2	39.1	43.6	55.0*
Church	112	103	29.5	61.2*	61.6	64.1	33.9	32.0	58.9	63.1
Sect	51	48	50.0	83.3*	86.3	79.2	76.5	54.2*	9.8	37.5*
100 members and above	178	183	61.8	86.9*	68.5	70.5	52.8	49.2	71.3	77.6
Church	170	162	61.2	85.8*	67.1	67.3	51.2	45.1	74.1	80.2
Sect	8	21	75.0	95.2†	100.0	95.2†	87.5	81.0†	12.5	57.1†

*Significant difference between 1952 and 1967, chi-square test 5 percent level

†Expected frequency < 5 in one or more cells

Weekday religious services. Another traditional Protestant religious activity is the weekday religious service, often a Wednesday evening service. In 1952, 44 percent of the congregations had this type of service compared with 42 percent in 1967. The statistical insignificance of the change in this activity is maintained for each category when controls are applied, with the exception of sect-type groups of middle size (50-99), which were more likely to have midweek services at the later date (Table 5).

Daily vacation Bible school. (DVBS). The intent of daily vacation Bible schools is to provide a concentrated religious educational experience for young people of the church. In contrast with the emotional appeal of revivals, DVBS is a more intellectual approach to socialization. In total, more congregations reported this activity in 1967 than in 1952. Although the difference was not large, it was statistically significant. The change was accounted for largely by increases in the middle-sized and larger sect-type congregations both of which showed significant change. Such changes bring sect-type and church-type groups closer in this activity in 1967 than in 1952.

Support of Extra-local Causes

Traditionally certain extra-local charitable and socially beneficial organizations

have been supported by local congregations. Among them are homes for the elderly, hospitals and orphanages. A majority or near majority of the congregations supported each of these extra-local causes. Orphanages received support from most congregations followed by homes for the elderly and hospitals.

Because support for extra-local causes seems to depend on more complex denominational apparatus, one might expect church-type congregations to offer such support more frequently than sect-type congregations. This was very clearly the situation in both time periods. The generalization did not change when size (and thereby resources) of the congregation was controlled.

On the basis of our hypothesis of urbanization we had also expected that more rural churches in the later period would support extra-local causes than had been the case in 1952. Perhaps the most notable overall pattern, however, was the great similarity for the two time periods in proportions of congregations providing extra-local activities with controls for size and organizational set. Of the 32 possible comparisons (4 categories could not be compared because of small numbers in one or more cell), only 3 were statistically significant. For many of the categories the interperiod proportions were very close.

Another observation of some importance is that substantial interperiod differences were more likely to occur among sect-type groups than among church-type groups. Since the tendency of sect type groups was toward greater support of extra-local activities, the change tended to bring them in greater conformity with the mainline denominations. At the same time, the data also inform us that such a process is relatively slow and that the two organizational sets remain quite far apart on this particular behavior.

Suborganization

On the basis of our hypothesis of urbanization, we had expected greater complexity of organization in local congregations and in conformity with our hypothesis on organizational leveling, for suborganizations of church and sect-type congregations to be more similar.

To some extent the internal organization of local congregations can be assessed by considering the suborganizations that the group maintains. In 1952 it was found that the great preponderance (91 percent) of the suborganizations of the local groups could be classified in seven categories: Sunday school, women's organizations, youth organizations, choir, men's organizations, young adult organizations, and older adult organizations. These suborganizations were also found to form a Guttman-type scale in the order listed above, with a coefficient of reproducibility of .94.¹² According to the logic of Guttman scaling, this means that the presence of a less common type of suborganization in a congregation would predict the presence of more common suborganizations in a particular congregation. The fact that the suborganizations scale demonstrates the unidimensionality of the suborganizations and thus becomes an index of the organizational complexity of the congregations. Coughenour and Hepple then computed, on the basis of scale scores, percentages of congregations having individual suborganizations. In essence they presented data by suborganization category as if the scale were perfect. They were aware of the problem involved and pointed out that reporting by scale score distorted the actual frequencies to the extent that the scale departed from perfection. For our purposes we accepted the demonstration of scalability as a useful instrument in understanding the organizational complexity of local churches but believed that we needed a more precise tabulation of suborganization occurrence for interperiod comparisons. We recomputed the 1952 data to obtain actual frequencies, using the original data cards. Therefore, the figures reported for

Table 6. Contribution by congregation to extra-local causes, 1952 and 1967 by church-type and sect-type by size of congregation

