

# Sustaining Vital Connections between Nonprofits and Their Faith Communities: Findings from the Faith & Organizations Project



## *Notes to accompany the power point presentation*

### **Background: Faith and Organizations**

- Many religious traditions in the U.S. have a legacy of compassion and justice with deep spiritual roots. Faith communities (congregations, denominations, religious bodies and/or networks) have historically played a vital role in providing social services, healthcare, education, and community development. The majority of congregations care for the needs of people in their community through organized programs or informal assistance.
- The most common forms of outreach offered directly by congregations are short term or emergency assistance and education/youth development. (African American churches are more likely than others to develop health or community/ economic development programs.) Outreach involving a broader scope or scale of services, long-term or resource-intensive interventions, professional staff expertise, complex finances or management issues, or significant liability risk is more likely to be done through a separately incorporated nonprofit.
- Faith communities regularly create or partner with nonprofits (faith based and secular) to carry out their service goals. According to research by the Organizing Religious Work project, the average congregation collaborates with an average of six community outreach organizations, and a third of these organizations are religious nonprofits.
- Faith communities sponsor and support faith-based organizations (FBOs) for a wide variety of service activities: meeting basic needs through soup kitchens, food pantries, clothing closets and homeless shelters; aiding victims of disaster; resettling refugees; caring for the sick, infirm and elderly in hospitals, clinics and nursing homes; building or repairing homes; childcare centers; educational, recreational and therapeutic programs for children and youth; mentoring/life skills for single parents or homeless individuals; befriending people with mental illness; “adopting” schools; addiction recovery programs; family counseling; aftercare programs for former prisoners; job training and economic development initiatives; etc.
- Mainline Protestant congregations tend to be the most invested in community partnerships, followed by Jews and Catholics (see the report on Organizing Religious Work, <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/orw/articlesandreports.html> ).
- Relationships with nonprofits can take the form of recruiting board members, staff and volunteers; donating money and in-kind goods; allowing the use of faith community space; providing technical assistance and training; referring clients; and sharing information through religious media and networks. More intangibly, faith communities may also inspire their members with a sense of cultural identity, theological mandate and personal calling to support the FBO’s mission.
- A growing body of practical materials on creating congregational ministries or faith based organizations is now available, e.g. from Alban Institute ([www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org)), Baylor University’s Center for Family and Community Ministries ([www.baylor.edu/social\\_work/cfcm](http://www.baylor.edu/social_work/cfcm)), FASTEN (Faith and Service Technical Assistance Network, [www.fastennetwork.org](http://www.fastennetwork.org)) and others.
- However, little attention has been given to how faith communities can effectively maintain these organizational connections as they offer guidance, support, and spiritually-grounded motivations for the work of faith-based nonprofits. Thus the Faith and Organizations Project was launched to deepen our understanding of the important relationship between communities of faith and the FBOs that they initiate and sustain.

## **Background: The Faith & Organizations Project**

- Multiyear, national team study hosted by University of Maryland College Park; Jo Anne Schneider, principal investigator.
- Clarifies the ways FBOs are connected with faith groups, and how these connections impact FBOs (and vice versa)
- 81 case studies from organizations and faith groups located in the Northeast and Midwest
- Compares Mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, Evangelicals, Quakers, and African American Christian traditions
- Organizations include social services groups, community and housing development agencies, healthcare institutions, emergency services agencies and schools
- Offers pragmatic guidance to faith-based organizations and faith communities through a Strategies Series on topics such as board appointments, volunteers, staff selection, leadership transitions, conflict, and stewardship
- Guides, reports and additional information available at [www.faithandorganizations.umd.edu](http://www.faithandorganizations.umd.edu)

### **The Faith & Organizations Project: Main Questions**

- How do strategies for guidance and support differ among the various branches of Christianity? How should guidance to those faith communities be tailored for each religion and denomination? What lessons apply to all faith communities?
- How do faith communities understand their practical theology (enacted expressions of faith and religious values regarding their work in the world), and how does that practical theology play out in stewardship of organizations?
- What strategies can a faith community use to address concerns regarding the faith base in organizations under its care or affiliated with that religion?

