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THE BLACK CHURCH: CHARITABLE  
CHOICE, DEVOLUTION,  
AND OBSTACLES

Introduction

In 1727, a small group of French Ursuline sisters arrived in New Orleans to provide for the local community's needs. With financial support from the French colony, the sisters created an orphanage, a health care ministry, and a home for "women of the streets." Sanctioned by President Thomas Jefferson, when Louisiana was purchased in 1804, their efforts marked the beginning of Catholic charities and Catholic health care in the United States. Public funding for faith-based organizations is rooted in the history of the U. S.

Fred Kammer, president of Catholic Charities USA, emphasizes that the sisters' work, supported by the colonial government, helped to determine the well-being of the whole community. Concerned about the status of their property and the revenues that supported their ministries when Louisiana became part of the fledgling nation, the Ursuline superior petitioned President Jefferson, pleading that the ministries were "useful" and "necessary" and "for the public good." Jefferson assured the sisters that their property was "sacred and inviolate" under the principles of the Constitution, further adding:

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...and that your institution will be permitted to govern itself according to [its] own voluntary rules, without interference from the civil authority whatever diversity of shade may appear in the religious opinions of our fellow citizens, the charitable objects of your institution cannot be indifferent to any; and [its] furtherance of the wholesome purposes of society. . .cannot fail to ensure it the patronage of the government it is under. [B]e assured it will meet all the protection which my office can give it.<sup>1</sup>

Kammer is not the only writer who notes that partnerships between faith-based and other social service organizations and government have a long tradition in the U. S. Daphne Spain, professor of Urban and Environmental Planning, University of Virginia, sees a parallel between the possibilities offered by Charitable Choice for serving urban communities and the "redemptive places" that grew out of the activism of the Social Gospel and evangelism in the late nineteenth century. Lyman Beecher and Josiah Strong rejected the traditional distinction between the "deserving and undeserving poor," preaching that "slums were created by society, not by sinners, and that improving squalid living conditions was a moral responsibility."<sup>2</sup> This mission was completed by women volunteers who provided living arrangements, job skills, and community services through the Young Women's Christian Association, the National Association of Colored Women, and the College Settlements Associations. Evangelists reached out to the indigent through the Salvation Army who provided "soup," "soap," and "salvation."

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<sup>1</sup>Fred Kammer, "Public-Religious Partnerships," *America* 184 (April 2, 2001): 7.

<sup>2</sup>Daphne Spain, "Redemptive Place, Charitable Choice, and Welfare Reform," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 67, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 251.

While the rationale for creating "redemptive places" was "the salvation of souls," it also provided concrete services to three major groups: European immigrants, black men and women who were part of the Great Migration from the rural South to the urban North, and single women who sought economic independence. Seeking new opportunities, "[a]ll three groups arrived with little material wealth and few skills suited to the industrializing economy."<sup>3</sup> A century later, the urban poor have remarkably similar characteristics, comprised of immigrants, who often speak little English and are likely to live in poor neighborhoods; African Americans, who are crowded in inner cities where poverty and its accompanying social problems are rampant; and single mothers, the group most affected by welfare reform. Faith-based organizations, qualified for funding under Charitable Choice, will be the twenty-first century descendants of the social activists who created the first "redemptive places" for the urban poor.

### Charitable Choice

Proponents of Charitable Choice typically stress the long history of public-private partnerships in the provision of social services, citing examples such as Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, United Jewish Communities, and the Salvation Army. In fact, Kammer argues: "Fears in the current debate about unseemly competition among churches seem strange to us"; these established organizations have engaged in effective collaboration for years.<sup>4</sup> However, it is precisely these respected

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 253.

<sup>4</sup>Kammer, "Public-Religious Partnerships," 9.

institutions that some critics fear will place small community churches at a disadvantage. For instance, Lisa Oliphant, an entitlements policy analyst at the Cato Institute, cautions that usually the big charities "with good lobbyists and political connections" are most successful in securing and retaining government funding.<sup>5</sup> Alternately, many smaller faith-based organizations (FBOs) see networking with other agencies as a viable and attractive option. Kevin Armstrong, senior public teacher at the Polis Center at Indiana University, views the established charities as a powerful resource, suggesting that "they can help move Charitable Choice forward by serving either as fiscal agents for smaller FBOs. . .or as direct subcontractors with FBOs."<sup>6</sup>

The logistics of securing government contracts represents the economic aspect of a controversy, spanning political, ethical, and moral domains as well as the practical concerns of administering public funds. At the core of the issue is the Establishment Clause, which mandates separation of church and state; both advocates and opponents of Charitable Choice recognize that FBOs have historically received government funding, on the provision that their services fulfill a secular purpose. Critics fear, on the one hand, the government is abdicating its moral duty to provide social justice by shifting responsibility onto the religious and private sectors. On the other hand, "there is some evidence. . .that when the government steps in, private philanthropy dies."<sup>7</sup> In effect, some opponents believe that, rather than contribute to social welfare, Charitable Choice may undermine funding from both public and private sources.

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<sup>5</sup>Lisa Oliphant, "Charitable Choice: The End of Churches As We Know Them?" *Policy & Practice of Public Human Services* 58, no. 2 (2000): 9.

<sup>6</sup>Kevin R. Armstrong, "A Ministry or a Program?" *Christian Century* 117 (July 5-12, 2000): 721.