Type and Size of Congregation	Number reporting		Percent making contribution to:					
			Old folks home		Orphanage		hospital	
			1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967
Total	505	503	54.3	57.0	62.4	64.4	42.4	43.8
Church	371	358	69.0	69.0	74.7	74.3	56.1	55.4
Sect	134	145	13.4	27.6*	27.6	39.6*	4.5	15.1*
49 members and below	162	170	27.2	35.9	36.4	40.3	21.0	24.2
Church	89	94	40.4	46.8	50.6	48.9	36.0	35.5
Sect	73	76	11.0	22.4	19.2	29.3	2.7	10.5†
50-99 members	162	151	54.3	58.3	61.7	67.5	36.4	41.7
Church	111	103	71.2	72.8	74.8	78.6	49.6	53.4
Sect	51	48	17.6	27.1	33.3	43.8	7.8	16.7
100 members and above	179	182	79.3	75.8	86.6	83.5	67.6	63.7
Church	171	161	82.5	79.5	87.1	85.7	70.8	68.4
Sect	8	21	12.5	47.6†	25.0	76.7†	0.0	28.6†

*Significant at 5 percent level

†Not enough cases in one or more cells for chi-square test

1952 are somewhat different (although not much) from the percentages based on scale scores and reported in Table 20 of the earlier analysis.¹³

Suborganization comparisons for 1952 and 1967 by size and organization type of congregation are presented in Table 7. The proportion of congregations having a given suborganization ranged from 91.5 percent having a Sunday school (1967) to 2.6 percent having an older adult organization (1952). With very slight variation (see youth organization and choir, 1967), the ordering of proportions having each suborganization was the same for 1952 and 1967.

Observing the totals for each suborganization, we can see the close correspondence for the two years. Only the number of older adult organizations increased enough to register a significant difference. An examination of chi-square tests for the separate size and organizational type (church or sect) categories reveals few changes of significance. Of the 84 relationships examined, 26 had too few cases in one or more cells for a chi-square test (expected frequency below five). Of the remaining 58 tests, only 5 proved to be significant.

The only pattern of change observable is that of sect-type groups as a whole showed percentage increases for five of the seven suborganizations. This same tendency in direction of change held true for sect groups in the two smaller size categories, but diminished in equality (3 gains, 3 losses, 1 tie) in the largest category.

RESOURCES: INCOME AND FACILITIES

Resources of a group are generally regarded as income available to the group plus assets in the form of property. The conception of rural society that we formulated led us to expect greater generation of resources by rural churches and more rational means of raising money in the later period. Under urbanizing influences we expected greater use of every member canvassing and pledging to raise money.

Income. There are problems in comparing the income and budgets of churches

Table 7. Suborganizations of churches, 1952 and 1967 by church-type and sect-type, by size of congregation

Type and size of congregation	Percentage reporting suborganization															
	Number reporting*		Sunday school		Women's organization		Youth organization		Choir		Men's organization		Young adult organization		Older adult organization	
	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967
Totals	505	505	88.8	91.5	56.5	56.2	37.6	39.4	35.6	40.7	12.9	15.8	8.0	7.3	2.6	5.0†
Church	371	359	87.9	92.2†	72.0	66.6	44.2	43.2	42.9	33.7	17.0	21.2	10.0	8.6	3.5	5.9
Sect	134	146	90.8	89.7	20.5	30.8†	18.9	30.1†	15.2	16.4	1.5	2.7‡	2.3	4.1‡	0.0	2.7‡
49 members and below	162	171	79.0	86.6	30.9	31.0	16.7	14.6	14.0	13.5	0.6	5.3‡	1.9	2.9‡	0.0	1.2‡
Church	89	94	73.0	87.2†	43.8	37.2	15.7	7.4	18.0	16.0	1.1	8.5‡	3.4	1.1‡	0.0	1.1‡
Sect	73	77	86.3	85.7	15.1	23.4	17.8	23.4	12.3	10.4	0.0	1.3‡	0.0	5.2‡	0.0	1.3‡
50-99 members	163	151	95.7	96.0	54.9	50.3	30.2	33.1	27.2	25.8	7.4	4.0	4.9	4.6	0.6	4.0‡
Church	112	103	95.5	98.1‡	70.3	60.2	36.9	35.0	33.3	29.1	9.9	4.9	4.5	6.8	0.9	3.9‡
Sect	51	48	96.0	91.7‡	21.6	29.2	15.7	29.2	13.7	18.8	2.0	2.1‡	5.9	0.0‡	0.0	4.2‡
100 members and above	178	183	91.1	92.4	86.6	84.7	63.1	67.8	61.5	59.0	29.0	35.5	16.2	13.7	6.7	9.3
Church	170	162	90.6	91.4	87.7	87.7	63.7	69.1	62.0	62.3	29.8	38.9	17.0	14.2	7.0	5.9
Sect	8	21	100.0	100.0‡	6.25	61.9‡	50.0	57.1‡	50.0	33.3‡	12.5	9.5‡	0.0	9.5‡	0.0	2.7‡

