

**WORKING DRAFT**

Please do not quote, cite,  
or reproduce without  
explicit permission from  
the author.

**A PUBLIC DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES SEEKS WAYS TO WORK  
WITH THE LOCAL FAITH COMMUNITY**

Bob Wineburg  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Prepared for the 2003 Spring Research Forum

*The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in the Social Welfare System*

Metropolitan Washington, DC  
March 6-7, 2003

**A Public Department of Social Services Seeks Ways To Work With the Local Faith Community**

*Bob Wineburg*

### **Introduction**

More than 20 years ago, April 14<sup>th</sup> 1982, a story by Herbert Denton (1982) appeared in the *Washington Post* that just may have been the cornerstone for today's White House Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives. The section A, page 3, story titled "Reagan Urges More Church Aid for Needy" quoted then President Reagan at a luncheon speech in the State Dining Room. Speaking to a group of more than 100 religious leaders, he began crafting a theme that is central to current social policy: "*that churches and voluntary groups should accept more responsibility for the needy rather than leaving it to the bureaucracy.*" That theme has had different variations throughout the last 20 years, but the march has been steady toward creating a social policy that increasingly involves the government and the religious community in social service delivery partnerships.

While government had been contracting with religious charities before the Reagan era (Netting, 1980 & 1982), each administration since Reagan, has had public proclamations followed by incremental, but increasingly larger steps toward using more churches to deliver social services.

(individuals <http://www.pointsoflight.org/about/about.cfm>, 2002, *Federal Register*, 1990:8555: Associate Press 1996, & Cumo, 1998)

Despite a sense that The White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives just happened because of political expediency, it is best viewed as part of an historical trend that shifted government social policy away from a strong centralized welfare state to an increasing number of hybrid sets of federal, state, and local partnerships with crisscrossing lines of authority for financing, implementing, and overseeing programs. While there is research in both the popular media and scholarly journals outlining, speculating about, and even categorizing the nature of a host of these federal, state, and local governmental and faith partnerships (Ahmed 2000, Press 2001 Davis 2001, Sherman 1997, Green and Sherman 2002, Chaves, 1999, Cnaan 1999, Smith and Sossin, 2001 Jeavons, 1994) very little scholarship examines the more refined details of how such partnerships have actually developed and operate. There is a significant lack of scholarships that looks at how this major policy shift has unfolded in various localities. There are exceptions that give snapshots, (Bartkowski, & Regis, 1999, Schneider 2001, Farnsley 2001, Orr 2001, Wineburg 2001, Pipes & Ebaugh 2002, Campbell, 2002) but none with the details that show how extremely complex partnerships between local government and local religious institutions are when it comes to forging long term service relationships.

### **Focus**

This paper will go a small distance in trying to add insight about the relationship between policy

formulation with regard to the faith-based initiative at the national level and its implementation in a system of diffuse authority and rivalry locally (Flanagan, 2001). It will tackle this task by both staying mindful of the larger policy goals, while examining the coarse-grained details of how service partnerships between one community's local government and its community's churches unfold. This author is completely aware that what is being presented in the community-side of this analysis is a case study, and the generalizability of the findings is limited.

However, these kinds of studies lay the foundation for both theory development and a deeper understanding of the connection between policy formulation and its implementation, without which, the scholarly community will have little more than guesswork to guide large scale studies. To date, the architects of the President Bush's Faith Based and Community Initiatives, and their predecessors have run workshops on getting government grants, and giving grants to intermediaries who will in turn help small religious organizations get government money. This paper will examine things from an angle that more closely reflects the way things actually operate in a complex local system of services that relies as much on cooperation and coordination, ad hoc task forces, informal as well as formal agreements, and numerous phone calls and meetings to keep the culture of cooperation alive. Thus, after a 20 plus year push to get the faith community to partner with local governments, this paper gets at some of the details behind such a partnership.