<sup>7</sup>Fred Glennon, "Blessed Be the Ties That Bind? The Challenge of Charitable Choice to Moral Obligation," *Journal of Church and State* 42, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 837.

A highly publicized misperception suggests that conservative evangelical churches are the driving force behind government funding of FBOs.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, responses from the elite leadership of major religious denominations support this view. At the national level, conservatives such as John Ashcroft and the Christian Coalition have been the most ardent supporters of Charitable Choice, while Americans United for the Separation of Church and State assembled a coalition of forty-six prominent liberal religious organizations who expressed their opposition.<sup>9</sup> For example, the director of the Washington office of the Presbyterian Church stated that Charitable Choice "will harm religion's historic autonomy from government" and "cause religious institutions to be subject to government oversight and regulation."<sup>10</sup> The Baptist Joint Committee, which supports some of the more liberal Baptist groups, including the three major African-American Baptist denominations, passed a resolution calling for repeal of Charitable Choice provisions for several reasons, including the rationale that "government subsidization of religion diminishes religion's historic independence and integrity."<sup>11</sup>

At the level of individual religious institutions, however, national surveys report paradoxical results. In the National Congregations Study (1998), representatives from African-American churches expressed the most favorable attitudes toward applying for government funding: 64 percent indicate willingness to apply for government grants as opposed to 28 percent of those from

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<sup>8</sup>Carl S. Dudley, "Charitable Choice," *Christian Century* 118, no. 9 (March 14, 2001): 17.

<sup>9</sup>Mark Chaves, "Religious Congregations and Welfare Reform," *Society* 38, no. 2 (January/February 2001): 25.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

predominately white churches.<sup>12</sup> Dash, Rasor, and Chapman support this conclusion in a recent study of black Protestant congregations.<sup>13</sup> Historically black churches have a far more diverse resource base than white churches, encompassing member contributions, bank loans, fund-raising events, local businesses, marketing initiatives, and an array of partnerships with public agencies. For these churches, Charitable Choice represents an extension of the collaborative efforts in which they have traditionally engaged.

Further complicating the issue of government funding for FBOs is the difficulty of empirical evaluation of these services performed. A study sponsored by Partners for Sacred Places, an organization committed to preserving historic church buildings, surveyed 113 congregations in six major cities (Chicago, Indianapolis, Mobile, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco) to determine types of services provided to whom. They observed a variety of activities, ranging from the traditional soup kitchens and clothing drives to recreational programs for children and youth, alliances with neighborhood organizations, and "important forms of fellowship for the elderly and sick."<sup>14</sup> Most of these services were performed for individuals outside of the congregation; in the terminology of social scientists and theologians, the church members were engaged in "other-regarding" work.

While it is easy to document "other-regarding" activities

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<sup>12</sup>Mark Chaves, "Religious Congregations and Welfare Reform: Who Will Take Advantage of 'Charitable Choice'?" *American Sociological Review* 64, no. 6 (December 1999): 841.

<sup>13</sup>See Michael I. N. Dash, Stephen C. Rasor, and [Christine D. Chapman], "ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000: An Affirmation for the Journey Inward and Outward," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* XXIX (Fall 2001/Spring 2002): 9-24, for an overview of the ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000: Study of Black Religious Life.

<sup>14</sup>E. J. Dionne and John J. Dilulio, "What's God Got to Do with the American Experiment," *Brookings Review* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 6.

occurring, it is more difficult to document their effectiveness—a requisite for receiving government funding. “There are, as yet, no suitably scientific studies that ‘prove’ the efficacy or cost-effectiveness of faith-based approaches to social ills, or that support the success claims of certain well-known national faith-based programs.”<sup>15</sup> Most evidence to date is anecdotal, and extensive monitoring and evaluation of faith-based organizations is complex and expensive.

Conducting a study of economic development activities by FBOs in the Detroit Empowerment Zone, Laura Reese confronted a myriad of methodological problems.<sup>16</sup> Catholic parishes were most easily accessible and thus were likely to be over-represented, while traditionally black churches, which played a key role in the economic development of the community, were least likely to respond. Several pastors openly expressed distrust of formal research pursuits. Additional barriers to access concerned the race or gender of the researcher. Even the unit of analysis was open to question; for example, one church was a “cathedral church,” with a central office and several storefront churches with worship and social service activities, thereby raising the issue of what to include: only the central unit or all of its satellites. Particularly problematic was the measurement of institutional resources: indicators such as number of clergy, staff size, number of services per week, pledge income, and even the concept of congregation were subject to variation by denomination, the proportion of neighborhood to extra-community members, and factors within each individual church.

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<sup>15</sup>Martin Davis, “Faith, Hope and Charity,” *National Journal* 33, no. 17 (April 28, 2001): 1233.

<sup>16</sup>See Laura A. Reese, “Should the Government Regulate Prophets? Methodological Problems with Research on Faith-Based Economic Development,” *Economic Development Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (November 2000): 376-383.

Most important, for institutions required to document their efficacy under Charitable Choice is the difficulty of operationalizing services. "Economic development" is a difficult concept for this process.<sup>17</sup> The methods of some successful urban ministries are highly unconventional, e.g., allowing street youth to sleep in the church or minister's home. While "hero" ministers are admired by their constituents, will their unorthodox methods stand up to scrutiny by public agencies, and can they document their success?

