Glenn Johnstone walked slowly through the gallery to Anthony Gray's office. Today Glenn didn't look at the many paintings and pieces of sculpture filling the Arts Association Co-op Gallery. Usually he reveled in discovering another nuance in a painting, or savoring again the delicate curves of a bronze statue. But today Glenn's thoughts were on the previous evening's board meeting and not on the beauty surrounding him.

Last night the Co-op Gallery board had met to discuss the crisis they were facing with their landlord. Their landlord was not an individual Glenn was accustomed to dealing with. Instead, the Gallery's landlord was the First Garden City Church or, more specifically, the Church's Board of Trustees. In this city of 250,000 people, the First Church claimed almost 3,000 people as its congregants and it owned several buildings in the downtown area as well as three small shopping centers around the city. Initially, Glenn and the other Gallery organizers had been delighted to lease space from another nonprofit organization since they had assumed that the Church might be more sympathetic to the difficulties of a fledgling organization like the Co-op Gallery.

"Apparently," Glenn thought as he paused in front of Anthony's door, "we were all very wrong when we assumed the Church would be supportive."

The idea for the Gallery had been the result of a brainstorming session organized by a local artist, Jeanne Bancroft. Jeanne had studied art at the local university and then gone to Paris and Tours where she learned the unusual art of gemmail, creating paintings using multilayers of glass. When Jeanne returned to Garden City, she was determined to make her living as an artist and to stay in her hometown in the house where she grew up. At first most of her sales were to galleries in Boston; eventually two small galleries in nearby towns took several of her pieces on consignment. But Jeanne was determined to find an outlet for her work and other artists' work here in Garden City.

Three years ago Jeanne approached Glenn and asked him to facilitate a brainstorming session she was putting together for all interested artists. She and Glenn had been classmates in high school, and Jeanne knew that Glenn's experiences in his family-owned car dealership had taught him the business skills she--and most artists--lacked. Her idea, as Glenn recalled, was to get several creative people in one room and come up with a variety of ideas about how to market their art. From this initial meeting, the idea of a co-operative artists' gallery evolved.

Caught up in the enthusiasm of the meeting, Glenn had agreed to serve as the chair of the new gallery's board. Moreover, he had taken the lead in securing donated services from a local attorney, a real estate broker, and a banker--all essential to forming a nonprofit corporation and finding space to house the venture. Finally, Glenn had helped the artists find six additional board members to oversee the gallery's startup and hire an executive director. Four of the original board members, plus Glenn, were still active; two members had quit after the first year and had been replaced by two new members. The original executive director, Anthony Gray, was still there and had proved to be an outstanding administrator who balanced empathy for artists' concerns with sound fiscal policies. Anthony had been especially effective in writing grant applications, and the Gallery had funding from several private...
foundations, including a three-year grant for operating expenses from El Lindo, a local foundation in Garden City.

As he looked around the gallery space, Glenn was amazed to see how many works of art were on display. The Co-op had started with the works of seven local artists; Anthony's report to the board last month listed twenty-two member artists and gross sales of $18,500-00. As Jeanne said when she saw Glenn at the grocery store last week, "Some of us are actually making enough money to live on from our sales through the Co-op!" And last night the board reviewed applications from two additional artists whose membership promised to broaden the kinds of work the Gallery displayed.

At the moment, however, Glenn was more concerned with whether the Gallery would survive, not with attracting and keeping a breadth of artistic talent. He sighed as he knocked and opened Anthony's door.

Anthony looked up expectantly as Glenn entered. The board president sat down wearily in the wingback chair across the desk from Anthony and said, "The board's decision depends on how I vote."

Anthony could see his own anguish reflected in Glenn's eyes. "You mean the board is split evenly on whether to comply with the Church's ultimatum? I was sure there would be greater support for artistic freedom than that," Anthony said with disgust.

"You've got to remember that these people have to work and live in this town, just like I do," Glenn explained. "Standing up for freedom of expression, especially sexual expression, can be difficult if it means losing customers and friends."

"I still don't believe this is happening to us," Anthony said. "If only I hadn't insisted on the Church making those repairs to the roof and the heating system."

Both men were silent as they reflected on the chain of events set in motion by Anthony asking the Church board to send a contractor to look at the Gallery's roof. The contractor, a member of First Church's congregation, had completed his inspection and reported back to the Church board. Their response was a curt letter to Anthony stating that they had no intention of making any repairs at the Gallery and that they would not renew the Gallery's lease when it expired next year. Stunned by this response, Anthony had called Glenn immediately and asked him to find out what had prompted the Church's reaction.

