

Religious Organizations, Anti-Poverty Relief, and Charitable Choice: A Feasibility Study of Faith-Based Welfare Reform in Mississippi



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The PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment for
The Business of Government

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Foreword

November 1999

When The PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment for The Business of Government was created in 1998, our vision was clear: to support original studies by the nation's leading academic researchers on issues related to the management of government. Our vision was also clear on what the Endowment was not: a foundation supporting studies examining the policies of government.

The Endowment's unique vision was forged for several reasons. First, we believe strongly that there were already enough experts and activists participating in the policy arena, both inside and outside Washington's beltway. Second, we believed that what was needed — and where the Endowment could add value — was in supporting an increased number of studies examining the implementation of public policy and aiming to assist public managers in the challenging task of transforming public laws into public programs.

In "Religious Organizations, Anti-Poverty Relief, and Charitable Choice: A Feasibility Study of Faith-Based Welfare Reform in Mississippi," Professors John Bartkowski and Helen Regis' excellent study clearly fulfills the Endowment's original vision. Their study takes no policy position on the concept of "charitable choice." It leaves the policy debate over "charitable choice" to others. Instead, Professors Bartkowski and Regis have prepared a report which aims to assist managers at the federal, state, and local level in meeting the challenge of implementing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which contained a provision authorizing "charitable choice" in the delivery of social services.

Professors Bartkowski and Regis provide a series of recommendations aimed at managers and policy-makers for implementing this new provision. We hope that this study, as well as other Endowment reports, increases our understanding of the management issues surrounding the effective implementation of public policy.

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Executive Summary

On the heels of recent welfare reform legislation, this study explores the feasibility of implementing “charitable choice” initiatives in Mississippi, a largely rural Southern state marked by a combination of long-standing social disadvantage and a thriving religious economy. The charitable choice portion of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act identifies religious congregations as a prospective provider of social services in states that contract for service delivery through local nonprofit agencies. As a feasibility study, this investigation (1) aims to provide guidance to policy-makers who are currently weighing the merits of routing social services through local religious congregations, (2) seeks to apprise local religious and community leaders of the potential advantages and disadvantages of faith-based welfare reform initiatives, and (3) attempts to anticipate the ways in which the interests of the poor may be effectively addressed or, alternatively, undermined by particular aspects of faith-based welfare reform.

Because an understanding of current faith-based relief efforts is a crucial starting point for gauging the feasibility of future charitable choice implementation, our investigation begins by describing the types of relief that these congregations currently provide, and the aid-provision strategies they utilize to do so. We then proceed to explore religious leaders’ perceptions of the prospects for charitable choice. To undertake this feasibility study, we draw on in-depth interview data collected from a purpo-

sive sample of religious leaders representing thirty faith communities in and around Mississippi’s Golden Triangle Region (GTR), a rural area in the northeast portion of the state.

Several noteworthy findings emerge from our study. First, religious communities currently offer many different types of aid to the needy, and pastors conceive of faith-based aid as a holistic form of relief that — unlike public assistance — aims to address both material and non-material needs among the disadvantaged. Among the most common forms of relief currently offered by local religious congregations are assistance with the payment of rent and utility bills, the provision of food and clothing, and various forms of counseling. Consistent with the emphasis on holistic aid-provision among local congregations, these material forms of relief are often intermeshed with aid of a less tangible character (e.g., social support, spiritual encouragement).

Second, taken together, local faith communities currently employ several different aid-provision strategies through which they offer social services to vulnerable populations:

- intensive and sustained interpersonal engagement with the poor;
- direct intermittent relief to the needy;
- collaboration with para-church relief organizations; and

- short-term mission trips to disadvantaged populations situated in distant locales.

Several faith communities utilize a combination of these aid-giving strategies simultaneously, and congregations typically develop strong preferences for specific means of relief-provision while eschewing other varieties. Our study highlights the advantages and limitations associated with the relief-provision strategies currently utilized by religious congregations.

Finally, although the preponderance of pastors in our sample are familiar with faith-based welfare reform initiatives, these religious leaders evince wide-ranging evaluations concerning the future possibility of charitable choice implementation within their home congregations and local faith communities. Consistent with previous survey research on this topic, black pastors in our purposive in-depth interview sample express more positive affect toward charitable choice when compared with their white counterparts. However, regardless of their general orientation toward charitable choice, virtually all pastors in our study express a mix of hope and trepidation when considering the possible implementation of this program in the near future. Pastoral affect toward charitable choice is traced to several factors, including:

- *evaluations of previous relief efforts complemented by specific congregational and denominational dynamics*, such that positive prior experiences with aid-giving lend themselves to more favorable views of charitable choice;
- *perceptions about race-ethnicity, the poor, and social inequality*, such that pastors who believe that current racial and class-based barriers can be overcome through faith-sponsored relief efforts are more favorably disposed toward charitable choice; and
- *beliefs about the government and its responsibility toward the poor*, such that pastors who believe the government must continue to sponsor anti-poverty programs seem generally more willing to support charitable choice.

