

Vocational shift among the amish essay



With a quarter of young people leaving the Amish community (Ediger, 2005), vocational shift for these young people have become important as a way of adjusting or adapting to the pressures experienced by the community. The Amish community is undergoing change because of internal and external pressures that catalyze change, which are not always within the control of community leaders. The compelling factors influencing change include the cost of agricultural production and the price of agricultural products relative to non-Amish farms using technology to drive down cost and increase productivity.

When linked with the growing population of Amish communities, dependence on agriculture as a primary economic activity may no longer suffice. (Ediger, 2005) With family and community ties based on agricultural production, the decline in agricultural production would necessarily affect close family ties especially among the young people. Investigating the vocational shift among the Amish would show the extent and rate that the Amish community, especially its young people, is coping with change. Theoretical Explanations for the Vocational Shift among the Amish Different perspectives emerged over the Amish but there is common agreement that the Amish community is undergoing change.

Lowery and Noble (2000) explained that the earlier perception of the Amish community is 'frozen in time' or unchanging to reflect the conscious resistance of the Amish to adjust and conform to the developments in the wider community. Kreps, Donnermeyer and Kreps (1994) disagreed with this perception and pointed out that change is not really so opposite to the Amish way of life. In fact, the Amish community emerged from protestant

reformation and separation from traditional religious beliefs and practices. This explains the close ties between religion and other aspects of community life such as self-sufficiency through agriculture.

As such, change is innate in the Amish tradition but that the community seeks to control the type and extent of change to maintain its system of beliefs and norms. Landring propounded a different explanation that while the Amish select not to conform to their external environment, they undergo controlled and measured change of a minute scale that the impact is minimal change in their traditions (cited in Lowery & Noble, 2000, p. 2). This alternative perspective recognized change in the Amish community, although tacitly, but to an extent and pace within their control.

These perspectives implied that the Amish are the actors and movers of change, making the change process primarily internal. Relative to the shift in vocation, this perspective then explains this shift as a conscious activity on the part of Amish community, something within their conscious control. Nevertheless, other multidimensional perspectives emerged due to the recognition that change may not be fully within the control of the Amish community. Earlier proponents of the view of the existence of external factors for change are Ericksen, Ericksen and Hostetler (1980) who explained that the external pressures emerge from the outside of the community such as economic, political, social and technological developments as well as from within the community as a direct result of its persistence of the traditional lifestyle over decades.

Kreps, Donnermeyer and Kreps (1994) explained that the Amish community constitutes a subculture, which means being inevitably part of the wider culture. As part of the wider culture, there would be pressures for change from outside of varying strengths that could cause differing degrees of change in the Amish culture. In relation to vocational change, this stream of thought recognized the impact of both internal and external pressures on the shift in importance of other vocations from the primary reliance on agriculture as well as the particular choice or preference of other vocations. Recent views accepted that via internal and external pressures, the Amish community does adapt to change, albeit with resistance. Theodorson and Theodorson explained adaptation as the facets of culture reflecting the adjustments to a group's physical environment as a means of survival (cited in Stoltzfus, 1973, p. 196).

This implies that the Amish community necessarily adapt to developments in their environment to survive such as by developing effective agricultural techniques. Lowery and Noble (2000) that the Amish community have adapted to pressures coming from within and outside of the community in order to survive but survival is also a factor strongly influencing the shift in vocations, which Foster (1984) describes as secularization with agriculture and vocational education closely tied to religious traditions. Internal and external pressures for change influence vocational shift. Internal pressures emerge from the within the community owing to the long-term impact of practices and traditions. External pressures come from the wider community that influences vocational change within the Amish community.

Donnermeyer and Cooksey (2004) identified a number of internal factors influencing vocational shift among the Amish.

One internal pressure is community expansion or population growth. In the 19th century, the cause of rapid community expansion was the massive immigration from Europe in search of frontier lands where the Amish community can establish and maintain its traditional lifestyle. During the 20th century, the established Amish communities were able to develop effective strategies in establishing cohesive communities supported by high fertility rates. These factors led to the growth in population and the expansion of the communities. Nevertheless, with a growing population and a static track of land, the issue of economic self-sufficiency and security emerged. Although, the Amish communities were able to allay the pressure of population growth by improving agricultural methods, the pressure is stronger now more than ever resulting to the consideration of vocational alternatives for survival by some members of the community.

Another internal pressure is high retention rates within the Amish religious community. Aversion to the problem of free riders explains the high retention rates. Religious practices in the Amish community implement strict rules that prohibit one member from becoming a free rider or taking advantage of another member. High retention also explained in part community expansion and constituted an internal pressure for vocational shift. The beliefs and practices of the Amish community created internal pressures for vocational shift. Kraybill and Nolt (1995) identified encroaching urbanism together with concurrent population growth in the wider community as external pressures affecting vocational change.

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As the wider community grows and develops, land increasingly become undergoes conversion into urban residential and commercial centers. This then makes agricultural land scarce and drives land prices upwards making it more difficult for the Amish community to purchase lands to support the growing population. Lowery and Noble (2000) further explained that the Amish community adjust to growth in its population by purchasing lands, near the community or even in another state or country, for married children to settle. However, with the declining availability of land and the rising land prices due to the operation of the supply and demand mechanism, the Amish community finds itself competing for land with the wider community.

This has two implications on vocational change. On one hand, the limited flexibility of the real estate sector pressures the Amish community to compete based on market terms. To do this, it has to develop other economic sectors to gain sufficient amount of money to purchase agricultural land. On the other hand, the scarcity of agricultural land meant that the Amish community needs vocational shift in response to the challenge to its economic self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, Foster (1984) and Lowery and Noble (2000) agreed that there is strong resistance to the change in vocation with efforts at maintaining social integration by keeping old traditions of maintaining an agriculture-based economy and educational seclusion. Kraybill described ' lunch pail threat' as one manifestation of resistance to vocational shifts.

The transmission of agricultural tradition depends on the interaction of fathers, who are the breadwinners through crop and livestock production, with their children, especially sons. If fathers shift to other vocations, the

traditional practice of fathers coming home for lunch would dissipate limiting transference of agriculture-based values. (cited in Kreps, Donnermeyer & Kreps, 1994, p. 708) Change is already happening, as members of the community attempt to explore other vocations as a means of survival (Ediger, 2005). With resistance to change, the present Amish community is experiencing the simultaneous push and pull of old traditions and emerging vocational alternatives.