"It's Jeanne's gemmail," Glenn had said when he called Anthony back the next day. "The contractor saw her "Women in Love" series when he walked through the Gallery and told the Church board president that we were displaying obscene and perverted works of art. The president convened an emergency meeting of the board and they voted unanimously to send the letter you received."

"But they can't do that," Anthony had protested. "They have no right to censor the works we exhibit. They own the building, but they don't have the right to infringe on the occupants' freedom of expression."
"That's true," Glenn had agreed, "but they also don't have to renew your lease. And I'm afraid it's escalated beyond the threat to not renew the lease now. According to Joe Fraser, the Church board president, several angry congregation members are demanding that the lease be terminated immediately unless Jeanne's work is removed."

"But moving at this time would destroy the Gallery. We're just beginning to realize some success and much of it is due to this central downtown location where there are retail stores attracting so many customers seven days a week," Anthony said, "All the other spaces we considered had many fewer potential customers passing by and dropping in while shopping at nearby spots. We have to continue to build on the base we've established in this spot. Besides, retail rents have escalated in the last three years now that vacancy rates are so low in the city."

"I know, I know," Glenn sighed. "I'll see what I can do to work out a compromise."

"There's not going to be any compromise," Anthony insisted. "The Church is going to have to realize it is violating our lease and back down!"

Over the next few weeks, Glenn had talked to the Gallery's board members, to Jeanne, and to the other member artists. The board members had been shocked by the Church's reaction. Several had suggested approaching the minister and the board with strong objections about removing Jeanne's paintings in glass, while others stressed the survival of the Gallery at any cost. Jeanne and her fellow artists were adamant that they would not compromise their artistic principles and that they would never submit to censorship.

"Take the Church to court and sue for breach of contract," one artist suggested.

The Gallery board's first response to the Church was a demand that repairs be made in accordance with the terms of the lease. The Church's response escalated the intensity of the conflict between the two entities by demanding that the Gallery members immediately vacate the building since they were "...violating the spirit of the lease by showing decadent works of art." Finally, in frustration, Glenn had recommended to his board that they inform the Church that the Gallery would file a lawsuit for breaking the lease. The board had considered this recommendation last night, splitting evenly on whether to carry through on this option.

"So you have to cast the deciding vote, Glenn?" Anthony asked, bringing them back to the present.

"Yes," said Glenn, "but I learned something this morning that makes my decision even harder than it was last night." He stared out the window at the river winding through town until Anthony coughed and interrupted his reverie.

"What happened this morning?" Anthony prompted.

"I had a call from Sylvia Mitchell, editor of the Weekly Chronicle. She told me her advertising manager had just brought in a full-page ad from the First Church and that they wanted to run it indefinitely. In this ad, the Church urges all community members to boycott my business and all the
businesses owned by Gallery board members until we remove all works from the Gallery that they consider to be 'anti-family.' And she said if the Church is spending $1200.00 a week in the Chronicle, who knows what they'll do in the daily paper.

Anthony was silent. He knew that such a threat represented not only a potential financial loss for Glenn; it also represented severe embarrassment for his family who had owned the dealership for 60 years. Glenn's father, the son who took over the business when Glenn's grandfather died, was 78 years old and had been diagnosed with terminal cancer last month. Many of the other board members owned businesses in town and would suffer similar financial and emotional losses if the Church carried out its threat of a boycott.

"I have some more--potentially--bad news, Glenn," Anthony said finally. "The request for renewal of our El Lindo Foundation grant was due last week. Until yesterday we were pretty certain the grant for operating expenses would be renewed for another three years. But Jim Coakley, the foundation president, called yesterday and asked a lot of questions about this thing with the Church board. He said El Lindo would hold off making a decision about renewing our grant until we could tell them that we would be staying in this location for at least another three years."

Both men knew that without continued funding from El Lindo the Gallery would find it very difficult to pay operating expenses, and it certainly would not be able to afford the advertising or other promotional activities its marketing committee had recommended.

"What will you do, Glenn?" Anthony asked in a whisper. "We can't give in to the board's demands-that would be giving in to censorship."

"I've thought about it all last night and all this morning," Glenn said. "I'm going to try one more time to talk to the Church board members and see if we can lower the rhetoric. Maybe there's a solution that will satisfy all of us. Maybe we just haven't seen it yet."
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can the Gallery articulate its position so that the Church board will understand and, hopefully, respect its point of view?

2. What terms would you expect the Church board to propose, if they decide to modify their position?

3. If the meeting between Gallery and Church representatives fails to reach a solution, what action should Glenn take regarding removing the objectionable artwork versus losing the Gallery's lease?

4. Is it possible for a nonprofit to compromise on its mission? Please explain.