



Evangelical Strategies to Maintain Connections Between
Faith Communities and Their Nonprofits: Findings from the
Faith and Organizations Project

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Historic Roots of Protestant Christians in the U.S.

As their name suggests, Protestant denominations originated in Europe as a formal and declared protest against the structure and practices of the Catholic Church in the 16th century, during the period that became known as the Reformation. Three root beliefs have historically characterized uniquely Protestant theological commitments: justification by grace through faith rather than works; the priesthood of believers, meaning that God relates to individuals directly, rather than through church leaders; and the Bible as the primary authority in lived faith, rather than tradition or ecclesiastical authority.

The multiple founders and traditions within Protestantism branched into the diverse array of denominational families which are evident today. Examples of modern expressions of Protestantism in the U.S. today include Anabaptist, Baptist, Adventist, Congregationalist, Nazarene, Pentecostal, Charismatic and Reformed denominations, as well as non-denominational churches. A collection of denominations with a strong presence in American religious history became known as the core “mainline” groups, though that label today is not limited to these denominations: Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and American Baptist. The rise of evangelicalism became a distinguishable movement in the 18th century, about 200 years after the Reformation. African American denominations, founded in the legacy of slavery and segregation, include AME (African Methodist Episcopal), National Baptist, and many independent Pentecostal groups.

The revivalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries went hand in hand with the development of a “Benevolent Empire”—a proliferation of home mission agencies, voluntary societies, and religiously based social services, driven by the earnest desires of revival-era Christians to show the “fruits of conversion.” Many of the hospitals, schools and other nonprofits founded in this era survive today. In response to the social forces of immigration, industrialization, and urbanization, Christian activism was a blend of relief aid, calls for personal spiritual repentance and society-wide moral reform, and advocacy on controversial social issues such as child labor and abolition. Protestants generally accepted the charge laid down by the editor of *The Watchman*, a leading Baptist publication, who wrote in 1857: “It is ours, not only to fit ourselves and others for a better world, but to labor to make this world better.”

As social gospel theology developed in the early 20th century with a focus on economic justice, it was embraced by some Protestant groups and rejected by others, leading to a definitive split between Evangelical and Mainline Protestantism. For Evangelicals this became known as the Great Reversal, a time when many congregations and denominations renounced social activism to focus on evangelistic outreach and personal discipleship. As a branch of the evangelical movement, fundamentalism became distinct in the early 1900s, embracing conservative theological principles and cultural values.

Among the many Protestant branches, distinctive beliefs and practices cluster around such topics as baptism, speaking in tongues, the process of salvation, ecumenism, and the role of women in the church, as well as the role of sacraments and use of liturgy. Significant diversity also exists in church polity, governance, and regional structures. There are also a rich variety of interpretations and emphases surrounding charitable care of others or social justice, in relation to evangelistic activities.

Despite this great diversity, the Mainline, Evangelical and African American communities share several core characteristics: a common identity as Christian and Protestant, as distinct from Christian and Catholic or Orthodox; a core theological framework featuring faith in Christ, the

Bible as a sacred text, and personal spiritual practices—though how these elements are defined and prioritized varies quite widely; and a worshiping community in which the congregation is the organizational and spiritual center—though how congregations are related in denominational polity also varies. The separate sections on Mainline Protestants, Evangelicals, and the Black Church give further details on the beliefs and systems which characterize each faith community and how these relate to their organizations.

Evangelical Christians and Their Charitable Organizations

Researchers have noted that it is difficult to describe the history of charitable action in the evangelical tradition, because in reality there are multiple histories. Evangelical Christianity is not a cohesive, organized body but a shifting canopy that covers many independent but like-minded groups. The Evangelical label encompasses an array of Protestant denominations and denominational branches, such as the Presbyterian Church of America, the Church of the Nazarene, the Evangelical Free Church, the Christian Reformed Church, the Free Methodist Church, Assemblies of God, the Missionary Church, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Vineyard churches, and Southern Baptists. About 20 percent of Evangelicals are estimated to belong to independent, non-denominational congregations. Moreover, individuals within other denominations may self-identify as Evangelicals. The Evangelical community additionally includes a number of national parachurch organizations that carry out specific functions across denominations or independently from denominations, including service organizations such as Prison Fellowship Ministries and Teen Challenge, and international aid organizations such as Samaritan's Purse, World Vision and World Relief. Ultimately, Evangelical affiliation is not a matter of institutional membership but theological and cultural orientation.

Evangelicals represent a significant, and expanding, slice of the American religious community. Although defining—and thus counting—Evangelicals is a disputed endeavor, several recent surveys find that they account for about a quarter of the U.S. population, with an estimated 40 million adherents. With growing numbers of members and churches, they are the second largest religious group after Catholics; conservative Protestant churches account for about half of all American congregations. Evangelicalism has at its heart a fairly consistent set of core beliefs and religious traditions: the call to personal relationship with Jesus Christ, as the only way to salvation; the divinely inspired, guiding authority of Scripture; the importance of personal spiritual practices (such as attending church and reading the Bible) in applying faith to daily life; and the mandate to share one's faith with others through evangelism. Around these core tenets there is considerable variation in doctrines, religious expression, and church polity. Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity, a major stream within Evangelicalism, shares these same core doctrinal beliefs, with additional emphasis on the dynamic role of the Holy Spirit in directing the spiritual life and behavior of Christians. While many African American faith communities have an evangelical theology in the core areas of Scripture, personal salvation and the centrality of Jesus Christ, African Americans tend to relate this faith to their understanding of society and their practice of the social mission of the church quite differently from white evangelicals.