In the end, our report highlights the prospective advantages and disadvantages associated with the possible implementation of charitable choice initia-

tives in Mississippi during the near future. This report, then, is designed to shed light on current patterns and future prospects for faith-based relief-provision within rural Mississippi and, more broadly, among congregations situated in rural areas marked by high poverty rates.

Introduction

Background: Welfare Reform and the Emergence of Charitable Choice

Although policy experts hardly agree on the merits of recent welfare reform legislation, many would concur that the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) has dramatically changed the face of public assistance programs in at least two ways. First, PRWORA replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). In contrast to the virtually unlimited assistance provided by entitlement-based AFDC, TANF provides strict time limits on the disbursement of federal funds to needy families. Among its other provisions, TANF requires adults to work for pay within 24 months after they begin receiving assistance. Second, PRWORA has altered the avenues available for the disbursement of temporary assistance funds.

Consistent with the philosophy of political devolution, welfare reform provides states and, ostensibly, local communities with greater autonomy in the distribution of public assistance monies. PRWORA provides states with a federal allocation of block grants — i.e., a fixed annual sum of federal monies which are dispersed to state governments and then matched by state funds. Champions of political devolution charge that creative and effective relief programs are more likely to be conceived and implemented by local officials who understand the unique dynamics of their communities more intimately than distant officials in Washington.

Because of the discretionary latitude associated with block grants, a provision in PRWORA called “charitable choice” (Title I, Section 104) requires that states who contract with local nonprofit organizations for social service delivery to include religious communities as potential contractees in the competitive awarding of block grant funds (see *A Guide to Charitable Choice* 1997; Chaves, in press; Sherwood 1998). The rudiments of charitable choice legislation are discussed in the accompanying sidebar, “What is Charitable Choice?” (see page 8).

Although charitable choice was introduced into the 1996 welfare reform law by Missouri Senator John Ashcroft, it was Marvin Olasky’s *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (1992) that initially catapulted the prospect of faith-based welfare reform into the public consciousness. Supporters of charitable choice such as Olasky contend that religious organizations will be more effective providers of social services than government agencies because of both the grassroots character of congregations and the unambiguous moral values they embrace.

Presidential hopefuls from both parties — Al Gore and George W. Bush — support charitable choice. Still, this initiative has attracted forceful criticism from civil libertarians, who worry about government-sponsored religious favoritism and faith-based proselytization with the use of public monies (e.g., Boston 1998; Pinkerton 1999; Fritz 1999). Other commentators question the practicality of this initiative in the late 20th century (e.g., Wolfe 1993),

and some religious communities are leery of perceived government “intrusion” into faith-based relief work (e.g., Burger 1996; Jewish News 1999; Raasch 1999).

Interestingly, Mississippi was among the first states to implement a collaborative church-state anti-poverty program. Before the passage of charitable choice legislation in PRWORA, the governor’s office in Mississippi implemented a statewide program called “Faith & Families of Mississippi” with the assistance of Mississippi’s Department of Human Services. Attracting national attention (e.g., Harrison 1995a, 1995b; Yardley 1996), Faith & Families of Mississippi sought to have local religious congregations adopt needy families receiving welfare (*Faith & Families of Mississippi* nd-a, nd-b).

Ideally, a welfare family sponsored by its adoptive local church could use a combination of public administrative and faith-based resources to move from government assistance into stable, long-term employment. Mississippi’s Department of Human Services currently utilizes outgoing Governor Fordice’s Faith & Families program as its primary means of implementing faith-based welfare reform within the state. Given upcoming gubernatorial elections in Mississippi and growing federal momentum for charitable choice implementation, there is a chance that such efforts may be expanded in the future. However, an official at Mississippi’s Department of Human Services suggested that some theologically conservative congregations in Mississippi might remain leery of an anti-poverty alliance between churches and the government.

Study Objectives, Context, and Research Methodology

In light of welfare reform legislation and ongoing debates about charitable choice, this study aims to address one basic question: What are the potential advantages and disadvantages associated with utilizing rural religious communities as collaborative providers of social services previously disbursed by the state? Many studies suggest that religious communities can — and often do — provide their members and local needy populations with safety nets that buttress the effects of poverty and personal misfortune (e.g., Amato-von Hemert 1998; Ammerman, 1997; Eng and Hatch 1991; Harris

What is Charitable Choice?

Charitable choice became law as part of the 1996 welfare reform legislation, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (see *A Guide to Charitable Choice* 1997). As outlined in Section 104 of PRWORA, state governments that opt to contract with independent-sector social service providers cannot legally exclude faith-based organizations from consideration simply because these organizations are religious in nature. Consequently, the language of “choice” in this legislation is designed to underscore the importance to giving religious congregations the same opportunities that secular nonprofit agencies enjoy in competing for purchase-of-service contracts with state governments. Furthermore, charitable choice aims to ensure that state governments cannot censor religious expression — i.e., religious symbols or practices — among faith-based organizations that are selected to provide state-funded social services.

