

YOUNG FARMER AND HOMEMAKER SERIES

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YMW Circular 2



# *Taking Part In Your Community*

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Being a real part of a community is one of the joys of living. Knowing HOW to take part makes it more enjoyable. Also, the more you know about how to take part, the more effective your participation will become. The young adult and the young married couple, in particular, will want to take part in the life of their community as adults, since their childhood has passed. There is no magic formula to success, but some basic principles can be of help in making your life in a community more warm and friendly.

## *Why Participation Is Important*

Going along from day to day with "noses to the grindstone" is neither a happy nor a full life. It takes time and effort to make worthwhile friends and neighbors, but it is worth it. A friendly community is the kind of place to rear children and make a home. A forward-looking community provides good schools and churches. These things don't happen by themselves. It is people working together that makes a good community.

### **YOUR PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE:**

- You make friends and neighbors.
- You find that by taking part you BELONG.
- You have a place to be of service.
- When you take part, others can help you develop your talents.
- If trouble comes your way, there are those who can help you over the rough spots.
- You share in your own future as a citizen.
- Democracy depends on vital voluntary groups as much as it depends on formal government.

## Community Leadership

Leaders are made, **not** born. People who are leaders start out like anyone else. The day-to-day activities and training they receive help to prepare them for leadership. Active followership is a stepping stone to leadership. No one is always a leader. The president of the local P. T. A. may be the follower when the "boys" get together to go fishing. The bus driver may be the town leader in folk dancing. The plumber's helper may be the church choir director.

You become a leader by participating actively in a group. You become a leader by practicing an activity until you excel in it. You become a leader by your friendly attitude of helpfulness toward others in your group as all work toward common goals. You become a leader as you understand fully what the group is trying to accomplish and can speak understandingly to others. You become a leader if you can help the members of a group overcome their differences and join in working for the good of all.

Community leadership is both an opportunity and a duty. When the group turns to you for guidance—do not hold back. On the other hand, do not push too hard for positions for which you are not prepared. One of your big jobs as a group or community leader is to train others for positions of responsibility. This will lighten your own load and contribute to the continued success of the group. You never get ahead as fast as you do when you help others up the ladder, and the community is better for it.

## *Putting the Pieces Together*

No one can take your place in a community. You must do it yourself. If you want things done in your area, you must work with others to get the job accomplished. This requires positive—not negative—attitudes. It requires persistence and hard work.

In order to enjoy community life, you must go more than half way. As a newcomer or a young couple, approach the community and its groups with friendliness and patience. Choose your groups wisely and stick with them. When your interests change or the group does not meet your needs, withdraw gracefully and join another.

You are dealing with human beings, each of whom has different goals, attitudes, and interests. Tolerance and understanding pay big dividends. The way you act and take part will determine your own happiness

