RESEARCH NOTES
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AN ANALYSIS OF CONGREGATIONAL PROGRAMS

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The nation's recent change in leadership has again focused attention on the role religious organizations play in our communities. Charitable Choice, or Section 104 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, authorized government to fund faith-based organizations engaged in providing social services. Policy-makers and analysts need data to evaluate the impact of both this legislation and the newly created Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. They also need baseline information on what congregations do currently before they can gauge whether or not charitable choice makes a difference.

The following analysis describes the program activities of a large sampling of Indianapolis congregations, and it correlates these with theological orientation, space availability, size of membership, and other factors. Our findings are based on data collected by The Polis Center between 1995 and 2000 as part of the Project on Religion and Urban Culture. Researchers surveyed 400 congregations in 17 urban and suburban neighborhoods of Indianapolis, observed worship services, and interviewed members and pastors of those churches. Our census grouped programs into six categories, worship services into four categories, and events into seven categories. For our analysis we collapsed these activities into two broader categories: religious programs and social outreach programs.

Findings. Nearly one-quarter of the programs that congregations engage in can be characterized as social outreach activity. Social outreach includes nursery, daycare, and preschool programs; political forums, rallies and crime watch meetings; enrichment programs (exercise and sports-based activities, and social programs for singles, youths and seniors); education programs; arts and cultural entertainment (music, dance and theatre classes and events); social services (blood drives, food and clothing pantries, financial assistance, counseling, and support group programs such as alcoholics, narcotics, and overeaters anonymous); scouting and tutoring programs aimed directly at youth; and various other activities, ranging from camps and radio shows to festivals, picnics, and block meetings.

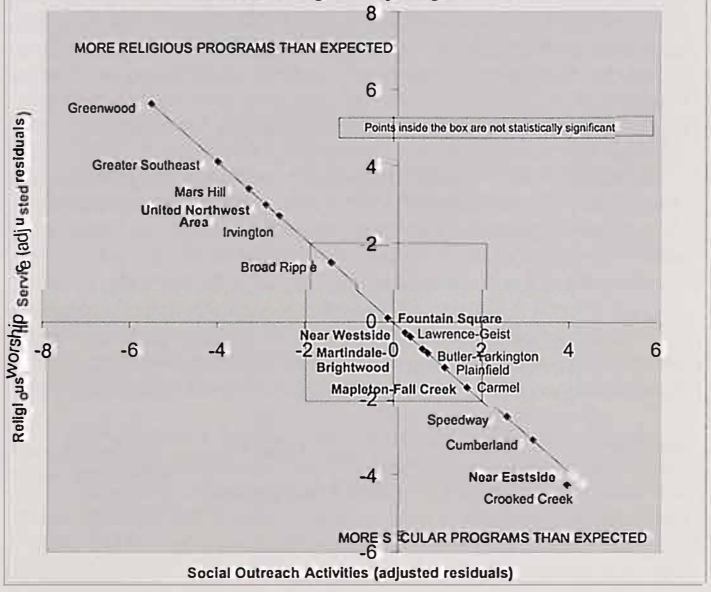
Three-quarters of all programs congregations offer are related to the practice of worship, or to administrative and other tasks that support worship activities (e.g., committee meetings, church dinners, Bible study, choir practice, and retreats). Table 1 reveals the dominance of religious or worship services among Indianapolis congregations.

Table 1. Number of social outreach activities and worship services

	Number of programs offered	Percent of church programming
Religious worship services	2083	76%
Social outreach activities	660	24%

This emphasis on religious programs did not vary significantly by church location. Whether a church is in the central city, inner suburb, or outer suburb, at least two-thirds of the programs offered are religious in nature. However, we discovered many more religious programs at churches in central city neighborhoods, and many more social outreach programs at churches in inner suburban neighborhoods, than we would expect if there were no relationship between type of program and location.[1] Nine specific neighborhoods were significantly different from the expected results. Three are central city neighborhoods (Mars Hill, Near Eastside, and UNWA); four are inner suburban neighborhoods (Crooked Creek, Greater Southeast, Irvington, and Speedway); and two are suburban neighborhoods (Cumberland and Greenwood). Figure 1 plots the degree of difference among all the neighborhoods for both worship services and social outreach activity. Those neighborhoods outside the box represent points that are, statistically, very different from what we would expect.

