Program and Policy Research Dynamics in Authority Contained and Dispersed Church Systems

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I. INTRODUCTION : Evaluative Research for Decision-Makers in Secular "and/versus" Religious Social Systems

A. Setting Clear, Measurable Program Objectives

Over the last thirty years, much has been written about the importance of research in getting facts for decision-makers in secular organizations. Much of this advice has been directed to humanistic nonprofits such as social service agencies and educational institutions, rather than corporate headquarters, laboratories, and engineering firms. This is because it appears more difficult for humanistic nonprofits to set clear, measurable program objectives:

- First, administrators and professionals in humanistic nonprofits are or thought to be so focused or pursuing high values in serving publics, that they are more apt than their counterparts in other types of organizations to ignore the importance of gathering the data than would assist their being effective (see Edward Suchman 1967:147 et passim.)
- Second, the organizational goals of humanistic nonprofits, however, are typically so unfocused that it is difficult to know what data would be relevant in assessing success (ibid.)
- Third, this last may be partly because humanistic nonprofits on order to obtain support from their diverse constituencies, have a tendency to make have goals statements which are so "grandiose, diffuse and ambiguous," explains Weiss (1975:16), that this creates the situation where there:

"...tends to be little agreement even within the program, on which goals are real in that effort is actually going in to attain them and which are window dressing. With this ambiguity, actors at different levels of the system perceive and interpret goals in different ways."

This last may result in several different versions of supposedly the same program inadvertently being run in different locations.

Leaders of religious organizations may be particularly prone to downgrade the value of gathering data to test the success of a core program, As C. Ellis Nelson (1975:9) put it: "evaluation is often regarded as the elevation of reason above faith and then neglected or dismissed because, in the mind of the church, faith is superior." Carroll et al (1986:133) point out that congregations

particularly have goals that are difficult to specify and measure because it is a voluntary organization:

."... The church is a voluntary organization and the continued existence of any voluntary group depends in part on the rewards gained from participation...factors of voluntarism and rewards make evaluation research in a congregation different from that in many organizations that engage in program study."

Nevertheless, the importance of research for developing faithful and effective programs sponsored by religious organizations is a central theme of books addressed to seminary administrators and faculty by Nelson (1975) and to clergy and lay leaders by Cahalan (2003) and Carroll et al (1986).

Avoiding Politics in Evaluation/Policy Research: Is it Possible?

1. **Evaluation is Always Political**

In any organization evaluation of programs or policies is always political, as Carol Weiss (1975:13-15) points out, because:

a. The programs or policies being evaluated were "proposed, defined, debated, enacted and funded through political processes; and in implementation they remain subject to pressures, both supportive and hostile, which arise out of the play of politics."

b. Since the purpose of the research is to provide information for decision-makers, this means that the evaluation "reports enter the political arena ...where they have to compete for attention with other factors that carry weight.

c. "Accomplishing the goals for which the program was set up is not unimportant, but it not the only, the largest, or usually the most immediate of the concerns on the administrator's docket."

In evaluating human services programs, Lee Gurel (1975:28) similarly concludes:

"...the major barriers to successful evaluation are not technical and methodological, though these are certainly important and worthy of further effort, but are rather the structural constraints and requirements and the interpersonal relationships which characterize the evaluation endeavor."

In order to mitigate the impact of politics derailing the evaluation effort, and creating tensions between administrators and researchers, Suchman (1967:158-160) strongly advocates developing an evaluation task group, including both administrators, other insiders connected with the program, and outside researchers. In this recommended scenario:

- Insiders and outsiders alternate leadership in different phases of the evaluation at that same time that they continue in close consultation with one another. Briefly, administrators-insiders would first take the lead in delineating program goals and what to evaluate, then the outside researcher(s) would next lead in designing the research process and methods to assess how well the program(s) were working. Both insiders and outsiders can be/should be involved in collecting various types of relevant information/data, although the researchers or outside experts lead in analyzing the data and drafting a report. However,

administrators or insiders have the primary responsibility for making recommendations and implementing them.