Furthermore, empirical documentation of organizational efficacy typically means a focus on short-term results. Peter Frumarkin and Alice Andre-Clark, of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, suggest that the holistic focus of FBOs in transforming the lives of indigent clients may work to the advantage of the recipients, yet paradoxically disadvantage the service providers:

Faith-based programs, and others that take time to emphasize the spiritual and emotional needs, must make some efficiency sacrifices, at least in the short term. . . . This long-term emotional and spiritual development might ultimately prove to help participants in faith-based programs stay in jobs for longer than other welfare recipients. However, such programs may be at a competitive disadvantage, because of the way program performance is now often measured.<sup>18</sup>

An emphasis on outcome measures may also conflict with the mission of organizations committed to serving the neediest. For instance, the director of an FBO providing job training in

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Peter Frumarkin and Alice Andre-Clark, "The Rise of the Corporate Social Worker," *Society* 36, no. 6 (September/October 1999): 50.

the Cleveland area was instructed by the city-funding agency to concentrate on clients with a higher probability of success, thus enabling the program to demonstrate greater efficiency. This director, along with other representatives from church-based and community agencies, expressed a great sense of conflict between meeting funding requirements and fulfilling their organizational mission.<sup>19</sup>

Pressures to produce results may indeed pose a conflict between the interests of funding agencies and the mission of FBOs and other nonprofits dedicated to helping the poor.<sup>20</sup> Charitable Choice holds the potential to transform the spiritual dimension of FBOs into an asset rather than a liability by allowing the organizations to preserve the unity of their religious and social services rather than establishing independent nonprofit subsidiaries in order to receive government funding, as FBOs often have in the past. This unique synthesis of spiritual and practical services can be a "critical point of leverage" for FBOs competing for government contracts. However, it also entails adapting the strategies used by the large nonprofits and private sector organizations. As the staff of one faith-based project emphasized, "Networking is the name of the game."<sup>21</sup>

### Historical Context of Charitable Choice

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, known colloquially as welfare reform,

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<sup>19</sup>See Jennifer Alexander, "The Impact of Devolution on Non-Profits: A Multiphase Study of Social Service Organizations," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 10, no.1 (1999): 57-70.

<sup>20</sup>See Frumkin, "The Rise of the Corporate Social Worker," 46-52.

<sup>21</sup>Dudley, "Charitable Choice," 17.

formally imposed time limits and work requirements on recipients of public assistance.<sup>22</sup> Welfare reform made fundamental changes to the social service delivery system by allocating more authority to state and local governments and by altering the conditions for the providing social services by religious organizations, particularly religious congregations.

Charitable Choice refers to a provision in Section 104 of the welfare reform act requiring states to include FBOs among the eligible bidders when contracting with nonprofit organizations. The states are forbidden to require a religious agency to "alter its form of internal governance" or "remove religious art, icons, scripture, or other symbols" as a prerequisite for contracting to provide services, and it states specifically that the organizations shall retain "control over the definition, development, practice, and expression of religious beliefs."<sup>23</sup> The intent of this legislation is to encourage states to expand the scope of FBOs and community organizations in supporting public anti-poverty initiatives.

Overall, the basic objectives of Charitable Choice are to: 1) allow states to contract with religious organizations for human services, or offer these groups other financial incentives such as certificates and vouchers; 2) clarify that states are forbidden to discriminate against potential service providers because of their religious affiliation; 3) assure that the internal governance mechanism of the organization remains intact; and 4) protect the rights of social service recipients to receive alternative services if they object to receiving services from religious organizations.<sup>24</sup>

With respect to clauses concerning the extent to which an organization can maintain its spiritual identity without trans-

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<sup>22</sup>Chaves, "Religious Congregations and Welfare Reform," 836.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Frumkin, "Rise of Corporate Social Worker," 50.

gressing the line between church and state, the legislation prohibits FBOs from using government contract funds for purposes of "sectarian worship, instruction, or proselytization." While conceding that this passage "creates a balance beam for FBOs to walk on," Amy Sherman, of the Hudson Institute's Welfare Policy Center, reports that of 3,000 clients receiving services from FBOs under government contract, only two complained of subtle religious pressures.<sup>25</sup> Consistent with the Charitable Choice provision, both clients were granted permission to receive services from secular agencies.

### New Federalism

In reality, the private sector assumed much of the responsibility for social service provision over the past two decades as federal funding for social programs declined. The proliferation of federal programs during the 1960s and 1970s produced marked expansion of the nonprofit sector. Federal funding for nonprofits reached a peak in the 1970s, only to decline significantly during the Reagan era. Reductions in government funding have been accompanied by a shift from grants to service contracts and resulting competition for support from foundations, corporations, and individual donors. A central feature of this devolution, known as "the new federalism," has been a shift from the federal to state and local governments in the allocation of resources, in particular, with respect to welfare reform.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Amy L. Sherman, "Churches As Government Partners: Navigating 'Charitable Choice,'" *Christian Century* 117, no. 20 (July 5-12, 2000): 717.

<sup>26</sup>Alexander, "Impact of Devolution," 59.