Figure 1. Religious Worship Services Relative to Social Outreach Programs by Neighborhood



The neighborhoods in the upper left (Greenwood, Greater Southeast, Mars Hill, United Northwest area, and, Irvington) have an unexpectedly greater number of religious programs than they would if these variables were independent. The opposite is true of the neighborhoods in the lower right corner. In Crooked Creek, the Near Eastside, Cumberland, and Speedway, we see fewer religious programs than we would expect without any dependent relationships between these two variables. Of the suburban neighborhoods, Greenwood has many more religious worship programs and Cumberland has fewer than we might expect. Looking at the inner suburban neighborhoods, Greater Southeast and Irvington have many more religious programs, while Crooked Creek and

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*We bring things into perspective*SM

Speedway have fewer religious programs. Of the central city neighborhoods Mars Hill and UNWA each have many more religious programs, and only the Near Eastside has fewer than we would expect. Three of the five neighborhoods—Greenwood, Greater Southeast, and Mars Hill—that have more religious worship programs than expected are located on the south side of Indianapolis.

Many of the churches on the south side have connections to Appalachian culture and to theologically conservative denominations, therefore, we also evaluated our data for the relationship between the type of programs offered and the denomination of a congregation. We examined six broad denominational categories. Table 2 makes clear that knowledge of the theological orientation of a congregation is a useful predictor of the type of program a church will offer. Mainline and non-Christian churches have many more social programs than we would expect, and evangelical and black Protestant churches have many more religious programs.[2] Though not shown in this table, we found that the pattern for mainline churches is maintained in all three geographic locations. However, the relationship disappears among the evangelical Protestant churches in the inner suburbs, and holds only for black Protestant churches in the central city.

Table 2. Type of program by denomination of church

		Count	% within denomination	Adjusted Residual
Evangelical Protestant	Religious programs	795	83%	6.4
	Social outreach programs	160	17%	-6.4
Black Protestant	Religious programs	321	84%	3.7
	Social outreach programs	63	16%	-3.7
Catholic	Religious programs	154	76%	.0
	Social outreach programs	48	24%	.0
Non-Christian	Religious programs	40	61%	-3.0
	Social outreach programs	26	39%	3.0
Other Christian	Religious programs	278	78%	1.0
	Social outreach programs	77	22%	-1.0
Mainline	Religious programs	453	63%	-9.6
	Social outreach programs	265	37%	9.6

To understand the relationship among outreach activity, denomination, and location, we reviewed the observation data to compare churches that had eight or more programs and churches with only one program. We examined all congregations with at least eight social outreach programs, and we chose a sample of five of the eighty-two congregations that had only one outreach program. Two areas emerged as most important regarding the number of programs that a congregation offers: capacity and general orientation.

Capacity, or the resources available within a congregation (financial, physical or human), appears to be related to the number of social programs that a congregation offers. In general, congregations with greater capacity provide a greater number of programs (Table 3). We can see from the grouped data for congregation size that as membership increases so does the frequency of social programs, the available facilities and square footage, and the number of volunteers, paid staff, and annual budget. We assumed that we would find a correlation between the amount of physical space a congregation has and the total number of programs offered, but were surprised to learn that there was no correlation. There was a correlation, however, between the number of square feet in a facility and the amount of space congregations made publicly available.[3]

The survey asked pastors to identify whether their church had any of the following amenities: a kitchen, recreation facilities, handicap accessibility, air conditioning, a school, playground equipment, indoor basketball courts, outdoor basketball courts, a gym, a pool, and outdoor playing fields. We were not surprised to find a positive correlation between the amenities a congregation has and the number of worship services and social outreach programs offered. To assess if there were denominational differences in the amount of space and number of programs offered we looked at the square footage data by denomination (see Table 4). Catholic churches have the largest amount of space, yet they are closest to the overall congregational average regarding the number of social outreach activities they offer. Mainline congregations, which have the next largest amount of space, offer the greatest number of social programs. Black Protestant churches, which have the smallest average square footage of all denominations, offer the same number of activities as other Christian congregations and offer slightly more outreach activities than evangelical Protestant churches, which generally have four times the space.

We are not certain why the amount of space does not correlate with the number of programs, especially since we found a correlation between the number of programs and other factors, including size of annual budget, number of amenities, and number of paid staff. We hypothesize that the relationship may be related to the availability of programs at surrounding and/or partnering institutions.