*some variations in 1952 sample

†significant difference between 1952 and 1967
 χ^2 test five-percent level

‡expected frequency < 5 in one or more cells

on a dollar for dollar basis over time. One problem results from changes in the value of the dollar which can be handled by applying an adjustment factor. A more serious problem in our opinion is that a false sense of precision may result from use of income data. Speaking of the latter survey, the church income figures most certainly are approximations. By pointing this out we are not suggesting that the figures are useless or misleading. They do in fact demonstrate a crucial point about rural churches—namely, that most persist on financial resources which are very low. Even allowing for the possibility of some (or even very substantial) errors in reporting income does not alter the picture. We do not feel, however, that the income data are sufficiently precise to make point for point comparisons even if adjustments are made for changes in the value of the dollar. While we present income figures for the two periods we do so in order to make some *general* comparisons on level and means of financing.

When we first examined incomes of rural churches reported in the 1967 survey, we thought that error in reporting or processing the data must have occurred because of the low levels of financial support. For example, the median income of churches was about \$3,000. In examining the data from the 1952 survey, however, it was found that the 1967 median figure was about double that of churches in 1952. Furthermore, as we laid the figures out as shown in Table 8, it was found that a general correspondence existed for the two periods with regard to the relationship of expenditures to organizational set of congregations. What is very clear is that the economic level of support of most of these groups was exceptionally low at both periods of time.

In other ways the financial picture for 1952 and 1967 were similar. The item of greatest expense was ministers' salaries and associated expenses, this was followed by operating expenses, with money for benevolences a weak third.

At both periods of time, churches depended heavily on "free will offerings" as a means of raising money. This might include tithing or payments in lump sums by congregation members but not a pledging mechanism. The use of pledges was about equally unpopular at both periods with 16 percent and 15 percent of the churches reporting use of pledges in 1952 and 1967 respectively. The Lord's Acre, a program identified with rural areas in which proceeds from a designated plot of ground are contributed to the church was an insignificant source of income in both periods.

Thus there is ample evidence that rural churches in Missouri in both periods were organizations of limited financial resources. It is a situation we want to examine later as we attempt to account for the survival of rural churches.

Facilities. We have selected three types of facilities to examine systematically over time; namely, kitchen facilities, a parsonage, and a separate study for the minister (Table 9). Kitchen facilities were more common in the later period than the earlier. The proportion with this facility doubled in the interperiod. For the smallest congregations (-50 members), the proportion with kitchen facilities in 1962

Table 8. Expenditures by churches, 1952 and 1967 by church-type and sect-type

	Amount							
	Under \$2,000		\$2,000 - 3,999		\$4,000 - 9,999		\$10,000	+
	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967
Total* (486/498)	65.0	35.8	17.9	22.6	13.8	19.5	3.3	17.1
Church-type* (364/358)	60.1	30.4	18.9	21.5	16.8	26.5	4.1	21.5
Sect-type* (122/140)	79.5	49.3	14.8	25.7	4.9	19.3	0.8	5.7

*Significant at 5 percent level.

Table 9. Selected facilities of churches, 1952 and 1967 by church--type and sect-type by size of congregation

	Percent of churches having facility							
	Number reporting		Kitchen facilities		Parsonage		Office for minister	
	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967	1952	1967
Total	499	505	24.9	51.7*	29.9	36.0*	11.6	23.0*
Church	365	359	32.7	60.4*	33.8	39.6	14.2	25.1*
Sect	134	146	3.9	30.1*	15.7	27.4	3.9	17.8*
49 members and below	160	171	4.6	24.6*	13.1	14.0	2.0	5.8
Church	86	94	4.7	22.3*	1.9	6.4	2.3	3.2†
Sect	73	77	4.5	27.3*	21.9	23.4	1.5	9.1†
50-99 members	161	151	16.1	45.7*	19.3	23.8	4.3	17.9*
Church	110	103	21.6	56.3*	20.0	20.4	5.4	15.5*
Sect	51	48	2.0	22.9*	15.7	31.2	4.0	22.9*
100 members and above	172	183	51.4	82.0*	54.1	66.7*	26.0	43.2*
Church	168	162	53.3	85.2*	55.9	71.0*	21.0	43.8*
Sect	8	21	2.5	57.1†	37.5	33.0†	25.0	38.1†