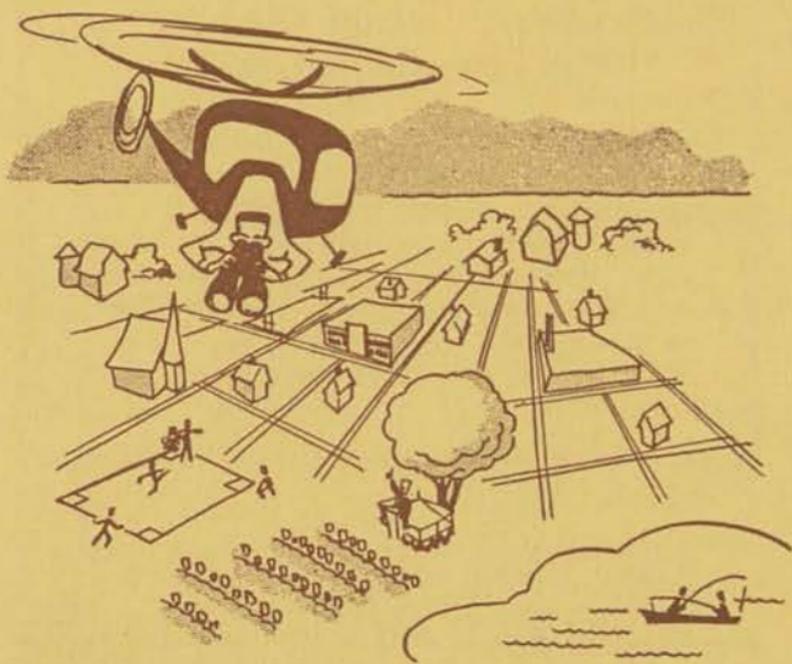
## Let's Look at the Community

In whatever community you find yourself these days there are people who have been there longer than you. They already belong. They have their ways of doing things. Your first job is to understand the "ways" of the local community and the backgrounds which make people as they are. Your likes and dislikes and your ways of doing things might not be the same as those of people already living in the community. Neither one may be "wrong," but they may be **different**. Look for and enjoy differences.

Every community has its farms, its stores, its schools, its churches, its political parties, its roads, its farm and business organizations. Every community also has its informal groupings and social clubs. There are families with strong ties. There are memories of good times together and of community battles which time has not healed.

Every community has its traditions. There are those to whom these traditions mean a great deal. Others living in the community want something new. Both elements find expression. Sometimes this leads to opposition, and at other times these forces are joined for community betterment.

Some communities change rapidly and others remain the same year after year. You can never know too much about a community and what "makes it tick." Living in a community is a flesh and blood affair and a real challenge. It makes life worth living even though there are sometimes irritations which require patience.



LET'S LOOK AT THE COMMUNITY

Your patterns of association with the many groups in your community will be different from those of your parents and many of your good friends or neighbors. This is natural. Also, your own interests in specific groups will change gradually from year to year. Too frequent switching from one group to another does not aid personal growth or make a strong community. However, don't hesitate to form new ties if the old ones don't meet your needs.

## *Types of Participation*

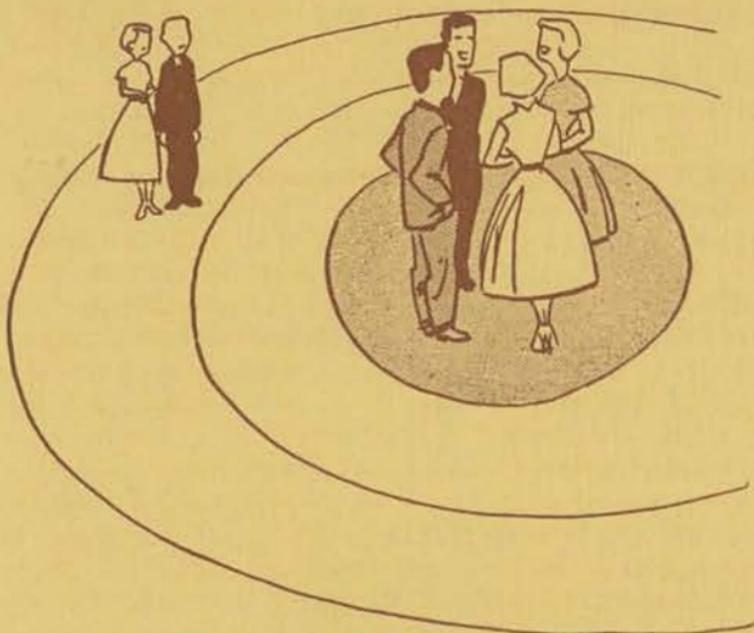
When you have found the groups with interests similar to your own, the next step is to take part. You will want to accept invitations to meet with these groups. You will want to express interest in the activities in which the groups are interested. Most groups have a trial period—either formal or informal. Seldom will you be "accepted" at once. This is good because it also gives you an opportunity to withdraw gracefully in case you are not satisfied with the group. Here are some typical stages through which people go in becoming an important group member:

- Period of observation—sounding out interests
- Invited guest or casual visitor
- Participation in group function as prospective member
- Invitation to join group
- Service in work of the group—committee assignments
- Election to office or steering committee
- Recognized group leader

## **Organizations and Institutions**

In modern American community life people do not participate directly in the community; they work with and through organizations. Certain long-established parts of the community have become "institutions" such as the church, the school, and the branches of local and county government. These cut across the workings of the entire community.

