An Overview of the Historical Development of the Urban-Industrial Ministry of the Presbyterian Church in the 20th Century

The literature and the art of the late 19th and the early 20th century depict the impact which the expansion of the cities and the growth of industry were having on the landscape of the United States. The promise of jobs and a better economic life was drawing millions of European immigrants to our shores. The dynamic of this ever-changing social and economic scene awakened the organized religious community to the challenge which this presented to their traditions. The response of the religious leaders especially sensitive to the working and living conditions within the cities was called the Social Gospel.

A vision of these changes was best visualized in the art of the New York based school of Ashcan artists. Their paintings capture the hard realities of the bottom side of city life. They show the despair of families living in the squalor of the tenements, the crush of life in the crowded immigrant neighborhoods, the increasing speed of life in the fast moving tempo of elevated trains, the exacting demands upon workers scaling high rise steel structures or digging underground tunnels, and the fleeting pleasures of city night life. They paint scenes upon scenes of the new secular world unfolding.

In the world of literature, the words and the photos of Jacob Riis in his "How the Other Half Lives" visualize the story of immigrant lives trapped in the cramped quarters of old law tenements. Alongside Riis's muckraking images, Upton Sinclair upset the eating habits of the U.S. public in his book "The Jungle" by picturing the unsanitary processes of the meat industry in the stockyards of Chicago. Sinclair was aiming at the harrowing conditions under which people worked, instead he threatened American appetites and ultimately brought on the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.

It was against this background in the late 19th century that the Social Gospel movement had its beginnings. It was out of the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch and his fellow religious activists that a century long movement toward more just conditions in industrial society was being shaped within the mainline churches.

One of the earliest moves in facing those changes was the call of Charles L. Thompson from his pastorate at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York to head the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions. Thompson saw the ministry of the church as working for "not merely salvation for eternity, but of the whole man in the regeneration of society." (1) In fulfilling this view Thompson set in motion a plan to reach the workingmen affected by the industrial changes within the United States.

In 1903 Charles Thompson brought into being the Workingmen's Department. The Presbyterian Church, USA became the first denomination to establish an organized program for reaching the growing number of industrial workers. To fulfill the vision of this Department, Thompson invited Charles Stelzle, an evangelist serving the Markham Mission Chapel, a workingmen's congregation in St. Louis. (2) Stelzle immediately set about closing the gap between the church and the workingmen and their unions. Stelzle, from his experience as a machinist, held a union card with the International Association of Machinists (IAM). In

1905 Stelzle was invited by Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor (A.F. of L.), to address the convention of the A.F. of L. meeting in Pittsburgh. In 1906 he won the Federation's endorsement of his ministry among working people and continued his participation in ten successive A. F. of L. conventions.

In 1906 the name of the Workingmen's Department was changed to the Department of Church and Labor. As immigrants continued to stream into the United States, in 1908 the Presbyterian Church added to Stelzle's work the newly created Department of Immigration. In 1910 Stelzle, who had grown up on the lower East Side of New York, began a local effort to reach the immigrants in his old neighborhood. Stelzle developed this work in the vacated Second Presbyterian Church naming it the Labor Temple. The main program featured an open forum called The Temple Brotherhood. Stelzle drew to the Labor Temple a wide range of immigrant and political groups responding to the controversial and engaging speakers. (3) His work among immigrants and the industrial work force grew so dramatically that by 1910 the Department of Immigration was given its own status and William Payne Shriver was called to become the superintendent of the Department. (4)

Under William Payne Shriver's leadership an overseas program was developed for reaching European immigrants by sending recent seminary graduates to those European regions from which the immigrants were coming. On returning to the U.S. the "immigrant fellows," as they were called, served in congregations and in settlement houses in the neighborhoods where the new immigrants had settled. Among the immigrant fellows Kenneth D. Miller was assigned to Prague in Bohemia and John B. Hayden was sent to Krakow in Poland. (5) Out of the experience of the immigrant fellows, leadership was developed which gave direction to the thirty neighborhood houses sponsored by the Presbyterian Church. (6)

