

# Exploring Congregational Clans: Playing the 'Mennonite Game' in Winnipeg

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Over the years Mennonites have developed a reputation for playing what has come to be known as "the Mennonite game." The goal of this game is to see how quickly two Mennonites, often meeting for the first time, can get to know each other's familial ancestry and establish how many of each other's relatives they know. While some participants may play this game reluctantly due to peer pressure, others seem to play for the sheer fun and challenge of it. In any case, participants likely believe that knowing something of another person's familial ancestry helps to understand that person better. Research suggests that this activity, of establishing and reinforcing "weak ties" across organizational networks, may indeed be functional for church life (Nelson and Mathews, 1991).

In one sense, the goal of this paper is to examine whether playing a variation of this Mennonite game, at a congregational level of analysis, can help to better understand Mennonite congregations in Winnipeg. While Mennonites often talk about "sister" or "parent" congregations, they seldom extend that metaphor to play the Mennonite game at the congregational level of analysis.<sup>1</sup> However, this idea of exploring the

organizational lineage of congregations is not new. An earlier study (Dyck, 1997) examines a larger population of self-governing congregations in terms of their organizational ancestry in light of hypotheses drawn from research on human families. That study showed that, just as an "only child" is likely to have more offspring than a child with one or more siblings, so also congregations with no siblings are likely to have more offspring than other congregations. Similarly, just as the level of conflict is likely to be higher between parents and their oldest child (compared to subsequent children), so also a first-born congregation is more likely to have been borne out of a conflict with a parent congregation than later-borns. (For a more detailed description of the formation of breakaway congregations, see Dyck and Starke, 1999.) Finally, just as humans flourish more if raised by care-giving parents rather than in an institutional setting, so also congregations often perform better if they have identifiable parent congregations rather than being, for example, "conference plants."

The present study builds on and extends this earlier research by contrasting and comparing specific clans of Mennonite congregations. This includes examining the external environment, including the effect of the larger socio-economic context in the early identity-formation of a clan, and whether the geographic location of offspring is related to clan identity. The study also looks at whether clan-size is related to the "natural child-bearing years" of parent organizations. Findings suggest that Winnipeg's Mennonite congregational clans: i) have unique identities; ii) are shaped by salient social and economic conditions at conception; iii) have distinct geographic characteristics; and iv) vary in size depending on the age of child-bearing parents.

The remainder of the paper is divided as follows. After a brief review of the literature, the four research questions that guide this study are presented, the method and findings are presented, and finally the implications of the study are discussed.

### **Review of the Literature**

The importance of family-of-origin on human development is clear: "virtually every aspect of adolescent [human] behavior is directly affected, for good or ill, by the family" (Berger, 1991: 479; cf Anolik, 1983; Cummings & Davies, 1995). For example, numerous studies show that there is substantial agreement between parents and their children on values, politics, and educational and vocational opinions (Dunham & Albert, 1987; Feather, 1980; Youniss, 1989).

It is odd, then, that researchers seldom apply the family metaphor to organizations. Rather, when organizations are compared to humans,

the focus is usually on similarities between organizations and individuals, perhaps best exemplified by organizational "life cycle" theory (e.g., Greiner, 1972), which suggests that new firms start as infants, grow through adolescence, and eventually reach maturity. One notable variant of this approach is Kimberly (1987), who draws specific attention to the importance of social values being imprinted in the earliest years of an organization's life, again echoing the same phenomenon in people. But, whereas Kimberly still focuses on organizations' founding entrepreneur(s), in our study we draw attention to the organizational heritage of founding members.

In many ways, this study elaborates and continues where Dyck (1997) leaves off. In particular, whereas Dyck focuses on how lineage effects one generation of relationships (i.e., the influence of parent-child relationships), our current study is focused more at the organizational clan unit of analysis. For example, several Mennonite congregational clans in our study span five generations, and findings suggest that an event in the first or second generation may have an effect on an event in the fifth. Dyck (1997) provides some anecdotal evidence that points to the possible merit in focusing on organizational clans when he describes five congregations that have a long tradition of planning and holding a joint Good Friday worship service every year. He notes that even persons regularly involved in participating and planning this event seemed unaware that the five congregations were "related" in a familial sense. It is only through drawing the congregational genealogies that Dyck learned that three of the five are actually "siblings" who shared a common parent congregation, and that the other two were a parent-child tandem! In effect, for these five congregations the joint Good Friday worship service acted as an annual "family gathering" of sorts (although the congregation that "parented" the three siblings does not attend). Furthermore, all five congregations were members of the same denomination which had a total of 14 congregations in the city (plus two Asian congregations). Of this "family" of 14 congregations, eight could trace their family lineage to three or more generations. Of the remaining 6 congregations, whose extended family history was relatively short, five were participants in the joint Good Friday worship service. In short, this anecdote suggests that a congregation's organizational family may have a greater effect on behavior than we realize.