### **Stewardship**

- Stewardship is often understood in a limited sense to mean a founding faith community's provision of resources to the organizations it created. Here stewardship reclaims an earlier, broader definition: *The faith community's efforts to maintain its practical theology of justice and charity in the activities of the nonprofits affiliated with that religion or denomination.*
- A key finding of the study: Faith communities are much more willing to support organizations that reflect their current beliefs and religious culture than institutions that simply have a historic connection to that faith.
- FBOs with strong connections to their founding communities interact on many levels in a dynamic relationship that reaffirm and strengthen both the nonprofit and the faith community.
- Although most FBOs can identify what they expect from their founding faith communities, most faith communities have limited understanding of how to successfully guide and support their organizations. Few non-Catholic Christian communities in the study had educational tools or clear goals for organizational stewardship.

- Resource stewardship includes funds, in-kind supports, the use of faith community property, volunteers, and back office supports like centralized insurance, recruitment and religious training.
- Other stewardship mechanisms are both formal and informal. Informal mechanisms to maintain relationships are often more important than formal mechanisms in fostering vital ongoing connections between faith communities and organizations.
- *Formal* stewardship mechanisms include:
  - Board recruitment and composition
  - Staff recruitment and composition
  - Leadership
  - Umbrella organizations (Federations, Catholic orders, interfaith organizations, nonprofit professional organizations)
  - Formal reporting requirements
  - Staff/agency evaluations
- *Informal* stewardship strategies include:
  - Informal monitoring practices, via private communication with organizational leaders or public statements giving faith community members' view of the organization. Leaders understand that unheeded negative feedback can lead to dwindling support of the organization.
  - Faith community media: Organization leaders paid careful attention to the media and often encouraged positive press. They also used media to reach out to faith community members.
  - Social networks: Organizational staff often had strong informal connections with the faith community, e.g. by participating in congregations or sending their children to a religious school.
  - Volunteers: Volunteers and board members often interpret their work as an extension of their personal theology, viewing service both as an obligation and as an expression of faith. However, the role of volunteers varies in different faith traditions.
- Organizations in the study that kept in close contact with their supporting faith communities and vice versa thrived, while organizations lacking those informal connections had trouble gaining support from their founding communities.

### **Examples of stewardship challenges:**

- A Mainline Protestant community development organization operates successfully for many years with the support of a coalition of churches. But several years after a leadership change, interest in the organization has waned and the downturn in the economy cuts many of its sources of support. The organization closes.
- A Catholic hospital system founded by a religious order is now separately incorporated. While some board members and key staff come from the founding order, the Sisters are concerned about maintaining a Catholic ethos in the institution.

- A large, historic African American church in an impoverished neighborhood hosts three affiliated organizations providing services to low income, African American children and families under the auspices of the church, all receiving federal funding. As the congregation has aged and the middle class moved away, church attendance and budgets have dwindled. Its activist pastor struggles to maintain crumbling buildings and build the church while keeping these ministries alive as funding from all sources diminishes.
- An Evangelical crisis pregnancy clinic thrives, expanding and buying state of the art equipment. Its faith based mission clearly has a strong network of supporters, yet its religious affiliation, funding sources, and governance processes lack transparency.

### **Three suggestions for improving stewardship:**

- Clarify faith communities' role as stewards of their nonprofits. Faith communities need educational tools on the meaning of stewardship, strategies for developing strong board members, and mechanisms for the organization to share its work regularly with the faith community and receive feedback from the community.
- Educate the agency leadership (board and key staff). Boards and other selectors of staff should seek leadership who can articulate the stewardship focus. Leaders must regularly articulate the faith base of the organization for it to remain alive.
- Build informal relationships. Faith communities and their FBOs should foster a variety of ways that faith community members can become involved with the organization, strengthen trust, and develop a sense of ownership of its mission—i.e. build social capital networks. Strong informal relationships lead to more successful fundraising, organizational operations, and ability to carry forward the agency's mission. In turn, involvement with the agency can strengthen members' commitment to the faith community or draw new members to that community.

### ***Stewardship: Discussion Questions***

1. How does your faith tradition define stewardship? Would it embrace this broader definition?
2. Discuss this key finding: "Faith communities are much more willing to support organizations that reflect their current beliefs and religious culture than institutions that simply have a historic connection to that faith." How (or not) have you seen this play out in your experience?
3. "Although most FBOs can identify what they expect from their founding faith communities, most faith communities have limited understanding of how to successfully guide and support their organizations." Is that true in your context? What does your faith community expect from the organizations it sponsors, and vice versa?
4. Name the formal and informal stewardship mechanisms that are active in your organizational/faith community context.
5. Which of the suggestions for improving stewardship might best apply to your organizational/faith community context? Can you think of other suggestions?

