



Strategies to Maintain Connections Between Faith
Communities and Nonprofits for African American
Churches: Findings from the Faith and Organizations
Project

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Funded by Lilly Endowment Inc

The church in the U.S. has long been a source of comfort, community, and help for many communities. For African Americans, the country's long history of slavery, racism, and discrimination manifested a context in which the Black Church has assumed a role and meaning within the community that is unparalleled among other U.S. religious traditions. The Black Church has fostered political engagement, social services, such as community development and education, and provided a safe space for freedom of expression, worship and supportive relationships.

For many Black Christians distinctive worshipping style and the role of the congregation in the Black community were a necessary source of social cohesion when other institutions such as marriage and family were destroyed through compulsory displacement--from their homes and from family by slave traders and owners. The comprehensive ten-year survey of Black churches in the U.S. by C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya established the Black Church as one of two major institutions in African American life, along with the Black family. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of this formerly "invisible institution" in the history of African Americans.

African Americans are more likely to attend and participate in worship and social serving activities through a congregation. The National Survey of Black Americans (1979-1980) found that of the 89 percent of about two thousand individuals who were surveyed were religiously affiliated, with 98.6 percent of them identifying themselves as Christian. On-going surveys conducted by the Barna Research Group and the Gallup polling center observe that more than two-thirds of adults in the U.S. identify themselves as members of religious congregations—and African Americans are even more likely to belong to a congregation.

In addition to membership in a congregation, African Americans report higher rates of attendance than either Whites or Hispanics. African Americans are also more active than other Americans in worship, personal prayer, and reading of religious material. These patterns were observed in several independent surveys including the National Social Capital Benchmark Survey of 2000, a survey of Black and White, lower income 11th grade adolescents conducted by Carol Markstrom in 1999, and in several articles and chapters by Robert Joseph Taylor and Linda Chatters (1989, 1991).

History of Black Congregations and Community Service in the US

Prior to and after the Civil War: banks, hospitals, credit unions, low-income housing aid, nursing homes, schools and colleges by and for African Americans grew out of religious communities. The Black Church has also been recognized as the birthing place of African American identity, political action, religious and secular education, entrepreneurship, family resiliency, the tradition of self-help, and community aid. Multiple publications demonstrate the historic and contemporary role of Black congregations in social support (see McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson & Fromer 1998, Hill 1999, Raboteau 2001).

Today, the Black Church remains an important source of practice and local help in African American communities. Family support programs offered through Black churches have been found to have a measurable impact on upward mobility for low-income families by Andrew Billingsley (1992). In black communities, when federal cutbacks result in fewer funds for programs that serve the homeless, poor, elderly, mentally ill and children, the "private organizations" that stepped forward to meet needs were often black congregations. The

Philadelphia Census of Congregations data indicate that black congregations provided more than half (54.6%) of all community-serving programs reported in the study.

Communities and Organizations in the Study

The study included five African American churches and seven organizations which represented three protestant denominations: United Methodist, Baptist, and African Methodist Episcopal. Organizations include two community development corporations; a public charter school; a Head Start program, a marriage education program; and a human development, economic development and public safety series of services; and an alternative school for out of school youth. Churches being researched are located in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Philadelphia. All sites were located in predominately African American communities and most are in areas that have experienced decline.

The United Methodist Churches – Northwood Appold and Cookman are similar in that they operate under the auspices of a Conference, where the pastor is reappointed on an annual basis. The structure of the African Methodist Episcopal church – Union Bethel – is similar. The Baptist Churches operate more independently of an adjudicatory body. It has been noted that many African American churches are managed top-down, with the pastor in the key leadership role and other officers and program administrators operating under the pastor's direction. This does appear to be the case in some degree in the churches in the study. There is a tendency towards an entrepreneurial spirit and a focus on empowerment of those to whom outreach is targeted as well as to their communities.