Although Evangelicalism is sometimes considered synonymous with Fundamentalism, there are very significant differences. Like Fundamentalists, Evangelicals tend to see the world as deeply sinful and all human institutions as intrinsically flawed, and many look to Jesus Christ's imminent and final return as King to be society's only true hope. However, Evangelicalism is distinguished largely by its emphasis on engaging an imperfect world rather than retreating from it, as well as a more flexible stance on certain cultural/theological issues many Fundamentalists consider "worldly," such as the permissibility of alcohol and participation in secular institutions.

Beginning in the late 1940s with Carl F. H. Henry's rebuke against Christian passivity in *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Evangelicals have seen themselves as called to a more active involvement in all segments of society. The gospel is seen as a change agent, and Christians are to have a transformational effect, following Jesus' metaphor of being "salt" and "light" in the world (Matthew 5:13-14). The majority of Evangelicals believe religious organizations, not government or secular agencies, can best help those in need. Or as one pastor in our study put it: "We are to be the social center of God's kindness." This activist trend within Evangelicalism has been labeled by researcher Christian Smith as "engaged orthodoxy" (*American Evangelicalism*, 1998).

Evangelicals have been mixed in their understanding of *how* this transformation is achieved. Many focus their energies on programs of Christian education and discipleship, believing that social change occurs primarily through the influence of changed individuals. Others believe that social transformation requires more organized forms of involvement. In the last half-century, this social witness has largely overlapped with political and social conservatism, giving rise to the movement known as the Religious Right. Many Evangelicals remain committed to the vision of a "Christian America," won either by legal fiat or by pervasive and persuasive cultural influence. Recent social advocacy has focused on issues connected with the values of sanctity of life (e.g., opposing abortion and fetal stem cell research) and sexual morality (e.g., promoting abstinence education and preserving a traditional definition of marriage). (These values align with conservative Catholic priorities, leading to some areas of shared advocacy.) Many Evangelicals have also reacted to perceived threats to Christian values in the public square (e.g. the banning of public school-sponsored prayer, court battles over religious displays on public property, the teaching of evolution). One response to this threat has been the founding of private Christian schools and alternative media outlets where an Evangelical worldview may be freely expressed. The evangelical Christian school in the project came out of this kind of concern.

However, the younger generation of Evangelicals has been embracing a broader spectrum of issues, including environmental concerns (interpreted as "creation care"), poverty, and sex trafficking—without losing their theologically orthodox roots. A prominent example of this is the mega-church pastor and popular author Rick Warren, who recently began marshalling conservative Christians to fight poverty and AIDS in Africa. This shift does not represent a departure from Evangelical theology but rather a greater tendency to recognize the Scriptural foundation for compassion and social justice. Well-known Evangelical author Philip Yancey notes in *Christianity Today*, "In one encouraging trend, the fundamentalist-social gospel divide that marked the church a century ago has long since disappeared. Now evangelical organizations lead the way in such efforts as relief and development, microcredit, HIV/AIDS ministries, and outreach to sex workers. ...Evangelicals have taken seriously Jesus' call to care for 'the least of these'" (November 2009). Southern Baptist researcher Ed Stetzer concludes, "Younger evangelical pastors are less likely to self-identify as conservatives than older generations and more apt to view social justice as a gospel imperative." Polling data from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life indicates that evangelicals are now divided about equally between traditional and more progressive camps (though still moderate compared to the typical range of Mainline Protestant positions). Thus Evangelicalism must also be described as an evolving movement in the midst of a demographic transition and identity shift.

One expression of Evangelical activism or "engaged orthodoxy" is the practice of personal volunteering as a discipline of the committed Christian life. Several studies have found that members of Evangelical congregations are more likely to volunteer their time for congregational outreach efforts than Mainline Protestant members or Catholics. The activist impulse has also historically found expression in the founding of institutions, whether designed to strengthen the

faith and lifestyle of Christians, to communicate the message of faith to non-Christians, to exert a Christian influence on a secular culture, or to demonstrate the love of Jesus by serving those in need. Because of their perception that most secular institutions do not significantly reflect Christian values, Evangelicals tend to prefer to create their own alternatives to secular institutions, particularly in the arenas of media, education, youth programs, and social concerns. Another consequence of this sense of the gap between Evangelical and secular values is that Evangelical organizations are less likely to engage in formal partnerships with secular community organizations than Mainline, Jewish or Catholic congregations. From an Evangelical perspective, government welfare programs and secular social work institutions are insufficiently concerned with people's spiritual well-being and eternal destiny; thus rather than contribute to or partner with established programs, churches might launch their own initiatives that incorporate uniquely Evangelical values. Some nonprofits with historically Evangelical origins (such as the YMCA) have become "secularized" over time, while others (such as World Vision) have remained distinct.

In comparison to Mainline Protestant denominations, Evangelical denominations tend to be younger, smaller (with the exception of Southern Baptists and a few others), and less centralized or bureaucratized in their structure. Many churches are not part of any denomination at all. This creates a more open and fluid environment for the development of organizations. As noted in *American Evangelicalism* (1998),

The evangelical field is structurally wide open for inventive leaders to emerge and launch new initiatives. Entrepreneurial evangelical leaders are much freer than Mainline or liberal church leaders to generate their own new evangelical churches, colleges, missions boards, parachurch ministries, radio programs, publishing ventures, biblical teachings, and spiritual programs. ... Largely unhindered by established denominational bureaucracies, very little but imagination and the limits of market opportunities restrict ever new waves of evangelical entrepreneurs from creating expansive supplies of religious organizations and products to both appeal to and mobilize a growing number of evangelical believers.

The leadership structures of Evangelical congregations are diverse, from the lay board-dominant system of Presbyterian and some Baptist churches, to the Episcopal polity of Evangelical Methodist and Lutheran denominations, to the pastor-driven culture of many Pentecostal and independent churches. As a generalization, however, charismatic leadership (whether the pastor or other key figure) plays a more prominent role in Evangelical circles than in other faith traditions.