## Practical Theology

- Working definition: *The formal and informal strategies a community uses to carry out its theological teachings, religious-based values, everyday practices, and religious culture in faith community activities and interactions with nonprofits affiliated with that religion.*
- Although all faith traditions use similar mechanisms to support and guide their organizations (e.g. board appointments, fundraising, volunteers, in-kind support), theological rationales and strategies differ based on the practical theology of the tradition. (There is of course considerable variation within each major stream of Christian tradition, but some general patterns can be observed.)
- Practical theology is often expressed through embedded religious values, defined as: Unstated values and/or expressions that may not be vocally articulated, but define the particular faith community. Embedded religious values are as important as explicit, formal faith references in an agency's connections with its faith tradition.
- Faith communities that use stewardship strategies to convey their practical theology to their organizations are more likely to maintain strong relationships with those non-profits. Organizations that reflect the practical theology of their faith community are more likely to sustain support from that community.
- A nonprofit may have a strong connection with the practical theology of a faith tradition without the explicit religious language or formal faith affiliations that most typologies use to identify FBOs. Faith traditions vary widely in the extent and ways they use God-language and include faith-based messages in their programming.
- In general, religious traditions that see faith as individual commitment (Evangelicals, African Americans and some Mainline Protestants) are more likely to use expressive language while religions with strong focus on communal religion (Jews and some Catholics) tend to have fewer explicit references to faith and may have few outward signs of a particular religion.
- Religious traditions that strongly emphasize religious tolerance and an appreciation for theological diversity (e.g. many Mainline Protestants) tend to embed their religious commitments more implicitly within their service organizations.
- Organizations should look for embedded theological values in assessing their relationship with their faith community.

## Examples of practical theology in a Mainline Protestant context:

- Mainline Protestantism has been significantly shaped by the Social Gospel movement of the early twentieth century, which called Christians to care for people in poverty and advocate for social justice as a central tenet of faith. Mainline practical theology emphasizes tangible demonstrations of God's care for the poor and vulnerable as an expression of personal spirituality. As a Habitat for Humanity staff member explains, "Ending poverty, providing housing, being involved in advocacy for the poor, involving congregations in hands on mission is all about ministry and all about faith. I am a very firm believer that one's faith is something that is active, and you live it out. And there's no better way of doing that than building houses for the poor." Mainline organizations serve their faith community by giving members an opportunity to live out their faith through meaningful service.
- Embedded core Mainline values of human dignity and religious tolerance are reflected in the norm that organizations, like individuals, should not impose their religious views on others--particularly in an interfaith context. A Bread for the World staff member shares an example:  
*We had an interfaith convocation at the Washington National Cathedral. Everybody knew that we were a Christian organization, but we have Buddhists, Jewish rabbis, and Muslims, and we came there around the issue of hunger. We weren't there to try to proselytize or anything. It wasn't so much that we were downplaying [religion], but we were just really dealing with the issue. It doesn't matter if you are a Jew or Muslim or Christian, if you are hungry.*
- Personal faith in the Mainline context is largely considered a private matter, though it leads to public engagement. While Mainline programs are often deeply motivated by faith, the organizational culture does not encourage overt expressions of religious identity. Apart from being operated by or at a church, Mainline-sponsored organizations may have few explicit indicators of their faith affiliation. For example, one Disciples of Christ church, drawing on theological values of equality and inter-group understanding, sponsored a youth arts program intended to bring together youth from various racial backgrounds. Program materials stressed unity and multiculturalism in general terms, with no overt Biblical or theological references.
- Pragmatism is a Mainline value that influences the administration of faith-based services. Mainline Protestants tend to view the organizations they sponsor from a practical standpoint and to make decisions about these ministries as they would a business organization. Funding is contingent on the organization's ability to fulfill its mission. For example, the director of one community development organization encouraged supporters to think of themselves as "shareholders" in the organization. Some nonprofits give preference to hiring executive directors with professional business backgrounds. This professionalization is rooted in the middle class, educated character of Mainline demographics, and in the history of Mainline influence in the development of professional care societies and standards.
- The values of pragmatism and tolerance also help drive partnerships. The study included several examples of Mainline Protestant churches coming together to form an organization to provide centralized outreach, such as SPAN (Severna Park Assistance Network). GEDCO (Govans Ecumenical Development Corporation) is an example of a Mainline-connected ecumenical agency with interfaith relationships. This is reflective of the Mainline Protestant values of diversity and openness to other religious views, especially where this is seen as advancing the practical objectives of the organization. As a SPAN staff member explained, "The only way to do it is to go across the boundaries and work with your ecumenical partners...if there is a Mosque in the area they would be invited to send representatives, the synagogue would be invited. I see it as the very heart of the gospel that we are doing as a people of faith."