*Significant at 5 percent level

†Not enough cases in one or more cells for chi-square test

was very low and almost identical for church-type and sect-type groups. Both types showed substantial and about equal increase. In the next higher category (50-99 members) there was a higher proportion of church-type than sect-type congregations with kitchen facilities in 1952. Both organizational types showed substantial increases over the interperiod with the difference in 1967 being greater in favor of church-type groups. Among the largest churches there was some evidence of greater increase among sect-type groups although the number of large sect-type churches was too small to yield firm conclusions. The increase in this facility was large enough to be significant for each size and organizational set category which had enough cases for statistical tests.

The provision of a parsonage by the congregation is a traditional way of compensating a minister. The maintenance of this facility was quite stable for the two time periods. Among church-type groups there was only slight change except in the largest size category. Sect-type groups showed greater proportional increase in the two smaller size categories. Statistically significant differences between the two surveys occurred only for the samples as a whole and in the largest size category.

There was also a substantial change in the proportion of congregations providing separate office facilities for the ministers. Increase was greater for sect-type than church-type groups. As we examine Table 9, it can be seen that in 1967 when size is taken into account sect-type congregations are more likely than church-type congregations provide this facility. The overall advantage of church-type groups stems from their greater number in the largest size category where this facility is most likely to be present.

The overall trend is for more congregations to have the selected facilities in the later period. Much of the increase is found among the sect-type groups. This tends to support the hypothesis of diminished differences between church and sect-type congregations as a result of leveling interorganizational differences.

MINISTERS OF RURAL CHURCHES IN MISSOURI, 1952-1967.

In this section we compare ministers of congregations in the sample of rural townships for 1952 and 1967. This same sample is the basis for data on the rural churches reported in Part I of this bulletin. The number of ministers, however, is not the same as the number of churches for several reasons. A minister may serve more than one church in the sample area; on the other hand, a church may have been without the services of a minister at the time of the interview. These latter churches might still conduct services using supply ministers on an irregular basis. In the later survey a somewhat larger number of ministers were excluded than in the earlier survey because they were not the congregation's regular minister. On the other hand, in the earlier survey, 60 ministers out of a possible 405 were not interviewed because they lived outside of Missouri, were unavailable because of vacation or other absences from the area during the time of field work, or did not provide data either through refusal or insufficient information. It was shown by Hepple that ministers for which data were not obtained were somewhat more likely to serve sect-type congregations which biases the sample toward church-type ministers.¹⁴ In the restudy, 6 clergymen were not interviewed; 4 because of refusals and 2 because they were unavailable during the time of the field work. Thus the comparison is made between 345 ministers in 1952 and 382 in 1967.

General Characteristics of Ministers

In both periods virtually all the ministers were men with 3 percent and 4 percent women ministers in 1952 and 1967 respectively. There were few Black ministers and the proportions (6 percent, 1952; and, 7 percent, 1967) were almost the same at both times. Nor was the age structure of ministers for the two periods appreciably different for the two time periods.

	Age of Ministers	
	1952 (N=345)	1967 (N=382)
under 35	28	26
35-44	22	24
45-64	34	37
65 and over	15	12
no report	1	1

At both times, slightly more than 1 in 4 ministers were under 35 years of age and about 1 in 8 was 65 years or older.

Ministers of church-type and sect-type congregations. At both time periods the proportion of church-type ministers was substantially larger than sect-type ministers. The proportion of ministers of sect-type churches was significantly larger in 1967 than in 1952.

	1952	1967
	percent	percent
Church-type	75	62
Sect-type	25	38

In accounting for the differences, it has been pointed out that losses through failure to interview in the 1952 sample were greater among sect-type than church-type clergymen. If it had been possible to interview all potential ministers, this would have reduced the proportion of church-type ministers to 72 percent of the total. Also, there was a slight overall shift from church-type to sect-type congregations. In addition, as we pointed out, it appears that more ministers were excluded in the

Table 10. Background characteristics of rural ministers, 1952 and 1967 by church-type and sect-type

Characteristics	Total		Church-type		Sect-type	
	1952 percent	1967 percent	1952 percent	1967 percent	1952 percent	1967 percent
	(N=345)	(N=382)	(N=260)	(N=240)	(N=85)	(N=142)
Native of Mis- souri or adjacent state	79.1	84.3	76.9	82.1	85.9	88.0
Youth location predominately in rural areas	78.0	72.3	75.4	66.0*	85.9	85.5
Father was a white-collar worker	22.0	19.9	24.2	25.0	15.3	9.9

*Significant at 5 percent level

later survey because they were not the regular ministers of the church. This may have reduced the relative number of church-type ministers in the 1967 sample. The total effect is to raise a question about the comparability of the ministers samples. Presentation of data in the present comparison by church and sect-type helps to reduce the problem. But still we must be cautious of our interpretation of differences between the two periods.