There is variation in how the observed programs are linked to their respective churches. Cookman United Methodist Church (CUMC) in Philadelphia has opted to operate its youth alternative program under the nonprofit status of the conference rather than institutionalize a separate 501(c)(3). The Eastern Conference of the United Methodist Church provided seed money to initiate the youth alternative education program; however, more recently funding has come from government sources. The Head Start program, although also government funded, comes under the auspices of Union Baptist Church's (UBC) nonprofit status. The government-funded marriage education program, at Northwood-Appold United Methodist Church (NAUMC), started out under the nonprofit status of the church but has now received its own 501(c)(3) status. This is the same for the CDC at Union Bethel African Methodist (UBAME). The public charter school created by NAUMC and the human development, economic development and public safety programs linked currently to Wayland Baptist Church (but created by a collaborative of churches), started out as their own separate nonprofit entities. These programs work in conjunction with the Wayland Baptist Church CDC, which includes the development of senior housing. So the trend among these sites was to establish a program-related 501(c)(3) which is legally, or "financially" distinct from the congregation.

All of these programs benefit from space provided in church-owned facilities, either as a contribution from the church or through a formal lease agreement. Program directors would agree that if they had to pay full market price for a space similar to what they are using for free or at a reduced rent, the cost would be prohibitive. The same goes for the cost of utilities and other facilities related services which are subsidized by virtue of being located in a building operated by or shared with a congregation. In addition, in many of the sites, church fundraisers were used to augment program funding which was received from governmental and other outside sources and fee for service income. In none of the programs were participants required to be the same faith as the respective church. Programs are open to members of the churches,

but most served participants who are not members of the affiliated faith community or congregation.

In these sites, organizations that have their own nonprofit status did not have formal requirements that board members must be the faith of the church; however, church members did predominate on the nonprofit boards. Except for an established public charter school, most programs and organizations drew their staff from the ranks of the congregation; although, again, there was no formal requirement for this. Most of these churches were small- to medium-sized congregations, but also had congregants with expertise in areas required for the programs. In cases where church members with certain skills or expertise were not available, the hired staff did not necessarily come from the same denomination, but tended to share a commitment to faith or the mission of the organization. Whether with their own 501(c)(3) or not, all of the churches being studied maintained strong links to the organizations that they created. This close connection to the original faith community is a distinctive characteristic among African American, faith-based service provision.

Practical Theology – Pragmatic Influences and Black Church Mission in the US

Faith communities manifest their lived theology, or work in the world, through how their organizations are supported and run. The following sections trace the roots of service within the Black church and the African American community and specific observations are drawn from the African American sites in the study. Woven throughout these sections is the underlying theme that for the Black church, “theology in practice” has been both a response to slavery, oppression and existing marginalization, as well as a reinterpretation of what it means to be a community of faith. Thus, these sections present theological commitments and the practices which follow from them.

In addition to its spiritual and religious mission, the Black Church remains an important source of at least three categories of service: political engagement; social services to the community, with an emphasis on education and community development; and a community haven. Three sections are grouped by these themes.

Political Engagement.

The Black Church has nurtured awareness and impetus for the advancement and legal rights of Blacks, including providing much of the people power for the massive civil protests of the 1960s, and creating and mobilizing local and national networks in electoral politics. African Americans, more than other ethnic groups, include church as an appropriate forum for political and social change. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) found that 92 percent of black clergy approved of church involvement in political tasks and felt that it was appropriate for them to express their political views as religious leaders. In 1998, a USA Today survey found that blacks were three times more likely (28%) to say that religious leaders discussed politics than whites (8%). Black Churches have promoted voter registration and “get-out-the-vote drives” (Wilcox & Gomez, 1990). Beyerlein and Chaves (2003) found that Black Protestant congregations were almost seven times more likely than evangelical/conservative Protestant congregations, six times more likely than Catholic congregations, and more than nine times more likely than Mainline/liberal Protestant congregations to host voter registration drives. Among the African American congregations and organizations in this study, two sites held voter registration drives. 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. Our study did not ask specifically about other types of political engagement.

Social Services and Education

Promoting education holds special importance for the Black Church in the US. During and immediately after slavery the Black Church was often the only, if not the primary source for children's secular and religious education. Religious leaders founded schools and used church basements as classrooms, and deacons and elders served as teachers, when black children were not permitted in public schools. Even after segregation of schools was outlawed in the 1970s, in the face of substandard urban public education systems, many Black churches responded by running private schools as an alternative to public education and there was evidence for this trend our study sites. The organizations and affiliated congregations in this site supported academic and educational achievement: Three out of the five African American sites in this study provided formal education ranging from pre-kindergarten, which was a Head Start program, through primary schools, including one alternative high school and one charter school.

Throughout our research, pastors stressed the importance of the church supporting these education programs 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 over a period of time in seeing that a Charter School could be more relevant for the needs of the community.