2. **Difficulties Avoiding Politics in Research for Complex Organizations**

Forming an evaluation team as described above may still not be a sufficient shield to withstand destructive political ploys. All evaluation team members, especially the researcher(s), as Gurel (1975:23) strongly advises, should:

"...explore thoroughly the motivations which led to plans for an evaluation...finding who wants what, why they want it, how much they are willing to invest to get it, and what they plan to do with it when they have it."

Even so, influential persons in the larger organization may derail the evaluation process or bury its results. Suchman (1967:144) warns:

"Administrators ...misuses of evaluation pose a major ethnical problem for the evaluator as researcher, and may become a serious source of conflict between the researcher and the program staff."

One might also point out that it is expensive for the organization to pay for research that is either misused or ignored, particularly when the program or policy being evaluated could have benefited from changes suggested by the research.

3. Politics of Evaluative Research in Religious Organization

Writing for decision-makers in religious organizations Carroll et al (1986) and Nelsen (1975) warn that politics surrounding evaluation may be more intense in religious organizations than in secular ones in large part because of faith/fact conflicts. These authors also stress the importance of involving decision-makers and program staff in any evaluation effort along with researchers. Nelson (1975: 75-82) urges the formation of an "evaluation committee" in seminaries to work with the researcher in focusing the questions, getting the data needed, and discussing the results and their implication for possible changes. Carroll et al (1986:133-134) likewise advises including "pivotal leaders and program staff" in the evaluation planning and process to better ensure their ownership and use of the research results. Cahalan (2003:76-77, 81-82) urges decision-makers in religious organizations, particularly congregations, to "create a culture of evaluation" in which on-going research is expected and appreciated as "learning" opportunities. In developing this *culture of evaluation*, decision-makers should early establish a process of "collaborative inquiry" involving representatives of all involved in program design, implementation, evaluation, and any ensuing recommended changes:

- In a congregation for example, c*ollaborative inquiry* of the project being assessed, should involve not only the pastor(s), key lay leaders, evaluators and any consultants in a project team, but also periodically most others in the congregation through having this project team give reports and elicit questions and input from members.

4. Increasing Ownership: Action Research and Formative Evaluation

From my own experiences, I have found what is sometimes called “action research” for developing policies and programs, and “formative evaluation” for assessing how well a new program is working, are helpful processes in developing ownership of the research. In “action research” the *process* from start to finish is ideally outlined at the outset to all concerned -- from design of the research, to understanding the findings, to deciding what actions to take next based on these results. The following is an illustration from an action research project in which I was involved:

- In the Episcopal Clergy Family Project involving 23 dioceses over a span of about 7 years, in order for a diocese to participate, the bishop of each diocese had to first appoint a committee, typically 8-12 people representing clergy, clergy spouses and one or two diocesan staff. A consultant came and explained the five-part process: (1) In the first months, the committee builds community and some vision of their diocese. (2) In the second stage, the committee working with the consultant decided which clergy in the diocese - other than active parochial and spouses – who should receive the 24-page survey (same for all dioceses), and whether they wanted add a few questions of their own. (3) I then sent them a copy of the survey to duplicate and a box of postage paid return envelopes addressed to me at Hartford Seminary; they wrote their cover letter and sent out the questionnaires with a postage paid return envelope. (4) After 4-6 weeks, I told each committee chair the id # of the survey which had been returned, and the Committee followed up on non-respondents. (This was a double-blind procedure: the Committee never saw the filled out surveys, and I did not know the identity of each id #.) (5) Their numerical survey responses were tabulated; and how clergy and spouses in their dioceses responded on each questions put on the survey form and written comments typed out. The committee scheduled a meeting at which the consultant came as well as the bishop (and usually his wife) and helped them talk about what they believed their survey findings indicated. At this meeting, they also began with the consultant’s help to (a) decide which results at they wanted to communicate back to others in the dioceses, and in what manner; and (b) start the process of “development of actions responsive to the data.”