Crucial to the ongoing work related to the industrial working class was the call for change in the conditions in which working people lived and under which they labored. The organization of the Federal Council of Churches in 1908 in Philadelphia provided opportunity for elaborating on the nature of the industrial change taking place in the U.S. The major speech given at the creation of the Council was delivered by Dr. Frank Mason North on "The Church and Modern Industry." In its eighteen pages was a section calling for support of social principles on behalf of "the toilers of America." The section was lifted out of the speech on a motion by Charles Stelzle and passed by the assembled delegates to become "The Social Creed of the Churches."(7) The Social Creed became the guiding document in following decades for the churches' efforts during the New Deal era to support legislation reforming the industrial system. The Creed was witness to the spirit of the Progressive era in the U.S. and became the primary expression of the Social Gospel.

"The Social Creed of the Churches" came at a time when Sunday work was a fact of life in the steel industry. Stelzle questioned the Sunday work required by Bethlehem Steel for which three protesting steel workers were fired. A movement was begun against the practice of the twelve hour day and a seven day week within the steel industry. World War I interceded in this ten year struggle until finally in 1919 a major Steel Strike was called. An Interchurch World Movement (IWM) was begun to bring the twelve hour day back into focus. (8) The report angered Judge Gary, the head of U.S. Steel, who undermined the financing of the IWM

and brought on its demise. But the report had its own impact and the steel industry abolished the twelve hour day.

The growth of industry in the 1920s continued and the speed up of the assembly line provided an intense work life for the worker. This was best visualized in the 1936 Charlie Chaplin film "Modern Times." So significant was it that in 1989 the Library of Congress considered it "culturally significant" as a portrayal of the industrial system. The impact of the assembly line upon the life of working people was central to Reinhold Niebuhr's early work "Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic." His experience in a Detroit industrial parish sharpened his theological insights on industrial society which were part of his major work "Moral Man and Immoral Society." (9)

The failure of the stock market in 1929 began the decline of the U.S. economy and the beginning of the Depression. The Presbyterian Synod of New York meeting in Buffalo, N.Y. in 1934 responded to the economic crisis by condemning an economic system which required wars for its support and maintenance. It called for economic motives that would supersede profits. It supported the rights of labor to organize and bargain collectively. It advocated for unemployment insurance and for the participation of men and women workers in the management of industry. At the same meeting the Presbyterian Fellowship for Social Action was organized the membership included Cameron Hall, John Coleman Bennett of Auburn Seminary, Edmund B. Chaffee of Labor Temple and G. Shubert Frye.

The 1930s saw a dramatic change in the response of the churches to the effects which the failure of the market system had upon the national psyche. The acceptance of free enterprise as a way of economic life came under severe criticism. The job loss across the economy, the long lines of unemployed waiting for food, and the Hoovervilles of the homeless brought the words of the Social Creed of the Churches of 1908 into focus. By 1935, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA reaffirmed several commitments to the Social Creed and called for the initiation of a social insurance system, legislation being considered by Congress. (10) Congress passed the Social Security Act in 1935 to assure the present and future "economically left-behind" that there would be support in their old age.

In the 1930s many clergy became advocates of the Roosevelt Administration's efforts to bring balance to the U.S. economic system. Within denominational offices, educational material was being produced on Christian ethical responsibility for creating a just society. Within the Presbyterian Church, a Department of Social Education and Action was created within the Board of Christian Education. The voice of the Department of Social Education and Action was Social Progress, a monthly journal lifting up the major social issues of the day. Social Progress had succeeded The Amethyst, a publication in the 1920s which had concentrated on alcoholism and gambling. Cameron Hall, who was called to head The Department of Social Education and Action in 1939, changed the content of the Social Progress to deal with economic issues and international relations. (11)