The Philadelphia Census of Congregations published a report (2001) which found that Black congregations are more likely than non-Black congregations to provide informal education and personal development type programs including mentoring, rites of passage programs, programs for gang members, computer training, and recreational programs for youth. Similarly, the National Congregations Study of 1236 congregations found that African American congregations supported a higher percentage of education or training programs than non African American congregations, including non-religious education, job-related, and tutoring/mentoring programs. Because our study focused primarily on programs which were operated through nonprofit organizations, we did not survey congregations about these other types of informal programs which may be provided.

These studies highlight the strong value placed on academic achievement and education by Black communities, and suggest that education, moral training, and civil rights were seen as prerequisites -- even to economic development. Several Black scholars have published detailed studies which document the importance of education among the Black Church and the role the church has played in advancing education among African Americans. For example, 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.

Social Services and Community Development: ie: "Uplift"

A third strand of how theological commitments in the Black Church are played out through social service and practice is often described as "social uplift." In this study, African American pastors and laity used the term "social justice" as a way to describe their motivation and commitment to ministry, service, or programs in the community. An embedded and common understanding was that it is the mission of the Black Church to uplift all African Americans, as an oppressed minority – not just to serve others as a more general part of doing "good works" but specifically to serve (African American) members and non-members as a way to empower the African American community.

One Black pastor used the term "empowerment" to summarize the theology behind their programming. Another pastor also emphasized the African Methodist Episcopal Church's focus on social justice as a primary motivation for programs.

I think the biggest thing and I will just say this, 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. The whole social justice piece. 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.

Reflections by a Black Baptist nonprofit executive director told how a pastor's extensive involvement in the 1950s and 60s with nationally recognized figures in the Civil Rights Movement impacted programming of the congregation and nonprofit. In the 60s the term "social Gospel" was used in a similar way as social justice is used today.

For him it's purely a social gospel movement. The idea that the Gospels are intertwined with politics and civil rights and he basically preached about churches fulfilling that mission.

A related observation which was present in our data was that of the African American church community as the "first response" or responsible party as opposed to other institutional structures which discriminated against or ignored the African American community. Rather than trusting or relying primarily on public (government) social welfare programs, the church community recognized that public welfare sources were insufficient. This concept of the Black Church as the first response for the uplift of African Americans are exemplified in the types of social programming that Black congregations and nonprofits organized. Programs in housing, and personal development such as a variety of education programming are common. Education programs observed for this study including Head Start programs, an alternative high school, GED or diploma equivalency programs, primary schools, and computer training programs. Other development programs include community health initiatives such as screenings, health awareness programs and nutrition and fitness classes. The focus on personal and community development has also been expressed through many employment training and welfare to work programs.

Historically, African Americans have been excluded from or marginalized in employment opportunities which are the traditional avenues to personal and community, economic betterment. Many Black churches have sought to remediate the effects of this economic oppression though various means including establishing alternative sources of credit and employment through forming credit unions, small business incubators, and advocacy around community concerns for such amenities as public safety, local grocery stores and banks. In addition, as noted, African American congregations have long provided exclusive or

complementary service in primary education, daycare, computer and job skills training, literacy, lay health support, care for elderly and other community development services. In this study, two of the five African American congregations supported community economic development organizations and another provided personal/family development through the publicly funded marriage education program. The congregations and organization provided additional formal and informal programs which supported public safety and senior housing or senior day centers.

Volunteering or working within the congregation also affords an alternative venue through which members can exercise skills, particularly when these skills were not recognized or valued by the wider society. For example, an African American who worked as a cleaning person or waiter for their paid employment might also be head of a women's auxiliary or serve as a deacon in a congregation and the congregation provided an alternative society where skills, leadership, expertise and authority could be exercised. These volunteer positions provided high social status and recognition which was not given in the individuals' paid employment. Our data shows consistent evidence for high levels of participation from church members in voluntary and staff positions within congregation services and their affiliated nonprofit organizations. The high proportion of congregation members who served on nonprofit boards, as program staff and as volunteers stood out as a distinctive occurrence as well as a stewardship strategy among the African American sites.