### **Research Questions**

The current study is guided by four research questions, some of which arose from the data itself (cf Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Note

that, because this is very much an exploratory study, we are not in any way purporting to “test” these as hypotheses. 1) Are there differences between congregational clans among Winnipeg Mennonite churches? If this is a helpful metaphor, then we would expect to find observable differences from one clan to the next. 2) Is there an effect of the external environment on how organizational clans develop? Most notably, we examine whether being born in poor economic times might affect subsequent clan size (just as, globally, family size is related to economic well-being). We also examine whether birth in a particular cohort group (e.g., congregations born in the “baby boom” cohort) affect subsequent congregational behavior. 3) Are there differences between organizational clans in terms of their geographical proximity to each other? Are some clans more likely to adhere closely together, and others more likely to scatter? 4) Finally, is there any relationship between organizational clan size and the age of parent organizations when children are born, just as humans have “natural child-bearing years”? In particular, does having the first offspring organization too early or too late limit clan size?

### Method

Each of the 44 congregations in our sample belongs to one of four Mennonite conferences: i) Mennonite Brethren (MB); ii) Mennonite Church (MC; until recently known as the General Conference, which itself had at least two historical antecedents relevant to our study, the Schoenwieser “clan” and the Bergthaler “clan”); iii) the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC); and iv) the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC). Other Mennonite congregations in Winnipeg, who belonged to smaller clans, were left out of this study.<sup>2</sup> Each denominational conference can also be seen as a sort of clan in its own right, and differences among conferences have been studied and reported elsewhere (e.g., Kauffman and Driedger, 1991). Our study is unique in looking at congregational clans (within conferences) in one city. Our focus on congregations is welcome because of the lack of organization theory research on religious organizations generally (e.g., Mason and Harris, 1994; Nelson, 1993). Our focus on Mennonite congregations specifically, thanks to their familiarity with the “Mennonite game,” is particularly appropriate, given the counsel to perform exploratory research like ours at sites where the phenomenon under investigation is most likely to be “transparently observable” (Eisenhardt, 1989).

A trained research assistant contacted each congregation in our target population, starting with those listed in the Yellow Pages, where

he scheduled and conducted interviews with persons familiar with the history and founding of the congregation. Following Dyck (1997), the primary emphasis for the interviewer was to determine the nature of the organizational ancestry of each congregation and whether it had offspring of its own. In addition, interviewees were asked for membership and financial giving data, and about current practices in their congregation (e.g., style of worship).

### Findings

As shown in Figures 1 through 6 and in Table 1,<sup>3</sup> the genealogical approach proved useful to organize the 44 congregations in our sample into seven organizational clans, most of which were parented by congregations who were the first one of their denomination in the Winnipeg. The oldest and largest of these is the clan (#1a and #1b in the Table) parented by Elmwood Mennonite Brethren (originally called Northend MB) congregation, which was the very first Mennonite congregation of any denomination (1920) and boasts a total of 14 offspring (three of which are now closed) spanning five generations.

Figure 1: Clan #1 (Elmwood Mennonite Brethren: orig. North End MB)

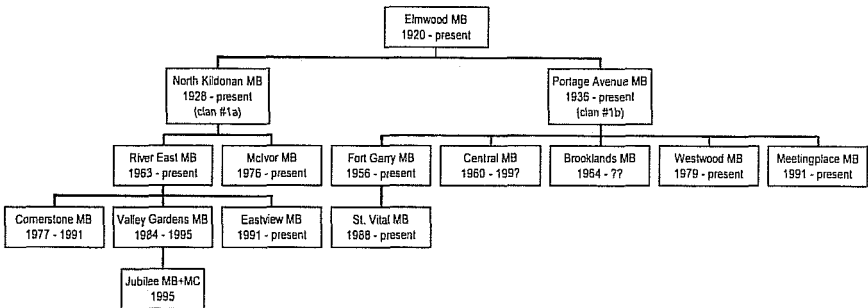


Figure 2: Clan #2 (First Mennonite Church)

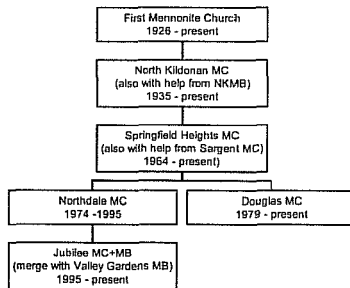


Figure 3: Clan #3 (Bethel Mennonite Church)