College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University, considers the devolution of government policy part of a larger reform movement deemed the "new public management."<sup>27</sup> The ideology of this movement is guided by two basic assumptions: 1) the efficiency of markets and the value of competition as a strategy for enhancing organizational performance; and 2) the conception of management as a generic concept derived from the private sector. These two trends have generated stronger cooperation between local governments and nonprofit social service organizations, under the direction of leaders who exhibit the values of efficiency, economy, and effectiveness. As stated by Sherri Wallace: "Interestingly, the rise of community enterprise activities in the United States parallels the decline of public and private funding opportunities for nonprofit organizations. This has challenged nonprofits to find ways to transform their organizations from traditional human and social service agencies into commercial vehicles that help sustain local community economies."<sup>28</sup>

The capacity of nonprofit agencies to provide social services is closely connected to patterns of government funding. Changes in funding and expectations are forcing these agencies to adapt their practices to correspond with those of the private sector and focus on accountability and outcome measures. To explore the adaptation of nonprofits to the demands of devolution, Alexander surveyed organizations in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, where Cleveland is situated, and is the thirteenth largest county in the U. S. Four types of organizations were reviewed:

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<sup>27</sup>Jennifer Alexander, "Adaptive Strategies of Nonprofit Human Service Organizations in an Era of Devolution and New Public Management," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 10, no. 3 (2000): 293.

<sup>28</sup>Sherri Leronda Wallace, "Social Entrepreneurship: The Role of Social Purpose Enterprises in Facilitating Community Economic Development," *Journal of Development Entrepreneurship* 4, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1999): 160.

1) traditional established organizations with a national base such as Easter Seals, the Salvation Army, and the YMCA; 2) community-based organizations, including neighborhood centers and social action groups that provide an array of services; 3) semi-public organizations; and 4) FBOs that provide a variety of community and emergency services.

Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of the organizations serve a population identified as "at risk."<sup>29</sup> This was highest among the community organizations (89 percent) and FBOs (80 percent), which collectively encompassed more than 80 percent of emergency and crisis intervention organizations, providing food banks, emergency shelters, emergency health care centers, and centers providing family support services. Sociologist Mark Chaves indicates that food projects are the most prevalent form of services offered by congregations (33 percent), followed by housing or shelter projects (18 percent) and clothing projects (11 percent).<sup>30</sup> In effect, small FBOs currently tend to focus on programs that address immediate needs.

Of particular concern to this study, community-based and smaller FBOs reported experiencing the greatest financial difficulties and the greatest degree of budget fluctuation. They responded to these problems by cutting programs, rationing services, and charging fees where possible. Not surprisingly, these groups also expressed considerable frustration over conflict between their mission to serve the poor and the need to generate income through their programs and services for organizational survival. The traditional, established organizations expressed the most favorable attitudes toward commercializing services and deploying funding to sustain programs for low-paying and poor clients.

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<sup>29</sup>Alexander, "Impact of Devolution," 62.

<sup>30</sup>Chaves, "Religious Congregations," 23.

Although the category of established organizations includes large, nationally prominent FBOs, their attitude does not appear to differ from their secular counterparts. Instead, only their size and material resources differentiate the organizations. Both survey and focus-group data confirm that small religious and community organizations often "lacked the service capacity, economies of scale, revenue flows, and trained staff necessary to adjust to the new demands."<sup>31</sup> Although some analysts foresee socially active community churches as the potential beneficiaries of Charitable Choice, critics argue that the vast differences in economic resources and staffing between small churches and large, established FBOs will preclude small churches from securing government funding.

All of the social service providers, regardless of size or classification, report a marked increase in the need for crisis-oriented services among low-income clients. Even larger organizations are apprehensive about how long they can continue to provide low cost or free services under the dual stresses of increased need and diminished funding. A common adaptation strategy is heavier reliance on volunteers. However, some observers are skeptical of the ability of relatively untrained volunteers to provide adequate services to the increasing number of human service clients with complex, multiple problems.

In an investigation of Charitable Choice in Texas, the first state to implement the provision and one of the most aggressive in awarding contracts to FBOs, Martin Davis notes this common concern among critics.<sup>32</sup> Between 1994 and 2001, the number of Texans on welfare dropped from a high of 800,000 to a low of 360,000. The implication for social service providers is that those remaining are the most difficult to place. For

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<sup>31</sup>Alexander, "Impact of Devolution," 63.

<sup>32</sup>Davis, "Faith, Hope, and Charity," 1233.

example, a pioneer program is Coaching for Success, a mentoring program for women on welfare. Director Heather Neuroth believes that a major strength of the program (sponsored by Lutheran Social Services of the South) is its spiritual focus. However, neither Neuroth nor her staff has formal social work training. Neuroth contends the issue is moot: Texas simply does not have enough social workers to handle the remaining cases; thus, it is vital to mobilize all available resources.

A recent report by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, a non-partisan group focusing on issues of urban poverty, is taking a stance against extensive reliance on volunteers. The report acknowledges volunteers as an often effective resource; however, they "are not a reliable enough foundation on which to build a long-term social service program, or set of programs, that can be replicated across many different regions."<sup>33</sup> It is far too early to assess the impact that Charitable Choice has had on social service provision in Texas. There appears to be unanimous agreement that the devolution of funds to the local level has had an immense impact on the delivery of human services, but the state has not consistently monitored the allocation of funds, and thus far, evidence of program success is primarily anecdotal.