Before moving to the local assessment, it important to note, that in order to make the links between policy formulation at the national level and local implementation, the work that stimulated this paper was guided by Checkoway's (1987) ten dimensional framework which outlines a set of skills necessary to move a political strategy for change into a social planning process, which then increases the chance of effective implementation. This project was where the community started to act, or at the level of implementation. Checkoway's dimensions are:

**(1) Setting goals, (2) Identifying issues, (3) Developing constituencies, (4) Building organizational structures, (5) Activating people in planning (6) Finding and making leaders (7) Establishing relations with influentials, (8) Educating the public (9) Building coalitions (10) Advocating for political and systemic change.**

Space limitations prohibit referring back and forth between the development of the faith-based initiative at the national level and each dimension of this framework as it unfolded in this local study, although some references will be made. The architects of the current faith-based were very unorganized in moving from the federal level of policy formulation to the next three levels: State government, local government, and sub-governmental units including churches, and other religiously linked social service organizations where implementation unfolds. It takes a good knowledge of local service systems to make planned change work, and detailed local implementation strategies have not been part of the agenda for

those who shaped this large policy. The Compassion Grant Program is a limited attempt to get local involvement. This paper will zero in on one community's attempt to formulate closer ties between local government and the local religious community.

What follows is a brief background description of the how the local study came to be, a description of the methodology, some of the findings, a model of a planning process that emerged from the study, and the conclusion.

### **Local Study**

*First Stage: Committee Representation.* In August of 2001, the local county department of social services (referred to as DSS) contracted with this author to assess the feasibility of developing sustainable partnerships with the local faith community. The author met with an inter-agency team of leaders: One member each from the local urban ministry that has 250 churches in its sphere; the Community Action Agency which operates a faith-based welfare to work program and works extensively with Black Churches, a local services for the aging that uses many churches for congregate meal sites, and the liaison from county department of social services (DSS).

The DSS has close to 600 staff members, a \$50,000,000 budget, and is responsible for overseeing and administering federal and state mandated services in Child and Adult Welfare. The department of social services (DSS) sees the religious community as the last set of local resources that can stave off a crisis in other parts of its system of mandated services. But just as the national policymakers have a limited awareness of the complexities of local service partnerships, this study will demonstrate that a courtship and eventual marriage between a voluntary set of organizations whose secondary or tertiary mission is social service delivery, and an institution whose mandate is to deliver formal services, has barriers to hurdle.

The department (DSS) had to get "buy in" from the major community-based organizations who already partner with, and thus extensively use the resources of the religious community, because it (DSS) does not have a good reputation in some parts of the religious community. Having the key stakeholders and brokers with the faith community as part of the assessment was essential for the development of future partnerships.

*Methodology for assessment:* A collaborative plan and an adaptive research methodology (Schensul & Schensul, 1978) was developed for the assessment whereby this author would do the following: (1) review the relevant literature, (2) analyze evaluation data collected from a meeting of 40 church and faith based organizational representatives called for and held by officials from the department of social services, (3) develop, administer, and analyze a survey given to Black church representatives to determine their willingness to work with the department of social services (DSS), (4) interview four leaders of faith-

based organizations to get an administrative understanding of their perceptions of relationships between the two systems (5) find other collaborative models statewide between the two systems (6) develop a plan based on a synthesis of the data (7) present the plan to leaders of both systems. Both data from a community forum (purposive sampling) and the use of key informants were also employed (Marlow, 1993).

### **Findings Faith Partners Consortium**

The first part of the assessment started with the analysis of 40 evaluation surveys, then in the possession of the department of social services, but unanalyzed. On February 5<sup>th</sup> 2001 the director of the department of social services, announced a new initiative called the Faith Partners Consortium. He invited members of the faith community to a February 26<sup>th</sup> 2001 meeting to “*share ideas and identify areas of collaboration between DSS and partners in the faith community, toward the goal of eliminating poverty.*” Representatives of 38 congregations and two faith-based organizations attended that meeting. They were from the community’s mainline white congregations.

#### *Fears Congregations of in the Department of Social Services Sphere From Feb 26.*

It is simply important to understand that regardless of their fears expressed in the text box below, there are important voices in the faith community, who, despite such critical sentiments, are in fact willing to help. Two primary things might be kept in mind here: (1) DSS does not always have resources to meet all needs. (2) Faith-based resources are increasingly central for help in managing problems, which if left unattended, might spill into the broader community’s health, educational, and law enforcement systems. So it is in the interest of the whole community to pay attention to what current and prospective volunteers are telling it.