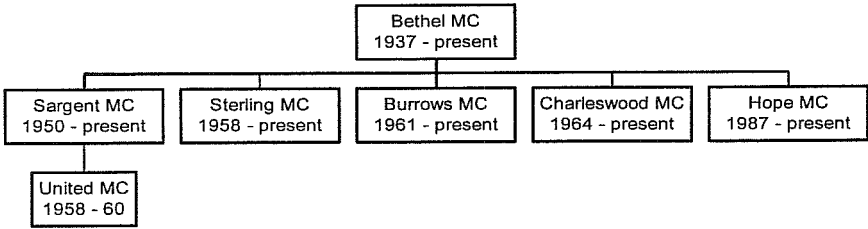


Figure 4: Clan #4 (Home Street Mennonite Church)

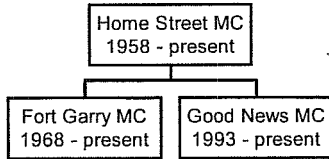


Figure 5: Clan #5 (Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite Church)

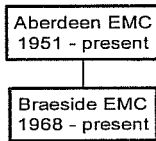


Figure 6: Clan #6 (Gospel Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church)

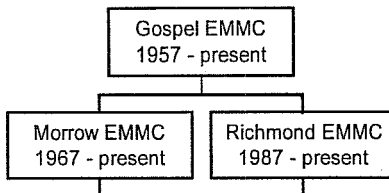


Table 1: Overview of Mennonite congregations in Winnipeg, by organizational clan

Denomination Name	Generation		Parent	Year Closed	Membership at Founding	Total Budget 1992		Per Capita Budget	
	Location	Year Founded		Purpose		Membership in 1992			
<b>Clan #1a congregations: Elmwood MB and their children</b>						548	1755	\$2,270,000	\$1,484
MB Elmwood MB	1	northeast	Conference	1920	Nurture	20	305	\$308,000	\$1,010
MB NK MB	2	northeast	Elmwood MB	1928	Nurture	15	515	535000	\$1,040
MB River East MB	3	northeast	NKMB	1963	Outreach	60	162	203000	\$1,250
MB Cornerstone MB	4	northwest	River East MB	1977	1991 Outreach	28	30	71000	\$2,360
MB Valley Gardens MB	4	northeast	River East MB	1984	1995 Outreach	25	65	99000	\$1,525
MB/C Jubilee MB/MC	5	northeast	VallGrdn+Northd	1995	na	na	na	na	na
MB Eastview MB	4	northeast	River East MB	1991	Outreach	152	164	277000	\$1,690
MB McIvor MB	3	northeast	NKMB	1976	Nurture	248	514	775000	\$1,510
<b>Clan #1b congregations: Elmwood MB and Portage Ave MB and their children</b>						294	1482	\$1,910,000	\$1,336
MB Portage Ave MB	2	northwest	Elmwood MB	1936	na	556	556	\$775,000	\$1,393
MB Ft. Garry MB	3	southwest	Portage Ave MB	1956	Outreach	47	353	\$380,000	\$1,080
MB St. Vital MB	4	southeast	Ft. Garry MB	1988	Outreach	18	32	\$50,000	\$1,490
MB Central MB	3	northwest	Portage Ave MB	1960	?? Nurture	121	190	\$165,000	\$870
MB Brooklands MB	3	northwest	Portage Ave MB	1964	Outreach	31	93	\$90,000	\$950
MB Westwood MB	3	southwest	Portage Ave MB	1979	Outreach	59	208	\$360,000	\$1,740
MB Meetingplace MB	3	northwest	Portage Ave MB	1991	Outreach	18	50	\$90,000	\$1,830
<b>Clan #2 congregations: First MC and their children</b>						1105	2790	\$1,470,000	\$665
MC First MC	1	northwest	Conference	1926	Nurture	254	1368	\$640,000	\$470
MC NK MC	2	northeast	First MC/NKMB	1935	Nurture	335	525	\$315,000	\$600
MC Springfield H. MC	3	northeast	NKMC	1964	Outreach	290	552	\$286,000	\$520
MC Northdale MC	4	northeast	Springfield H. MC	1974	1995 Outreach	43	45	\$40,000	\$850
MC/B Jubilee	5	northeast	Northd+VallGrdn	1995	na	na	na	na	na
MC Douglas MC	4	northeast	Springfield H. MC	1979	Nurture	183	300	\$190,000	\$640
<b>Clan #3 congregations: Bethel MC and their children</b>						242	1515	\$1,560,000	\$908
MC Bethel MC	1	southwest	Conference	1937	Outreach	21	556	\$775,000	\$1,400
MC Sargent MC	2	northwest	Bethel MC	1950	Nurture	45	487	\$375,000	\$775
MC United MC	3	northwest	Sargent MC	1958	1960 na	na	na	na	na
MC Sterling MC	2	southeast	Bethel MC	1958	Outreach	18	107	\$90,000	860
MC Burrows MC	2	northwest	Bethel MC	1961	Nurture	66	152	\$130,000	\$860
MC Charleswood MC	2	southwest	Bethel MC	1964	Outreach	45	160	\$155,000	\$975
MC Hope MC	2	northwest	Bethel MC	1987	Nurture	47	53	\$30,000	\$575
<b>Clan #4 congregations: Home Street MC and their children</b>						159	482	\$360,000	\$912
MC Home Street MC	1	northwest	Conference	1958	Outreach	45	260	\$185,000	\$720
MC Ft. Garry MC	2	southwest	Home Street Mc	1968	Nurture	34	142	\$175,000	\$1,230
MC Good News <sup>11</sup>	2	northwest	Home Street Mc	1993	Outreach	80	80	na	na
