

Notes for Presentation to the
OXNARD MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION

Friday, April 14, 11:00 A.M.

I. Introduction

Pleasure to join with you this morning. Especially privileged to meet with a group of individuals who are not only making many important contributions to the community's welfare, but who are also extremely influential in the formation of community opinions and values.

II. Roles of the Speaker

In this morning's discussion of the major challenges facing the Oxnard community, I will be speaking from within several different roles: As a City Councilman, I am primarily concerned with the effectiveness of city government in meeting the municipal service needs of local residents in the most efficient and economical manner possible; as a member of the Board of Trustees for the Oxnard High School District, I am mainly concerned about the ability of local secondary schools to equip youngsters with the skills and motivations needed for productive and self-fulfilling lives; as a parent, I am concerned about the maintenance of a physical and social environment which will allow my children to develop to their fullest capabilities; and, lastly and most importantly, as a Christian I am concerned about the development of a community which fosters feelings of love and concern for one another.

III. Community Goals

I am sure my concerns in each of these roles are similar to your own concerns and similar to those of other community residents. Although nearly all local residents would agree that we should attempt to create a community which meets our physical and social needs and provides for our intellectual and spiritual growth, there are probably many differing views as to how these goals might best be achieved.

IV. Pursuing Community Goals

I believe the first and most important step towards the achievement of these goals is the development of a sense of community - a state in which each of us tries to understand and empathize with the needs of our fellow residents and actively works to fulfill these needs. Although this concept is admittedly vague and difficult to measure, I feel it is nonetheless the foundation upon which all community improvement projects must be built. Without this sincere interest in the welfare of our fellow residents, it is unlikely that we will be willing to make the personal sacrifices needed to move our community closer to its goals.

V. Roadblocks to the Attainment of Community Goals

We live in a society which is pluralistic in nature-- composed of a wide variety of different ethnic, social, religious, and political groups. This diversity is one of the sources of America's strength and has been instrumental in its development as one of the world's most progressive nations in terms of its technology, its institutions and its preservation of human freedoms. In this sense, America's cultural pluralism is positive and should be encouraged; however, this diversity can be a negative characteristic if we allow it to be a source of friction and disharmony through a lack of understanding and communication among our society's many cultural groups.

A. Prejudice

One of the causes for friction and disharmony is prejudice (i.e. basing our reaction to people upon our conception of the cultural group to which they belong rather than judging their individual worth). No matter how difficult it may be to put an end to prejudicial feelings, it must be done since such feelings are not only a cause of friction and disharmony, but of inequity, hatred and the waste of human resources as well. If any of us doubted the existence of these feelings in the past

this doubt was clearly removed by the President's National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders which identified these feelings as a major cause for the rash of civil disorders which plagued America in the mid 60's. It was only last summer when some of us learned that the violent results of these negative feelings are not confined to the large cities; rather, the civil disorder in the Colonia last July showed that we have to look no further than our own community. While these dramatic manifestations seem to have subsided for the time being, the intense negative feelings which caused these violent outbursts remain unchanged and must be replaced by feelings of love, hope, and harmony.

B. Lack of Sensitivity and Concern

The current lack of community spirit in our own community is probably the result of a general lack of sensitivity and concern for our fellowman rather than outright prejudice. Much progress has been made in eliminating the blatant prejudices of the past; however, at the same time many of us have turned inward to our own individual needs and interests and excluded consideration of the welfare of others. Since we do not yet live in a perfected society, and since there are many human needs yet unmet, this introversion must be replaced with genuine sensitivity and concern for others in need of assistance and support.

C. Unequal Opportunities

The practical results of our prejudice, and our lack of sensitivity and concern, is a society and a community which does not offer equal opportunities for all its members. In the year 1972 few would argue the fact that the amenities of life in our society are inequitably distributed-an inequity based on prejudices rather than reason. The existence of these inequities is widespread.

1. Employment

National studies continue to indicate that annual income of minority groups is substantially below the national average. To some extent this

results from the fact that some individuals of minority groups are receiving lower pay than Anglos in comparable positions. However, for the most part this income disparity results from the unemployment, underemployment, and lack of promotion of minority group members. This situation should be of urgent concern to all of us.

The Oxnard City Council has recognized the problem and has made a commitment to an "Affirmative Action Program" which will make even greater efforts to recruit and promote individuals from minority groups. Under this program the City hopes not only to thoroughly review testing procedures to assure their fairness to candidates from all ethnic groups, but also develop more effective ways of recruiting minority group individuals. The City already has an education incentive plan which encourages employees to continue their formal education and thereby become eligible for promotion within the City service.

The City also exerts some influence upon those contractors working for the City on federally assisted projects. Each of the major and sub-contractors on such projects must demonstrate to the City that they are conforming to the equal employment opportunity provisions of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

While city government can assure equal employment opportunities within its organization and projects, much of the responsibility in this area rests with private industry. While some companies, from the large public utility concerns to the small businessman, have made an effort to increase employment opportunities for minorities, there is still a great deal left to be done. A good job represents more than an elevation of material life style, it represents a chance for dignity and self-respect and it is therefore

critically important that we increase the opportunities in this area.

2. Housing

All of us know that in the past individuals from minority groups have not had complete freedom in selecting the residence and neighborhood of their choice. The reason for this restriction was clearly ethnic discrimination. Today the freedom of such individuals in determining their place of residence is also limited, but this limitation has become more subtle; today it is economic discrimination. Since the development of low and moderate cost housing is confined to certain areas, and since many members of economically disadvantaged groups are also from minority groups, the community remains essentially segregated and will remain so until housing units of all price levels are developed in all neighborhoods. Although city government can prohibit the development of additional low cost housing in areas already populated by ethnic minorities, the City is limited in its authority to effect such development in other areas. Much of the authority for such development, and its resulting integration of the community, rests with the developers and the lending institutions. Since these groups cite existing public attitudes as the reason for their reluctance to integrate housing units of vastly different cost, it is attitudes of both those with authority in this area and the public which must be changed.