Another implication of the fluid, entrepreneurial nature of the Evangelical system is the tendency for organizations to work relatively independently from one another. Without a centralized organizing system, Evangelical groups lack a formal vehicle for sharing resources or coordinating their efforts. Competition for members, volunteers and funds can edge out cooperation. On the other hand, their shared cultural values and theological framework provides fertile soil for informal partnerships and networks to take root. Leaders with networking skills may succeed in joining forces with other like-minded leaders and groups to multiply their impact. Because associations are voluntary rather than hierarchically mandated, their viability depends on leaders' ability to maintain participants' commitment to shared goals. Rather than drawing on institutional resources, leaders mobilize by tapping into the passion of individual Christians. Thus independent Evangelical organizations tend to attract other Evangelicals interested in supporting a particular cause. For example, the following quote is from an independent, interfaith organization founded by a Catholic lay person with Evangelical leanings that draws supporters from both the Catholic Church and Evangelical communities:

I don't know if Evangelical would be the correct word as long as that also would include some of the Catholics—in other words, I'm not sure how you guys define that exactly. For us what it means is that anybody interested in being involved here has to be able to state their personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and how they will be able to share that with someone else, and that will include not only Evangelicals but Catholics in that sense. Not that all Catholics would be able to necessarily state that. The same thing is there would be other people in different denominations that might not be able to. But yes, that's what we mean, that's our definition.

As this quote implies, a driving force underlining much Evangelical activity in the world is the desire to bring others to Christian faith. Three-quarters of Evangelical churches identify evangelism as one of their congregation's primary goals. The very name "Evangelical" derives from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning "the good news," also the root meaning of the term "gospel." The history of Evangelicalism is grounded in a series of evangelistic revivals that swept the nation in the 18th and 19th centuries. During this period, evangelism was typically seen as going hand in hand with social reform. Following the reactive turn away from the social gospel known as the Great Reversal, Evangelicals withdrew from their earlier zeal for social transformation and channeled their resources and organizational initiatives more narrowly into leading individuals to salvation. This drive was captured by a famous quote from evangelist Dwight L. Moody: "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can!'" The legacy of this turn is seen in the fact that Evangelical congregations still support fewer community-serving programs on average than their Mainline counterparts.

Yet the common perception that the priority of evangelism always displaces social ministries is not supported. In large measure, these orientations are no longer perceived as an either/or choice. Evangelical congregations are increasingly likely to address *both* the perceived need for spiritual transformation and relationship with Christ along with the need for practical relief and social transformation. For a significant segment of Evangelicals, both word and deed are viewed as indispensable and complementary expressions of God's love. Taking seriously Jesus' command to his followers to love their neighbors means engaging in acts of service to any who are in need. Evangelical community ministries thus seldom limit their services to members of the church (except in the case of some education programs). Charitable work may be viewed as a vehicle for bringing non-Christians into the church's sphere of spiritual influence.

Evangelical churches or volunteers that care passionately about saving souls may thus rule out partnerships with groups that they perceive as restricting their ability to communicate the gospel, or compromising their Christian values. Evangelicals are significantly less likely to participate in interfaith or ecumenical coalitions than their Mainline counterparts. On the other hand, evangelism-minded Christians may seek out partnerships with non-Evangelical community groups that allow them to form relational connections with under-reached people groups. For example, the Pregnancy Help Center belongs to a coalition of crisis pregnancy centers from a variety of religious backgrounds throughout the state of Maryland. Either way, the value of organizational linkages may be measured by their potential for spiritual impact alongside charitable relief or societal transformation.

This trend toward integrating spiritual and social concerns has been dubbed the "reversal of the Great Reversal." Some Evangelicals are looking back to reclaim their heritage of social reform that followed on the heels of revival, recalling the 18th and 19th century church's involvement in the abolitionist movement, advocacy for child labor and education laws, and the proliferation of

urban mission societies that cared for the needs of the poor. Anglo Evangelicals on this path are rejoining African American Evangelical groups, which typically have embraced both personal salvation and social change. Some moderate Evangelicals are also finding common ground with Mainline groups that are embracing a more spiritually-oriented approach to social transformation.

Faith Communities and Organizations Participating in the Study

The Evangelical organizations studied in this project provided a diverse array of services. These include a Christian K-12 school; a pregnancy help center; community-based Kindness Centers that provide relief assistance and also skills training for single mothers; a Blessing Room that distributes clothing and food; an Urban Center that provides mentoring and other services to neighborhood children and their families; and a Pentecostal church that operates a food pantry and counseling center and supports various other regional and international aid programs with volunteers and funds. Charitable Christian Fellowship is a hybrid between an Evangelical and mainline Protestant organization. Founded by evangelical Lutherans over 100 years ago, it is now jointly under the authority of Missouri Synod and ELCA synods in the Baltimore area. Its programming shares much in common with other evangelical organizations, but has the governance structures characteristic of Mainline Protestant organizations. Most of the organizations studied are formally incorporated 501(c)(3) organizations, while a few exist only by informal arrangement. With the exception of the Christian school which primarily attracts Christian families, the ministries exist to serve people regardless of their faith.

Most of the organizations in our study were founded by lay individuals rather than clergy. In most cases their governance remained independent of formal affiliation with specific congregations, though they often depended on congregations for support. Annapolis Area Christian School, for example, was founded by a group of parents and originally met at a Presbyterian church, but it developed as a non-denominational institution that has no formal connection with any particular church. The most vital of the Evangelical organizations in this study came out of networks of individuals who shared a concern over a particular ministry. These ministries frequently have college educated leaders with a deep commitment to Evangelical Christianity, and a passionate sense of personal calling for their ministry. They build networks of other individuals and churches who share this sense of dedication to their cause. This is illustrated by the pregnancy center:

We grew out of a calling really that came from Christ to minister to women who were in need and hurting over an unplanned pregnancy. So any churches that are involved with us evidently believe in what we are doing. They are very aware of our services and need our services just as much as we need them to help support us. So any churches that were involved are very dedicated to the ministry and us to them.