Background characteristics of rural ministers. The background of rural ministers for the two time periods remained almost unchanged. In 1952, 79 percent of the ministers had been born in Missouri or adjacent states; in 1967 the percentage was 84. Not much difference between church and sect-type ministers was apparent for either year. Similarly the preponderance of ministers was reared in rural areas for both periods.

About 1 in 5 fathers of rural ministers were in white collar occupations. This included about 1 in 10 in the professions (9 percent, 1952; and, 10 percent, 1967). The profession cited most often was the ministry which accounted for about 7 percent of the fathers at both time periods. The single occupation of fathers of greatest frequency at both times was farming.

Education of ministers. We expected the education of ministers to shift upward; especially, an increase in those with post-college work. In 1952, more than 4 in 10 of the rural ministers had not gone beyond high school with the possible exception of Bible college. The situation had not changed materially in 1967 when all ministers were considered. There was a slight decline in proportion of ministers with no more than a high school education for both church-type and sect-type groups. Ministers of church-type groups showed some increase in post-college education while the great majority of sect-type ministers did not have post-college work at either time. The change in educational level was significant for church-type ministers but not for sect-type ministers. In spite of these changes, the overall educational level of rural ministers in 1967 remained essentially what it had been in 1952.

Relationship to the church. The pattern of tenure of ministers in their current churches was almost identical for the two periods. There was little difference between

Table 11. Education of rural ministers, 1952 and 1967 by church-type and sect-type

	Total		Church-type*		Sect-type	
	1952 percent	1967 percent	1952 percent	1967 percent	1952 percent	1967 percent
	(N=345)	(N=382)	(N=260)	(N=240)	(N=85)	(N=142)
Less than college	42.0	40.5	28.8	20.0	82.3	75.4
Some college	29.9	26.7	34.6	32.1	15.3	17.6
Post-college	28.1	32.7	36.6	47.9	2.4	7.0

*Significant at 5 percent level

Table 12. Relationship of rural ministers to church, 1952 and 1967 by church-type and sect-type

Relation to church	Total		Church-type		Sect-type	
	1952 percent	1967 percent	1952 percent	1967 percent	1952 percent	1967 percent
	(N=345)	(N=382)	(N=260)	(N=240)	(N=85)	(N=142)
Tenure in present charge						
0-1.9 years	43.9	45.5	43.4	44.2	45.8	47.9
2-3.9 years	29.5	27.7	30.9	30.4	25.3	23.2
4 years or more	26.5	26.7	25.8	25.4	28.9	28.9
Only one church in charge	47.3	63.3*	38.1	54.4*	75.3	78.2
Secular occupation						
no secular occupation (full-time)	41.7	51.8*	47.7	61.3*	23.5	35.9
secular occupation (part-time)	58.3	48.1	52.3	38.7	76.5	64.1

*Significant at 5 percent level

church-type and sect-type ministers for either period. About 45 percent had served their present church for less than 2 years; about 30 percent had tenure of from 2 to 4 years; and, slightly over 25 percent for 4 or more years.

Church-type ministers, but not sect-type ministers, were somewhat more likely to serve but one congregation in 1967. This difference, however, may have resulted in part from the exclusion of more ministers in the 1967 sample because they were not the regular minister of the church.

Secular employment was an important factor for ministers at both times although there was some reduction in the proportion who engaged in secular occupation in the later survey. The pattern of greater secular employment of sect-type ministers,

however, was present for both years.

We have pointed out that caution must be exercised in comparing ministers in 1952 and 1967 because of some differences in sample selection. In spite of this it was found that differences were relatively small for the two periods. We conclude that the background of ministers and their relationship to congregations had not changed much in the interperiod.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

(an interpretation of rural religious group survival)

We had certain expectations about changes in rural churches. First of all we had expected to find a substantial decline in number of congregations and indications of a process of deterioration in many congregations toward eventual demise. At the same time, we had expected to be able to detect the influences of the larger urban society on the program and organization of rural congregations. More specifically, we thought traditional services such as Sunday evening worship, midweek evening services and revivals would show evidence of erosion and that other activities such as daily vacation Bible school, which represents a more formal means of socialization, would be more favored. As a parallel development, it was expected that local churches would be more directly involved in supporting extra-local causes such as hospitals, homes for the elderly and children's homes. The same urbanization should lead to greater differentiation among congregations in terms of organizational complexity. As with other rural institutional organizations, we expected some churches to show dominance manifested by organizational complexity and others to show signs of simplification.

