

TRENDS  
SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

In the process of gathering data on what's happening in Santa Clara County, the Mission Strategy Development Team tried to identify the major trends which may impact ELCA congregations and special ministries in the county in the next several years. As you examine this material, be conscious of the fact that some of it is somewhat general and speculative. You may choose to take issue with the trends we have identified, for you may have a clearer crystal ball. Nevertheless, it is the team's hope that this kind of data will lead to some helpful dialogue among SCVLP planning groups, councils, committees, and programmatic units.

Sources for these trends include such major works as, *MEGATRENDS 2000*, by John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene. Other sources include feature articles in the *SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS*; the 1989 report of the United Way of Santa Clara County, "A Community Challenged"; a report from the California Legislature's Task Force on the Changing Family, "Homelessness in Santa Clara County, 1989"; the 1990 report of the California Attorney General's Commission on Racial, Ethnic, Religious, and Minority Violence; and the recent report from the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Inmate Population Management in California State Prisons and Jails.

From these sources, six major trends that would seem to have an impact on the church emerge:

1. In the next decade, as the millenium approaches, there may well be a religious revival in the United Sates, though not necessarily within the mainline churches.

Factors contributing to this trend are:

- beliefs among some people that "the time is at hand," a belief that in previous eras tended to foster religious fervor;
- a similar time in the United States was in the 1890s as the country became more industrialized and a wave of indigenous religious movements was born: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, and Transcendentalists;
- the scientific era has not answered questions about the meaning of life and many people feel a void in spiritual depth;
- mainline churches have shown declining memberships since 1965, while fundamentalist and evangelical churches have grown;
- while most Americans express belief in God, the percentage who do not go to church increased from 41% in 1978 to 44% in 1988;
- the next 10 years will be a significant opportunity for mainline churches to reclaim relevance.

2. In a variety of ways, this will be the decade of women growing in leadership roles.

Factors contributing to this trend are:

- women now fill a substantial proportion of previously male-dominated careers in the information and service industries; according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women now hold 39% of the 14.2 million executive, administrative, and management jobs in these two fields, a figure nearly double that of 1972;
- in various other fields, women have made comparable gains;
- women are making headway into more leadership roles in religious groups; today 84 denominations ordain women and there are 21,000 female ministers in U.S. churches;
- women represent a higher proportion of membership in mainline churches (55% of Santa Clara County Lutherans) and may signal the value of new leadership styles in congregational life;
- the impact of women working outside the home is reflected in changing family lifestyles and needs; childcare is a major issue in the county, where in 1988 only 32,000 of the estimated 90,000 children needing day care were served in licensed day care facilities;
- families adjusting to new lifestyles face significant challenges, challenges which women may feel most profoundly;
- demographers predict that half of today's children will live with a single parent at some time in their lives;
- 23% of California's children live in poverty today, a rate double that of 1969;
- ministry opportunities with the "new families" of the county abound.

3. The influence of the Pacific Rim on West Coast life will be a significant factor in Santa Clara County in the next decade.

Factors contributing to this trend are:

- 30 years ago the Gross National Product of Pacific Rim countries equaled only half of that of the U.S. and only one-third that of Europe; by the year 2000 the GNP of the Pacific Rim countries will equal that of North American and exceed that of Western Europe;
- the ties of Pacific Rim countries to the West Coast are very strong; more than 40% of total Japanese investment in the U.S. is in California;

- in 1975 there were only about 500 Indochinese people living in Santa Clara County; today that population is nearly 41,000; by the year 2000 it is expected that the Asian population as a whole will approach 18% (almost 280,000) of the county's total
- just as the business community on the West Coast sees the ties to Pacific Rim countries as lucrative for them, the church may be enriched by new ministry ventures with the Asian community here.

4. Globalization is becoming a stronger influence on our lives and worldview.

Factors contributing to this trend are:

- 3 million people a day fly from one place on the planet to another; one billion passengers a year fly now, 2 billion by the year 2000;
- with a smaller globe comes a more global lifestyle; television is universally popular, ethnic foods are available everywhere (Tex-Mex is prepared kosher in Israel and is all the rage in Paris);
- with global sensitivity comes greater awareness of environmental sensitivity; churches are only beginning to realize the importance of the growing environmental movement and creation-centered spirituality;
- is it true that the more homogeneous our lifestyles become, the more steadfastly we cling to deeper values: religion, language, art, and literature?

5. The next decade will emphasize the individual.

Factors contributing to this trend are:

- as communist countries reform, individual freedom and the importance of individual creativity and energy as beneficial to the state will be emphasized;
- "we are the world" reinforces individual responsibility;
- as a whole, individuals in Santa Clara County do very well financially; median family income in the county in 1985 was 44% higher than the rest of the state and 64% higher than the national median; individual responsibility should, therefore, be proportionally higher here;
- religious commitment may be reflected less in organizational loyalty and more through spiritual quests and the need for individually meaningful ministry;
- individualism does not mean isolationism; how can the religious community welcome the individualist?

6. There is a growing social will to respond to community problems in Santa Clara County.

Factors contributing to this trend are:

- a recent ELCA survey indicated that nearly 9/10ths of the laity agreed with the statement that "the church should be an active force in the world, challenging our society to be more like what God intended it to be";
- traffic congestion has been of major concern and taxpayers have supported highway expansion;
- increased public attention to the following issues has begun to generate more community response:
  - \* From 1980 to 1990, the number of people in the county ages 65-74 has increased by 20%, 75-84 by 14%, and 85+ by 48%; most needed social services for seniors are inadequate or the elderly are not aware of them.
  - \* The Santa Clara County Bureau of Drug Abuse Services estimates that there are approximately 112,000 drug users in the county, half of which use drugs daily.
  - \* Approximately 4,000 people are incarcerated in county facilities on any given day.
  - \* In 1987, a total of 32,967 cases of family violence were reported in Santa Clara County. In 1988, more than 24,000 cases of child abuse were reported.
  - \* During the 1987-88 school year, over 3,100 students in Santa Clara County dropped out of school.
  - \* Issues related to the high cost of living and housing/homelessness in Santa Clara County have prompted extensive response by governmental entities and churches.
- the trend in community response to social issues is to seek more collaborative ways of responding;
- churches have a valuable role to play in responding to community needs;
- increased general awareness of the human capacity to degrade the environment offers churches the opportunity to play a leading role in reshaping behavior and attitude toward their community as place.