Most other organizations have a single purpose or at most several purposes. Special interest groups such as chambers of commerce, farm organizations, labor unions, sportsmen's clubs, folk dance groups, political parties—make up the large percentage of the formal associations which have definite responsibilities to the community.



**DON'T EXPECT TO BE TAKEN INTO THE INNER CIRCLES IMMEDIATELY**

## **The Young Family's Problem**

Every new family or young couple entering into the life of a community must recognize that they get worthwhile returns in proportion to the worthwhile efforts put in. It is definitely a two-way process. The apparent lack of immediate recognition is often due to the lag between the time the effort is put in and the returns.

You cannot expect to be taken into the "inner circles" immediately. Every group has its own standards and goals. As a new family or individual in a community, you are on trial. This is a natural procedure and should not be looked on as a deliberate "cold shoulder."

At the very time you are being "looked over" you have the opportunity also to "look over" the community's groups and their activities. This should not be a period of waiting for things to happen, however. The others in the community want to see how you take part, whether you can be trusted, whether you are friendly, whether you will accept responsibility and carry out an activity once started.

The community wants to know if you are too forward, too aggressive or too retiring and lacking in drive. How do you take sides on community issues? What are you for? What are you against? In your effort to please, don't be spineless, but be tolerant until you can be sure you have seen all sides of the issue or issues.

Full participation in the adult life of a community is a goal toward which every adult must work. It is a sign of being an adult. How well you succeed de-

pends largely on your sincere interest and "know how." It is a matter of human relations tempered with tact and good judgment.

## Common Interests—Key to Opportunity

You do not weave yourself into the whole fabric of community life at once—you do it a piece at a time. One of the first steps toward participation is in finding groups with common interests like your own. These groups may be formal organizations or informal visiting groups.

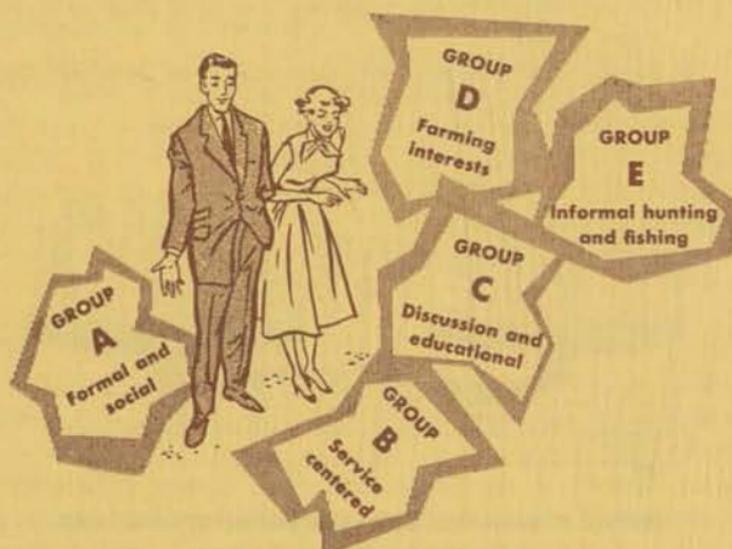
Look at yourself first. What interests do you have? What are your backgrounds? Start answering these questions in your own mind by checking your positions on the following scale.



### What Set of Interests and Backgrounds Do You Have?

Newcomer		Reared in community
Farm background		City background
Politically "conservative"		Politically "liberal"
Little education		Well educated
Financially well off		Present income low
Prefer "homemade" recreation		Like amusements that must be "paid for"
"Easy going"		Want to "get ahead"

It is very seldom that any one group will satisfy all of the different interests of an individual or young couple. For this reason it is necessary to seek out several groups which provide common interests in specific things.



A young couple that wants to help make the community a better place in which to live joins such groups. There they will find others with similar interests. Most of these groups want new members and "young blood." There you will find a friendly welcome if you are willing to take part in a constructive way.