Table 3. Descriptive information about congregations based on size of membership

	Number of churches	Mean number of social programs[a]	Mean number of facilities[b]	Mean average square feet[c]	Mean number of volunteers[d]	Mean number of paid staff[e]	Average annual budget[g]
Very small (< 100 members)	60	1.9	3.0	7,318	14	1	$41,204
Small (101 - 200 members)	44	2.3	4.3	11,399	15	3	$96,450
Medium (201 - 500 members)	59	3.0	4.7	23,762	46	6	$157,777
Large (> 500 members)	63	3.5	5.9	41,276	111	12	$458,670
Total	226	2.7	4.6	17,773	49	6	$159,610

a. ANOVA (F = 10.623) is significant (p = .0005)
b. ANOVA (F = 19.099) is significant (p = .0005)
c. ANOVA (F = 1.145) is not significant
d. ANOVA (F = 3.489) is significant (p .017)
e. ANOVA (F = 27.737) is significant (p =.0005)
g. ANOVA (F = 44.285) is significant (p =.0005)

Table 4. Mean square feet of congregation with at least one program by denomination

SQFTNLOG

Denomination	Frequency of churches	Mean square feet of facility	Mean number of secular programs
Catholic	37	41,126 [a]	2.8
Mainline	6	26,886 [a]	4.0 [b]
Evangelical Protestant	9	16,466	2.0 [b]
Non-Christian	6	16,279	3.0
Other Christian	22	14,604	2.2 [b]
Black Protestant	41	3,948 [a]	2.2 [b]
Total	121	17,602	2.7

a. Black Protestant churches are significantly different from Catholic and Mainline churches with respect to average square footage of their facility.

b. Mainline churches are significantly different from evangelical Protestant, other Christian, and Black Protestant churches with regard to the average number of secular programs.

Were we to analyze congregational partnerships, we might be able to explain this finding.

There may be other, more influential factors that determine program activity beyond the physical facilities. A church may have a large physical capacity, for instance, yet be unwilling to engage its surrounding community. At one church we examined, the pastor indicated that non-members were not allowed use of the building.

Human capital, especially clergy leadership, is another factor that may be important to the provision of social outreach programs. In churches offering eight or more social programs clergy tend to be well-respected in their community or well-liked by the congregation. This enables them to use their position to encourage members to act, thereby maximizing the service potential of the church. In churches offering only one social program, observation data reveals that human capital may somehow be less focused, for reasons such as tension in the church and low congregational morale. In cases of tension, there may be a level of disinvestment in the activities of the church. In one church, we observed not only a psychological disinvestment but also an actual reduction in membership size, which may have inhibited the congregation's ability to provide social programs. The size of a congregation may also be an important factor in a church's ability, or desire, to provide social programming. This is demonstrated most directly in the positive correlation between the number of members at a given church and the number of social programs that the church provides.[4]

The size of the paid staff also seems to influence of the level of programming activity. The number of worship programs and the number of social outreach activities each correlate most strongly with the total annual budget and the number of paid staff (see Table 5). The correlation between type of program activity and the other factors we reviewed differ in a way that suggests that worship activities are the responsibility of full-time staff and that social outreach activities are supported mostly through the efforts of part-time staff. The number of social outreach programs offered correlates more strongly with the number of part-time paid staff than with full-time paid staff. It also correlates with the amount spent in social services. Worship services correlate with the full-time paid staff, but not part-time staff; they correlate as well with the annual budget, but not with the amount spent on social services. From this we conclude that outreach is secondary to worship.

General Orientation: Interplay of theology and community relationship. A congregation's general orientation, as defined by both its theological outlook and community involvement, may play a role in the number of social outreach programs it offers. This is most apparent in the relationship we found between denomination and the number of social programs offered. The highest proportion of worship programs are found in theologically conservative churches, followed by mainline Protestant, black Protestant, other Christian, Catholic, and finally, non-Christian congregations. When we look at the data for social outreach activity, we find that mainline churches have the most programs, followed by theologically conservative churches, other Christians, black Protestants, Catholics, and non-Christians.