<b>Clan #5 congregations: Aberdeen EMC and their children</b>						234	324	\$305,000	\$870
EMC Aberdeen EMC	1	northwest	Conference	1951	Nurture	6	78	\$55,000	\$720
EMC Braeside EMC	2	northeast	Aberdeen EMC	1968	Nurture	228	246	\$250,000	\$1,020
<b>Clan #6 congregations: Gospel EMMC and their children</b>						18	211	\$325,000	\$1,253
EMMC Gospel EMMC	1	southwest	conf (+Sterling?)	1957	Nurture	na	182	\$300,000	\$1,630
EMMC Morrow	2	southeast	Gospel EMMC	1967	Nurture	na	na	na	na
EMMC Richmond	3	southeast	Gospel/Morrow	1987	Nurture	18	29	\$25,000	\$875
<b>Non-clan congregations (i.e., little organizational lineage to identifiable parent)</b>						226	545	\$310,000	\$1,566
MC Vietnamese		southwest	MCC/MB/MC	1986	Nurture	13	40	\$50,000	\$1,195
MB Salem		northwest	Conference	1963	Outreach	23	42	\$45,000	\$1,010
MB Chinese MB		southwest	Vietnamese MC?	1986	Nurture	40	35	\$40,000	\$1,150
MB SiBoniface		southeast	Conference	1982	?? Outreach	43	15	\$50,000	\$3,230
MB Maples		northwest	Conference	1980	1990 Outreach	13	19	\$35,000	\$1,750
MB Transcona		northeast	Conference	1982	1993 Outreach	31	21	na	na
EMC Cresview		northwest	Conference	1965	Nurture	9	110	na	na
EMC FortGarryEMC		southwest	Conference	1976	Nurture	26	178	na	na
EMC SiVital		southeast	Conference	1990	Nurture	28	85	\$90,000	\$1,060
<b>TOTALS</b>						<b>2826</b>	<b>9104</b>	<b>\$8.5 million</b>	<b>\$1,185</b>

The second clan, First Mennonite Church (1926), has helped to parent five offspring, one of which has since closed, and also spans five generations. It is interesting to note that the most recent offspring in each of these first two clans is shared between them, when in 1995 the Jubilee congregation was born by amalgamating the Northdale MC and Valley Gardens MB. What adds intrigue to this marriage is that, in their early years, their great-grandparents (North Kildonan MC and North Kildonan MB, respectively) had also worshipped together.

The third clan, parented by Bethel MC, is related to the First MC (Bethel MC was spearheaded by the same pastor who started First MC), but has a distinct heritage within the MC conference (First MC was founded by "Schoenwieser" MCs whereas Bethel was founded by "Berghthaler" MCs). Bethel has parented 6 congregations, two of which have since closed.

Three smaller denominational clans are: i) a third MC clan, this one parented by Home Street MC (three members; note that Home Street was originally named the Berghthaler Church); ii) an Evangelical Mennonite Conference clan, parented by Aberdeen EMC (two members); and iii) an Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, parented by Gospel EMMC (three members).

A seventh category of congregations might best be called "non-clan congregations," as it encompasses eight congregations that do not have one identifiable parent congregation. Most of these were planted by denominational conferences that were already represented by other congregations in the city and also have no offspring of their own. Consistent with human family research (Pease and Gardner, 1958) and with findings presented in Dyck (1997), performance of parent-less congregations suffered in some respects compared to parented congregations.<sup>4</sup> For example, three of the nine "non-clan" organizations in our sample have since closed. The data on these non-clan congregations are dropped from our subsequent analysis in this paper.