These church connections develop in two main ways, according to the director: "Someone at a leadership level is passionate about what we do. It touches some chord with them personally. ...There just happens to be somebody that just is really excited about what they see happening here." The other key connection is volunteers: "People get involved in our ministry, volunteers from that church, and so that part spreads. They're talking about it more at the church level, and so it just naturally connects it more." A sense of passion for a shared vision is foundational to other resource development; building personal connections with the ministry, and with its theological foundations, is a key strategy for tapping into this passion. The importance of shared Christian vision to sustaining organizational viability is one reason the Evangelical organizations in this study did not participate in interfaith coalitions.

The organizations studied practiced a wide range of organizational systems, from the sophisticated management methods and deliberate move toward professionalism at the Christian academy, to the informal style of the Blessing Room, which has no board, no official budget, and no formal operating procedures. "We do as the Lord tells us," explain the ladies who run the center. "We do not need formal rules; we follow the Lord." While this informal style seems well-suited to the relatively simple program design of the Blessing Center, it is also evident at the more complex Urban Center. The Center, founded to be a "presence for Jesus in the community" in inner-city Washington, D.C., intentionally maintains a "flat" organizational structure that emphasizes staff's relationships with one another and with Christ as the central organizing principle. One of the founders explains, "We don't have a boss and an assistant boss here and that sort of stuff here. We just want to be a family. Maybe [the cofounder] and I are the older parents, but we're not the bosses." This system works because of the shared commitment to the core mission. "Everybody here knows what the goals are. Everybody interprets it different in how they are going to be involved, but they know that we are about who Jesus is about." This leader's job description is thus not based on tasks but on relationships:

My role is to be a presence for Jesus in the neighborhood. ...'What would Jesus do?' is the question that we ask ourselves. And when we ask ourselves that question we see children walking around without fathers, and we see young boys hanging on the corner and not being productively or imaginatively engaged. So that then becomes the mission in my mind. What I feel great about is I am freed up to change that mission everyday.

A staff member observed that this relational style of management also has a cost in that issues can easily become personal. "It's rough because in an organization like this nobody really is standing over you. Nobody in this house is closely supervised, but you have a job to do and people trust that you're going to do it. So on an occasion when [something negative] does happen, it hurts more so than anything else, because everybody in this house is so trusting." This dynamic of *trust* is also a key factor in how the Urban Center, like many Evangelical organizations, relates to the faith community. While formal channels of accountability do exist (such as the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability), they tend to be secondary in supporters' minds to more qualitative assessments that an organization is being faithful to the mission and to their relationships in the faith community.

In Evangelical organizations founded by an individual or group, boards tend to come from networks attached to the founder(s), and function relatively informally. For Evangelical organizations that are more professionalized or national in scope, the board may play a more formal role. It may be an unwritten expectation rather than a formal requirement that board members, directors and (to a lesser extent) all staff share the faith of a program's founders. In the organizations studied, staff and board appeared drawn to the organization by a combination of shared evangelical faith and the individual's belief in the cause addressed by the ministry. Volunteers were often more likely than outsiders to evolve into paid staff, and those who were served were also sometimes invited to become part of the organization. In these independent organizations, worship community and ministry were often merged, as volunteers, staff and sometimes people served and worshiped together on a regular basis.

Fundraising may also rely heavily on the founder's personal networks of like minded individuals, as well as church contributions and in some cases foundation and government grants. The organizations in the study infused traditional fundraising techniques—often including a sophisticated use of media to communicate their mission—with the understanding that God is the ultimate source of all resources. Thus one organization's strategic development session

combined prayer with computer based systems to develop their mission and vision statement. A Pentecostal church pastor drew on his connection with the local Business Advisory Board to obtain demographic data to plan the church's fundraising strategy, an idea which he says came to him through prayer. The Urban Center hosts a series of prayer breakfasts and publishes newsletters that reach many of the powerful and connected in Washington, D.C. who share the founder's faith, yet they attribute their development to God's miraculous provision, with resources appearing just in time to meet a need. The pregnancy center used a combination of word of mouth recruitment, the internet and various media to draw attention and support to its efforts. It too, describes Christians with needed resources appearing just as a need arose. Since God is the ultimate supplier, God gets the ultimate credit. The Urban Center passed on this perspective to their constituents: "Because you can get help here, we try to make sure that they understand that the help is coming from the Lord. We try to take no personal credit."

Explicitly religious practices have a prominent role in these organizations, but often with an outreach-focused rather than inward-focused character. For example, the Urban Ministry organization shared times of corporate prayer directed toward enhancing the neighborhood. The waiting area of the Kindness Centers features Christian music and religious literature, which a leader describes as creating an relaxing environment for people in stressful circumstances. When the ladies at the Blessing Room share the gospel with the people who come in needing food or clothing, it is with the goal of encouraging them so they can better cope with their distress, by reminding them "how much they are loved and not to give up, that we all go through situations, but the Lord is ever, ever faithful." At the pregnancy center, the faith-based identity is clear and religious messages are shared with any clients who are open to them, but the focus is on saving the unborn rather than converting the parents.