One approach to understanding the relationship between denominations and worship and social outreach activities is to look at the ratio between these two types of program activities. The higher the values of the ratio, the greater the emphasis on worship and spiritual activities as opposed to community or secular engagement. The balance between worship services and outreach activities is tipped in favor of worship activity for black Protestants and Catholics. For every outreach activity these groups generally have four worship activities (Table 6). Mainline churches and non-Christian congregations are each more likely to engage in social outreach programming than one would expect if there were no relationship between denomination and type of programming. This is evident in the lower ratio values that suggest a roughly two-to-one ratio of worship to social outreach programming for these groups.

Table 5. Correlations for Indianapolis churches with one or more secular outreach programs

		Number of worship activities	Number of secular outreach activities	Number of full-time paid staff	Number of part-time paid staff	Annual Budget	Amount spent on social services
Number of worship activities	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.152*	.230**	.091	.322**	.145
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.022	.001	.218	.000	.162
	N		227	196	184	155	95
Number of secular outreach activities	Pearson Correlation		1.000	.269**	.325**	.323**	.239*
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.000	.018
	N			200	189	157	98
Number of full-time paid staff	Pearson Correlation			1.000	.421**	.595**	.470**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000	.000	.000
	N				185	152	96
Number of part-time paid staff	Pearson Correlation				1.000	.424**	.195
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.000	.059
	N					149	94
Annual budget	Pearson Correlation					1.000	.447**
	Sig. (2-tailed)						.000
	N						94
Amount spent on social services	Pearson Correlation						1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)						

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Congregations offering only a single social outreach program tend to have a more conservative theology and worship style. Sermon and Bible study topics in these churches focus more often on issues of personal morality and individual salvation. References in these sermons and studies include the deceit of the Antichrist, the value of speaking in tongues, the dangers of alcohol and non-Christian music, and the importance of salvation through Christ. This focus may influence the way in which these congregations define their role in the larger community. Congregations in this subset understand their primary focus to be spiritual salvation and see service provision as important mostly to the extent that it serves spiritual goals.

Worship programs by denomination

Evangelical Protestant	38%
Mainline	22%
Black-Protestant	16%
Other Christian	14%
Catholic	7%
Non-Christian	3%

Social outreach programs by denomination

Mainline	41%
Evangelical Protestant	25%
Other Christian	13%
Black Protestant	10%
Catholic	7%
Non-Christian	5%

Congregations offering eight or more social programs tend to fall on the other end of the theological spectrum. Sermons and Bible studies in these churches use a spiritual lens to focus on larger social issues such as racism or violence in schools. In these congregations, spiritual issues take on an outward-directed tone of working to understand the place for one's faith in the larger world. Members of congregations in this group are more likely to express an awareness of the needs and trends in their surrounding community. They see social service outreach as a requisite Christian activity as opposed to a means to achieve personal salvation. They stand in contrast to members in congregations offering only one outreach program, who may believe themselves to be, as one pastor expressed it, "in the world but not of it." The latter occasionally make note of the community but do not reference it in the context of worship or in the social interactions we observed. In these churches there is also a sense of separation from community based on the increased distance members live from their church, visual barriers such as fences around playgrounds and locked church doors, or even feelings of psychological separateness and isolation from nearby churches. Finally, in the case of churches with a single social outreach program, the resources they make available through activities, such a food or clothing pantry, are generally aimed at members instead of the larger non-church community.

TABLE 6. Mean ratio of worship to secular programs

Denomination	Number of churches	Ratio: worship to secular programs
Black Protestant	27	4.2
Catholic	16	4.2
Evangelical Protestant	16	3.8
Other Christian	38	3.1
Mainline	68	1.9
Non-Christian	8	1.8
Total	227	3.1

Conclusions. While it was our goal to present general findings regarding congregations and their program activity, we hope this analysis also points out distinguishing characteristics of congregations that are—or are not—engaged with their community. We are aware that as churches decide whether to develop new programs, particularly in response to opportunities presented by Charitable Choice, they may want to understand their own dynamics and resources. While this analysis does not evaluate the success of any of these programs, it does suggest that facilities, size, staff, theology, and community awareness are all factors that contribute to, shape, or inhibit the activities of a congregation.