*Ways DSS Not Helpful.* In examining the list of reasons why church representatives said DSS was not helpful, it becomes a bit clearer as to why the participants in the summit had fears about working with the Department of Social Services. There were responses of outright cynicism, as in the second response: “I don’t know what DSS does that is helpful,” to more suggestive kinds of answers that may indeed point to things that can be done to help make services better: “Churches not prepared for referrals.” If there is a common phrase that

#### **SOME FEARS EXPRESSED ABOUT WORKING WITH DSS**

How much is expected of us?  
DSS perceives faith-based groups as less professional  
Too much red tape  
Too many limits and restrictions  
Need for gradual involvement  
Fear of unknown  
How to begin?  
Distrust of applicant  
Uncertainty: re-verification of need  
Being bombarded by referrals  
Being restricted in sharing faith  
Accountability or paperwork burden  
Lack of respect from DSS professionals  
Politics

#### **WAYS DSS NOT HELPFUL**

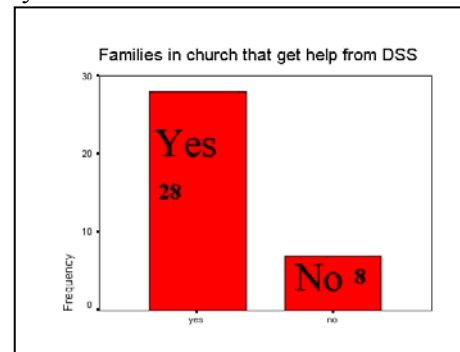
Workers accountable to a form, not a family  
I don't know what DSS does that is helpful  
System is not integrated  
Confusion about process, and regulations  
Churches not prepared for referrals  
Service not available for working people  
Workers become frustrated (stressed out)  
Quick fixes instead of lasting solutions  
DSS not connected with community

demonstrates what the participants at the faith summit saw as the contrast between the public and religious systems of care, it is that: **DSS is not seen as “client or church friendly.”** What is important is that leaders of DSS called this meeting, and they were open and honest enough to ask how to make these emerging partnerships stronger.

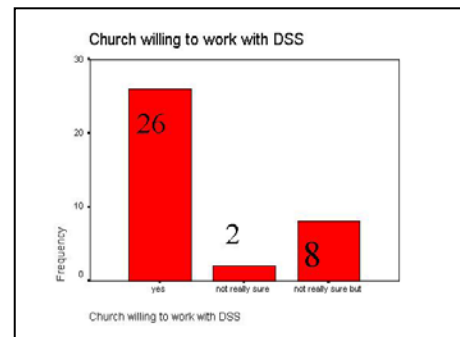
### Black Churches

Welfare to work survey. Committee members thought that even a small survey to a group of active churches would yield valuable information in further building a partnership. The vast majority of the churches that went to the DSS summit were mostly larger white churches. Participants were informed of the purpose of the questions and were given the opportunity abstain from participating in the survey. Only 8 questions were asked so as not to burden the respondents.

Guilford County Churches Who Attended Training. The vast majority of churches attendees were from churches with less than 250 members. This finding is important in program planning because such congregations are not large enough to have the capacity for serving large numbers of people. Thinking about partnerships might best focus on targeting small groups of volunteers performing “well-defined tasks on a periodic basis (Chaves, 1998).” **These churches don’t have the capacity for much more.**



However, the chart in text box above shows that of these 36 congregations, 28 have members who receive help from DSS. While in itself such data don’t really say much with regard to program planning, the fact that 11 of the churches already have a working relationship with DSS and the chart in the second text box showing the number willing to help or work with DSS, does begin to provide some optimism for program planning. About 26 are willing to work, 2 are not sure, and 8 would like more information. Clearly, the large majority are in fact willing to work with DSS. So what do these findings say? Smaller Black Churches are likely to have a membership who is active with DSS. Some already have working relationships. Most are willing to explore working with DSS, and the most likely reason is that they can help their own members. This is important to a keep in mind when considering how relationships might unfold when developing programs with these smaller churches.