Furthermore, rationalization of behavior should be detected in the means of obtaining resources and indeed in the level of support of local religious groups. Part of the expectation on level of support stems from changes anticipated in the characteristics of ministers of rural churches. In general, we looked for greater professionalization of the clergy as evidenced in more education, and less dependence on secular occupations.

Related to these developments, greater homogeneity was expected among church and sect-type congregations. This was based on the proposition that common influence of mass society tends to bring local religious groups into organizational alignment. The classic theoretical statements on church/sect identify church-type with the "mainstream" social values. Research has tended to show that sect-type groups become more church-like over time. Such movement can be conceived of as the common effects of larger societal influences. Thus we might expect greater homogeneity between the church and sect-type group behavior changing toward church-type group behavior.

The data presented can be interpreted within the expectational framework. In reviewing them, we will consider: 1) the survival of groups, 2) the changes in programs and organization, 3) resources, 4) the professionalization of ministers, and 5) the changes by organizational set.

Survival of religious groups. The rural churches showed a strong ability to survive in a situation that appeared unfavorable for survival. This is a central finding of this study. There were several relationships to survival of note. Chances of survival were greatest in larger places and least in the open-country; church-type groups were more vulnerable than sect-type; and losses were heavier in the commercial agriculture area than in the Ozark area.

Changes in programs and organizations. The programming of rural churches in aggregate appeared not to have changed substantially. The major exception appears to

be greater likelihood of having worship services each week. Traditional Protestant services such as Sunday evening and midweek services and revivals were maintained at about the same level at both time periods. Furthermore, the similarity across time periods for specific size and organizational set categories (among which were great differences in both periods) indicates that the same basic pattern persisted for the two periods. Similar correspondence across time was also observed for participation in extra-local causes.

Changes in organizational complexity. As with program, evidence of substantial change in organizational form and complexity was not apparent. Most rural churches remained very simply organized with emphasis placed on providing worship services and Sunday schools (which can themselves be construed to be forms of worship service). The major additions to these for both periods were the traditional suborganizations of women's organizations, choir, and youth organizations. The pattern of suborganizations did not support the contention that either a greater number of congregations were becoming more complex or that a greater number were becoming more simply organized. Suborganizations by size and organization set categories of religious groups remained substantially unchanged over the time period.

Resources and facilities. The point to be made about income of churches at both periods of time is that for most churches the level of support was very low. Size and organizational set factors related similarly to income in both surveys. In addition, the means of raising money did not change toward more systematic methods as had been expected under the hypothesis of urbanization. Some changes in facilities were observed in the form of greater frequency of congregations providing kitchen facilities and an office or study for ministers with only minor changes in providing a minister's parsonage.

Professionalization of the ministry. The level of education of the rural clergy had not undergone major change although there was a slight increase in the overall level of education with more clergymen having post-graduate training and fewer with less than college. Also, while the basic pattern of engagement in secular occupation persisted, somewhat fewer ministers had secular employment in the later period.

While the stability of church numbers, programs, organization, level of resources, and professionalization of ministers was impressive, where changes did occur they tended to be in the direction expected under a hypothesis of urbanization. For in fact, there was an overall loss of congregations of about 4 percent, a slight erosion in traditional services, an increase in vacation Bible school programs, an increase in selected facilities, and some increase in indicators of professionalism among ministers. The nature of these changes reminds us that institutional patterns and the groups which manifest them change slowly. There may be continued changes in the direction congruent with urbanization. While the data suggest very gradual change, there is always the possibility of a tipping point where change becomes more rapid and even dramatic. As we will develop later, there appear to be structural characteristics of rural churches that oppose rapid change on the basis of larger society influence.

In the introduction of this summary it was suggested that common influences of the larger society might be expected to bring church and sect-type congregations closer together. In a manner reflecting stability of organization, church and sect organizational sets maintained consistent differences in program, organization, resource, and ministerial characteristics. Parenthetically, the consistency of the church/sect relationships for the two time periods demonstrates the validity of division of congregations on this basis. But also to be pointed out is that the overall changes have in fact produced some greater homogeneity. A factor which we had not taken account of in our expectations about sect-type groups was the general vitality of sect-type

groups in the larger society. Sect-type churches in fact are the most dynamic religious groups in urban society and in this regard the situation in rural Missouri reflects the larger society.