Religious congregations first and foremost provide worship services. The more fundamentalist or theologically conservative a congregation, the greater the number of worship programs a church offers. The more theologically liberal the greater the number of social service outreach programs the congregation offers. While theologically liberal churches have proportionally more social outreach than theologically conservative ones, they still spend two-thirds of their efforts in the pursuit of spiritual growth and development. Given that churches focus primarily on worship and related activities, it is essential to take into account not only a congregation's capacity but its theological outlook and level of community engagement when reviewing social outreach activity.

NOTES

[1] Expected values are based on a technical feature of formal statistical analysis. When we cross-tabulate our data, the marginal totals are used to determine an expected value (number of items) that will fall in each cell, assuming there is no relationship between the variables. When the actual values for any cell (e.g., the number of worship programs in the central city or the number of worship programs in the outer suburbs) differ far enough from that expected value, we can argue, statistically, that there is a relationship between the two variables, and that by knowing something about one, we can predict something about the other.

[2] Residuals plus or minus 2 indicate a significant relationship between variables and the direction of the difference from what is expected is indicated by the sign.

[3] The correlation was 0.486 and the significance was p=0.0005

[4] The correlation between the number of members and the number secular programs churches provide is 0.315 (p=.01).

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Photos by Rick Baughn

ROUNDTABLE

Recently, Research Notes hosted a roundtable discussion at The Polis Center. Participants had been provided beforehand with the text of this issue of RN, and were invited to respond to the issues raised in the paper. Dan Duncan is executive director of the United Way/Community Service Council of Central Indiana. The Rev. Philip James is pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Indianapolis. Sheila Kennedy is professor of law and public policy at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at IUPUI. Stephanie Lowe-Sagebiel is congregation coordinator with the Coalition for Homeless Intervention and Prevention (CHIP). Dan Shepley is the director of CHIP. Dawn Parks and Susie Quern, researchers with the Project on Religion and Urban Culture at The Polis Center, co-authored the paper under discussion. Kevin Armstrong is senior public teacher at The Polis Center. The following is an edited version of their discussion, which was moderated by Armstrong.

ARMSTRONG: Congregations have re-emerged at the center of attention, now that government proposes using congregations as social services providers. Are we talking about a new phenomenon, or are we simply revisiting some place we have already been?

DUNCAN: Are we just repeating our history? That is clearly true. You go back to the poor laws, to the history of welfare in this country as well as in Europe, and the churches and religious institutions have played a variety of roles. At the same time, we are searching for that magic solution. As a friend of mine said once, for every complex problem there is a simple solution that won't work. But the human service system has not had good results. There are still babies having babies, people taking drugs, child abuse, and domestic violence. These are critical issues in this country, and we are still looking for solutions.

LOWE-SAGEBIEL: The new twist is that partnerships are being developed between faith-based organizations and congregations and social service providers. In our Congregations as Partners Project, CHIP is working with congregations on transitional housing programs, and on a homelessness prevention program.

JAMES: I think we are repeating what has been done before because social services have not worked to the degree that people had hoped. If you can change a person's heart, then you can change their outlook on life and their desire to help themselves do better. That is the one element that social services has not provided—probably could not provide. When you start dealing with core problems, then you are getting into ministry. A faith-based provider can probe a little deeper than a human services provider would be willing to go.

ARMSTRONG: Dawn and Susie's essay says that worship is the primary focus and motivation of churches. If so, do human service activities run a close or distant second to a congregation's primary objectives? What has been your experience?

SHEPLEY: Churches can be primarily places of worship, but still get involved in social ministry. There has been a history of congregations being able to balance those. The fear now is that the balance is going to be tipped—that there is going to be pressure on congregations to get involved in areas where they don't have the capacity to do well. But I don't think that having a small social service program necessarily dilutes the role of a congregation as a place of worship.

KENNEDY: Even if the concerns that some of us have about constitutionality are resolved, there is still the situation that was illustrated rather well by the paper. There are simply not the resources in the faith community that will enable it to add dramatically to the benefits and programs we are talking about. This whole initiative has been built on a lot of assumptions, none of which have been validated by data. Certainly the paper we are discussing today casts doubt on the assumption that there is a certain level of capacity in congregations.

ARMSTRONG: Let's talk about those capacities for a moment. Dawn and Susie suggest that factors of physical plant, finances, human resources, leadership, and theology contribute to a congregation's participation in social outreach programs. What is your experience? How would you rank those factors in importance?

