

The following is a review on Carl S. Dudley's book, *Making the Small Church Effective*



by Father Anthony Holder

Carl S. Dudley's book, *Making the Small Church Effective*, explores in a broad way and with exercises at the end of each chapter, the inner values, qualities and dynamics of life in small congregations, particularly in small towns and rural areas. He also deals with the mechanisms that can make them effective in living out their faith. The strength of the small church, expresses Dudley, lies in its intimacy and in human relationships, which is "the largest expression of the Christian faith" (48).

The author does not believe there is anything wrong with small churches. They just want to preserve their social and family intimacy, territory, and the ability to remain comfortable among each other. Presuming that small churches want to grow, Dudley reflects on the problem which they encounter in trying to ascertain how best to grow as a church while at the same time maintaining the intimacy of their faith community. In order to remedy this situation, Dudley offers "adoption" as a model which he believes is biblically supported and would allow persons to become members gradually rather than rapidly. Dudley believes that this would allow the congregation to experience gratification in being a Christian community of faith which in turn would become "the common property of the congregation, not the private possession of a few" (58).

I am pleased that the author recognizes the negatives of the "adoption" process of membership that small churches should use. Although I believe we are always too ready to welcome people into our churches without proper instruction, yet such a process can easily promote religious snobbery instead of Christian love. I agree with Dudley that the problems and challenges of small churches are more highlighted than their strength and value.

Dudley's book allows the reader to look at small churches and their ministry in a new and fresher way in terms of highlighting their strength of familial intimacy, sense of belonging and expression of love. Although, I view these factors as vital, yet like many priests and pastors, I tend to focus more on spiritual and numerical growth. Having served in large congregations in Barbados, there is the tendency to want small churches to become larger. Dudley sends a loud message that it's alright to have small churches.

In my opinion, *Making the Small Church Effective*, is a very worthwhile book. The practical exercises before each chapter and the resources used assist in affirming the strengths and gifts which the small church brings to ministry and the community.