As the New Deal moved forward in the 1930s the labor movement gained strength. In 1935 the National Labor Relations Act (the Wagner Act) was passed which guaranteed the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively with employers. The right of labor to organize was

also in the original spirit of the Social Creed of 1908. As labor struggles ensued with the passage of the Wagner Act, the 1937 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church spoke of "the inequitable distribution of the fruits of industry ...the concentration of control and power in the hands of the few and the temptation of this group to exploit the many for profit ...these are some of the elements in our present social order which are incompatible with the Christian ideal of the Kingdom of God." (12)

Direct relationships were developing with organized labor among the Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish faiths in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Both these religious groups and organized labor published mutually supportive publications. (13)

As the Second World War was coming to an end, Cameron Hall, as Director of the Department of Social Education and Action, saw the need for a statement on the Presbyterian Church's view on the field of industrial relations. The General Assembly authorized the Department to set up a committee composed of four people from labor, four from employers, four from the public, and four from the clergy. Out of that committee's two year discussion a report on "The Church and Industrial Relations" was approved by the 156th General Assembly of 1944 and recommended to the churches for study and appropriate action. (14)

In following up on the Report on "The Church and Industrial Relations" Jacob Long, who headed the Unit on City and Industrial Work in the Board of National Missions, proposed that the Labor Temple, under the Presbytery of New York be the site for a newly created "institute in the field of industrial relations." On November 30, 1944 the Board of National Missions finalized the Jacob Long proposal and voted to establish the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR) at the Labor Temple in New York City. (15)

Just as the Presbyterian Church's creation of the Workingmen's Department in 1903 laid the foundation for the church's engagement with labor and the field of industrialization for the next forty years, so the establishment of the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR) in 1945 strengthened the church's leadership in the field of industrial relations in the post-World War II period. Under the able leadership of Dean Marshal L. Scott, the training programs of PIIR enlarged the scope of the ministry of Presbyterian ministers and laity as industrialization became an international movement. Reflecting on the influence which the PIIR program had upon individual ministries, a reunion of PIIR alumni was held in 1999, which provided over fifty PIIR participants opportunity to tell of the story of Marshal Scott and the PIIR program's impact upon the larger life of the Presbyterian Church, USA. (16)

After the Second World War the issues of urban change and industrial growth reached beyond the Western world into the growing economies of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Presbyterian Church USA, and other denominations, were called upon to see their ministry to former mission churches in those regions in a new way. The war had affected former colonial arrangements and in its wake had strengthened nationalist movements for freedom and self-government. Mission churches had become national churches, many of them with broader ecumenical connections.

By the 1950s the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, USA had become the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations (COEMAR). An added dimension to the change was the reuniting of the Presbyterian Church, USA with the United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1957 to become the United Presbyterian Church, USA. Under the newly created COEMAR, mission relationships were changing and the United Presbyterian Church was called upon to respond to requests from overseas national churches for personnel trained to deal with the emerging political and economic situations within their nations.

In light of the new circumstances in the developing nations, the United Presbyterian Church began developing the new field of industrial evangelism. The early beginnings of this industrial ministry had been a request by the Church of Christ in China, after the defeat of Japan, to send personnel equipped to develop a ministry within the industrial areas of coastal China. In 1947, Henry Jones, formerly of the Dodge Community House in Detroit, was called to help organize the Industrial Evangelism Committee of the National Christian Council. With the victory of the People's Army in 1949, Jones' work was cut short in China. After a brief ministry in Iowa, Henry Jones was invited by the United Church of Japan in 1953 to work in the field of "occupational evangelism." While based in Japan, Henry Jones began visiting and surveying the church's response to the growing industrialization throughout Southeast Asia. (17)

Among the nations Henry Jones visited, concern for an industrial ministry was already on the agenda of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. In 1957, Richard P. Poethig was called as a fraternal worker to aid in the development of urban-industrial ministry in the Philippines. Within a year, with the help of the United Presbyterian Church, a conference was planned to bring together representatives of Asian churches from sixteen countries to review urban-industrial work being done in the Asian region. The First Asian Conference on Industrial Evangelism held in Manila in June 1958 was the precursor for the development of a network of urban-industrial ministries throughout Asia. (18)