DUNCAN: As with nonprofits, there has to be a commitment on the part of the leadership. Those that are doing the best work are focusing on the causes and not just offering Band-Aids.

KENNEDY: Doing business with the government involves compliance costs. Sophisticated resources are required even to engage in the kind of partnerships that are being suggested here, over and beyond the capacity to deliver the services themselves. And I would add: to the extent that a faith-based service can be effective, it is because of the faith, and that is precisely what cannot occur under the First Amendment, at least not with government money. So it takes a fairly sophisticated understanding by the participating faith organization of what can and cannot be done constitutionally, and fiscally.

DUNCAN: If government forces money on churches, or if churches go after the money and then figure out what to do with it—that is not going to work. Resources are not going to make the difference between success or not. The mistake for government would be to think that this is going to be a quick solution. "We'll just give all this money to churches, and they'll automatically do stuff." I don't believe that is the case.

ARMSTRONG: Some would say that the willingness of a congregation to engage in social outreach programs is absolutely linked to the leadership. What do congregations and human service providers need to know about congregational inclinations and leadership?

SHEPLEY: A minister or a lay leader can say, "This seems like a great idea." But if the program is going to work, there has to be commitment on the part of the people who are running the program. The obvious danger is that people get burnt out. They have great intentions, and then find out that they haven't solved the problems overnight of the families they are working with. It isn't as warm and fuzzy as they thought it would be, and they don't want to do it anymore. People have to go into this clear-eyed, with a commitment to the learning process both for themselves and for the people they are trying to help.

JAMES: I believe that the theological foundation, the worship, and the whole dynamic of what church should be moves the spirit of people to get involved. There should be a rotation of volunteers. The other thing is to recognize that there are human services organizations out there that are doing parts of this, and you can connect people with these groups. But I think the theological foundation, the bible study, the preaching, should lift up the fact that we need to reach out beyond ourselves and do what we can to help others.

KENNEDY: Social service provision is this huge patchwork where this group does job training, and this group does child care. Nonprofit organizations also vary dramatically in the resources they have, in their leadership, and their mission. Learning how to negotiate that crazy quilt of services, and adding value to the whole process—to me, that is a critical element of leadership.

PARKS: If you want to keep the continuity in a program, sometimes you have to create a funding stream. What happens when you incorporate the funding base into the mission? In other words, what happens to the dynamic when people get paid? Does the ministry message get lost, now that people may be looking to government as a funding solution? I have a clear sense that the mission changes as a result of obtaining that additional funding. And I don't think that people within congregations understood yet that the ministry may get lost in meeting some of those external needs.

JAMES: I think that's the greatest fear. The government cut funding to a feeding program because of the issue of church and state, and that program had to cut back. The church has to deal with whether it can do ministry—do that which deals with the heart—while getting funds from the government. That is where the challenge is right now, and why the critics are concerned, because those funds may inevitably change the ministry focus.

LOWE-SAGEBIEL: Each congregation has its own culture. We've seen this in our Congregations as Partners Project. One program from the beginning stated, "This is a ministry, this is a faith-based program," and never seemed to lose sight of that. Another program didn't really want to talk about spirituality and religious activity, even though churches were very much involved in the program. That was a question I had: "Okay, if this is a faith-based program; why aren't there a lot of faith-based things happening here?" Now I think it was just a question of the culture, because after about a year and a half in the program, we are starting to see more spiritual activity. Those partnerships are very personal and individual.

KENNEDY: I would like to ask a question: what are we talking about when we talk about faith-based providers? For a hundred years, Catholic Charities, Jewish Welfare Federation, Lutheran Social Services—I mean, we've got faith-based organizations that have done yeoman's service. In 1994, Catholic Charities' budget was two billion dollars—BILLION—and 70 percent came from the government. So what is Bush talking about when he talks about extending the role of faith-based providers? Other than the provision of Charitable Choice that allows employment discrimination, what's new?

ARMSTRONG: Let me address a question to the folks who are involved in social service provision. For your organization, what makes for an effective faith-based partner?

SHEPLEY: When we got interested in fostering partnerships between homeless service providers and congregations, we did not intend for congregations to become the administrative lead—we didn't want them to deal with the paperwork and all the government regulations. We asked them, "What can you bring that's different?" And the answer was, "We can provide a caring, supportive network. We can relate to people on a human level in a way that one case manager with 40 families cannot do. We can also mobilize the community in terms of one-time or short-term volunteerism." We have a transitional housing facility that would have taken a year for us to do. The church basically said, "let's go," and it was done in three months.