#### **MOST ORGANIZATIONS WANT NEW MEMBERS**

Sometimes these groups get ingrown and self-satisfied. They lose sight of their importance or responsibilities in the community life. When this happens they will eventually die a lingering death or will be rejuvenated with new members and fresh ideas. In a democracy, new groups often are formed to meet the needs which established ones fail to satisfy. This leads to competition which is often a healthy thing. At least it is healthy up to a point where too many "splinter" groups make effective community action difficult.

Here are some formal organizations with local groups in most communities. There are always dozens of others and **you can take your pick:** Sportmen's Club, P. T. A., Republican Party, Democratic Party, Grange, Farm Bureau, Farmer's Union, Lions Club, Jaycees, and Society for the Promotion and Preservation of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America.

#### **Informal Groups**

Not all community life is centered in formal organizations. In every community there are dozens and sometimes hundreds of informal groups. There are "Thursday night" clubs, bridge clubs, birthday clubs, hiking clubs, book clubs, bowling teams—to mention **only a few.**

On an even more informal level there are visiting groups, golf partners, coffee party neighborhood groups, school chums, and just "old cronies" that habitually drop by the postoffice at a certain time of the day. Intertwined with all of these are family events and circles of relatives. Once one is a part of small community, it is often impossible to walk down the street without being stopped to talk about plans for an organization or a get-together.

## Choosing Wisely

Most rural communities are so highly organized with both formal organizations and informal groups that an active person must be careful or he won't have any time to be at home with his family. This is the challenge then—to strike a balance between home living and community participation. Every couple and every individual needs some of each.

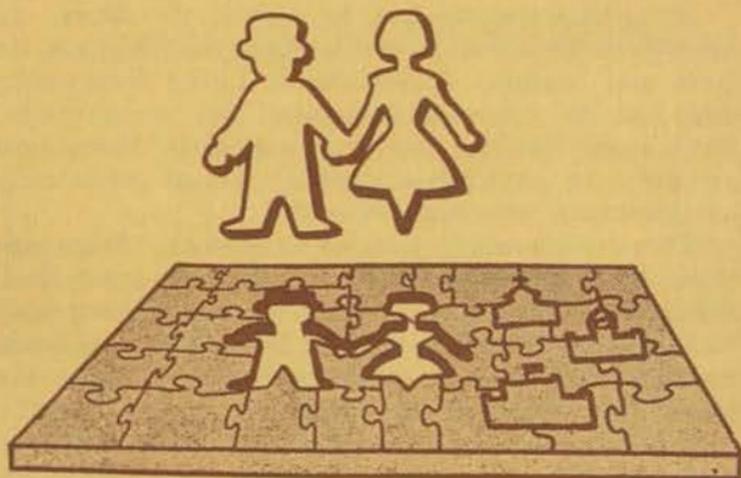
There are two extremes—the hermit who never goes anywhere and the confirmed gad-about who hardly stops long enough to sleep. To choose wisely, several things must be considered:

- Regard for the health of each family member is of first importance.
- A reasonable living must be earned by most families; by holding a job, running a farm, or managing a business.
- Family life should have a high priority. A married couple needs time together. Children need parents with whom they can discuss problems and have the experience of a happy home.
- Neighborliness makes for a happier environment for all members of the family.
- Citizen support is needed by groups and organizations that are seriously interested in community improvement.
- Government is as good as you and your neighbors make it.
- Leisure activities are necessary to refresh the body and mind.



**STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN HOME LIVING AND  
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

in the community. Your taking part will make your community a better place in which to live. Your pay will come from others when they say, "There go John and Mary. They are an active young couple interested in the community." Or when you get an invitation such as "Drop over to the house tomorrow evening—we want to talk over preliminary plans for some new road signs advertising our community." And you'll go—because you take pride in your community and you **belong!**



**NO ONE CAN TAKE YOUR PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY—  
YOU MUST DO IT YOURSELF**

### **CONSULT YOUR COUNTY EXTENSION AGENTS**

They will be glad to work with you on problems like those discussed in this brief circular. Visit them in the county Extension office or invite them to stop at your home or farm when in the vicinity. If you know of a few other couples in your community with similar interests, suggest that they, too, get in touch with your county Extension office.

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