### Navigating the Establishment Clause

The "Establishment Clause" refers to that portion of the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution that prohibits government from "establishing" a religion. Interpretation of this clause has evolved consistently with changes in the way the American public and government view the role and place of reli-

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

gious and faith-based organizations. At an absolute minimum, the Establishment Clause is intended to prohibit the federal government from declaring and financially supporting a national religion, such as existed in many other countries at the time of the nation's founding. It is far less clear whether the Establishment Clause is also projected to establish "a wall of separation" between church and state.

Abigail Kuzma, executive director of the Mapleton-Fall Creek Christian Legal Clinic, Indianapolis, Indiana, observes that Establishment Clause case law is constantly evolving consistent with changes in the way the American public and government view the role and place of religious and faith-based organizations.<sup>34</sup> The landmark decision *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), which limited state aid to private, religiously-based social organizations, was handed down at a time when churches were presumed to provide social services primarily to members of their own congregations. In *Everson*, it was also deemed that the services were adequately provided by public schools. In the current environment, it is widely acknowledged that FBOs, including community churches, regularly provide services that extend beyond the bounds of a single congregation or religious denomination.

Although many parochial schools, especially inner city Catholic schools, have a high non-Catholic enrollment, the controversy over school vouchers has demonstrated that the separation of church and state regarding education remains a heated issue. In contrast, Kuzma notes that the Supreme Court's stance on FBOs that provide health care has largely been ignored in public debate, yet this area of social service delivery

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<sup>34</sup>Abigail Lawlis Kuzma, "Faith-Based Providers Partnering with Government: Opportunity and Temptations," *Journal of Church and State* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 40.

may offer a model for aid to welfare-related services by FBOs.<sup>35</sup> A significant proportion of hospitals with Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant religious affiliation received federal grants under the Hill-Burton Hospital Construction Act of 1946. Most hospitals receive federal funding under Medicare and Medicaid. Hospitals with religious affiliation have chapels within their walls, and religious symbols are often prominently displayed. Despite the open display of religious artifacts, the only Supreme Court case involving government funding of health care was decided a century ago, in 1899.

The tolerance of religion-based hospitals may stem from an implicit belief that they are committed to serving the poor, regardless of budget cuts or changes in health care reimbursement, or have a spiritual advantage in offering solace to the sick and dying. In effect, there seems to be some agreement that faith-based hospitals provide services that the government cannot duplicate. This decision is rooted in pragmatism. There is a practical need for religious affiliated hospitals; thus, they are accepted as an integral part of American health care.

Kuzma believes the success of Charitable Choice may lie in treating faith-based social services agencies the same way health care facilities have historically been treated; that is, allowing them to retain their religious character and not perform services conflicting with their beliefs.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the author goes farther than most advocates of Charitable Choice, proposing services offered all clients who meet eligibility requirements, regardless of their religious beliefs, and who are given a choice of religious or secular providers. There is no constitutional objection to the FBO requiring a profession of faith before services are provided.

In the Texas survey, this issue seemed to be irrelevant; most

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 66.

clients who chose FBOs did so because of shared religious beliefs, although service providers were careful not to slant their spiritual message toward a particular denomination. At the same time, no such profession of faith is required prior to receiving health or medical services from the religious hospitals which Kuzma views as a model for Charitable Choice.<sup>37</sup> However, the author's key point is that FBOs may be wary of seeking government funds if they believe their spiritual mission will be compromised. Allowing FBOs to display their religious orientation may alleviate the distrust of many FBOs toward seeking government contracts and leave the question of religious interactions to the discretion of the provider and client.

### Religious Involvement in Community Activities

The opposite perspective to Kuzma is offered by Glennon, who contends that the line between conveying a sense of spirituality and proselytizing is too fine not to allow abuses by churches seeking new converts.<sup>38</sup> The author staunchly upholds the moral responsibility of both religious institutions and government to provide services to the poor, but argues that partnership under Charitable Choice amounts to a no-win situation: by conveying a religious message, FBOs compromise the rights of recipients; by withholding it, they are likely to compromise the integrity of their original mission. In particular, Glennon ranks among those critics who view Charitable Choice as an abdication of the government's obligation to help individuals in need.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 43, 67.

<sup>38</sup>Glennon, "Blessed Be the Ties That Bind," 827.

In fact, many supporters of Charitable Choice might prefer a return to the social programs of the 1960s and 1970s; however, Americans are pragmatic. Taking a proactive approach to helping the poor is a more practical alternative than lamenting the absence of federal programs emerging from a dramatically different social and political landscape.

According to Dennis Hoover, a resident fellow at the Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion and Public Life, Charitable Choice represents an "unusual opportunity" for a broad-based social initiative.<sup>39</sup> Consistent with Chaves's findings, this author views Charitable Choice as the philosophical union of a "religious center," a "confluence mainly of Roman Catholic, black Protestant, and moderate to left evangelical streams."<sup>40</sup> While some groups "may possess conservative theological and moral sensibilities. . . they bring to the table a powerful social ethic that demands care for the poor, and not just through charity."<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, survey data suggest that three-quarters of the public supports the awarding of government contracts to service-providing FBOs.