Both sets of respondents reminded us that they had worries or would like more information, but that there were indeed solutions to overcoming the barriers they perceive in working with DSS. Those barriers will come down when a thoughtful plan is drawn up. This must be a plan that harnesses the will and capability of the congregations to serve. The spirit of such a plan should be held together with a true respect for the voluntary efforts to help, along with education, training, the tailoring of programs, and implementing time-tested mechanisms for sustaining and nurturing voluntary involvement of people and institutions.

### **LEADERSHIP DISCUSSIONS**

*Leaders.* While survey respondents were clear in their uncertainty whether DSS was helpful in capturing and harnessing their desire to work with DSS, the four leaders interviewed from the faith-based agencies further clarified things. They work regularly with the volunteers and employees from the faith community, and their clients are often receiving some type of assistance from DSS. They have a double fisted view by having to work with two very different sets of institutions in order to serve their clients and sustain their agencies.

They all noted that there is wonderful topside to the prevailing spirit, in that people are genuinely willing to listen but it is not always followed by the same enthusiasm to act as matters move down the ladder of authority. The spirit, the energy, and the commitment to help the individual and family in need, are not the same between the religious volunteer, the professional from a faith-based agency, and the lower level DSS employees, the gatekeepers to services

While it is indeed positive that the leadership has set a constructive tone at the upper institutional level for the eventual creative day-to-day relationships between the rank and file of the faith community and DSS, a new spirit must take hold quickly at the entry level of services. There is an increased risk strip-mining the resources of the faith community instead of making its institutions sustainable and renewable partners in service delivery. Changing conditions, and a real need for new partners among religious congregations and faith-based organizations, suggest looking seriously at doing things differently. As one leader of the faith community said, “DSS needs to become an “Invitational Agency.” This will go far in getting the faith community to accept the invitations to be partners for the long haul.

### **Conclusion**

DSS might consider looking at this effort as a twenty-year project that strengthens the partnership between DSS and the faith community. Then DSS should also consider setting set up an internal planning committee whose mission is to determine the potential resources of the faith community.

Those potential resources could then be matched systematically to the well examined, and well-defined needs that must be met in various programs in DSS. The practical outcome would be the development of a resource bank of congregations in the county that tells planners which congregations have what resources, and how those congregations might be capable of contributing to meeting which aspect of those well documented and clearly defined needs. In North Carolina where this research took place, there are 13 counties who use faith coordinators. They are either housed at a county DSS, or contracted out to faith-based organizations. They are full or part time employees, and in one case, there are 2 part time employees. The full and part time model are seen housed at DSS or a faith-based organization. Each has its positives and negatives. The faith coordinator housed at the DSS may be seen as an outsider to the faith community, or be swooped into the politics of DSS. The faith coordinator housed in a faith based organization has a better chance of gaining the allegiance of the faith community but not necessarily the allegiance of the DSS workers.

Another option could be used. It calls for the gradual development of faith community coordinators housed **both at DSS and the major faith-based organizations**. Funding for such an operation should not be so difficult, as there is ample federal money and new private money for these kinds of long-term systemic changes. A sub-committee of the larger committee might work best by: (1) Determining needs within DSS and then; (2) Considering actual ways that the matches between resources and needs could be implemented. A market-like strategy to educate the general community and then the faith community about DSS, and its need and desire to assist the vulnerable, must be implemented. Successful community education hinges on the full support of the community leaders and the institutions they represent. Therefore, it is important to establish an external community advisory committee, one that has visibility and influence, but one also willing to work. This group would be responsible for educating the community. Only when that plan is applied can any of the 3 options the committee recommended could be implemented effectively.