“Formative evaluation” is a *process* in which the researcher/evaluator -- in ongoing communication with a committee of those involved in the program’s design, implementation, and future -- engages in continuous research to help the leaders make in-course corrections.

- In my experience, formative evaluation definitely enhances ownership of the research process by the innovative project team, since they are continually getting feedback from the researcher, being able to pose new questions for the researcher to assess, but also and maybe especially because (as I tell them):

“No program team can anticipate all that may happen when the new program goes into operation. If there is a flaw/miscalculation in the new program as it is implemented -- and the formative evaluator does not catch it in time -- it as much or more the evaluator’s fault as that of the innovative program team.”

This approach makes evaluative research less threatening and much more useful.

Following the various suggestedsteps described for effective program evaluation while avoiding destructive politics is usually easier to accomplish in a more *authority- contained* than in an authority-dispersed church system particularly, for reasons that will be discussed next.

II. SYSTEMIC VARIATIONS: Conducting and Using Evaluative Research in Authority-Contained and Authority-Dispersed Church Systems

A. Authority in Church Systems

- ***Authority-Contained* Church Systems**as defined here are those in which there is one central person or one group that makes the major decisions for the religious organization. In the purest type, this leader or leadership group has the formal authority to make key decisions and have final say on whether a program or policy starts, continues or ends. Formal power alone is insufficient for a real *authority-contained* church system. The leader must also possess the knowledge, competence, and vision; as well as the entrepreneurial, charisma, organizational and people skills, to develop and implement a program/policy and rally the support and participation of members and relevant outsiders. An *authority-contained* church system may appear as a theocratic autocracy or oligarchy, a tight federation, or a republic with a chief of state and elected representatives.

- ***Authority-Dispersed* Church Systems** are defined as those characterized by several to multiple locations (positions, groups, offices, units, divisions, agencies) which are semi-autonomous in operation from one another. In one type of *authority-dispersed* system, each location has a near equal voice in what decisions are made on key matters affecting the whole. In another type, some locations have primary authority to design programs and policies for the whole system; but the authority to actually put these in to practice is dependent on other locations within the church system that control funding, publicity, staff or other necessities for program or policy implementation. Or alternatively, the formal positions of leadership authority and decision-making flow may appear clear in organizational charts, but there is little formal power attached to these leadership positions for rewarding or penalizing persons or locations that do not follow through. Or the officials not only have little influence based on expertise or charisma, but also neglect to exercise the formal power they could have, with the result that other locations go their own way or compete for power over the whole. An *authority-dispersed church system* may appear as a constitutional or pure democracy, a loose federation, or near anarchy.

B. Location on an *Authority-Contained* to *Authority-Dispersed* Continuum.

1. Locations and Use of Research. The preceding depictions of church systems in which authority is centralized or diffuse are ideal types. Individual church-affiliated organizations may fall in between one or the other, and vary over time. However, it my contention that as a group some types of church-related organizations are typically closer to the *authority-contained* and other types are nearer being an *authority-dispersed* system. The location of the church-related organization on the *authority-contained* to *authority-dispersed* continuum may be very important in determining ways in which research can be made most helpful to these organizations. How the type of authority system may impinge on the evaluative research and it use, will become clearer in discussing different types of church organizations.

2. Congregations probably come closer to being *authority-contained* systems than seminaries, or regional and national religious bodies. To be sure, there are great differences among congregations depending on denominational polity delineating degree of congregational autonomy. Even within one denomination, its congregations will likely vary considerably in whether they are more *authority-contained* or *authority-dispersed*, depending on theological foci, congregational history, goal clarity and expectations of leadership among other factors.

Serious conflict within a congregationis certainly an indicator that it is not running smoothly, particularly as an *authority-contained* system. Assuming that clear goals and expectations for members are generally characteristic of congregations that are *authority-contained* systems, then these congregations would be less prone to being divided by conflicts, as found by Carl Dudley and David Roozen (2001:62-63) in a multi-denominational survey of congregations.