An explanation for the survival of the rural church. In our report of the rural churches in Missouri¹⁵ we speculated on the ability of the rural church to survive in an urbanized society. With the comparative data of this report, the picture becomes clearer and offers us an opportunity to frame a more comprehensive rationale for this phenomenon. In approaching the explanation in this manner, we are engaging in what has been called the generation of grounded theory; that is the process of developing and modifying theoretical schemes on the basis of data.¹⁶

Our assumption was that rural churches represented an institutional system that could be treated as a whole. A parallel to this would be the school system. The expectation was that rural churches would be highly sensitive to influences of the larger society. On examining the evidence the basis for the hypothesis (urbanized influence) seems to have been in error. The basis for influence of the systems of larger society on local units is that a critical relationship is maintained between them. One way of developing this critical relationship is for the local unit to become specialized and dependent on units of the larger systems. To apply this reasoning to local churches, as local churches become more dependent on denominational centers for program, organizational models, and leadership (clergy), they are more subject to influences of these same centers. Our most general conclusion is that rural churches have to some degree avoided the dependency relationship and therefore are not highly sensitive to centralized influences. We will develop this argument as accounting for the survival of rural churches.

While our presentation involves some repetition of data presented previously in earlier sections and summarized in this section, what we are aiming for here is a re-interpretation of our theoretical framework (hypothesis of urbanization and organization and organizational leveling) on the basis of the data. In other words, to indicate where we went wrong in conceptualization and to present an alternative.

A finding was that sect-type groups in aggregate had a better survival record than church-type groups. By definition sect-type groups were not as involved in the activities of the larger society, and the sect-type concept suggests the establishment of moral communities based on immediate membership. This idea can be extended to denominations within the church-type organizational set. Those less structured (e.g., Southern Baptist) showed better survival experience than the more structured (e.g., Methodist and Presbyterian). Interestingly enough, aggregate survival was highest in the Ozark area for both sect and church-type congregations. In terms of our conceptualization, this is the least urbanized of the social areas and theoretically least subject to the influences of the larger society. These separate findings indicate that congregations which are further removed from influences of the larger society are more likely to survive. In this series of observations, however, we note two pieces of evidence which might be contrary to our general theme. One is that survival was least likely in the open-country and places up to 200 population; the other was that survival was least likely among the smallest churches. This probably is accounted for by the truism that a minimum level of resources and population base is needed in order to maintain any group.

The characteristics of local congregations' programs may insulate them from the influences of the larger society. Programs tended to be turned inward emphasizing worship services. To this point the only program change of magnitude during the interperiod was in frequency of worship services. Midweek services and revivals were maintained at about the same level. The ubiquitous Sunday school is another evidence

of the self-maintaining characteristic of the church program. Sunday schools can be a completely laymen's activity. Furthermore, organization of congregations tended to be simple. A majority in fact had no other suborganization than a Sunday school and women's auxiliary. Resistance to complex organization was also apparent in the lack of official boards in many churches and the irregularity of their meetings in still more.¹⁷

The fact of low financial support for rural churches is also a statement of low financial obligations. The simple building and minimum expenses for professional leaders exempts rural churches to a large degree from economic constraints. The self-sufficient church (as well as the self-sufficient farmer) is not affected much one way or another by wages and prices of the market. Whether the size (as a proxy of resources) of a congregation was too small depended on what was expected of the group by its members. If aspirations are for an elaborate program, then many rural churches are too small, but if the rural church is perceived as a fellowship group, then a congregation might exist "where only a few are gathered together."

The characteristics and relationship of the clergy to community and congregation are further factors which exempt congregations from influences of the larger society. A function of professionals in rural society is to bring in the thoughtways of the larger society. Vidich and Bensman found that the clergy played this role in Springdale, New York.¹⁸ We found, however, that the clergy reflect closely the rural and native Missouri background of their congregations. Added to this is the moralistic orientation of ministers which tends to turn attention inward and emphasizes a moral community.¹⁹ Thus such issues as social drinking and even social dancing are of concern to the rural clergy. These most certainly are not issues on the national agenda. Furthermore, a substantial part of the rural clergy does not carry the educational criteria of professionalism and judges that their congregations do not expect seminary training. The clergy contributes to the exemption from the demands of the market on the congregation in yet another way in that a substantial proportion supports itself through secular occupations.