Taken together, our ability to cluster most of the congregations in our sample (35 out of 44 congregations, or 80 per cent) into meaningful organizational clans suggest that the notion of organizational clans may provide a helpful heuristic device to see the organizational history of a number of related organizations. We will now analyse our data in light of our four overarching research questions.

### Research Questions

In the first research question we wanted to see whether there were differences across the various clans in our data. Is there any evidence



of the sort of cultural imprinting that distinguishes human families? Is there any explanatory added-value in identifying which clan a congregation belongs to?

Because research has shown that financial issues are a central issue in human families, we decided to examine whether there were differences in financial giving patterns between congregational clans. To do this we used "membership data" and "total financial giving" data to calculate the "average per member giving" figures for each congregation in our data set. We used 1992 data, as this was the most complete set to which we had access. We first used a t-test to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between each denominational clan and the other congregations in our data set. We found that the MB clan was statistically significantly different from other congregations ( $\alpha=.0005$ ), that the overall MC clan (i.e., including all MC congregations, Schoenwieser and Bergthaler) was statistically significantly different from the other congregations ( $\alpha=.003$ ), and that the First MC clan was different from the rest ( $\alpha=.0002$ ). Perhaps as a result of their smaller sample sizes, we did not find statistically significant differences for EMC ( $\alpha=.36$ ) or EMMC ( $\alpha=.69$ ) denominational clans.

In a somewhat more fine-grained analysis, we also wanted to see if there were differences between clans within the same conference. Consistent with clan theory, we found a statistically significant difference between First MC clan and the Bethel MC clan ( $\alpha=.05$ ). We also wanted to know whether there might be statistically significant differences between Elmwood MB's two fairly large sub-clans (i.e., between the seven congregations of clan #1a with North Kildonan MB, and the seven congregations in clan #1b with Portage Avenue MB). Consistent with family social imprinting theory, there were no differences between these two sub-clans ( $\alpha=1.00$ ).

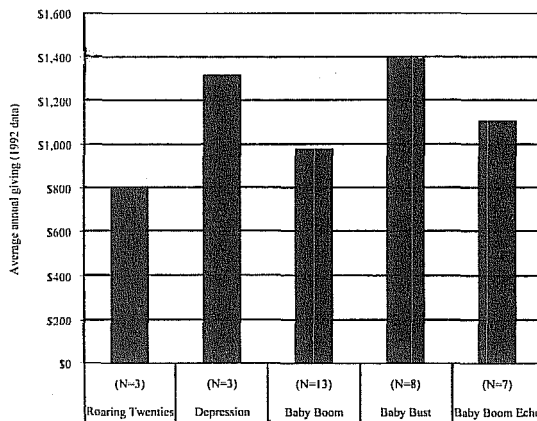
Taken together, these exploratory results should encourage future researchers, to examine whether a whole host of other variables (e.g., worship style, attitudes to service, participation rates in overseas missions, etc.) are also prone to social imprinting in an organization's formative years (Kimberly, 1987). In short, parental heritage may provide an important indicator of subsequent congregational behavior.

The second research question focused on the role of the socio-economic environment. Just as human family size is affected by economic context, so also our data provide a striking indication that economic conditions may also have an effect on subsequent procreation and clan size. The two congregations in our sample that were born in the harshest of economic times (the 1930s) are also by far the most "prolific parents": Bethel MC and Portage Avenue MB have each birthed five children plus one grandchild.<sup>5</sup>

This finding led us to examine a more general question, namely, whether there might be differences among cohorts of congregations depending, for example, if they are a “baby boomer” or a “depression baby” congregation. Drawing on Foot’s (1996) demographic study of Canadians in general, we grouped our congregations into the following categories according to when they were born: the roaring twenties (1920 to 1929); the depression babies (1930 to 1939); World War II (1940 to 1946); the baby boom (1947 to 1966); the baby bust (1967 to 1979); and the baby-boom echo (1980 to 1995). To start, we were curious whether there might be differences in the average financial giving per member in congregations depending on their birth cohort. However, because we were aware that financial giving is imprinted by clans, we recalculated the financial giving data to hold clan constant.<sup>6</sup> The results suggest that there is a significant effect of birth cohort for congregations.