Penny Edgell Becker (1999:174-178) found that the role of the pastor as authoritative leader will vary often according to whether the congregation's culture is modeled more on being a house of worship, a family, a community, a leader congregation or more mixed in type. In illustration, where the pastor is seen as an "outsider" (typical) in *a fam*ily *congregation* regardless of denominational polity, the pastor has in fact little ability to institute changes and little or no ability to resolve church fights. In contrast, the pastor in a *leader congregation* (Becker 1999:147) has a much easier time making programmatic or policy changes effectively:

"Because the pastor's authority is not based on being accepted by the inner circle of long-time lay leaders and because the pastors sphere of decision making is clearly demarcated, there are fewer struggles between the pastor and lay leaders than in family congregations…Because member commitment is high, mobilizing people to perform needed tasks is not a problem."

A "leader congregation" is an example of an *authority-contained* church organization.

3. **Denominational and interdenominational seminaries**are as a group somewhat more apt to *authority-dispersed* church organizations than congregations. Seminaries are more complicated organizations than congregations, with multiple goals variously favored by different levels and departments within the institution and its related constituencies. Nelson (1975) suggests this reality can create intra-seminary misunderstandings, competition for funding or space, and ensuing problems for instituting and evaluating new programs. It seems likely that the more financially secure the seminary's operational budget and endowment, the less likely it will be disrupted by infighting over allocation of program resources. Even with institutional stability, tenured senior faculty are a potential block to the president/dean trying something "new" in the way of policy or program at the seminary.

4**. Middle (regional) judicatories** are more somewhat more *authority-dispersed* as a group than single congregations as well, given that they are made up of congregations and other subgroups. Depending partly on denominational polity specifying judicatory officials' legal control over clergy and congregations, however, their executives may successfully operate as leaders of more *authority-contained* jurisdictions. Denominational control is somewhat of a double-edged sword for the judicatory executives: denominations in which judicatory executives have more legal authority over their congregations and/or clergy, are also those denominations in which the national body has more power to remove the regional executive from office.

Within a denomination, middle judicatories can vary considerably in whether they are more authority-contained to authority-dispersed systems, as I (Lummis 2001) found in a national study of regional judicatories of eight Protestant denominations. Just like congregations, individual judicatories can develop their own cultures and expectations of leadership. In a study of Episcopal bishops, (Vache et. al: 1985:34-44) there was a range among bishops and diocesan council members (especially) in how they viewed their/their bishops' leadership of the diocese on two dimensions – as operating on "bishop's authority" to operating on "the basis of consensus" with the bishop's approach. On these two dimensions, dioceses were seen as ranging from "royal republic" to "autocracy", from "democracy" to "anarchy."

Regional judicatories can have their cultures and expectations gently or dramatically altered by substantial economic and cultural changes in the region, or especially by the coming of a new executive with a different vision, operational agenda, and leadership style. The American Baptist Church, a denomination in "the free church tradition," has far less control over congregations and clergy than does the Episcopal Church and other more hierarchal denominations. Yet, Paul Borden (1999) as new Executive Minister of the ABC West District describes how he instituted a series of policy and program changes that brought the district from decline to growth, and in many ways moved it from being an *authority-dispersed* to a far more *authority-contained* regional judicatory.

5. The national denominational levelis closer to being an *authority-dispersed* system. Thenational church central offices may operate as *authority-contained system*, with the presiding official or presiding group of officers making the major and final decisions about who is hired, fired, and how resources are allocated within their office complex and for mission monies they control. Yet, the denomination as whole is almost always an *authority-dispersed sy*stem. The larger the denomination, the more likely it closely fits the definition of an authority-dispersed system. In summarizing a study of national denominational decision-making in eight denominations, David Roozen (2005:590) concludes that:

"By its very nature as a national, organizational carrier of a religious traditions, a denomination is intrinsically segmented into a variety of different and potentially different constituency groups…(in which) intra-organizational strains arising from the discrepancy between ideal and actual are ubiquitous, pervasive and systemic…Additionally, the ultimate worldly authority for all American Protestant denominational systems is their national assemblies, all of which act through some form of participatory democracy. That is, their decision-making process is intrinsically political."