## Examples of practical theology in an African American Christian context:

- For the Black church, “theology in practice” has been both a response to slavery, oppression and ongoing marginalization, as well as a continual reinterpretation of what it means to be a community of faith in relation to a changing social context.
- African Americans, more than other religious groups, view the church as an appropriate forum for political and social change. Historically, black churches have nurtured the work of civil rights and economic advancement for African Americans, including providing much of the people power for the massive civil protests of the 1960s, and mobilizing local and national networks in electoral politics. For example, Union Baptist has a significant history as a center for the civil rights movement in Baltimore and sponsored speeches by local politicians during the study. Two of the African American religious groups in this study hosted voter registration drives.
- Promoting education holds special importance for the Black Church in the U.S. During and immediately after slavery the Black Church was often the primary, if not the only source for children’s secular and religious education. Even after schools were desegregated, many Black churches ran private schools as an alternative to substandard public education systems. Throughout our research, pastors stressed the importance of the church supporting programs of education as a way to improve conditions for the African American community. For example, the charter school came out of a strategic planning initiative for the church community, where members of the congregation called for the creation of a school. Most thought along the lines of a private, Christian school, but the pastor guided them to see that a charter public school could be more relevant for the needs of the community. The mission of the charter school is:

*To cultivate with regularity and predictability young people who are proficient relative to academic achievement and intellectual skills; advanced, constructive, and healthy relative to character development; empowered to make a life; equipped to make a living; and positioned to participate fully in freedom and democracy.*

- African American leaders often use the terms “social justice” or “empowerment” to describe their motivation for ministry. Many in the Black Church see it as their mission to uplift all African Americans, as an oppressed minority. One Black pastor emphasized how social justice is intertwined with the very reason for the church's existence:

*The AME Church has a lot to do with social justice. That is one of the major reasons for the founding the AME Church. It wasn't to establish another branch of Methodism. ... So outreach ministries that benefit the neediest of us and those who are lost and forgotten are just crucial to everything that we do and everything that we believe.*

The church is seen as having a responsibility to the African American community as a whole. This understanding is embedded in church-sponsored programs that focus on social “uplift” or personal and community development, such as employment training, welfare to work programs, and credit unions.

- The African American embedded value of empowerment gives work for the church or its social programs an added layer of meaning as an alternative venue by which members can develop leadership skills, particularly when these skills are not recognized or valued by the wider society. For example, the pastor of Cookman United Methodist Church, who also serves as the director of the church's educational and social welfare programs, stated that she is committed to “hiring developmentally.” Study data shows consistent evidence for high levels of participation from church members in voluntary and staff positions within congregation-based services and affiliated nonprofits. The high proportion of congregation members who served on nonprofit boards, as program staff and as volunteers stood out as a distinctive stewardship strategy among the African American sites.

## Examples of practical theology in an Evangelical context:

- Evangelical theology seeks to apply the teachings of Scripture and the believer's personal relationship with Jesus to all of life. The practice of personal spiritual disciplines--e.g., Bible reading, prayer, worship--is likely to be embedded into Evangelical organizations, whether as formal program activities or as an informal byproduct of evangelical culture. Because Evangelical social action tends to be directly linked to personal faith, these practices strengthen the motivation for ongoing service.
- Encouraging others to experience personal salvation is a core Evangelical value, though there are a wide range of strategies for achieving this goal. Many ministries regard humanitarian service as incomplete if the person being served is not eventually invited to share in the faith of the ministry sponsors and/or to join the sponsoring worship community. One example of this is the Blessing Room at Chesapeake Christian Center (Church of God), which provides a food pantry and free clothing, while also encouraging clients who come for services to give their lives to Christ. As one staff member explains:

*When people come in with problems and they need food and they need money and they need clothes, we invite them and try to help them as much as we can. [We] introduce them to Pastor and [the key volunteer], and she encourages them, and we tell them about the Lord, you know, about how much they are loved and not to give up—that we all go through situations, but the Lord is ever, ever faithful.*

- Other Evangelical ministries take more implicit, less verbal relational approaches to sharing faith. In response to the theological principle of free will (God wants people to choose faith freely, not by compulsion or cultural habit), and also in reaction to the mainstream cultural resistance to overt evangelism, many are sensitive not to appear too "pushy" about their faith. For example, this staff member at a pregnancy center affirms, "We don't have an agenda for the woman coming in except that, you know, we hope at some point to be able to share the Gospel. But our point is that we care about her and her outcome and what happens. ... In that sense everything that we do is free, is given freely."
- Because they view humanity as innately fallen and in need of conversion, Evangelicals tend to be pessimistic about the potential of human institutions to effect lasting social change, though they are strikingly optimistic about the potential to influence personal transformation that spills over into societal benefit. Thus Evangelical programs tend to emphasize compassion over justice, and to focus on individual over societal change.
- Because Evangelicals look to the Bible as the authoritative guide to all of life, the programs undertaken by Evangelicals are typically motivated, directed or supported in some way by Scripture. Organizations that maintain a strong connection with the Evangelical community are likely to be rich in Biblical references in the communication of their mission and activities, though such allusions may not be understood by non-Evangelical supporters.
- Another characteristic of Evangelicalism is a strong current of individualism, tracing back to the Reformation, tying into the theological and cultural themes of personal relationships and religious freedom. This individualism extends to the decentralized polity of many Evangelical churches and organizations, and may help explain why Evangelicals form many organizations but belong to comparatively few social service-related umbrella institutions.
- The theme of individualism also contributes to the important role that visionary leaders often play in the Evangelical community. Since evangelical organizations rely strongly on the personal call of their leaders and key staff, leadership transitions can foster significant changes in the organization. For example, the form and very nature of the programs sponsored by Charitable Christian Fellowship changed each time a new executive director took over; the program continually reinvented itself to reflect the current direction of its leadership and network of supporters.



## ***Practical Theology: Discussion Questions***

1. How does practical theology (the formal and informal strategies a community uses to carry out its theological teachings, faith-based values, everyday practices, and religious culture in faith community activities and interactions with nonprofits affiliated with that religion) differ from dogmatic or systematic theology?
2. Describe practices or characteristics of a ministry associated with your faith community that reflect embedded religious values. (These are values or expectations that may or may not be vocally articulated, but that define the particular faith community.)
3. What is the role of explicitly religious language and references to personal faith in your faith tradition? Is faith something to be expressed publicly or kept private? How is this consistent (or not) with how faith is expressed in particular nonprofits supported by your faith tradition? Come up with several examples.
4. "Organizations that reflect the practical theology of their faith community are more likely to sustain support from that community." Why is this the case? Have you seen examples of this in your experience? Think of a nonprofit that is struggling for support, and consider how its relationship with the faith community might be a factor. What about organizations that are linked with more than one faith community?
5. How could the practical theology of a nonprofit organization be assessed, in relation to its connection with its supporting faith community? Develop a process for evaluating this dynamic.

## Faith Tradition Systems

- While each religious group employs unique strategies, the study identified three broad systems that religious communities use to organize their connections to organizations under their care that reflect practical theology and stewardship strategies.
- These systems come out of the faith communities, shaping both the stewardship strategies of religious institutions and the ways that nonprofits from that religious tradition approach faith communities for support and guidance.
- Identifying systems is important because the best practices, weaknesses, and logic behind non-profit activity are specific to each system. While some best practices may cross systems, wholesale attempts to replicate strategies appropriate for another system are unlikely to work because they run counter to the cultural and theological logic behind the founding relationship between faith community and organization.
- The Faith & Organizations Project identified three main systems: *Institutional*, *Congregational*, and *Network*.
- *Institutional* systems organize and centralize supports at the faith-community level, with expectations that the entire faith community is responsible for those in need. They centralize fundraising, volunteer recruitment, training and sometimes facilities management. They have a strong tradition of centralized planning and resource-sharing. Umbrella organizations often play a key role. Most Jewish and Catholic organizations fit into this system; Catholic systems are integrated into either the archdiocese or order while Jewish systems centralize all social and health services.