More specifically, as shown in Figure 7, there is an intriguing pattern in the data, where average giving per members goes up and down from one cohort to the next, and increases over time. Thus, the three congregations<sup>7</sup> born during the “the roaring twenties” (1920 to 1929) had the lowest overall average per member giving (\$794/year). This increased statistically significantly ( $\alpha=.06$ ) with the three depression babies (1930 to 1939) to \$1316 per member. The average giving decreased to \$976 per year for baby boomers (1947 to 1966), and then increased statistically significantly ( $\alpha=.002$ ) to \$1,391 per member for congregations born in the baby bust era (1967 to 1979). Finally, financial giving per member decreased statistically significantly ( $\alpha=.098$ ) to \$1,108 for “baby-boom echo” congregations (1980 to 1995). Extrapolating based on this pattern, we would expect congregations born after 1995 to have the highest average per member financial giving.

Figure 7: 0



We were also curious whether there might be differences among these cohort groups according to whether congregations were started in order to “nurture” members or with an agenda to do “outreach” and attract new members. While there were no clear tendencies among the cohorts, there was a striking tendency within each cohort group to shift from a “nurture” emphasis to an “outreach” emphasis. We divided each cohort of congregations into two equal halves: those that were born earliest in each “era” and those that were born latest. If a cohort had an odd number of congregation, we simply followed King Solomon’s example and divided the mid-point congregation into half. Overall, we found that congregations begun during the early parts of an era were twice as likely to be founded for nurture reasons than for outreach reasons (10.5 to 5.5, respectively) whereas the opposite was true for congregations started in the latter half of each era, which were twice as likely to be founded for outreach reasons than for nurture reasons (again, 10.5 to 5.5 respectively). These results may suggest that congregations gain increasing confidence to do outreach as they gain greater experience and familiarity with the dynamics associated with any given era.

The third research question considered the variable of location. Historically, there has been a tendency for human families to remain close to one another, both in terms of socio-emotional support and geographical closeness, especially when moving into new communities. For example, this tendency is evident in the development of ethnic communities in many cities (e.g., Chinatown, little Italy, a Ukrainian neighborhood). Within Winnipeg, the northeast quadrant (esp. the suburbs of North Kildonan and East Kildonan) is known for its high concentration of Mennonites. Our data lend support to this reputation.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the data are particularly striking in that, of the 13 Mennonite congregations listed in the northeast quadrant, 11 belong to the Elmwood MB and the First MC clans, the two earliest Mennonite congregations in the city. In particular, 11 of the 13 congregations in the First MC clan and the Elmwood MB/NKMB sub-clan (clan #1a in Table) are in the northeast quadrant of Winnipeg. These results suggest that, analogous to human family clans, when denominations first enter a city they gravitate toward developing congregational clans located in the same neighborhood.

Moreover, the geographic location of these founding congregations’ offspring stands in stark contrast to our two “prolific parent” clans, Bethel MC and Portage Avenue MB. Not one of the 14 congregations in the Bethel MC and the Portage Avenue MB clans are located in Winnipeg’s northeast quadrant!

One possible explanation for the differences between prolific parent clans and the other clans is in the reason given for the congregations’

initial founding. Prolific-parent clans were twice as likely to be “outreach-oriented” than “nurture-oriented” (8:4), while congregations in other clans were more likely to have been founded with a nurture than an outreach orientation (12:8).

In light of organizational theory, the first congregation of a denomination in a city may see itself as having a monopoly, and thus may adopt more of a Defender than a Prospector orientation. In our sample, this tendency may have been heightened because the reason that denominational conferences were founding congregations in the city was to retain their membership (previously Mennonites had lived almost exclusively in rural settings). As a result, later-arriving clans who were more outreach-oriented had the rest of the city in which to open new congregations.

The fourth research question used as its analytical tool the model of the reproductive life cycle. Just as humans have natural child-bearing years, so we also wondered whether the age of the parent when giving birth to offspring was a factor. Again, our findings astounded us. In our sample, of the 13 congregations who had at least one offspring, seven congregations gave birth too soon, from a human point of view. (All seven had their first child before they themselves were teenagers). On average, parent congregations who gave birth to an offspring prior to being 13 years old had a total of 1.8 children.<sup>9</sup> Compare this to four congregations<sup>10</sup> whose firstborn arrived when the parent was between 13 and 24, for whom the average number of children per parent was 3.7. Finally, compare this to the two congregations (Fort Garry MB, North Kildonan MB) who were 32 years or older when they had their firstborn, and on average had 1.5 offspring. In summary, congregational parents who had their firstborn too soon or too late were likely to have half as many children as congregational parents who were between 13 and 24 years old when they had their firstborn.

## Discussion

The implications of this study are manifold. First, at a basic level, our study demonstrates that the congregational clan metaphor provides a helpful and meaningful heuristic device to examine the history of the over forty Mennonite congregations in Winnipeg. But more than that, the metaphor’s conceptual framework also provides a new way of seeing and understanding congregational growth, proliferation and development.