6.Implications for research in different church authority systems: Generally, leaders in *authority-contained ch*urch systems because (by definition) they are officially and influentially in charge, can more smoothly follow the recommendations and steps outlined: in the formation of a committee for program/policy design and implementation, and for engaging with researcher in data gathering, and especially in deciding how to use the results to redesign or fine-tune the program or policy.

However, following these steps assiduously is unlikely to work anywhere near as well in *authority-dispersed* church systems. Reasons why may have been partly evident in the foregoing discussion. In the next section, more detailed attention is given to what can go wrong, but might turn out right, in more *authority-dispersed* church systems.

III. MAKING RESEARCH USEFUL IN AUTHORITY-DISPERSED CHURCH SYSTEMS .

NOTE: Applied Research requested by church-related organizations, whether called evaluative research, market research, policy research or action research, is the focus of this section. That is, research that the particular "client" foundation, seminary, ecumenical agency, regional judicatory, or national denominational office requests in order to make decisions about its future policies or programs. I am not talking about grant-supported basic research in the sociology of religion. Of course, data gathered for a client religious organization could be later used if permitted, for exploring general theoretical issues in the sociology of religion and advancing knowledge. The focus here, however, is whether the religious organization paying for the research finds it useful. .

Specific examples I use in the following discussion will be from such applied research I have over the last thirty years or so for church-related organizations. Confidentiality concerns, which exist long after the research is over, preclude naming the client church-related organizations involved.

A. Will the *Real* Decision-Makers Please Stand Up and Cease In-Fighting, Or at Least Tell the Researcher What You Are *Really* Fighting About

1. Forming the Committee and Informing the Researcher: Several of those cited earlier advise the researcher doing policy or evaluative research to try to get a handle on possibly important political realities in the organization, so that these can be articulated considerations in the research design and process for using the research. Assuming that the program committees that hire the researcher know the political realities, they may be reluctant to impart this information. So u*nderstandably*, what they tell the researcher/research group is on a "need to know basis." However**,**f they may not tell the researcher all that in fact he/she needs to know, or may not know themselves, what kinds of information would have been helpful in the research design, communicating its results, and making recommendations.

It is wise to have those in decision-makers on the research oversight committee, as discussed. But: (1) those with real authority may refuse to be or the committee; (2) or are not wanted by program administrators on the committee because they would be disruptive; (3) or are decision-makers in other locations of the church organization who subtly or intentionally covertly work against the program or policy being either implemented or continued. Although I have witnessed all of these scenarios, I think the last is possibly the most destructive to research being of value to the church-related organization:

2. Ignorance is Bliss until Beheading: In this scenario, often repeated in practice, the program decision-makers are politically naïve about how decisions are actually made in the larger institution, at least until it is too late for their program. I have seen this occur in seminaries, judicatories and research done for national denominational groups.

- Those who design and lead the particular program/policy eagerly engage in research to make their program stronger and carefully proceed along the steps described earlier. However, these program innovators are typically mid-level decision-makers (if that) in the larger organization. Being idealistic and somewhat "outside the loop," they assume that if they prove the worth of their program to those participating or impacted, the senior level decision-makers and those at their level in other locations of the organization will approve

their program continuing or expanding. So they happily proceed accordingly with their program evaluation.