Joseph Hacala, a former special assistant to Andrew Cuomo, secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Development, cites an impressive list of government-FBO partnerships that have served U.S. communities over the past century by providing housing supports. Among these are Lutheran Services in America, which serves approximately 65,000 older adults in nursing and independent living facilities, and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which has funded more than 3,000 projects developed by community organizations,

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<sup>39</sup>Dennis R. Hoover, "Yes to Charitable Choice," *Nation* 271, no. 5 (August 7, 2000): 6.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

including low-cost housing units in New York City and other urban centers. In fact, this author emphasizes that B'Nai B'rith and other Jewish agencies, Catholic Charities, and various Protestant groups rank among the most prolific and successful developers of subsidized housing for the poor and elderly.<sup>42</sup>

Habitat for Humanity International has worked closely with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide safe, affordable, comfortable homes for the poor. Indeed, Hoover stresses that HUD funding administered by community or faith-based organizations were estimated at nearly \$1 billion for fiscal year 2000. Among the recipients were organizations serving the homeless, the elderly, and persons with HIV/AIDS.<sup>43</sup> HUD's Center for Community and Interfaith Partnerships operates via a multi-faceted approach, encompassing building awareness, providing outreach and education, and publicizing successful efforts and models.

Programs such as Habitat for Humanity employ a grass-roots approach that emphasizes community empowerment. Organizations of this type, whether religious or secular in orientation, have traditionally played a key role in community development.<sup>44</sup> Grassroots organizing, as the name suggests, works from the bottom up, denoting full participation and direct representation by the clientele being served. In contrast, top-down approaches view the target clientele as consumers of services. Activities are organized primarily by professional service providers rather than by the "people" themselves. Richard

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<sup>42</sup>Joseph R. Hacala, "Faith-Based Community Development: Past, Present, Future," *America* 184, no. 14 (April 23, 2001): 16.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>For a full discussion of the word "empowerment," see Douglas D. Perkins, "Speaking Truth to Power: Empowerment Ideology As Social Intervention and Policy," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 23, no. 5 (October 1995): 765-794.

Couto cites the Campaign for Human Development (CHD) of the Catholic Bishop's Relief Fund as one of the nation's most venerable grassroots empowerment efforts.<sup>45</sup> The significance of this FBO is underscored by the fact that in the wake of reduced funding to the War on Poverty by the Nixon administration, the CHD was named by the Ford Foundation as the largest, most important source for community development in the U. S.<sup>46</sup>

While both bottom-up and top-down approaches can be effective, the grassroots or empowerment approach is typically more effective for working with disadvantaged groups. This assumption was confirmed by a study of mothers of preschool children, who comprise a significant proportion of welfare-to-work clients. The women expressed substantially more satisfaction with a client-centered empowerment model, than with a professional-as-expert model that offered them minimal input.<sup>47</sup> Rooted in a holistic approach to healing, FBOs may be ideally suited for providing client-centered services to beneficiaries.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is a non-profit engaging in extensive public-private collaboration. One of their recent efforts exemplifies the potential for interfaith collaboration, as well as a grassroots approach. Launched in 1992, Faith in Action was developed to enable communities to serve the increasing number of homebound persons due to chronic illness, disability, or infirmity, and stands as the RWJF's most

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<sup>45</sup>See Richard A. Couto, "Community Coalitions and Grassroots Policies of Empowerment," *Administration & Society* 30, no. 5 (November 1998): 569-594.

<sup>46</sup>Meredith Ramsey, "Redeeming the City: Exploring the Relationship between Church and Metropolis," *Urban Affairs Review* 33, no. 5 (May 1998): 598.

<sup>47</sup>Carol M. Trivette, Carl J. Dunst, and Deborah Hambly, "Characteristics and Consequences of Help-Giving Practices in Contrasting Human Services Programs," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 24, no. 2 (April 1996): 276.

ambitious program to date.<sup>48</sup> The program also represents the effective deployment of volunteers, who are recruited from participating religious congregations and from the community at large. Health and social service facilities are an essential part of the model; volunteers do not provide any services that require licensing, nor do they supplant professional services. Where necessary, professional referrals are made. Of particular note, religious proselytizing is strictly forbidden.

Faith in Action represents the first attempt by the RWJF to replicate a pilot program on a national scale. Among the reasons cited for this initiative are the aging of the population and deinstitutionalization of the chronically ill, the documented need for informal home care, a need for services in low-income urban and rural communities underrepresented in the pilot phase, and the "core altruistic values" held by the RWJF. Jellinek proposes two models for broad expansion of the program.<sup>49</sup> The first is that the federal government develops a similar program of its own, although the author cautions that a top-down approach would undermine the concept of grassroots organizing and local empowerment that is central to the program's success. The second, a more practical alternative, is "word of mouth" replication, whereby interested parties from communities informed of the program's success can develop models of their own with start-up funding from Faith in Action or local philanthropic or government sources. In effect, a program of this type can benefit by Charitable Choice funding, providing services not offered by government programs, and developed by each community and/or congregation in accordance with its unique vision and the characteristics of its constituents.

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<sup>48</sup>Paul Jellinek, "Faith in Action: Building Capacity for Interfaith Volunteer Caregiving," *Health Affairs* 20, no. 3 (May/June 2001): 273.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 277.

Urban planners should look to the "redemptive places" that evolved in cities a century ago for models on which to base contemporary community centers. The characteristics of these "redemptive places" included decent buildings in an accessible, central location, job training facilities, day care, and living quarters for persons in transition. While theoretically sound, this simple proposal is modest in view of the array of social problems confronted by urban churches. According to Eleanor Scott Meyers, former president of the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, "Charitable Choice is very much on the agenda of city churches," which require continuous funding to serve an increasingly needy population.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, many urban ministers express concerns often reported in the literature: fear of government intrusion in church affairs, including the way money is received and spent; conflict between spirituality and government; loss of autonomy; and balancing the provision of religious and social services. One minister referred to the award money as "terrible choice."