In particular, the metaphor points to the importance of “social imprinting” that occurs in the formative years of a congregation. This parallels a similar phenomenon in human families. For example, knowing which clan a congregation belongs to can give us statistically

significant information of the financial giving patterns of its members. We would expect that similar “clan effects” would be evident in terms of the theology of congregations, worship patterns, attitudes to education, and so on. This awaits further research.

Our results also have some very practical implications on church planting strategies, and, in particular, they draw attention to the importance of new congregations having an identifiable parent rather than conference support. Again, the parallel to humans is evident, who also tend to benefit from having identifiable parents rather than institutional nurture.

Taken together, this leads to a somewhat controversial implication, raising questions not unlike those being raised in the area of genetic engineering. Given the importance of a “clan effect,” should conferences interested in church planting be careful to select from their available “gene pool” those who will parent a new congregation? Should congregations that have the “best” theology, or the most successful programs, or the highest per member giving patterns, be selected to parent new plants?

Interesting also was our finding about financial giving across cohort groups. What might explain the patterns and statistically significant differences we found? Is it as simple as an interaction between institutionalized giving patterns coupled with cost-of-living needs at birth? This would mean that congregations establish their financial giving patterns based on the cost-of-living at their time of birth, that these patterns get institutionalized and fail to keep up with the rising cost of living. If this is the case, then are there also other “out-dated” practices that congregations perpetuate based on their birth cohort group? And, it raises the question: Should congregations have a sunset clause, where they are required to disband and re-group, say, every fifty years or so? This certainly would be a different way of thinking about jubulatory practices! But perhaps it would be healthy and re-energizing for the church.

Of course, there are many other factors that affected the congregations in our sample, including immigration, urbanization, language transitions (German to English), leadership personalities, worship styles, institution-builders, the presence of conference and Bible colleges, and so on. In fact, the uncontested importance of these other factors makes our findings all the more remarkable, because our findings suggest that a significant amount of variation in congregational behavior is attributable to their organizational ancestry, and that this effect is not overwhelmed by a host of other factors. Of course, there may also be important interaction between these various events that contribute to our findings. Again, this awaits future research.

Let us reiterate that this is an exploratory study. As such, it may provide an empirical basis for future research and the development of

a much more general paradigm based on organizational lineage and clans. Due to the exploratory nature of our study, we should not assume the organizational clan framework to be equally relevant for or generalize to organizations in different sectors of the economy. Our findings are most likely to generalize to other self-governing congregations, and the extent to which they do so can be determined by future hypothesis testing. Even so, we believe that the organizational clan metaphor developed here provides an intriguing conceptual framework with which to view organizational histories in general. Thus, following Elsbach and Sutton (1992), our tentative findings might be tested not only in a large, representative sample of self-governing congregations, but also in more diverse samples of organizations (cf. Bartunek, 1984).

In terms of this latter agenda, recall that Dyck (1997) found that twenty percent of new start-ups in a variety of industries have a traceable organizational lineage as operationalized here (i.e., these organizations were founded by two or more people who had previously belonged to a different parent organization). For example, three different advertising agencies recently have had groups of executives exit a parent organization in order to form new agencies (Heitzman, 1993; O'Leary & Warneford, 1995; Tyrer, 1993). Another example comes from 3Com Corp., where the inventors of the Palm Pilot organizer left to form Handspring, Inc., after they were unable to convince 3Com to spin-off the Palm Pilot division (Avery, 1999). Even though twenty percent may seem like a small proportion of start-ups, they have characteristics that suggest that they may be the most viable organizations (consistent with our data that showed that parent-less congregations are more likely to close than parented ones). According to a review of the literature by Cooper & Gascon (1992), organizations are more likely to succeed if they have been founded by (i) a group of people (rather than individuals) who (ii) have previous experience working together in (iii) a shared parent organization (cf. Kamm, Shuman, Seeger and Nurick, 1990).

Future researchers may wish to develop this paradigm by "loosening" the definition of what constitutes organizational lineage. For example, the metaphor developed here may be of particular interest and relevance for understanding profit centers linked to a "parent" "mother" corporation, or to franchising operations. Situations like this clearly demonstrate a sense of organizational lineage, one that is in some ways more tightly-coupled than the operationalization that we chose. Similarly, there may be merit in examining the organizational lineage of so-called "lone entrepreneurs" who start a new organization.

