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SOCIAL SERVICES IN FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: *Pittsburgh Congregations and the Services They Provide*

Is there more than anecdotal evidence about the human and social services that congregations and faith-based agencies offer? What is the impact of these services upon communities and individuals? And in what ways are Pittsburgh's congregations contributing to the social welfare of those in need within the metropolitan area?

The Forbes Funds commissioned Buchanan Ingersoll PC to survey Allegheny County's congregations and related faith-based agencies to determine what level of services they are already providing to families and individuals. Working in cooperation with Dr. Carol DeVita at the Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy, and Dr. Hide Yamatani at the University of Pittsburgh, attorneys Gregg Behr and Melanie DiPietro designed a 4-page survey consisting of 34 questions. This survey was distributed, in November 2001, and again in January 2002, to 1133 congregations within Allegheny County. The list of congregations to which surveys were sent was obtained from American Church Lists, Inc., then cross-referenced against local telephone and denominational directories. Two hundred seventy-six unique congregations responded, yielding a response rate of 24.4%. This response rate compares favorably with other congregational surveys, as reflected by the Urban Institute's yield of 24.2% for a similar survey conducted in Washington, DC.

It must be emphasized that what follows is not an analysis of the efficacy of faith-based programs in Allegheny County, but rather a census-like survey about how congregations are contributing to Pittsburgh's social service infrastructure. Indeed, the basic premise of this report is to understand "What's going on?"

The brief answer to that question, at least in descriptive terms, is that the services supported by Pittsburgh's congregations generally mimic those provided by congregations in other urban areas.

NATIONALLY: CONGREGATIONS AND RELATED FAITH-BASED AGENCIES

Public attention to congregations and faith-based agencies as problem-solvers is not a "new thing." What is new is that leadership within the highest levels of state and federal government particularly encourages public contracting with faith-based service providers.

Policymakers turned their attention to faith-based agencies as providers of social services with the passage of what has come to be known as "charitable choice," one component of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act.¹ Charitable choice has since been expanded to include a range of federal programs, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (1996); Welfare-to-Work formula grants (1997); Community Services Block Grants (1998); and drug abuse treatment programs (2000).

Shortly after assuming office, President George W. Bush established the Office of Faith-Based and Communities Initiatives, along with five similar offices in the Departments of Education, Justice, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Housing and Urban Development.² These five departments have been tasked by the administration to contract with faith-based agencies nationwide.

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Certainly, this is already occurring at the state level. According to a study published by the Government Accounting Office, as of January 2002, “at least 19 states have contracted with faith-based organizations to provide some welfare-related services.”³

Researchers, too, have begun to document the social service programs of congregations and faith-based organizations. While one national survey has identified the percentage of congregations that participate in or support some type of social service program to be as low as 58%, the great majority of congregational surveys — typically conducted in urban areas — demonstrate that between 85% and nearly 100% of congregations provide some type of service.⁴ That finding is evident in Pittsburgh.

LOCALLY: CONGREGATIONS AND RELATED FAITH-BASED AGENCIES IN PITTSBURGH

Two hundred seventy-six congregations responded to the survey that was distributed by Buchanan Ingersoll PC to the 1133 identified congregations in Allegheny County. Of the respondent congregations, 153 are located within the city’s limits. Most of the responding congregations are well-established. Among all respondents, only 13% have operated for less than 25 years and 64% have operated for 75 years or more. Nineteen denominations are represented among the respondents, but 5 denominations account for 73% of the respondents: Presbyterian, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, and Baptist. Further, many of the congregations are small. Twenty-five percent of the respondents have more than 500 members, but nearly 50% have less than 200.

Significantly, 88% of the responding congregations operate at least one social service program. This percentage compares exactly with the percentage documented among 1376 congregations in Philadelphia.⁵ In Pittsburgh, 67% charge no fees for the services they provide. This is due, in part, to the small size of the programs. Reflecting their small size and limited resources, approximately half of the responding congregations report that they serve less than 100 people. Further, 83% operate programs in only one delivery site.

With respect to capacity, 52% of the respondents report having facilities to accommodate additional clients. This is significant, as nearly 100% anticipate serving at least as many people this year as they did last year. That said, 57% do not anticipate having enough staff to serve additional clients, and 67% do not expect to be able raise more funds to serve additional clients. The participation of volunteers is consequently critical for operating, and continuing to operate, such programs. It is thus not surprising that 68% of the respondents report relying upon 20 or more volunteers.