Maintaining a clear Christian identity is important to these organizations and their faith supporters. At the Annapolis Area Christian School, while new leadership has been taking steps to professionalize school operations and raise academic standards, the school deliberately and proudly maintains its identity as a Christian, nondenominational institution. One way it does so is by the use of creeds, which link the school to not to a single denomination but to the historic Christian community. However, as the school's enrollment and support has increasingly come from the local Mainline Protestant community, its character is now perceived as broadly Christian, rather than specifically evangelical. Parents who were unhappy with this shift broke off to form a more conservative school that preserved the Evangelical identity.

When the Charitable Christian Fellowship director was asked whether there were any situations in which they would downplay the religious nature of their organization, he replied,

No, we never ever downplayed the spiritual outreach of a Christian message. Jesus was always the center. The message of Jesus was always central. But that was the very reason we were doing this, because this was a compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ and the New Testament and the Christian teaching. So while that was the foundation, that certainly doesn't limit reaching out to groups outside the Christian church. So no, there was not a downplaying of the message, but there was certainly an outreach that gave that basic message, which is a fundamental social message, and took it to the outside community."

This quote illustrates the basic Evangelical principle of being *in* but not *of* the world – the challenge of interacting with non-Christian groups for the purpose of outreach, while remaining true to the Christian principles and identity driving the outreach.

Practical Theology

The hallmarks of Evangelical faith – the central role of conversion through faith; belief in the unique power of Christ for personal salvation and social transformation; trust in the authority of Scripture as divine revelation; and a commitment to an active lifestyle that reflects Christian values—have an imprint on the relationships between Evangelical churches and the organizations they support.

In general, because they view humanity as fallen and in need of conversion, Evangelicals are more pessimistic than Mainline or African American communities 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. Whereas Mainline Protestant theology affirms the potential for realizing the kingdom of God on earth, many Evangelicals believe that only Christ's return will set the world right. Evangelicals are divided in the implications of this worldview for the goal of improving social conditions. Some believe that all efforts at reforming a "wrecked vessel" (to use Dwight Moody's metaphor) are futile, and humanity's only hope is for the world to come. In the interim Christians should display God's mercy and compassion by relieving the needs of hungry and hurting individuals, but their priority remains preparing people for their eternity destiny. Others believe that God has entrusted Christians with stewarding God's human and natural creation until the King's return. This group envisions the church as a caring community that offers a beacon of hope in a dark and dying world. Social action is motivated by faithfulness to God's command to "act justly and to love mercy" (Micah 6:8) rather than the ambition of ultimately achieving it in a fallen world. In either case, ministry programs that embody Evangelical beliefs are seen as a vital part of the appointed task.

Similarly, while encouraging others to experience personal salvation is a core Evangelical value, there are a wide range of strategies for achieving this goal. Some Evangelicals regard evangelism as the primary mandate, viewing social service either as a distraction from that priority, or chiefly as a means to that end. Other Evangelicals seek a "holistic" approach, pursuing both evangelism and social action as equally valid, Scripturally-based practices. Some groups pursue these objectives as separately organized outreach initiatives; for example, a church may cover its outreach agenda by supporting an Evangelistic youth program and a local food bank. In other cases, churches may design ministries that integrate explicit religious content with social care. These 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 latter model is the Blessing Room at Chesapeake Christian Center (Church of God), which provides free clothing and a food party for the poor, while also encouraging clients who come for services to give their lives to Christ:

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.

However, not all Evangelically-sponsored community-service organizations are overtly evangelistic in practice. Nonprofit ministries draw from a range of strategies for communicating faith messages, including more implicit, less verbal relational approaches, depending on the nature of the service and the characteristics of those served. 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 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. Numerous parachurch organizations exist to help Christians fulfill the Scriptural mandate to save souls, in their own communities and abroad. Similarly, if Evangelicals are convinced that the Bible says to feed the hungry, care for those who are sick, and seek justice for the oppressed, they are more likely to initiate and support these activities. 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 or appreciated by non-Evangelical supporters.

Evangelical theology seeks to apply the teachings of Scripture and the believer's personal relationship with Jesus to all of life. The culture of the Evangelical community is thus rich in explicitly religious language and activities. 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. Staff, volunteers, and sometimes clients may be expected or required to participate in these explicitly spiritual activities. Some organizations even function as an alternative worshiping community for their staff and supporters, with shared prayer times, Bible studies or chapel services reinforcing the common religious culture. Because Evangelical social action tends to be directly linked to faith, these practices strengthen the motivation for ongoing service.

Another characteristic of Evangelicalism with relevance for community involvement is the strong current of individualism, tracing all the way back to the Reformation, tying into the contemporary theological and cultural themes of personal relationships and religious freedom. Evangelical ministries—with the exception of African American Evangelical groups—are more likely to focus on serving and equipping individuals over advocacy for structural reform (except on selected issues such as abortion). Evangelicals speak the language of personal compassion more fluently than the language of social justice. Evangelical programs also often have an underlying goal of building personal relationships alongside the provision of goods and services; these relationships open channels of communication and trust for sharing faith.

This individualism extends to the decentralized polity of many nondenominational, independent and congregational churches that emphasizes local autonomy over vertical linkages. This may be one factor in why Evangelicals form many organizations, but belong to few umbrella institutions compared to other religious traditions (with the exception of the National Association of Evangelicals and other groups wholly within the Evangelical community). The theme of individualism also contributes to the important role that visionary leaders and religious "personalities" (such as Billy Graham) often play in the Evangelical community, in contrast to investing trust in particular offices or positions as is the case in some other religious traditions.

For the people at Chesapeake – life and ministry are very simple- their major mission in life is to bring people to Christ and their church is their focus while they wait for his return. They do not

think in terms such as stewardship or organizational theory. They would not accept any advice unless it comes from their pastor.