For example, at Cookman United Methodist, two separate boards exist which both provide oversight for the programmatic arms: There is a "traditional" church board, and there is a "program council" which appears to provide more of the management oversight for the various programs on a day to day basis. Pastor Jones is the Executive Director and the Program Director also chairs the Program Council and is a member of the church. Pastor Jones relies heavily on the input of key staff, (about 8) half of whom are also members of the congregation, to influence the culture and "faith-base" of the programs. Overall, of the 21 staff on the directory, just less than half (10) are also members of the church.

The Church Building as Haven

This study did not specifically categorize data about the spiritual and personal significance that the Black Church holds for African Americans. Yet, literature on the Black Church frequently draws attention to this unique role of the Black Church in the US-- as a communal place of refuge, a place in which to affirm cultural and ethnic identity, and space for "norming" and healing the experiences of persecution and being a minority population. The use of the term "safe haven" has been used to describe one of the roles of the Black Church. Historically, the sanctuary provided both autonomy and anonymity for African Americans where a sense of self, culture, and opportunity could be nurtured. Several of the scholars already cited within this section have pointed out – with great eloquence – that within the church walls, in and through church life, African Americans who faced oppression and dehumanizing experiences developed and sustained a culturally distinct identity and view of reality (Haight, 2002; Lincoln, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

In our study, this common experience and communal understanding of what the Black Church represents was often implied during interviews. One pastor stated it more explicitly, suggesting that for persons who have experienced oppression, the history of the Church in the Black community means that merely entering a church building brings a sense of safety and hope. We note here and will discuss at length in the following section, that the African American sites were more likely to house their service programs and nonprofits within a congregation-owned facility or building.

Distinctive Strategies for Stewardship and Maintaining Ties with Community of Faith

Various communities intentionally or unintentionally utilize various strategies to maintain a relationship with their faith base in organizations under its care or affiliated with that religion. The following patterns were observed regarding the level of control that the founding faith maintains over the organizations among primarily or exclusively African American sites.

Overlap of Organization Leadership Roles and Church Membership

Overlap of religious positions, such as pastor and church members were appointed in staff leadership positions of the program or community development corporation which had a separate formal designation as 501(c)(3). For example, at the Head Start program at Union Baptist, the four directors were either pastor or prominent church members and the board which oversees the nonprofit programs were almost entirely members of the congregation. Volunteers came from the congregation as well. At Union Bethel, which incorporated a CDC after almost 20 years of leadership by one pastor, the same pastor became the Chair of the CDC and the Asst. Pastor is the Executive Director. Similarly at Northwood-Appold, the pastor is the head of both the 501(c)(3) for both the marriage education program and the public charter school, although lay members of the church serve respectively as director and principal. At Cookman, they chose not to incorporate formally as a 501(c)(3), and similar overlap between prominent church members and staff leaders is seen. The pastor serves as executive director and the program director is also a prominent church member. Not all the staff are church members, but key staff appear to be directly involved in both the congregation and the programmatic arm or nonprofit hosted. At Union Bethel, while just 3 out of 9 CDC board member positions are reserved for church members, it so happens that many influential community members who serve on the CDC board are also members of Union Bethel.

Use of Separate 501(c)(3) Designation

Forming separate 501(c)(3) was observed as a relatively recent phenomenon among the African American (church) community. It was viewed by the Pastor of Union Bethel as a way to “enhance, embellish, or expand” the services that the congregation was already doing, and would continue to do. This pastor said that it is a matter of semantics that religious people call such programs “ministry” and others call it “service.”

Cookman UMC is unique in choosing not to form a separate, program-related 501(c)(3). In the late 1990s, early 2000s, church leaders started the paperwork to form a separate 501(c)(3) for the programmatic ministries of the church and then decided against it. Under the pastor’s leadership the congregation has kept its nonprofit status through the regional denomination office. For accounting and financial purposes, the congregation partners with a local coalition as a fiduciary agent to manage the large, primarily public grants (city, state, or federal) for programs. Working with a fiduciary partner is an innovative alternative strategy to forming a separate 501(c)(3) and helps maintain ownership of the programs under the congregation. The congregation/organization has a finance person on staff to keep proper records for the program budget, distinct from the church budget.

Stewardship differs among the various branches of Christianity (Mainline Protestants, Evangelicals, Peace Churches, Catholics, African American churches) and Jews. A final distinctive pattern was observed among the African American sites in the project. As noted earlier, the church building or a congregation-owned facility was consistently used as the place

where separately formed organization programs were carried out in each of the agencies. Use of the congregation building is rent-free or is provided for lower than market cost for similar space. In one case, a pastor explained that the in-kind provision of space is used as the congregation's required match for its federal funding. This finding was corroborated in the Philadelphia Census of Congregations (PCC) data.