With respect to those served by congregations, 68% offer social services to anyone in need. Only 13% limit services to members only, and 19% provide services to those who meet certain requirements. Ninety-seven percent report that they serve some low-income families and individuals. For nearly a quarter of the respondents, virtually all of their clients are regarded as low-income families and individuals (primarily women and children), and more than half of the respondents, have low-income case loads exceeding 70 percent of their clients. Approximately 55% of the respondents turn away or refer clients because they do not provide requested services, but only 16% turn away or refer clients because they are operating at full capacity.

Among the services provided by congregations, most services can be categorized as emergency care (food, cash, clothing, counseling) or nurturing activities (mentoring, parenting support, parenting education). For the most part, congregations and related faith-based agencies do not currently provide complex or professional social services, such as job training, respite care, or substance abuse treatment.

Types of Social Services Provided by Congregations and Related Faith-Based Agencies in Pittsburgh

Service	Percentage of Congregations Providing Service	Service	Percentage of Congregations Providing Service
After-School Care	17%	Mental Health Services	5%
Child Care	16%	Mentoring/ Tutoring	20%
Child Welfare	3%	Parenting Education	24%
Clothing	32%	Parenting Support	24%
Counseling	51%	Respite Care	4%
Developmental Disabilities	3%	Senior Services	19%
Emergency Financial Assistance	50%	Soup Kitchen	7%
Emergency Food	58%	Substance Abuse Treatment	6%
Foster Care	2%	Transitional Housing	5%
Legal Services	2%	Vocational/ Job Training	2%
Medical Services	3%	No Services	12%

In comparison to the services offered by congregations elsewhere, the types of services provided in Pittsburgh are not remarkably different.

Percentage of Congregations Providing Social Services by Type of Service

	Pittsburgh Study	Philadelphia Study ⁶	National Study ⁷	Washington, DC Study ⁸
Cash assistance	50%	---	65%	52%
Food pantry/ emergency food	58%	47%	42%	59%
Soup kitchen	7%	24%	---	8%
Substance abuse treatment and prevention	6%	14%	12%	6%

Approximately 50% of the respondents support their social service programs with budgets amounting to less than \$20,000, and indeed, approximately one-third have operated such programs in recent years despite deficits. Most programs are small. And most respondents receive funding support for their social service programs from, not surprisingly, their congregations (91%), individual donors (38%), and fees (21%). Little funding has been available, or sought, from corporations, foundations and government. For those that have received funding from these sources, such funding has typically accounted for less than 10% of program expenses. That said, 36% of respondents

expressed interest in applying for funding from government sources. And, in a national survey of 1236 religious clergy, 36% also answered that their congregations would apply for government money to support human services if such money were available.⁹

Congregations as Recipients of Funding for Programs and Services by Source

	Philadelphia Study ¹⁰	Pittsburgh Study
Corporations	7%	6%
Denomination	8%	18%
Foundations	13%	13%
Government	8%	10%

NEXT STEPS

The Forbes Funds is embarking upon a three-year effort to assess the capacity of Pittsburgh’s faith-based social services and to determine what, if any, capacity building strategies are appropriate to assist these organizations in delivering high quality services to our community. Our efforts will focus not only on congregations, but on separately incorporated 501c3 organizations that are faith-based or faith-related. We are particularly interested in questions such as:

- What types of services are provided by these organizations?
- What, if anything, is unique about the services provided by these organization or the manner in which these services are provided?
- Do these organizations fill a particular niche in the social service infrastructure?
- How sophisticated are the management and governance systems that support these services?
- Do these organizations perceive a need for targeted capacity building activities to enhance their ability to serve the needs of the community?

As research continues locally to deepen understanding about congregation-based social services, as well as the services offered by separately incorporated faith-based agencies, it is critical for researchers, policymakers, and citizens to engage in dialogue about what is known and about what must still be learned.

To read the full text of this study, log onto The Forbes Funds’ web site at (www.forbesfunds.org).

¹ P.L. 104-193, Title I, § 104 (Aug. 22, 1996); 110 Stat. 2161; 42 U.S.C.A. 604a.