Stewardship and Strategies for Maintaining Connections in the Evangelical Community

Stewardship refers to the faith community's efforts to maintain its practical theology of justice and charity in the activities of its affiliated nonprofits. Because the Evangelical community is so varied, likewise the forms of stewardship are diverse. In some cases, nonprofits are sponsored by a denomination, though their organization and funding may be managed by local churches. Many Evangelical programs remain under the auspices of a church with no independent incorporation, though they may attract volunteers from the community and even from other churches. Many nonprofits that started as a church program spin off with an independent 501(c)(3) status, but remain closely linked with a particular congregation or network of churches. One example of this is the private Christian schools where many Evangelical families prefer to send their children. Many other nonprofits are independent from any church affiliation, originating instead from the vision of a single leader or group. Such initiatives often are driven by the desire to meet a need that is not being met in the community, or that is not being met within an Evangelical framework. A number of nonprofits supported by the Evangelical community have a national or international scope, including mission societies and humanitarian organizations such as World Vision, which calls itself "the Church on special assignment to the poor." Regardless of their origins, Evangelical organizations typically rely on support from churches and individual church members.

Many Evangelical organizations are responsible not primarily to a denomination or hierarchical institution, but rather to their community of supporters -- those who donate, volunteer, and spread the word. This means that ultimately, the viability of stewardship lies in the extent to which supporting congregations and individuals see these ministries as faithful to the authority of Scripture and to their mission. Indicators of this faithfulness include formal measures such as a statement of faith, affiliation with a clearly Evangelical denomination or the National Council of Evangelicals, faith requirements for staff and board members, references to religion in program materials, and explicitly spiritual practices (such as corporate prayer) integrated into regular programming or management routines. Other, less formal elements of the stewardship of spiritual values include the prevalence of religious speech and personal spiritual practices among staff (such as quoting Scripture or talking about one's relationship with the Lord), testimonies from clients and volunteers about the religious nature of the program, and the reputation of leaders as being Godly individuals with a passion for the organization's mission.

We began from a church-based ministry and everything we do we do based on being good stewards of what has been provided us from God. I think - well I know - that everything that we do is prayed about. So I can't see anything that we do that we don't pray about here. Scripture affects our every word and deed.

The stewardship relationship also depends on the organization's ability to communicate the most meaningful aspects of their program in a way that captures the hearts and religious imagination of supporters. In a dynamic, entrepreneurial organizational marketplace, Evangelicals are more likely to invest their resources in organizations where they feel personally connected with a mission that is invested with theological significance.

One implication of Evangelical individualism is that service is largely perceived as being the responsibility of the individual (or the individual congregation), rather than the entire faith community, as is the pattern in some other religious groups. Given the emphasis on personal,

experiential relationship with God, Evangelical social service initiatives often are inspired or sustained by a strong sense of spiritual calling. As one Evangelical woman engaged in outreach in the study commented, "I felt called by the Lord, and then things just sort of happened." Evangelical stewardship strategies thus highlight both personal responsibility for and the personal rewards of service.

Evangelicals operate from a position of deep faith-based conviction and have demonstrated a willingness to commit to social outreach as long as it aligns with their theological objectives and cultural identity. Because Evangelicals seek to ground their beliefs in Scripture and to pattern their lives after Jesus Christ, mobilizing resources for community involvement often begins by connecting Christians with relevant Biblical texts and stories from Christ's teaching and example. Charismatic, entrepreneurial nonprofit leaders who are skilled in communicating this framework can succeed in drawing on the human and social capital of the broader Evangelical community, often across congregational and denominational lines.

It is expected that the people in the centers as they meet people that come in put forth the Christian faith in a way that is not beating them over the head obviously, but to show them that this is a Christian organization and to be ready to help with any need that they have. They come to our centers with all kinds of needs. The centers have their Bible studies and they have their hymn sing. People come in and they see that this is a Christian center. The centers are expected to show this faith to the people. May I add - I don't know where we have seen it - on tapes and that kind of thing. People say, "I come in here because I know it is a Christian place that people treat me so well." This is the type of ambience and atmosphere that people are trying to promote.

On the other hand, the relatively narrow scope of this framework has sometimes restricted significant engagement with strategies and organizations outside of the Evangelical movement. Some Evangelicals lack skill in "bilingual" communication of their message than others—in other words, they cannot translate their mission to a non-Evangelical constituency. Other Evangelicals resist making connections with groups that do not share their core beliefs, out of concern that these ties would compromise or restrict their gospel message.

Basically, like I said, we don't take government money so that we can be a Christian organization. We can expound our beliefs. In our centers we are able to have a cross which you can't in some places and we have Bible studies and we have our child compassion with the parents where the mothers that are taught how to be Christian parents.

Limits to collaboration can also originate from outside the Evangelical community; other religious groups, perceiving (whether accurately or not) that Evangelicals do not share their social commitments or are not "team players," may be less likely to invite them to participate in ecumenical or interfaith efforts. Lacking the reputation and history of Mainline Protestants for civic engagement, Evangelicals do not have an established seat at the public table. This appears to be slowly changing in many communities. Groups receiving government funding for the first time under George Bush's faith based initiative, for example, included Evangelical-sponsored programs. Many evangelical groups felt that they were welcome for the first time to apply for funds.

Addressing Opportunities and Concerns

Organizational Transitions

Leadership transitions are difficult in many Evangelical organizations, as with the African American community, because they are often based on a very personal sense of call, and on entrepreneurial development. The pastor or founder may have spent years, or even decades, developing a ministry—and they are often not willing to let that ministry go. Or others may be reluctant to step into their shoes. Because the leader's personal network is often the basis of raising support, this network may not transfer to a new leader. Trust is another key ingredient in maintaining connections that cannot be handed over to a successor. Leadership changes in supporting faith communities can also impact their relationship with independent organizations. In several instances, organizations started by a visionary pastor lost support when that leader left. For instance, one Evangelical project received far less support when a new pastor took over the church, and organizations like the Charitable Christian Fellowship are careful to incorporate new pastors into their network to ensure continued congregational participation.