The growth of the urban-industrial movement grew rapidly in Asia as experiments in ministry reached into all corners of expanding urban and industrial sectors of national economies. One of the areas which saw immediate action was ministers responding to labor issues in South Korean sweat shop industries. The response to unjust working conditions, ministers challenged the management of industrial firms. Such challenges were met with force from police supporting local management. Those engaged in justice struggles found themselves harassed, beaten and often imprisoned. One on the most crucial resources in telling the Korea urban-industrial mission story was the work of Linda Jones and her organization of the Church Committee on Human Rights in Asia. Her committee documented the social justice events in Korea in the Asian Rights Advocate published out of the office of the Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society. (19)

The relevance of this new work of urban-industrial mission within Asian economies received immediate recognition from Asian church leadership. The work of urban-industrial ministries was taken under the wing of the East Asia Christian Conference as a program of the regional churches. A succession of Asian urban-industrial mission meetings was held to gather the stories and to further the progress of urban-industrial ministries within the region. The work of

urban-industrial mission expanded globally and soon became part of the work of the World Council of Churches with the creation of an Urban-Industrial Mission Desk at its offices in Geneva. Switzerland. (20)

Through the Urban-Industrial Mission Desk, the World Council of Churches supported urban-industrial ministries (UIM) around the world. It helped develop a network of those serving in UIM ministries. (21) This worldwide dimension of urban-industrial mission, in its various ministerial forms, was reviewed in 1976 in The International Review of Mission, a publication of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. The voices in the articles were inter-global and the stories they told were set in different national, cultural and historical contexts. (22)

The Philippines is one such example. Action in the Philippines happened in a largely democratic and pragmatic context. The concept of urban-industrial ministry fell within a liberal understanding of the Gospel's role within Philippine society. Initial efforts were made to understand the settings in which development was happening. Central to this approach was to distinguish between those who make decisions and those who have the power to bring change. The various regions of the country were visited and "on the ground" conferences held to bring pastors in conversation with those engaged in the politics of their region, with those involved in the agricultural, industrial, and mining sectors, and those in the labor unions. Pastors in the city came together seminars to fathom the tempo of city life and to put them touch with both the decision makers and those on the margins of society. In a special program pastors were enrolled in Labor Education Center, a program centered upon the training union members in democratic union leadership. The pastors learned about trade unions and studied beside and became acquainted with labor union officers, some from their own communities.

In summer seminars at St. Andrews Episcopal Seminary, seminarians were sent to work in the poor squatter areas and to learn community organizing. Others went to work "on the line" at Allied Thread Co. and other industries to experience the daily life of working people. Courses were taught at Union Seminary and the Silliman Divinity School to discuss and think through the role of the church and the Gospel in the political, social, cultural and economic life of the nation. (23)

There were a variety of missional approaches, but central to all of them were those built upon "community organization," a strategy of organizing individuals around common interests to achieve the well-being of the larger community. Soon after the work on community organization began in the Philippines and in South Korea in the mid-1960s, the need for "on the ground" training in "community organization" became apparent.

The earliest effort at community organization training was in the creation of the Philippine Ecumenical Council on Community Organization (PECCO) in Manila in 1970. Five Roman Catholics and five Protestants serving on the PECCO board established a program in community organizing, using the Tondo foreshoreland on Manila Bay as a training ground. One year later community organizing training had gained wider Asian acceptance and the Asian Committee for People's Organization (ACPO) was established in March 1971 in the Philippines. On the tenth anniversary of ACPO, a consultation on community organization

met in Tagaytay, the Philippines. A modest report told of the ten years of community organizing training which had drawn support in India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Korea and the Philippine. Fourteen years after the founding of ACPO one of the early Philippine organizers, Denis Murphy, edited conversations on community organization experienced in people's organizations actions around Asia. This was followed by a 15 year assessment of the work of ACPO at a meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal, April 16 – 21, 1986. Training manuals on community organization were being developed within each country. In the Philippines, "Organizing People For Power "produced by Filipino organizers, had reached its fourth edition in 1987. (24)