(Examples: Catholic Charities, the Jewish Federation)

- *Congregational* systems see congregations as the central organizing force for justice and charity work (sometimes with support from denominational structures). Though efforts that begin within a congregation typically spin off as independent nonprofits, these organizations may maintain ties to one or more congregations through board appointments, appeals for resources, volunteers and in-kind supports. In this study, Mainline Protestants, some African American churches, and Quakers fell into the congregational system (no Evangelical nonprofit in the study sample fit this category, but it is likely that some evangelical groups do use this system as well).

(Examples: A church-based school; a food pantry located in a congregation; a housing ministry launched by several churches that now operates as a separate nonprofit; a denominational relief program that depends on congregations for funds and volunteers)

- *Network* systems draw together individuals with a shared commitment to the work of the agency, based on the founder's social network or institutional/virtual networks of individuals with a similar vision. Nonprofits may be connected with one or multiple congregations, but their decision-making and support systems reside outside the congregational system. Almost all the people involved with the organization share the founding faith, have a connection with the leader, or have some other personal connection with the ministry. One main subset of this group is formed by evangelistic organizations, for which sharing their faith is a key element of the ministry. Evangelical groups tended to fall in this system, as well as some African American and some Mainline groups.

(Examples: a pregnancy center that draws pro-life volunteers from various denominations; an urban ministry founded by an evangelical leader who recruits volunteers and support from his personal network; an independent Christian school that recruits students and support based on a particular theological framework)

- *Hybrid forms:* Some organizations blend characteristics of different systems. For example, the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has elements of institutional and congregational systems. The national organization draws support from the Lutheran conferences and centralizes some administration, but local affiliates rely on congregations as primary sources of sponsors and funds, as well as board members.

### ***Faith Tradition Systems: Discussion Questions***

1. Which of the three systems for organizing connections with the faith community best describes nonprofits in your faith tradition? Does your tradition mainly utilize one type of system, or does it include nonprofits in more than one category?
2. Discuss the advantages and drawbacks of each of the three strategies for organizing and sustaining religiously based work.
3. How do these systems relate to other typologies or frameworks for nonprofits that you have studied?
4. “Attempts to replicate strategies appropriate for another system are unlikely to work because they run counter to the cultural and theological logic behind the founding relationship between faith community and organization.” Come up with several examples of a how a strategy appropriate to an organization in one faith system might not work for an organization in another system.
5. What (a) ethical issues and (b) leadership challenges might be most relevant to each of the different systems?

### **Key Organizational Challenges**

The following challenges are common to many organizations. How can FBOs address these challenges in a way that strengthens their faith community connections?

1. Growth and formalization
  - What happens to organizations during times of rapid growth and/or expansion of capacity and how does this affect their relationship to their founding faith community?
  - How can organizations take steps towards formalization and professionalization while preserving their faith based identity?
2. Leadership transition:
  - How have organizations successfully navigated major transitions in leadership?
  - What is the role of the faith community in leadership transition?
3. Demographic changes:
  - How can FBOs respond constructively to demographic shifts in their faith community or target community?
4. Participatory attenuation:
  - How can organizations counter attenuating faith community involvement?
5. The current economic situation:
  - How has the current economic situation affected organizations?
  - What is the faith community's role in supporting nonprofits in an economic downturn?

## **Growth and formalization:**

- Expansion of services and capacity seem to be the most common issue driving organizational transformation.
- In some cases, rapid organizational growth leads to organizational formalization of previously informal processes. For example, after an African American congregation received a grant “almost by chance,” the church hired a professional grant writer, which led to a much larger grant and a revision of their fiscal practices.
- In other instances, professionalization was a deliberate step to facilitate expansion of services. As the pastor of another African American church described her strategic involvement with the church's plans for a community development corporation:

*Because I was familiar with working with non-profits through my public servant life and because I knew that the church wanted to do more, I spent six months putting together what I considered to be a business strategic plan about how to move forward and make outreach ministries into something that was more viable in terms of a business. ... We wanted to start serving the community in a way that we could not as a church.*