DUNCAN: As a funder, we would look at the same things in faith-based partners as we would in a nonprofit agency in partnering. And that, in today's world, means focusing on results and outcomes. I worked with a number of faith-based organizations where charity with no questions asked is all they want to do; no requirement that the client look for a job, or connect with other agencies. There is certainly a role for that, but we would look for partners who understand long-term issues and who are focusing on outcomes. Accountability would be a key piece.

ARMSTRONG: So faith motivations are secondary—the outcomes are critical, and the connections with others. Phil, how does that compare with your understanding of what makes for good ministry, or good human service provision? Does that seem compatible?

JAMES: There are churches that are not set up to handle paperwork, but that are willing to provide the human resource. I think some great ministry can be accomplished in partnership with an agency. If it fits, I would go with it.

DUNCAN: I think President Bush's strategy will lead into the same situation that many social service agencies are in—it's about the money, and keeping folks employed. Churches will become employment agencies, rather than focusing on results and outcomes.

SHEPLEY: The number one question for secular service providers is how to get clients motivated. Because of the outcomes—based emphasis, the secular agencies will often screen out people who they don't think are motivated. If anything comes out of the faith-based emphasis, it might be to learn about building a caring, supportive network around people, and addressing them with respect and trust.

JAMES: Whatever you do, you go at it with the concept that you're going to work with the whole person. I think there is a way to deal with the whole person from a faith-based vantage without necessarily talking about faith, if that makes sense—it's kind of risky to say that. I don't know whether a faith-based provider would move toward becoming just a job, or an employment agency. They wouldn't feel good about themselves if they found they were doing that.

KENNEDY: A fundamental issue is the utterly fragmented and inadequately funded social service network in general. I am one of those middle-class people who never encountered the social service network. But I have a son who is ill, and can no longer work. Thus far, he has not gotten Medicaid; he has not gotten Social Security Disability. It took his brother who is a lawyer, his mother who is a lawyer, and a friend who was head of the Coalition for Human Services sitting down in my kitchen to just make out his paperwork.

LOWE-SAGEBIEL: We talk about congregations in general terms, but we are really talking about the people in the congregations who are building personal relationships with the people who are coming in for services. What we are finding in our projects is that more has to be done in terms of training, in developing support systems for volunteers. You have to ask, what are your motivations for wanting to be a volunteer? What are the expectations you have in terms of getting into a relationship like this? If we're not careful, a lot of well-meaning people will be discouraged and turned off, and it's going to go downhill very fast.

SHEPLEY: We have to be careful about managing expectations.

Kennedy: I'm really hoping that—as more people who haven't encountered the system do so—there will be a public outcry for systemic change.

DUNCAN: Systemic change relates to jobs. Are there enough jobs, are we paying adequate wages, are we providing the training so folks can earn enough money? The key to people being successful is having hope and believe in themselves. And another issue: this country has put a lot of people in jail. If we don't figure out how to welcome these people back into our neighborhoods, back into jobs and housing, the cycle is going to get worse.

ARMSTRONG: I want to address the distinction between a partnership and a program, which Dawn and Susie have hinted at in this essay. What are the differences between a congregational program and a partnership?

SHEPLEY: I'm not sure there is a real clear demarcation line. What we have tried to do is promote the idea that congregations do not have to do it all. That is why we focus on partnership.

PARKS: My sense is that programs take the lead, and a partnership is a shared responsibility. It is not the burden of a single organization to address the large systemic problem, but maybe by recognizing a piece of it, in partnership with others, you're moving in the direction of making a difference. I want to raise another question. Considering the legislative barriers and the rule-making barriers to congregational participation, do we raise questions for agencies? You know, since we're in partnership with a congregation, can we do this or that with these federal funds, or can we not? Are we going to open a whole new can of worms?

KENNEDY: I just wrote a paper raising exactly that question. What we've had in many cases is a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. We have situations where faith-based organizations have partnered with social service providers in ways that would not withstand the bright light of constitutional scrutiny. The pragmatic solution is to not talk about it. Suddenly, by raising this issue, we may well upset a lot of well-established pragmatic operations that probably aren't constitutional, and aren't hurting anybody.