Not all the ministers were apprehensive about applying for contracts under Charitable Choice. On the contrary, several focused on the potential benefits to the community of services provided under government contract. Some proposed that the need for collaboration offers the potential to transform the governance structure from the traditional single, senior pastoral program model to a leadership team concept. Indeed, team leadership and networking was a prominent theme in the African-American churches referenced earlier is perceived as a powerful force for transforming the lives of the urban poor. Collaborations among congregations and with city government

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<sup>50</sup>Eleanor Scott Meyers, "The Church in the City: Past, Present and Future," *Interpretation* 54, no. 1 (January 2000): 26.

offers a viable channel for addressing the basic needs of the community, taking an active role in local policy-making, and strengthening the community overall.

The dynamics of church-based community activism are interrelated with the political climate of the nation. During the 1960s, interfaith collaboration was closely linked with the Civil Rights Movement and opposition to the Vietnam War. In the mid-1970s, as federal funding began to be cut back, the focus changed from the external political environment toward revitalizing the community. After radical budget cuts during the Reagan administration, neighborhood churches began forming coalitions, attempting to remain independent of reliance on funding from government, foundations, and corporations; instead, focusing on fund-raising activities and dues which enable them to remain free of external constraints and experiment with innovative new approaches to community development. Urban ministers are divided over whether Charitable Choice will have a negative impact on their ability to implement innovative programs, or whether it will prove a valuable resource for expanding their services.

### The Black Church Service Delivery and Charitable Choice

Numerous sources<sup>51</sup> recognize that the Black Church has historically played a central role in community development. A recent survey of 1,863 African-American congregations indicates that nearly three-fourths support at least one outreach

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<sup>51</sup>See Chaves, "Religious Congregations," 843-844; Dudley, "Charitable Choice," 17; also Ramsey, "Redeeming the City," 604 and 606.

program targeted to providing family, health, and social service needs.<sup>52</sup> Another survey of 635 black congregations in the Northeast observes that two-thirds of the churches support outreach programs.<sup>53</sup> Pastoral counseling is a traditional function of clergy; however, many clergypersons have constituents with mental health needs requiring professional services. In view of this need, and of the historic influence of black churches in the community, Joseph Taylor has proposed a model of collaboration between black churches and social workers. He recommends that social workers conduct a systematic evaluation of religious institutions in their service delivery area. Of special importance in this assessment is knowledge of services and resources operating within the churches. This is crucial for referrals and building relationships with local pastors. Social service agencies should employ a partnership model for developing programs in conjunction with the churches. Endeavors such as health promotion programs have been successful in African-American churches. Both players deploy their own resources: churches have access to large segments of the community; social service agencies have expertise in service delivery.

Because clergy and lay leaders may be unprepared to provide counseling for persons with serious problems, social work agencies might consider conducting in-service training programs. Conversely, clergy can provide in-serving training to social workers on the impact of religion on the lives of their members. Social work agencies can offer churches administrative and technical assistance. Collaboration of this type can be extremely helpful to churches applying for grants under

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<sup>52</sup>See Dash, "ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000," 9-24.

<sup>53</sup>See Robert Joseph Taylor, Christopher G. Ellison, and Linda M. Chatters, "Mental Health Services in Faith Communities: The Role of Clergy in Black Churches," *Social Work* 45, no. 1 (2000): 77-78.

Charitable Choice. Many small religious organizations need help in navigating the complexities of government funding, which is integral to the operation of social service agencies.

Although the collaborative model proposed by Robert Taylor is designed for African-American churches, it is easily tailored for diverse communities and affords a channel for essential collaborative efforts for service delivery under Charitable Choice. Anna Greenberg, assistant professor of Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, examines the churches' role in promoting civic involvement, surveying Protestant women from mainline and evangelical white and African-American churches in Chicago.<sup>54</sup> Clergy in this study staunchly believe in providing political information to their congregations. This practice is most explicit in black churches where political candidates are routinely invited to speak to congregations, and clergy encourage political and community involvement. A marked distinction between white and black churches, on the one hand, is that clergy in white mainline churches often had stronger ideological commitment than their church members, who feel that social and political issues should not be part of the sermon. On the other hand, black church members often see an inextricable link between religious and political commitment.

Greenberg's research identifies a distinction in the growth patterns of theologically conservative churches and moderate or liberal ones. In the number of churches founded since 1970, 11 percent describe themselves as liberal, 18 percent as moderate and 69 percent as conservative or extremely conservative.<sup>55</sup> The

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<sup>54</sup>Anna Greenberg, "The Church and the Revitalization of Politics and Community," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 3 (January 2000): 378, note 4.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 389.

rapid growth of white evangelical churches and the vociferousness of their leaders in advocating a conservative agenda have fueled the assumption that these churches will benefit from Charitable Choice. While Chaves claims that these churches are least likely to seek government funding,<sup>56</sup> Greenberg asserts that they are the least involved in social service provision.<sup>57</sup>

There is a parallel between the Black Church and the Catholic church in commitment to social justice, combining service provision with social activism. This dedication to social activism is a prominent theme among African-American church members. Unlike mainstream white churches that typically separate outreach and social service ministries from religious ministries, black churches firmly embed these programs in their mission. Although Catholic parishioners were not included in Greenberg's survey, her vision concurs with Chaves's prediction for Charitable Choice: "The promise of religious institutions in revitalizing politics and community really rests upon the ongoing commitment of African American and Catholic churches that both confront the problems of urban life, and have the infrastructure to support social service and community efforts in ways connected with political action."<sup>58</sup>

This ideal also concurs with Thomas Wolff's secular vision for a healthy community in which civic engagement is an integral part of community life, with the goal of continually building new social capital for the community.<sup>59</sup> The realization of this goal involves systematic commitment among churches, schools, health and social service agencies, business, and government.