Another threat to the development of a truly integrated community is the over industrialization of our city. Experience of other cities shows that areas with a high concentration of industrial development often drive their more mobile residents (i.e. upper income groups) out of the City and into the suburbs where the environment is more livable. This leaves the City itself composed largely of economically disadvantaged and minority group residents.

To the hills here

Indeed, this phenomenon is one of the basic problems facing the nation's cities. Our response to this problem should be a special effort to maintain a balanced, livable community and thereby retain a population composed of individuals from all economic and cultural groups.

3. Education

I view the objectives of education as the intellectual, physical and social preparation of our youth for a productive and self-fulfilling life. If our concerns were solely for the intellectual and physical development of students, effective compensatory education programs might satisfactorily meet the present needs of individuals from minority and economically disadvantaged groups. However, no matter how successful compensatory education might become (and it has not been very effective to date) this approach alone will not provide children from minority groups with the social understanding necessary to function outside their own community. America is a pluralistic society, a society where Anglos are in the majority and dominate our institutions, mores, and values. It is important that minority group youngsters who wish to function within this pluralistic system develop a social understanding which extends beyond their own community. It is equally as important that Anglo children develop a better understanding and sensitivity toward members of other ethnic groups. This understanding can probably be best achieved by attending school and living with people from all ethnic groups. While Oxnard's current busing program is an interim improvement, the real and lasting improvement must be the integration of our community.

D. Ineffective Leadership

While the feelings of prejudice and lack of concern for our fellowman and their resulting inequities have been primarily the result of historical circumstances rather than design, public leadership has obviously been ineffective in dealing with the problem; Governmental agencies, schools, churches and private organizations have all failed to take the initiative needed to achieve our national ideals. This past failure makes it especially difficult for present leadership to resolve the problem because many people have lost their trust in these institutions-feel they are no longer credible nor relevant.

E. Oversimplification of Problems

We live in an extremely complex society. This complexity creates doubts and frustration within all of us; we simply feel threatened by those things which we do not understand. Perhaps the greatest danger posed by the existence of these feelings is that they sometimes cause us to oversimplify complex issues and problems; when we are unable to grasp the many causes of a problem, and the comprehensive action needed to resolve it, we often look to simple explanations and solutions. The end result of this tendency is often identifying and treating symptoms rather than root causes of problems.

There are many examples of such oversimplifications:

I. Drug Abuse

Drug abuse in this country and this community has reached epidemic proportions. Many people are now responding to this problem by calling for greater penalties for the users and peddlers of illegal drugs. Such an approach obviously does not confront the real problem; namely, the widespread dependency upon drugs-both legal and illegal-by our society. The real problem we must address is why do people need

artificial support (be it marijuana, alcohol, or tranquilizers) to cope with life, and what can be done to replace this artificial support with more positive human support.

2. Social Disharmony

Everyone in America is understandably concerned about the increasing violence in our society - violence resulting from profit motivated crimes and violence which is purely an expression of frustration and hatred. The answer of many to this violence? Increase the strength and severity of law enforcement, in a catch phrase - a return to "law and order". Again, they would treat the symptom and not the cause; while we certainly must have a strongly supported law enforcement program, we are not going to put an end to violence unless we treat the root causes of the frustration and hatred which leads to this violence. Unfortunately, anyone who expresses the need to confront these root causes is immediately accused of "coddling criminals", "sympathizing with dissinters" and opposing "law and order".

3. Economic Inequities

In a similar vein, many people look at the depressed economic condition of some groups and blame it upon their ignorance, lack of initiative and desire to live off the work of others. Their solution - cut off all assistance and force these individuals to make it on their own. Again, such suggestions overlook the root causes of the problem; namely, that our society has not equipped individuals from many groups (ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged) with the skills and motivations needed to compete within our economic system, nor have we always

fairly rewarded individuals from these groups who have been able to compete. Until these inequities are resolved, there will continue to be economically depressed groups with our society.

These are just a few examples of our tendency to oversimplify problems. I am sure all of us could cite many others.

VI. Overcoming These Roadblocks and Achieving a Sense of Community
A. Leadership

Enlightened and forceful public leadership can overcome feelings of prejudice and introversion and their resulting problems by encouraging individuals to take an honest and comprehensive look at existing problems, and by coming to grips with the complex realities of these problems rather than looking for simple explanations which support our own biases. While governmental agencies, schools and private organizations can all contribute to this effort, it is the churches which offer much of the hope for this improvement. Since the churches are instrumental in developing community attitudes, they can effectively encourage members to love and demonstrate active concern for their fellow residents. Specifically, it is the churches which can encourage local residents to welcome members of all ethnic groups as neighbors, to support the busing program as interim solution to integration, to work for the increased employment and promotion of minority group members, to support efforts to spread public housing units throughout the community, to support compensatory education programs which will equip youngsters from economically deprived areas with the necessary skills for achievement, and to encourage the City to rebuild deteriorated sections of the community. In these and countless other ways, each of you can help to build a community which meets the needs of all local residents, is harmonious, and achieves the ideals which our nation has established and pursued.

VII. Conclusion

I have probably spoken long enough; I would very much like to hear some of your ideas as to what role local churches and the Oxnard Ministerial Association might plan in building a better community.