² Exec. Order No. 13198, 66 Fed. Reg. 8497 (2001).

³ *Charitable Choice: Overview of Research Findings on Implementation* (United States General Accounting Office, Washington, DC), GAO-02-337, January 2002, at 2 (citing Laura Meckler, *Most States Pass on Charitable Choice*, Associated Press, 2001).

⁴ Mark Chaves and William Tsitsos, *Congregations and Social Services: What They Do, How They Do It, and With Whom?*, NONPROFIT AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR QUARTERLY, vol. 30, no. 4, December 2001, 660-683 (interpreting data from the 1998 National Congregations Study, which includes data collected from 1236 congregations nationwide, states that “58% of congregations participate in or support some type of social service program” (668)); Ram Cnaan and Stephanie Boddie, *Philadelphia Census of Congregations and Their Involvement in Social Service Delivery*, SOCIAL SERVICE REVIEW, December 2001 (reporting survey results from 1376 of an estimated 2095 congregations in Philadelphia, indicating that 88% have at least one social program (568); that each congregation provided an average of 2.41 programs (569); that 552 (40.1%) congregations collaborate with secular organizations (572); that 841 congregations (61.1%) are open to collaborating with government welfare programs (571); and that each congregation-sponsored program serves 39 within, 63 without (570)); Tobi Jennifer Printz, “Faith-Based Service Providers in the Nation’s Capital: Can They Do More?” (Urban Institute, Washington, DC), 1998 (identifying 95% of congregations as providing some type of service or program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area); Carl S. Dudley and David A. Rozen, “Faith Communities Today: A Report of Religion in the United States Today,” (Hartford Seminary), 2001 (finding that, based upon data from more than 14,000 congregations representing 41 denominations, over 80% of congregations provide at least one service); Other significant reports include: Scott Anderson, John Orr, and Carol Silverman, *The California Religious Community Capacity Study: Technical Report* (California Council of Churches, Sacramento, CA), 2000; Laurie N. DiPadova, *The Impact of Welfare Reform on Charitable Organizations: The Capacity of the Charitable Welfare Sector in Utah* (Center for Public Policy and Administration, University of Utah), Aug. 2001; Virginia A. Hodgkinson and Murray S. Weizman, FROM BELIEF TO COMMITMENT: THE COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES OF RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES, (1993); Susan Grettenberger, *Churches as a Resource for Human Services and Social Capital Development: A Survey of West Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church* (Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI), 1997; Kirsten A. Gronbjerg and Sheila Nelson, *Mapping Small Religious Nonprofit Organizations: An Illinois Profile*, NONPROFIT AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR QUARTERLY 27(1), 1998, 13-31; and John McCarthy and Jim Castelli, *Religion-Sponsored Social Service Providers: The Not-So-Independent Sector* (Aspen Institute’s Nonprofit Research Fund, Washington, DC) 1998.

⁵ Cnaan and Boddie, *Philadelphia Census of Congregations and Their Involvement in Social Service Delivery*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Carl S. Dudley and David A. Rozen, Hartford Seminary “Faith Communities Today: A Report of Religion in the United States Today,” 2001.

⁸ Tobi Jennifer Printz, Urban Institute, “Faith-Based Service Providers in the Nation’s Capital: Can They Do More?” 1998.

⁹ Mark Chaves, *Religious Congregations and Welfare Reform: Who Will Take Advantage of Charitable Choice?*, AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW 64, 1999, 836-846.

¹⁰ Ram Cnaan, “Keeping the Faith in the City: How 401 Urban Religious Congregations Serve Their Neediest Neighbors,” (Philadelphia) 2000.

This TROPMAN REPORT is one of a series of briefing papers generated by The Tropman Fund for Nonprofit Research. TROPMAN REPORTS in this 2002 series are:

1. Capacity-building in the Nonprofit Sector: *A Comparison of Resources and Practices in Pittsburgh and Denver*
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7. **Social Services in Faith-Based Organizations: *Pittsburgh Congregations and the Services They Provide***
8. Staying Ahead of the Curve: *An Assessment of Executive Training Needs and Resources in Pittsburgh*
9. Strategic Planning: *Positioning Identity, Values and Aspirations*

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