- Many FBOs turn to their faith community for added support during periods of expansion. For example, a large Lutheran organization took steps to increase its outreach to congregations as federal funding was cut; facing increased need and limited grant funding, a large Catholic social service entity created a parish partners program to generate more support; a rapidly expanding Quaker school received approval to come “under the care” of the Yearly Meeting, including additional board members.
- Umbrella organizations and professional societies can also serve as a resource for groups seeking to grow and expand capacity. However, this can lead to conflict if the vision and culture of these groups is not consistent with the mission and practical theology of the FBO.
- Steps towards formalizing and expanding operations may create tension with the goal of preserving the organization's faith based identity. When certain board members of a rapidly growing ecumenical housing agency suggested changing the mission statement to reflect increased participation by non-faith-based supporters, other board members protested. As another example, some Catholics in the study voiced concerns about the changing nature of their schools and other institutions, as priests and nuns were replaced by professional administrators and social workers whose training was perceived as being more secular.
- During periods of growth, an FBO may re-evaluate its faith based mission and connection to its faith community. In some cases the agency decides the risk of secularization is an acceptable trade-off for increased capacity and more efficient administration. In others, the agency opts to strengthen how faith-based accountability is built into procedural policies, such as the faith community's involvement in selection and training of board and staff.
- Some organizations decide to forego expansion of services to preserve faith-based elements of their ministry. As the director of one Evangelical food pantry stated, “You live by the grant, you die by the grant.” Since federal funding would prevent them from distributing religious material along with the food, they restrict their support to private sources.
- However, professionalization and faith are not mutually exclusive. Professionalization may be compatible with the expectations and practical theology of the sponsoring faith community. Other organizations resolve the tension by seeing God as the ultimate source of organizational growth, even if this growth comes through a secular medium. Several Evangelical nonprofits in the study have college educated leaders with the expertise to fundraise from various sources and manage a complex organization, but they maintain strong connections with Evangelical networks that reinforce the faith-based mission.

### **Leadership transitions:**

- Leadership transitions have an impact on the religious culture in the nonprofit and the relationship between the faith community and organizations.
- Faith community leadership transitions can change the community's relationship to the nonprofit. New leaders bring new vision and new priorities.
- Organizations started by a visionary pastor may lose support when that leader leaves. This is particularly evident for organizations within the Network system, which are more entrepreneurial in nature. In other cases, leadership changes in the faith community provide the impetus for starting or expanding FBOs.
- FBO leadership transitions can reshape connections to the founding faith community. Boards may try to choose leaders that share their values, even if they do not come from the founding faith.
- Leadership changes that fail to reinforce practical theology can weaken an FBO's connections to the faith community.

### ***Examples:***

- One agency selected an executive director from another faith tradition because he was "from the community served;" however, this person's leadership style clashed with the culture of the faith community, leading to strained relations, and he was ultimately replaced.
- One Evangelical project received far less support when a new pastor took over the church. A similar reduction in support following leadership change was also seen in two of the African American organizations in this study.
- A Jewish organization came out of a planning study developed by newer leaders of the local Federation who envisioned a more active involvement in local social services by the Jewish community.

### **Participatory attenuation:**

- Faith communities and FBOs must develop a strategy for responding when the relationship between them becomes less strong or attenuates.
- One factor leading to attenuation may be the selection of board members or executive staff who lack understanding or personal connection with the faith community.
- In other cases, lack of sufficient support can lead organizations to expand beyond the founding faith community. A shift to primary dependence on other sources can alter the stewardship relationship with the original faith community.
- Another factor in attenuation may be conflicts between the organization and faith community. These conflicts may involve religious disputes, unfulfilled expectations, or practices at odds with the culture or theology of the faith community.
- Changing relationships to the founding faith community can even lead an organization to decide to become completely independent of its former faith connections.
- Alternatively, agencies may pursue strategies to renew its relationship with the founding faith community, to become attached to a new faith community, or to expand its connections to include new faith groups (whether through linkages with multiple congregations, ecumenical groups, or interfaith coalitions).