Finally, in our original expectation of the effects of urbanization on rural churches, we had conceptualized the effects as unitary with the exception of the church/sect distinction. No such unitary system seems to exist; instead the denominations act separately with varying effects. As denominations seek to influence local congregations to conform to their models of program and organization some congregations may opt and have the ability to disassociate themselves from the denomination. A case in point is the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in which a sizable number of congregations are listed as non-brotherhood which means that they maintain independence from the state association. The congregational bent of rural churches as well as the large number of denominational identities serves to blunt any overall common influence of centralized systems of the larger society.

The rural church as a primary group. In reformulating our conception of congregations of rural churches we finally regard the congregations as primary groups. In this respect the neighborhood school and the rural church although having much in common in their beginnings have taken sharply divergent paths. The neighborhood school has been incorporated into the complex educational system finding standards, resources, and control at the state and national levels. From neighborhood institutions, schools have become specialized groups which are removed from direct community control through professionalization of staff, standardization of curriculum, and extra-local evaluation. At the same time, consolidation of schools through state requirements has effectively eliminated the open country schools and changed the locational patterns of other primary and secondary education units. There was some lo-

cal resistance to these developments as well as support. Opposition to closing of open country schools was often posed in terms of loss of neighborhood identity and to closing small high schools as loss of community. These arguments were to no avail because the purpose of the school was now narrowly the transference of specific parts of the culture, not community integration.

The rural church, as we have seen, has not followed the same course. It has remained neighborhood and community dependent and oriented. Specialization, in the form of organizational elaboration or leadership roles, has been minimal. The moral precepts of the church are likely to reflect those of the community and the different local congregations can accommodate the particularism on which primary group relations are maintained. In addition, as other groups such as the school become more secondary, the primary group quality of the rural church may take an added importance. In general the study of the rural church informs us of the dynamics of rural society and suggests an addendum to a monolithic influence on urbanized social systems on the local community.

FOOTNOTES

¹Marvin T. Judy, *The Cooperative Parish in Nonmetropolitan Areas*. Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press 1967.

²Norvall Glenn, "Massification Versus Differentiation: Some Trend Data from National Surveys." *Social Forces* 46 (December) 1967:172-180.

³Norvall Glenn, "Massification Versus Differentiation: Some Trend Data from National Surveys." *Social Forces* 46(December) 1967:172-180.

⁴Edward A. Suchman, "The Comparative Method in Social Research," *Rural Sociology* 29 (June) 1964:123.

⁵Lawrence M. Hepple, *The Church in Rural Missouri: Part I, Introduction*. Columbia: Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 633A, 1957:23.

⁶Ibid., 1957:34.

⁷J. Kenneth Benson and Edward W. Hassinger, "Organization Set and Resources as Determinants of Formalization in Religious Organizations," *Review of Religious Research* 14 (No. 1) 1972:30-36.

⁸Lawrence M. Hepple, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁹Edward W. Hassinger and John S. Holik, "Changes in the Number of Rural Churches in Missouri, 1952-1957" *Rural Sociology* 35(September 1970):354-366; Edward W. Hassinger, J. Kenneth Benson, and John S. Holik, "Changes in Program and Suborganization of Rural Churches in Missouri in a Fifteen-year period" *Rural Sociology* 37 (September 1972):354-366. (Some of the data in this section were published previously. It is included here as part of a more comprehensive picture of changes in the rural church)

¹⁰Cecil Gregory, *Rural Social Areas in Missouri*. Columbia: University of Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station Research Bulletin 655, April 1958.

¹¹Melvin W. Sneed and Douglas Ensminger. *The Rural Church in Missouri*. Columbia: Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station Research Bulletin 225, 1935:22.

¹²Milton Coughenour and Lawrence M. Hepple. *The Church in Rural Missouri Part II: Religious Groups in Rural Missouri*. Columbia: Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station Research Bulletin 633B, 1957.

¹³Coughenour and Hepple, *op. cit.*, 1957:94.

¹⁴Ibid., 1957:97

¹⁵Lawrence M. Hepple, *The Church in Rural Missouri, Part III: Clergymen in Rural Missouri*. Columbia: Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station Research Bulletin 633C, December 1958, pp. 155-157.

¹⁶Edward W. Hassinger, J. Kenneth Benson, James H. Dorsett, and John S. Holik, *The Church in Rural Missouri 1967*. Columbia: Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station Research Bulletin 984, December 1971.

¹⁷Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1967.

¹⁸Hassinger, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, 1971:20.

¹⁹Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town In Mass Society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958.

²⁰Edward W. Hassinger, J. Kenneth Benson, James H. Dorsett, and John S. Holik, *Ministers in Rural Churches of Missouri*. Columbia: University of Missouri College of Agriculture Agricultural Experiment Station Research Bulletin 955, February, 1973.