## Conclusion

At first glance, a study of congregational clans may seem somewhat contrived. We are not accustomed to think about organizations in this way. However, is the idea of organizational lineage any more contrived than the more commonplace ways of thinking of organizations, most notably, that they are like machines that can be managed to become evermore efficient? Moreover, upon further reflection, the family metaphor may provide a particularly appropriate metaphor for Mennonite congregations, reflecting our theological tradition and emphasis on the extended community. Thus, this metaphor may inform not only how we look at our congregations, but also how we look at organizations more generally. Of course, the implications go far beyond understanding congregational-level phenomena (e.g., financial giving patterns), because it also draws attention to our inter-generational organizational responsibilities and opportunities. Finally, although we limited our analysis to congregations in one city, the framework could also be used to examine analogous organizational ties internationally (cf. Nelson, 1993), and thereby give new meaning to our self-understanding as family members in a global village.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This study adds to a stream of organizational research that uses the biological and social family as a metaphor to understand organizational phenomena.



Notable contributors to this research include population ecologists, who suggest that organizations have "genetic blueprints" (e.g., Hannan & Freeman, 1977), and scholars within the area of inter-organizational networks who utilize concepts like "clan control" (e.g., Ouchi, 1980). The goal of this present study is to use these ideas as a point of departure and, specifically, to examine whether there is merit in examining multi-organizational "clans."

- 2 For the focus of our study, we report here data only from Mennonite denominations that have three or more congregations in the city. In addition to those mentioned here, Winnipeg is home to a number of Mennonite-related congregations (e.g., Grain of Wheat) and lone-denominational congregations (e.g., Sommerfelder).
- 3 Note that for ease of presentation, each congregation is listed by: a) its current name (numerous congregations have changed their names over time as a result of moving from one location to another); and b) with its denominational affiliation (e.g., "Fort Garry MC" is actually "Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship"). Note also that there is not always complete agreement on all matters related to each congregation's history (e.g., was Portage Avenue MB the parent of Central MB, or vice versa?). Thus, in some cases we made an informed choice between competing stories of a congregation's history. To determine whether there is a pattern among congregations with ambiguous organizational ancestries remains a question for future research.
- 4 However, before we conclude that conferences should not take primary responsibility for planting congregations, take care to note that: a) all our first-congregation-of-a-denomination received outside conference support; and b) several of the conference-plants are doing very well.
- 5 A third congregation, North Kildonan MC (1935), also had its official start in the 1930s. Note, however, that the history of this congregation dates back earlier to years when members worshipped together with North Kildonan MB (1928).
- 6 This was a four step process. First, we determined the overall average giving per member in our total data set. Then we used the average giving per member per congregation to calculate the average giving per member in each clan. Third, we divided the clan average (from step #2) by the overall average (step #1), and, finally, we used the resultant correction factor to recalibrate each congregation's average giving so that each clan's average would be the same as the overall average. As a result, the differences in average financial giving were now no longer attributable to which clan a congregation belongs to. Of course, there were still differences among congregations within and across clans, and our results suggest that these differences may be partly explained by which birth cohort a congregation belongs to.
- 7 The three roaring twenties (1920 to 1929) congregations are: Elmwood MB, First MC, and NK MB; the three depression babies (1930 to 1939) are: NK MC, Bethel MC and Portage Avenue MB; the 13 baby boomers (1947 to 1966) are: Sargent MC, Aberdeen EMC, Fort Garry MB, Gospel EMMC, Sterling MC, Home Street MC, United MC, Central MB, Burrows MC, River East MB, Brooklands MB, Charleswood MC, Springfield Heights MC; the eight baby bust congregations (1967 to 1979) are: Morrow EMMC, Fort Garry MC, Braeside EMC, Northdale MC, McIvor MB, Cornerstone MB, Douglas MC, Westwood MB; and, finally, the seven baby-boom echo congregations (1980 to 1995) are: Valley Gardens MB, Richmond EMMC, Hope MC, St. Vital MB, Meetingplace MB, and Eastview MB. We used t-tests to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in average giving per member for adjoining congregational cohort groups.
- 8 According to our data, in 1992 the northeast quadrant had 3,414 members listed among its 13 congregations, the northwest quadrant had 3,568 members among its 13 congregations, the southwest quadrant had 1854 members in 9

congregations, and the southeast quadrant had 268 members in 6 congregations. Note that the northwest quadrant (i.e., the area west of the Red River and north of the Assiniboine River) of Winnipeg is considerable larger than the northeast quadrant.

- <sup>9</sup> These congregations are: First MC, Springfield Heights MC, Sargent Avenue MC, Home Street MC, Vietnamese MC, Elmwood MB and Gospel EMMC. Note that none of these have more than two offspring.
- <sup>10</sup> Bethel GC, River East MB, Portage Avenue MB, Aberdeen EMC.
- <sup>11</sup> Included here although Good News is not formally a member of Mennonite Church Canada.