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<sup>56</sup>Chaves, "Religious Congregations," 844.

<sup>57</sup>Greenberg, "Church and Revitalization," 389.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 393-394.

<sup>59</sup>Thomas Wolff, "The Future of Community Coalition Building," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 29, no. 2 (April 2001): 264.

As we have seen from Chaves's research, popular misconceptions about the attitudes of religious organizations toward Charitable Choice are dispelled, and Sherman, similarly, dismisses the mistrust about its operation.<sup>60</sup> No support is evident that contracts are awarded to "wacky cults"; indeed, the documentation required for receiving funds should allay any fear that organizations with less than legitimate credentials are awarded contracts. Nor is there support for concern that organizations would "bully" indigent clients into attending worship services in order to receive services. Only a few FBO representatives are unsure of the extent to which they can integrate their spiritual ministry into their service provision.

### Spring 2003 Survey: The White House Initiative and the Black Church

In 2000, the largest survey of denominationally sanctioned congregations ever conducted in the United States provided a public profile of the organizational backbone of religion in America. Although this national survey indicated that the majority of congregations in the U.S. develop resources to respond to basic human needs in emergency situations, Black protestant congregations supply the greatest number and type of outreach ministries. In spring 2003, the Institute for Black Religious Life,<sup>61</sup> Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, conducted follow-up research to examine the types and

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<sup>60</sup>See notes 12 and 25, respectively.

<sup>61</sup>The Institute for Black Religious Life is a research and public outreach organization devoted to promotion of the black religious experience. Established in 2001, the Institute is a programmatic initiative of the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC). The ITC Institute for Black Religious Life is based at ITC in Atlanta, Georgia.

levels of current and desired black church interest in issues identified by the White House faith-based initiative: at-risk youth, prisoners and their families, elders in need, substance abuse, wealth creation, financial education, church/state separation, role of fathers, rites of passage, hip-hop music/entertainment, and Afrocentric culture.<sup>62</sup> Findings from the survey include: desired levels of interest in ministries related to the White House faith-based initiative averaged a 68 percent increase from current levels of activity:

- Priorities for faith-based activities were:
 

1. Elders in need	83.6%
2. At-risk youth	77.8%
3. Prisoners or their families	70.8%
4. Substance Abuse	67.8%
- Over half (60 percent) of respondents indicate involvement in social and public policy issues (at least one annually).
- Sixteen percent indicate significant involvement (four or more activities annually).
- Social and Public Policy Issues
- Current levels of three or more activities related to Access to Health is 54.9 percent with a desired activity level of 77.7 percent, a 42 percent increase.
- In the area of social policy, 100 percent of respondents desire the rate of involvement to increase at the moderate (4 or more activities annually) level.

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<sup>62</sup>The data generated from the follow-up research for the spring 2003 White House initiative by the Institute for Black Religious Life have been presented by this writer at the following professional conferences:

"Getting a Piece of the Faith-Based Pie," American Sociological Association Section on Sociology of Religion Annual Meeting, Atlanta, August 2003.

"Research Report: Back Religious Life in America." NAACP Eighth Annual National Religious Leadership Summit, Atlanta, November 2003.

- Desire for four or more activities annually related to financial education and wealth creation is 75.8 percent as compared to current levels of 42.6 percent, a 78 percent increase.
- Of the six social policy areas surveyed, access to health has the highest desired interest (77.7 percent), followed by financial education (75.8 percent), wealth creation (74.8 percent), minority representation (71.2 percent), affirmative action (64.3 percent), and welfare reform (53.9 percent).
- Depending on the topic, the more personal the social policy topic, the more sensitive the desired response is to the sermon topic. Four of the six social policy topics have a personal impact (financial education, wealth creation, health, minority representation). Two topics (welfare reform and affirmative action) are public policy issues—less personal and less sensitive to a response as a sermonic topic.

### Implications for the Black Church

A central theme of religiosity within the Black Church is the spiritual and community outreach connection. As demonstrated from this research, desire to be involved with ministries supported by the White House faith-based initiative is high. Ministries identified by the faith-based initiative report a desired average increase of 68 percent over current levels of ministry activity. Of special note is the desired increase of 111 percent for activities related to substance abuse.

All respondents indicate a desired increase in the levels of activity for ministries related to social and public policy. Of spe-

cial note in this area is the nearly 80 percent increase in the desire for ministries related to financial education and wealth creation over current ministry levels. Social policy topics having a personal impact (financial education, wealth creation, health, minority representation) indicate that increased desired ministries are determined, to an extent, by the number of times pastors annually preach on such topics. Afrocentric culture received the highest interest in both moderate sermonic activity as well as a significant desired ministry level. This has strong implications for training black church leaders at the seminary level.

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