The primary experience out of which community organization became a major strategy in Asia was the organization of the squatters on the reclaimed Tondo foreshoreland of Manila Bay and harbor area. During the war in Asia and immediately after, many rural folks made their way to Manila both for security and economic reasons. The shortage of housing forced many families to build their shacks on the reclaimed land of the Bay where male family members were stevedores and the women worked in the markets. (25)

The government response to the squatter issue was relocation back to rural areas outside the city. This approach failed since many of those resettled, returned to find housing in their original or nearby areas. Their hopes are tied to the possibility of being given land in the areas of their work, for which they would pay the government over time. They sought the creation of safe communities with clean water, fire protection and liveable conditions.

The squatters were never without organizations to work for these conditions, and in the Tondo district there were some sixty separate organizations. To gain united community strength, the churches, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, worked to bring the groups together in one organization Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO) and to encourage and train the members to elect from among their number leaders who would speak and act on their behalf. Such was the story of ZOTO. The occasion of the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Philippines provided the opportunity to have the people's issues heard. A visit to the Tondo foreshoreland was planned by the Pope and the people of ZOTO prepared a short manifesto outlining their plight. The elected leader of ZOTO, Trinidad Herrera presented the manifesto to the Pope in the midst of the hundreds of Tondo squatters and church and government officials. As examples of the ZOTO action and other urban-industrial ministries multiplied across the world, it became apparent that there was need for a means of communication between the different groups to enhance cooperation, to take courage and to share experience. (26)

A search was begun for a site which would become a center for the gathering and exchange of the many stories of ministry. Early in the history of the urban and industrial movement the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR), established at McCormick Seminary in 1952, had drawn people from outside the United States to take part in its summer program. A review of the history and program of PIIR convinced those from the World Council of Churches Advisory Group on Urban and Industrial Mission that PIIR's resources should become a center to provide "information and advice on urban-industrial mission training facilities and a service of reference and information on literature." In January 1968, The Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society (ICUIS) began its work in Chicago,

coterminous with the PIIR based at McCormick Theological Seminary. The initial funding of ICUIS was provided by the United Presbyterian Church, USA. (27)

The Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society began its work of information gathering and sharing with Bobbi Wells as its first administrator and Mary Kirklin as information systems organizer. Upon returning from the Philippines in May 1972, I was called as Dean of the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR), The Director of the Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society (ICUIS) and as a faculty member at McCormick Theological Seminary. The task was to put together a teaching program and an international information network in urban-industrial ministry. In the international information program the initial publication of ICUIS was Abstract Service, a monthly source of abstracts on the international urban and industrial ministries which crossed its desk. The mailing list was composed of those engaged in these ministries as well as those in the larger community whose interest centered on the development of these ministries. (28)

Another ICUIS publication, Justice Ministries, was created to cover issues challenging the church and community in the United States. By the late 1970s, it was covering plant closings which were forcing layoffs across the Rust Belt in the Midwest. The closing of Youngstown Sheet and Tube in 1977 had threatened the east Ohio community's economy. The church community's response was immediate. An Ecumenical Coalition of the Mahoning Valley was organized in the first month of the shutdown to study the possibility of a worker operated plant which would seek government and community investment. The Youngstown shutdown was quickly followed by the failure of Wisconsin Steel in Chicago. Again the early responders to the loss of jobs in the community was the religious community in the organization of the Calumet Community Religious Conference. The stories of the church's response to plant closings and economic disinvestment in U.S. industry became the new face of church's efforts in urban-industrial mission. (29)