### **Examples:**

- Description of a Quaker organization that addressed attenuation by coming under the auspices of a higher level adjudicatory body, the regional Yearly Meeting:

*What happened was, people in the beginning, there were Quakers who were on the board either from the [the founding] Meeting or from here and over the years as they have dropped off, either because they have reached the end of their term or they died or what have you or had to leave for other reasons. We were not attentive to that, and I didn't pay any attention to it, until all of the sudden we got into legal trouble because the board was not constituting according to our by-laws [regarding the number of Quakers on the board] and the lawyers said 'you've got to fix this or the actions of the board are not legal because you are not following your own guidelines, your own bylaws.'*

- Another Quaker social service agency lost effective ties to its founding Quaker community after several choices of executive directors with limited leadership ability and limited understanding of Quakers. The faith community had played a limited role in choosing staff, and connections to the founding faith were seldom discussed with leadership. It began to question whether to call itself a faith-based agency. Facing potential sale of property and closure of programs due to loss of a major funding source, the executive director brought the organization under the umbrella of a large, respected social service entity affiliated with the African American community, the major community served by the agency.
- A Habitat for Humanity chapter discovered that it had trouble getting either funding or volunteers from its core faith communities because access was controlled by key volunteers who only recruited others from their personal social networks. In order to gain more resources to survive, the organization created a separate program for Jewish and Muslim faith communities to do Habitat houses.
- An African American FBO loses its original sponsoring church because its pastor does not want to take federal funds. Other churches step in to take over sponsorship of the organization.
- The director of an Evangelical pregnancy center describes the conflicts that led to severed ties with some faith community members:

*There were some denominations that didn't want to get involved with us because other denominations were involved with us, and I think they felt like we were proselytizing someone away from a certain church. We did have some churches that thought that we would put volunteers from their denomination with a client that said she was from that denomination, and we had to explain that's also not what we are willing to do, because we believe whoever they're going to see is who God has set for them. ... Some churches have wanted us to ... make a political statement. We had to explain that we were not a political organization and we weren't going to make a statement against someone or something.*

- An Evangelical Christian school broke with its founding congregation when its values shifted from the original core faith beliefs. The school became an independent conservative Christian school and the families that shared the original congregation's theology formed a new school.

### **Impact of the recession on FBOs in the study and their faith communities:**

- Initially few of the organizations considered service cutbacks; in fact several wanted to expand the scope of their services to meet emergent need. However, as the recession deepened, some cut staff or programs in an attempt to balance the budget.
- Effectiveness of various organizational strategies during the economic downturn seems to depend on two factors: adaptability and credibility (though various faith traditions define these qualities differently.)

- Organizations that took immediate steps responding to the economic downturn received enthusiastic support from their preestablished funding and volunteer base. Visible rapid action was also essential to motivating new sources of support from other sectors and organizations.
- Organizations attached only to a small number of congregations (particularly aging or lower-income) had the hardest time finding sufficient resources. Several experienced financial pressures from decreased giving and increased need; two of the organizations studied during this project closed due to severe financial problems.

### **General positive strategies in response to faith-related challenges:**

- Seek to understand, appreciate and deepen the role the organization plays in the faith of all those actively involved, regardless of their role as staff, board, volunteers or program participants
- Create open lines of communication among all those who are actively involved about matters of faith, in a way appropriate to the religious culture
- Define faith community expectations for the agency and vice versa
- Clarify accountability processes for both the faith-based organization and supporting community
- Encourage greater integration through strengthening social networks between the organization and the faith community
- Incorporate multiple generations in all aspects of maintaining connections between the faith-based organization and faith community
- Encourage organizational self-assessment and self-examination that includes reflection on stewardship of faith connections

### ***Key Organizational Challenges: Discussion Questions***

1. This set of questions relates to a specific organization in your ministry context. Which of these challenges has this organization faced? How has the organization responded, and how has this situation impacted its relationship with the faith community?
2. Discuss the role that this organization plays in the faith of volunteers, staff and beneficiaries. What might be “appropriate venues for communication about matters of faith”?
3. Identify strategies for strengthening social networks between the organization and the faith community. How might this connection affect its capacity to respond to organizational challenges?
4. How might stewardship of the faith element be better incorporated into this organization’s accountability and evaluation processes?
5. If you were a leader of this organization, how might you help ensure that leadership transitions (both on your way in and on your way out) could help deepen a vital relationship with the faith community?



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