However, the innovative program designers/leaders were in trouble from the getgo:

- Because mid-level decision makers in other locations of the organization may be on the lookout for ways to covertly undermine attempts to expand or possibly even continue the program if it threatens their funding. As one such put it: "I want their baby (e.g. program) to live, but not if it takes food out of my baby's mouth." And/or
- There are more senior decision-makers who disvalue the purposes of the innovative program and therefore distrust its leaders, and so have taken on as almost a holy mission an effort to weed it and its supporters out of the larger organization, no matter what was found by the research or what the program leaders proposed. As one such promised: "That group could put up the Lord's Prayer, and we would vote them down." And/or
- The top executives major concerns are with negotiating cross-pressures from internal and external constituencies with divergent views on the program's priorities as appropriate at all or for their church organization. These top executives may be verbally supportive to the program innovators, but not materially supportive; or they may even become the program executioners, in order to mitigate resistance to their own leadership from other more important constituencies. .

B. Evaluative Research is for Boring Bureaucrats; Not Real Leaders

1. **The almost classic conflict over the worth of evaluative research between managers and researchers** comes to the fore where an evaluation of a program administered by one individual/group in the organization has been requested by more senior officials in the organization or by an outside organization. "Being evaluated" is threatening to the manager's program, own position, or future career, if the results are less than positive. This may result in difficulties for the researcher in getting the information/data necessary to do an adequate evaluation. In church-related organizations particularly, getting the needed information may be less due to program leaders' apprehension of negative results, as much as their irritation that their work is being subjected to assessment by mere number-crunchers and sociologists. Such decision-makers expend little effort in communicating with the researcher, since they do not anticipate using the research results. They are simply complying with requests from executives in their church system or outside foundations in completing annual reports and the like.

Empirical research is not a high priority of most senior denominational executives -- they are under constant pressure currently to make valid decisions and based not only on the hard cold facts of the matter but the politics surrounding the implementation of any decision made. Even if these decision-makers are aware of the organizational politics that should be included as elements in the program research effort, they may not feel like communicating these to an outside researcher. Such church leaders are very, very annoying to researchers who trying to do the best most helpful research possible. However, the more I have learned about the ongoing jobs of these top decision-makers in *authority-dispersed* church systems particularly -- the conflicts they must adjudicate, the cross-pressures from constituencies with ensuing church leadership confidence crises, and the

ongoing press of new demands against often ever more limited resources -- the more sympathetic I am, or could be if I try harder.

2.Time makes ancient good uncouth – or at least of marginal concern to church officials who leave, but especially those who come to a vacated position with their own ideas. Church officials and professional staff do not stay in one position forever – or even for the length of the program evaluation that they requested, got funded, and planned to use. They leave for better positions or lives elsewhere, with insufficient instructions to those that eventually replaced them about the evaluation in progress. Or equally likely, those new to the position feel under no obligation to see what their predecessors were working on prior to their departure.

- The worst case I experienced of this is where the executive who got substantial funds for an innovative program with an ongoing evaluation component, left for another position soon after receiving the grant, as did his senior staff. When I came as previously scheduled about eight months later to begin the evaluation, the new executive and senior staff were not aware this research was supposed to take place, and far worse -- not understanding grant requirements, were not running the program which had been funded, and furthermore had already spent most of the grant money for other institutional needs and programs. .

C. Kinds of Research Most Likely to be Ignored

"What research do you think denominations (or other church-related organizations) have not paid enough attention to?" was one of **Keith** Wulff's suggested questionsfor us to address in this session. My answer would be research involving issues which are not only likely to arouse competitive fears of those in different positions about their personal power, program autonomy or finances being diminished, but also and especially issues that have value dimensions which can be used mobilize support or resistance from others not directly affected by the research. In my experience, these areas of research include:

- **Policy/evaluative research on funding regional and national church offices** – Partly because policies here affect those in locations through out the system, **and**because the issue of "stewardship" in control of amount and direction of funding can have theological dimensions. Theological arguments then undergird ensuing conflicts among all feeling their position is just and moral – regardless of the "misguided" or "self-centered" interests of others located elsewhere in the church system.