ARMSTRONG: If you were to design a process that reviews congregational programming, what would you want folks to know? How would you design that review in such a way that you could say: this will help us understand whether these programs and partnerships are effective?

SHEPLEY: We would want to know: are you utilizing your resources in the most effective way, or are you duplicating existing services in an ineffective way? Do you have a well-designed approach to helping people? Do you really understand what you're getting involved in? Do you understand the need for coordination with others, and the concept of best practices? I think sometimes among the faith-based community there is a sense of: "We were called to do this, and that is all we need to say."

DUNCAN: I would look for the ability to create a learning organization, to really make sure that they have more than the hammer of their faith; that they have a wide variety of tools—either provided by themselves, or in partnership with other organizations. These problems are very complex. A stronger engagement by the faith community is going to be wonderful, but it is going to take faith communities, social service communities, business communities, families, neighborhoods, and government to really turn it around.

LOWE-SAGEBIEL: An interesting challenge for funders now is that they are going to have to evaluate faith-based partnerships and programs in a more creative way. One of the things that we're struggling with is how can we begin as funders to capture what is really happening in the program without using typical social service measurements.

DUNCAN: Are you trying to have contributing members of society, or self-sufficient families, or self-sufficient individuals? If that is the ultimate outcome, then it's measured the same way, whether the program is faith-based or not. The issue is what other outcomes can we look at that may be different, and begin to evaluate that.

KENNEDY: I have a grant from the Ford Foundation, pursuant to which I am trying to answer some of those questions. In the debate that surrounded the passage of Charitable choice, the supporters said, "Everyone knows that faith-based organizations are more effective." Well, I've got news for you. Nobody knows that because there are no studies, and it is going to be incredibly difficult to evaluate. There may well be internal changes in a person, but there's no way to measure that kind of thing. You have to look at outcomes: did this person keep a job for X amount of time? Did this person stay off drugs for X amount of time?

SHEPLEY: One of the things we know from best practices is that a lot depends on trusting relationships, respect, building a support network. So when you are evaluating faith-based providers, those things have to be looked at.

KENNEDY: That is why I say we're only doing some very gross evaluations because it's virtually impossible to measure those things. It may be the distinction is between faith-based social services, which come out of respect for the individuality and the humanity of the person being served, and faith-infused social services, which may or may not have that. I just think that the whole issue is not being explored with nuance.

QUERN: Sheila's last comment was something we dealt with in the qualitative data, and it was really borne out by some of our findings. The churches we looked at with eight or more social services programs tended to have the perspective that the service came out of a Christian obligation or was faith-in-action. The churches offering fewer programs tended to have this notion that social service was assistance to spiritual salvation.

JAMES: That a person may come to express faith in Christ is almost a by-product of our providing social services. When we're feeding the hungry, I might say, "Let's play some Christian music in the background," or we might put a brochure into their groceries. That is just about the extent of it. I feel that we need to do something along those lines, to distinguish us from a human service organization. If it happens, we celebrate. If not, we can still celebrate that we have helped, and have created an atmosphere where a person can make some decision as to where they are in their moral and ethical development.

PARKS: Could you build an outcome measure that says, the outcome is not simply the population in need that's served, but the population that's doing the serving—in other words, you're measuring an outcome for the servers. So that the needs of the servers become a part of the problem. Is that possible?

LOWE-SAGEBIEL: That is why I said that the lost component in all of this is the people in congregations who are going to be doing the work. There is such a profound disconnect. We have to look at this in very creative ways. This isn't just social services; it isn't just churches doing their thing. What's new about it may be in the way that we're viewing it—when it's something that has been happening for years.

SHEPLEY: I don't think we've evaluated ourselves to know whether we have the capacity to really marshal and mobilize these resources. Churches have been very active in leading the way on race relations and civil rights. Are we ready to engage them as partners in economic issues—in social change? To me, that seems to have a greater potential and holds a much more exciting promise.

ARMSTRONG: Last question: what is the most important thing that public policy makers need to know about congregational involvement in providing social services?

KENNEDY: It's a lot more complicated than they think.

JAMES: Historically, the church has dealt in motivating behavioral change. So I think there are great possibilities in partnering to a greater extent than we have in the past.

ARMSTRONG: Thank you all.

RESEARCH NOTES
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