Since evangelical organizations rely strongly on the personal call of their leaders and key staff, leadership transitions can also foster significant changes in the organization. For example, the form and very nature of the programs at the Charitable Christian Fellowship changed each time a new executive director took over. As such, the program reinvented itself to reflect the current direction of its leadership and network of supporters, moving from volunteer efforts focused on one set of needs to its current structure of worship and support communities. Its structure continues to evolve, but consistently combines worship with faith inspired service.

One significant change taking place in the broader Evangelical community is the growing interest of congregations in community service. Historically, conservative Evangelical churches have been less likely than other religious traditions to organize corporate ministries of social concern under the auspice of the church. Many Evangelicals understood the church's priority to be evangelism, while charitable work was the responsibility of individual Christian compassion or nonprofits. Increasing numbers of Evangelical churches now appear to be expressing an interest in sponsoring their own community service programs, and hiring or assigning staff for the purpose of managing community ministry. This is evidenced in the growth of associations such as the Christian Community Development Association and the Externally Focused Church Network, which attract a substantial Evangelical constituency.

This suggests that congregation-sponsored programs, or programs that spin off from a church into independent nonprofits, may become increasingly prevalent in the Evangelical community. Given the expanded interest of churches in sponsoring or partnering with service nonprofits that reflect their values, Evangelical organizations that were founded independently of formal church affiliation might seek to bring their ministries into closer relationships with churches. This is already the case for national and international organizations such as Salvation Army, Compassion, World Relief and World Vision, which have developed extensive ties to Evangelical congregations (as well as other religious groups). Congregational sponsorship of ministries is also a function of size, as Evangelical megachurches are documented to have a higher proportion of service outreach. As larger churches develop both the capacity and the inclination to form their own "in-house" outreach programs, it is expected that more will do so.

Whether this newer generation of Evangelical ministries spin off to become independent nonprofits at the same rate as in the Mainline community, and whether they maintain strong ties to their Evangelical sponsors, remains to be seen.

Community Conflicts and Concerns

Evangelicalism is now divided between those who hold to traditional conservative values and priorities for outreach, and those who want to engage a broader social agenda. A dialogue is now unfolding among Evangelicals how to prioritize these newer concerns such as poverty and creation care alongside traditional issues such as abortion and marriage. While Evangelical churches have long offered relief services such as food and emergency assistance, the new conversation includes concepts of social justice and economic development. This new movement will affect the number, scope, and culture of organizations founded by the current generation of Evangelicals.

I remember when I was working in the church, one thing my pastor always said, that the way to find out if a church is relevant is if they asked themselves, if we closed our doors would the neighborhood miss us? If we closed our doors today, I can tell you, we would be missed in this neighborhood. Yes, we do make a difference. We plant seeds, and we have been blessed to see a lot of them grow, and we hope to see a lot of the others.

While Evangelicals overall tend to be less educated than members of Mainline denominations, there are increasing numbers of college educated, socially moderate evangelicals serving as pastors and lay leaders, which means that the programs founded by Evangelicals are likely to employ a greater degree of sophistication in their governance and fundraising methods. This professionalization, however, comes with greater pressures to downplay the religious dimension of their work and other potential threats to Evangelical values. Concerns about secularization through professionalization were not uncommon during the study, and it cannot be denied that increased reliance on “professional” administrators and staff changes the character of a faith based organization.

Several Evangelical Christian organizations deliberately restrict their income to private funding sources to avoid a potential compromise of their faith-based objectives. As the director of the Charitable Christian Foundation stated, "You live by the grant, you die by the grant." He explained that acceptance of federal funding for a project like their food pantry would prevent them from including religious material with the food that they distribute. Faced with the opportunity for increased funding, at the cost of decreased opportunities for ministry and evangelism, the organization has chosen to forgo any funds that would restrict or control the way in which they conduct their outreach.

Other Evangelical organizations, however, have espoused the view that since all resources ultimately come from God, God can work through public funding as well as private sources. These organizations often maintain their identity, faith witness and connection to the faith community by focusing on relationships rather than more explicit forms of religious expression. While still a tiny percentage, the number of Evangelical organizations that have accessed federal funding is growing. In fact, one Evangelical organization in our study doubled its size through a government grant, won through the expertise of its faith driven leadership. Interestingly, while a majority of Evangelicals support faith-based initiatives in principle, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center, most do not think that government funds should go to religious groups who proselytize or who limit hiring to those who share their religious beliefs.

Current Economic Situation

This research project has indicated that adaptability and credibility appear key to surviving difficult economic times. The informal, leader-centered character of many smaller Evangelical organizations enhances their ability to adapt to changing economic conditions, as decisions can

be made with a minimum of bureaucracy. On the other hand, this same informality may detract from the credibility of the organization, especially outside Evangelical circles. Among Evangelicals, effectiveness is often measured more qualitatively than quantitatively. For example, at a fundraising banquet, one organization presented statistics on their services, but the main message was the stories about people whose lives were changed by receiving the assistance or by hearing the gospel through this organization.

Maintaining faithfulness to theological principles and cultural values is critical to sustaining support in the Evangelical community, though those same characteristics may present a barrier to expanding support to the larger Christian community or beyond. The stewardship relationship also depends on the organization's ability to communicate the most meaningful aspects of their program in a way that captures the hearts and religious imagination of supporters. Evangelicals are more likely to invest their resources in organizations where they feel personally connected with the mission.

The impact of economic downturn on the clientele of organizations is also felt. For example, the current economy, as well as patterns of urban development in the D.C. area will likely force out many of the residents who have come to rely on the Urban Center. This mobility affects their ability to form meaningful relationships with residents as a basis for effective service. However, the founders and staff continue to be hopeful in their mission to be a positive presence in a stigmatized and often overlooked area of the city.