## References

- Associated Press, (1996) Clinton asks churches to hire welfare receivers, *Greensboro News and Record*, 106, 251, Section A2, 9/7.
- Ahmed, Fasih, (2000) Faith groups and welfare reform: An empirical analysis: Unpublished paper: Carolina Evaluation Research Center, December.
- Bartkowski, John and Helen Regis, (1999) A Charitable Choice and the Feasibility of Faith Based Welfare Reform in Mississippi. @ Final Report Submitted to the Joint Center for Poverty Research, North Western University, June, 1999.
- Campbell, David. (2002) Beyond charitable choice: The diverse service delivery approaches of local faith-related organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 31,2, 207-230.
- Chaves, M. 1999. Religious congregations and welfare reform: Who will take advantage of 'charitable choice'. *American Sociological Review*. 64:836-846.
- Checkoway, Barry, (1987) Political strategy for social planning 326-342. In: Strategies of community organization, Eds, Cox, Fred M., Erlich, John L., Rothman, Jack & Tropman, John.FE. Peacock Publishers Itasca, Illinois, 4<sup>th</sup> edition.
- Cnaan, R. (1997). Social and community involvement of religious congregations housed in historic religious properties: Findings from a six-city study. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work. *Sociology of Religion*, Spring 2002 v63 i1 p49 (20).
- Denton, Herbert, H. (1982). Reagan urges more church aid for needy. *Washington Post* A., 3. April, 14.
- Farnsley, Aurthur, E., II. (2001) Can Faith-based organizations compete? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30,1, 98-111.
- Green, John & Sherman, Amy (2002) Fruitful collaborations: A survey of government funded faith-based programs in 15 states. Hudson Institute. [www.hudsonfaithcommunities.org](http://www.hudsonfaithcommunities.org)
- Jeavons, Thomas, (1994). When the bottom line is faithfulness: Management of Christian service organizations. Indiana University Press, Bloomington Indiana.
- Cumo, Andrew (1998) Cuomo calls on faith-based and community groups to form new partnership. PR Newswire March 9 [SOURCE U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.]. Federal Register, March 8, 1990. p.8555
- Flanagan, Richard M., (2001) Lyndon Johnson, community action, and management of the administrative state. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 31, 4, p585-609.

Davis, Martin, Faith hope and charity, (2001) National Journal, 33, 17, 1228-1237  
April, 28.

Marlow, Christine. (1993). Research methods for generalist social work. Wadsworth Inc., Belmont, California.

Netting, F. Ellen. (1982). Church-related agencies and social welfare. *Social Services Review*, 58,3, 404-420.

Netting F. Ellen. (1984). The changing environment: Its effects on church related agencies. *Social Services Review*, 2,1,16-30.

Netting F. Ellen, Kettner, Peter, M., & McMurtry, (1995). Selecting appropriate tactics, p171-186. In: Techniques and tactics of community intervention. Eds, Tropman, John, E., Erlich, John L., and Rothman Jack, FE Peacock Publishers Itasca, Illinois, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

Orr, John, Mounts Carolyn, & Spoto, (2001) Peter Religion and welfare reform in Southern California: Is charitable choice succeeding? Center for Religion and Civic Culture, Los Angeles, California.

Pipes Paula F, and Ebaugh Helen Rose (2002) Faith-based coalitions, social services, and government funding. *Sociology of Religion*, v63 49-69.

Press, Eyal, (2001) Lead us not into temptation, *The American Prospect*, 12,6, p 20-27.  
April, 9.

Schmid, Hillel (2001), "Rethinking the policy of contracting out social services to non Governmental Organizations: Lessons and Dilemmas. Presented at ARNOVA Conference Miami, Florida 12/1/.

Schensul, Stephen, & Schensul, Jean, (1978) Advocacy and applied anthropology p.121-163, in Social scientists as advocates eds: Weber, George H., & McCall, George, J. Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, California.

Schnieder, Joanne. (2001) Kenosha social capital study,  
<http://www.chss.iup.edu/jschneid/KENOSHA.HTML>

Sherman, A. L. (1997). Fruitful collaboration between religious groups and governmental entities: Lessons from Virginia and Maryland. A report *prepared* for the workshop on *Implementing Government Cooperation with Religious Social Ministries*. Washington, DC and Annandale, Virginia: Center For Public Justice and The Center for Law and Religious Freedom.

Smith, Stephen, Rathgeb, & Sossin Michael R. (2001). The varieties of faith related agencies. *Public Administration Review*, 61, 6, p652-669.

The Points of Light Foundation (individuals<http://www.pointsoflight.org/about/about.cfm>, 2002)

California.

Wineburg, Bob (2001) A limited partnership: The politics of religion, welfare, and social service.  
Columbia University Press, New York.