Information sharing played a major role in keeping the struggles faced by the various urbanindustrial ministries in front of the network. Materials from these struggles were shared across the church community and in the public press. Some of the stories told of imprisonments for actions taken on behalf of working people and those on the margins. The government in some countries had turned autocratic and basic human rights were threatened. The stories of those who faced these justice struggles were provided channels for reaching larger audiences in the international network. (30)

In the span of twenty-five years of urban-industrial mission history, the experience garnered in this period brought forth more sophisticated approaches to "doing mission in the new age." Action-research was developed in mission strategies using the data and statistics of change in the developing Asian economies. (31) The area of mission had also changed to include the major area of rural life which dominated most of Asia. Urban-Rural Mission was the official title of the new work in the Christian Conference of Asia. Against this background of political and economic change in their regions, Asian theologians, Kim Yong Bock and Masao Takenaka were providing theological insights on these issues from within an Asian perspective. Out of the writings and the thoughts of these Asian theologians new movements for justice and peace were called into being. By the early 1990s, a cross-representation of

theologians from Asian churches met to review the history and impact of Urban-Rural Mission and to contemplate the road ahead. (32) New voices were also being raised in Latin America and Africa as dramatic change was affecting life there as well. (33)

By the late 1980s it was determined to draw together the history of what had now become Urban-Rural Mission (URM). The ministries in response to the justice issues in the developing economies across the globe had grown exponentially. The dramatic way in which these ministries had developed needed to be gathered and told in a special way. The World Council of Churches office of URM had decided to lift up "the essential lesson of the past 25 or so years...to look forward, always exploring, out of current experiences, the meaning of Christian faithfulness in the contemporary world." Stories were gathered together – testimonies of people in urban rural mission were published in a book called "A Community of Clowns." The image was drawn from the words of Oh Jae-shik at an URM Advisory Group meeting in Washington, DC in 1982. "The organizer is a clown. You make yourself nobody, empty yourself, to be filled by the people's agenda... We are a community of clowns – anonymous but not defeated; stateless by not hopeless; despised not yet destroyed; resilient but not yet dogmatic; open-minded as a community, but not giving in so easily." (34)

Even as these words were spoken, the tempo of religious discussion on justice in the economy was moving toward interfaith cooperation on the larger issue of working globally for sustainable lifestyle solutions. The URM discussions which had begun earlier in the century on urban-industrial mission had moved steadily over the years to the recognition of the need to develop policies aimed at equitable and sustainable development. The voices of those who had dealt with winning basic life needs for those at margins of society were also concerned with participation in the producing and in the equitable sharing of their nation's resources. They were also concerned with the careful planning and development of those resources in the light of the fragility of our earth.

In the care of the earth's resources, the 208th General Assembly (1996) of the Presbyterian Church, USA issued the statement "Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development." The work for a just resolution of the inequitable distribution economic resources and the conservation of those resources by wise use was put before the members of the Presbyterian Church in the document. (35) In Asia, similar thinking had brought together an interfaith consultation to reflect on a sustainable lifestyle in cooperation with the different faiths of Asia. (36)

Reviewing the churches' response to the urban and industrial changes which had overwhelmed societies in the early 1900s, it was apparent that the effects of these changes had tremendous impact on the earth's future. Offices and departments were organized to confront these changes and to find people who would respond in ministry to working people and the larger society. In the United States, this brought on a cooperative venture in the Federal Council of Churches in the USA. At its organizing meeting the gathered delegates saw their responsibility to the working class issues by adopting "A Social Creed of the Churches." In the following decades the churches responded to these issues seeking just solutions and supporting government legislation. New injustices have continually confronted us and as we have entered the twenty-first century our attention is now focused on our responsibilities on a

global scale. Following on the issuing of the first Social Creed of the Churches, in 2008 a Twenty first century Social Creed was adopted by 35 Protestant and Orthodox church communions which speaks to the current challenges and choices faced in moving toward a fairer and healthier world. (37)

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Resources for Documenting the Change from Urban–Industrial Mission to Global Sustainability

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