Our task then is to be prayerful about how to help people accommodate by being able to stay here. So what do you teach? You teach money management, the importance of longevity in employment, about credit reports and about what it costs to buy and run a household and you teach about the government resources available to them. So then, maybe only 10% will heed that advice and be able to stay. But isn't that a whole lot better than no percent or two percent?

Implications for Practice

- ❖ **What organizations do reflects on the faith community's values and identity, and visa-versa.** The relationship between Evangelical organizations and their faith community often goes far beyond funds and volunteer support; often these nonprofits are seen as an arm of the church (though not necessarily affiliated with any single church), entrusted with carrying out a vital aspect of the church's mission. Increasingly, Evangelical churches are seeing service ministries as a way of building good will in the community in order to earn a platform of trust for sharing the gospel. Conversely, when a church or individual supports a nonprofit that is seen as going astray from the faith, this may be seen as compromising or reflecting negatively on all Christians. Thus there is much at stake in the stewardship of this relationship.
- ❖ **Support systems often depend on communicating an Evangelical identity to people who share the same faith commitments.** Faith is an explicit part of the glue that bonds the network. Organizations display their faith to people requesting services in a variety of ways, depending on the context. Organizations would benefit from intentional considerations of how, and to whom, they communicate their religious identity.
- ❖ **Evangelical organizations use a variety of strategies for combining their strong commitment to evangelism with their calling to serve the needs in community.** One option is to cultivate close ties with one or more Evangelistic churches who can

reach out spiritually to the people they serve. Another option is to incorporate Evangelistic activities within the mission of the organization. Evangelicals can be guided in developing strategies for expressing faith that are appropriate to the type of service, the nature of the relationship with the sponsoring faith community, and the skill sets and Evangelistic commitments of volunteers. Appropriate training is needed to achieve this goal.

- ❖ **Guidance and mentoring may be needed to deal with the difficult issues of how to maintain Evangelical values and identity in an increasingly complex, professionalized environment.** Ministry leaders today are increasingly college educated, with exposure to the social sciences and training in organizational development. They can access the skills needed to lead a complex organization and comply with the administrative requirements of government and foundation funding. They can also attract volunteers and other resources through a combination of sophisticated fundraising techniques and media presentations of their message.
- ❖ **A key issue for many Evangelical organizations is whether and how an organization should continue once the founding leader moves on.** Some organizations do not survive this transition. Structures of governance and support – i.e., board members and donor bases -- often depend on the personal networks of these individuals, and it is important to consider in advance how these structures might be affected by changes in leadership.
- ❖ **Evangelical organizations must carefully weigh the pros and cons of public partnerships,** now that the faith-based initiative has created a more level playing field for seeking government funding. On the one hand, reliance on public funding limits some forms of faith-based expression, though not eliminating it entirely. Current policy bans proselytizing, worship and religious instruction as part of government-funded programs, but encourages organizations to be open about their religious identity, and to fund religious activities through private sources. Organizations also need to be aware of how such partnerships affect the perception of their faithfulness in the religious networks from which they draw support.
- ❖ **The controversy over whether organizations that receive government funding should be permitted to use faith affiliations as criteria in hiring is likely to have a significant impact on whether Evangelical organizations seek government funding.** Because shared religious beliefs and values are so integral to linkages within the faith community, the presence of more non-Evangelicals or non-Christians in an organization could weaken their connection with the faith community, even if this did not change the actual day-to-day provision of services.
- ❖ **Volunteers play a key role in Evangelical organizations, both by providing essential services and by promoting the organization in their congregations.** Volunteering is often perceived in spiritual terms as a form of obedience to the Scriptures and the example of Jesus, and often accompanies a sense of personal spiritual calling to a particular area of ministry. Both organizations and churches would benefit from enhancing the experience of volunteers on the job through training, and in their church through opportunities to share their volunteer experiences with others in the church and to process the implications of the experience for their own spiritual development.

- ❖ **The lack of training and guidance for individuals appointed as board members to Evangelical organizations often represents a weakness in the organization.** Churches could also benefit from training for their various governing boards on how to conduct the business of the church. Often congregants are thrown into these positions without much orientation or training in how to carry out their role.
- ❖ **There is a need in the Evangelical community for building capacity for effective, accountable systems of management.** Many smaller Evangelical organizations have an informal, leader-driven style of governance. Not only does this make it more difficult for outside groups to understand or assess their accounting, it means that they would not withstand audits necessary for government or private funding unless they revised current practices. We did not see any financial scandals in the network organizations participating in this study, but the lack of fiscal transparency would make them vulnerable to charges of irresponsibility.
- ❖ **Because Evangelical organizational systems are often informal, trust is an essential ingredient for effective management.** Organizations and their faith community partners can look at factors that either diminish or strengthen trusting relationships—within the organization, between the organization and its supporters, and between the organization and those they serve.
- ❖ **Communication between the faith community and their organizations is vital.** The faith community needs to feel connected with the organization's activities and theological framework for ministry; and the organization needs the guidance and feedback from the faith community to help discern whether it is faithfully representing its values, especially in a time when Evangelical values are in flux. Media thus plays an important role in Evangelical support systems – conveying the mission to current and prospective supporters in a way that builds trust, stirs passion and motivates involvement.

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 Evangelical 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 List

Balmer, Randall (1999). *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Chaves, Mark (2004). *Congregations in America*. Cambridge, MA and New York: Harvard University Press.

McGrath, Alister (1995). *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

Phillips, Timothy and Dennis Ockolm (1996). *A Family of Faith: Introduction to Evangelical Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Smith, Christian. (1998). *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