- **Research on educational programs for ministry,** especially those (1) that espouse standards other than those preferred by senior executives/faculty; or (2) which involve crossing or even reconfiguring departmental boundaries; (3) or targeted to groups not previously served by the church organization, **and** when those leading such programs offer a faith-based rationale for giving their programs priority over others in the allocation of institutional resources.

- **Research on the effectiveness of persons of any type as church leaders other than white male heterosexuals.** Explanation here should be unnecessary.

D. The Researcher: Get Off Center Stage but Get Feedback

In congregations of an *authority-contained* character, it may be possible and even advisable for those collecting the program evaluation data to also take a lead role in deciding what to disseminate to the congregation and what program changes to effect as a result of the research. This is particularly true if the "researchers" and the leaders are the same, e.g. pastor, doing his/her D.Min. dissertation on a congregational program.

In more *authority-dispersed* church systems, such as a seminary or denominational headquarters, those collecting the facts to evaluate a program or policy, even should they be long-term employees, are likely going to be seen as "outsiders" to those in charge of designing or implementing what is being evaluated. The sociologist is almost invariably the "outsider" in church systems. In trying to make the research helpful to congregations, seminaries and denominations, we naturally want to make sure we use the best questions and procedures, and especially that the sponsoring organization understand and act on the findings we have so carefully lifted up for their attention.

Whether an insider or an outsider, the sociologist doing research for a denomination does not have final authority in decisions on what questions to include in surveys or interviews, who will be surveyed or interviewed, what the final report by the sponsoring group will contain, and particularly what recommendations will be in the formal report. The researcher does not (and should not) have complete autonomy in doing applied research for religious organizations, particularly those that are *authority-dispersed*. Consequences of lack of research autonomy for the religious organization and for the sociologist are:

- On the negative side, this may create instances where the research – particularly evaluative research – is so compromised by those charge of the program or organizational executives, that for the sociologist to sign off on a report as accurate would be a violation of professional ethics. There have been only two such instances where I have refused to continue with the research requested for such reasons.

- On the positive side, I find applied social research where the client church group or organization is taking direct interest and making decisions on which questions to include and methods to be used – some of the most personally valuable research I have been engaged in (even if frustrating at the time). This is because these officials or committee heads may sense that some questions are important to include, even when they cannot articulate the reasons at the time. In one relatively recent incidence, these were questions I would have discarded, and the research would have been less valuable for the committee. The research results would also have been even less *theoretically* interesting sociologically, had leaders of the oversight committee not asked that these items be included.

Sociologists doing policy research or program evaluation for church organizations can and should develop drafts of surveys and reports for discussion with the appropriate committee, and advise process and what might be done with the results, or what to look out for in designing and implementing innovative programs. Yet the sociologist, especially if not on regular staff of the sponsoring organization, will in most cases have no idea how helpful the research was to the religious organization and what was done as a result (if anything.)

I have three suggestions for making research more useful to church-related organizations, which are more likely to be followed if requested by a foundation funding the program or its evaluation: Ask the key decision-makers and/or oversight committee in a "final" or follow-up report, to:

1. Indicate how useful the religious organization found the evaluative research completed to its planning of programs/policies, and what it planned for the future in part based on research, completed or projected.
2. In retrospect, how might the research process/researcher(s) been of greater assistance? Were there kinds of information gathered, reports given, which were a waste of time or particularly helpful to the decision-makers? How might the process of working with the researcher be improved in a future study?
3. Tell the sociologists; we often have trouble getting feedback from those requesting research in congregations, seminaries, middle judicatories, and denominational bodies in how to be most helpful.

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Footnotes

Analysis of data from twelve dioceses that were involved from 1990-1993 describes this process and the findings on clergy and clergy families (Walmsley and Lummis 1997:x).

To paraphrase Jackson Carroll's (2000:82-87) portrayal of ideal pastoral leadership for churches in the 21 st Century

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See Appendix to this paper, which is a check-list I developed for those designing and implementing new programs, partly in response to results from their diocesan surveys on what clergy & spouses wanted.