Addressing Opportunities and Concerns

Organizational Transitions – Sensitivity to Leadership

Despite including two study sites' whose United Methodist heritage follows an appointment process directed by the regional conference rather than through an independent call process, it remained clear that pastors within Black congregations enjoy a greater degree of local autonomy and support of their congregations than may be typical of other congregational systems. This tradition makes Black congregations more flexible in their approach to providing local services, but also can result in an environment which is highly sensitive to the leadership.

Because of the African American respect for charismatic leadership and reliance on highly talented leadership, Black pastors in many traditions typically have greater autonomy within the local congregation. This means that the level of organization or administrative hierarchy is determined by the local pastor. As such, transitions in leadership can have a great impact on how things are done and what programs are supported. This is very different than for example, denominations with highly structured and centralized administrative routines for leadership transition.

One Baptist pastor described his experience of assuming leadership after the former pastor who had a long pastorate:

He was really more into being charismatic. As a result... the Church programs were somewhat in disarray, they weren't highly structured, lines of authority were very vague and responsibilities were very vague.

Additionally, within the Black Church it is more commonly accepted and practiced that the retired pastor remains an integral and respected member of the faith community. This is in contrast to more structured denominations where the retiring pastor is either appointed to a new position or is expected to find a new faith community. The on-going presence of an emeritus pastor is more common among Black congregations and this may impact programming and polity.

Community Conflicts and Concerns

For African American churches, at least in urban areas, they may be likely to be experiencing some "dis-location" between their original site and immediate community, if established members have been socially "upwardly mobile" and have re-located out of the vicinity of the church building. At three sites (Northwood-Appold, Union Bethel and Wayland Baptist), the researcher noted that while some members have relocated, the communities straddle both lower income and more upwardly mobile neighborhoods so that many members are still living in the same community.

At Union Bethel, one-fifth of the staff were estimated to live in the neighborhood. Since the majority of the staff were also members of the congregation, this is likely to be a good estimate

of the proportion of congregants who live in the community as opposed to those who drive from a further distance.

This observation regarding a congregation's "residential presence" in a community may be especially salient to the programming of Black congregations and their affiliated nonprofits, given the theological value of the faith community as a source for social uplift and empowerment of the Black community. Strong Black churches which have been located in neighborhoods which experienced decline over the past several decades are an institutionalized strength and have advocated for their neighborhoods. It remains to be seen whether these Black congregations will sustain programming focused on neighborhood residents if a majority of the church members no longer live in the neighborhoods surrounding the congregational buildings and property.

This phenomenon, where by members of the congregation no longer reside in close proximity to the building, does not only affect African American congregations, but is more likely to affect younger, non-Catholic or non-Orthodox Jewish, and immigrant congregations (see Sinha, Hillier, McGrew & Cnaan, 2007). For African American congregations, the strong commitment to serving the local community may result in a stronger pull to stay rooted or connected to their local residential community. The traditional commitment to social uplift and giving back to the community may make Black congregations and their affiliated nonprofits better able to find volunteers even among members who may no longer live in that community.

Ownership of Programs and Financial Accountability

Because Black congregations have retained a closer control over established nonprofits through a high proportion of overlap between nonprofit staff and boards with congregation members, careful dialogue about decisions, turf or "ownership" of building space, properties, programs and budget transparency are raised.

One pastor described a change in policy and understanding between the congregation and the nonprofit. There was tension between the congregation and the nonprofit on control of assets. When the current pastor assumed leadership, he gave the congregation more power and re-stated the nonprofit as the affiliate of the congregation rather than as a somewhat independent program:

...there was a tension between those that kind of felt like they were safeguarding assets that were accruing in our affiliate organization and those of the Church leaders who were saying, "Now wait a minute, we paid for those assets." ...now I have them very clear that every asset is to be, that an irrevocable trust is to be given to the Church on every asset that is developed through an affiliate agency, so that everything has to have the name of the Church on it. Any, nothing can be sold or dissolved of without the approval of the Church.

As noted earlier, one Black congregation made the decision not to incorporate a separate 501(c)(3) for the purposes of community programs. The congregation went so far as to submit the paperwork to obtain nonprofit status, but never incorporated. In part this decision reflected the leaderships' concern that the programmatic outreach remains an expression of the congregation's work in the world and does not become a separated, secularized arm of service.

Implications for Practice among African American Communities of Faith and Agencies

Two features in particular distinguish social service provision by African American faith communities. The first is the intentional or unintentional use of church members on agency boards and in leadership and staff positions. A second distinguishing feature among African American communities of faith and affiliated service provision is the historic and deeply held commitment to the social uplift of the poor, disenfranchised, African Americans, and the community.

- ❖ **Use of church members on agency boards and in leadership and staff positions.** While church membership was not a formal, written requirement in any of the agencies or programs, there was a consistent overlap among agency leadership and board members with persons who were also worshipping members of the original faith community. It is not clear whether faith community leaders seek out this overlap, or whether it occurs due to informal “word of mouth” advertising for positions, or because of the convenience of available expertise among church members. All of these reasons may influence the common overlap of church members and agency positions and board membership. An implication of the overlap between church members and agency staff is that while being effective at keeping the agency and the faith community closely linked, managing overlapping communities required savvy leadership. Leaders of such agencies and congregations need to maintain and nurture open communication and clear direction for distinguishing who provides oversight and vision for the agency and the congregation.
- ❖ **Historic and deeply held commitment to the social uplift of the poor, disenfranchised, African Americans, and the community.** While this is not a “strategy” as much as impetus for maintaining close ties with the original faith community, its importance in visioning and implementing outreach and the types of services provided should not be overlooked. For example, the types of programs provided all were geared toward development, including two community development corporations; education—which included the public charter school, a longstanding Head Start program, and an alternative school for older youth; and human development—which included a marriage enrichment program and public safety programs. This historic commitment provides a common set of concerns that can unify agency efforts and help to recruit and solicit help from the wider community.
- ❖ **Special considerations for hiring policies.** One implication for practice among African American communities of faith which also sponsor or provide social services, is that agencies and congregations should be careful not to write policies or by-laws which infringe on their legal right to hire co-religionists, if indeed this is an important value for the sponsoring faith community. For example, a sponsoring faith community would not want to write by-laws which required that a majority of agency board members be from the community but not from congregation. Also, sponsoring faith communities need to be clear about the level of professionalism or quality of service they wish to and need to provide and to seek individuals who are accordingly qualified for agency positions. The pressure to hire a church member or referred person, as well as the potential inconvenience of publicly advertising agency positions should be carefully monitored to ensure that individuals with the right qualifications are hired.
- ❖ **Special attention to financial reporting and budget transparency.** A final implication is that congregations are not immune to calls for more budget transparency for mid-sized and larger nonprofits. Black congregations which are highly connected in staffing and expenditures to affiliated nonprofits must become proficient in maintaining accounting

records which distinguish the congregation budget from the nonprofit budget and be able to show to external funders how the funds are invested.

Information about the Faith & Organizations Project

Since the late 1990s, practitioners and researchers from different faiths have been working collaboratively to understand the connection between faith communities and the non-profits they have created, sponsored or supported. The *Faith and Organizations Project* also has explored ways that faith traditions play out in organizational structure and practice, the role of faith based organizations in their service sectors, and faith based organizations' interactions with the people they serve.

This publication is based on findings from the Project's second study, *Maintaining Vital Connections Between Faith Communities and their Organizations*. The project was funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc., with research activities beginning in March 2008. It examines the relationship between faith communities and organizations founded by Mainline Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Evangelicals, Quakers, and African American churches in the Mid-Atlantic (Philadelphia and the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan areas), Midwest (Ohio and Chicago) and South (South Carolina). This report provides details on strategies to maintain connections for African American churches, outlines unique relationship challenges, and suggests practical ways that faith communities and their organizations could strengthen their relationship and ensure that faith based organizations receive appropriate support and guidance.

Our first report, *Overview Report on Project Findings*, offers a general summary of key project findings and contrasts religious strategies while our second report, *Comparing Strategies to Maintain Connections Between Faith Communities and Organizations Across Religions*, includes findings for all of the religious traditions in the study as well as an introductory overview of key concepts and a conclusion with comparative findings. A series of best practices documents on topics covered in both reports is in development. These products, along with publications from our pilot study and other information on the project, are available on the project website at <http://www.faithandorganizations.umd.edu/>.

Suggested Reading

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