Even as it protects the religious expression of faith-based organizations, charitable choice provisions in PRWORA are intended to preserve the civil and religious liberties of welfare recipients. Charitable choice provisions mandate that states which utilize religious congregations as social service providers offer welfare recipients the choice of receiving assistance from faith-based or secular organizations. Moreover, religious congregations that provide state-funded social services to the needy cannot legally force beneficiaries of such services to participate in religious practices. In the end, the charitable choice provisions found in Section 104 of PRWORA strive to manage the tension between several potentially competing aims: (1) the state’s obligation to provide poverty relief without fostering welfare dependency; and (2) the protection of civil liberties for both religious communities and welfare recipients, such that religious organizations may be awarded government monies to provide public sector anti-poverty services along with guaranteed protections for the particular sensibilities (religious or secular) of welfare recipients.

1995, 1996; Hogstel and Davis 1996; Humphrey 1980; Morrison 1991; Olson, Reis, Murphy, and Gehm 1988; Rawlings and Schrock 1996). Yet, are Mississippi religious communities in a position to expand current aid offerings or launch new service programs — perhaps with block grant monies — in an age of temporary public assistance? How, if at all, are such efforts expected to compare with public assistance programs offered by the state alone?

In one of the few previous studies of congregational orientations toward charitable choice, Chaves (in press) found that approximately one third of 1236 faith communities surveyed throughout the nation would consider participating in a charitable choice program. Liberal and moderate congregations, as well as African-American faith communities, were more likely to evaluate positively the prospects for charitable choice initiatives.

Our investigation extends Chaves' study by focusing specifically on the viability of rerouting welfare services through religious congregations in rural Mississippi (specifically the GTR). To this end, we have conducted in-depth interviews with key informants (typically pastors) representing 30 religious communities in northeastern Mississippi.¹ Our analyses of these interviews are informed by ethnographic data (not analyzed here) culled from a subsample of four churches in the GTR.

The GTR connects three Mississippi counties (Oktibbeha, Lowndes, and Clay), and their respective county seats (Starkville, Columbus, and West Point). Columbus is the largest of these small cities, with a population of approximately 24,000 residents. Starkville has about 18,000 residents, while West Point has a population of just over 10,000 (Mississippi Population Data Sheet 1993).

¹ Several notes bear mentioning at this juncture. First, our final sample of churches contains one black congregation located just outside of GTR proper. However, the demographic profile of the community in which this church is situated (not identified to preserve pastoral and congregational anonymity) is quite similar to those of small towns in GTR. Second, although we interviewed a leader from a local mosque, stylistic conventions dictate that we sometimes use the word "church" to refer to the religious communities in our sample. Third, one church is not featured in Appendix A. This church did not return a pre-interview survey initially provided during the in-depth interview.

Mississippi is overwhelmingly populated by whites (63%) and blacks (36%) (Mississippi Population Data Sheet 1993). Within the GTR, Clay County is 53.3% black, whereas Lowndes (37.2% black) and Oktibbeha (34.3% black) conform more closely to the ethnic composition in the state. Clay is by far the most rural of the three counties (48% farmland), when compared with Lowndes and Oktibbeha counties (39% and 28% farmland, respectively).

Why Mississippi?

In several respects, Mississippi provides an ideal test case in which to examine the feasibility of faith-based welfare reform. Apart from the challenge of providing social services to a geographically dispersed rural population, a plethora of statistical indicators underscore the pervasiveness of poverty and public assistance use in Mississippi at large and, more specifically, throughout much of the GTR.

Nearly 20% of all Mississippians and 32% of all children in the state live in poverty (1996 Statistical Abstract; Kids Count Data Book 1998). About 17% of Mississippi children live in extreme poverty (i.e., household income under half the poverty level), an indicator that is almost double the national rate (9%) (Kids Count Data Book 1998).

Income disparities between Mississippi's GTR and the U.S. are quite striking. Analyses of 1990 census data reveal that households earning \$5,000 or less annually are over 3.5 times more common in the GTR (8.26%) than in the nation at large (2.34%). (Within Mississippi as a whole, 7.89% of households earn \$5,000 or less annually.) Mississippi as a whole ranks last among all states in per capita money income (\$16,531) (1996 Statistical Abstract). It is for such reasons that some scholars have described Mississippi as the poorest state in the nation (Howell 1997).

In addition, Mississippi features one of the highest rates of public assistance use in the country. In 1992 and 1995, Mississippi led the nation in receipt of public assistance (AFDC and SSI) (11.8%) (1995 Statistical Abstract) and in receipt of food stamps (19.26%) (1997 Statistical Abstract), respectively. Strikingly, public assistance use rates for Mississippi (15 public assistance recipients per 100

non-recipients) and the GTR (14 recipients per 100 non-recipients) have been recorded at more than twice the national average (6.5 recipients per 100 non-recipients). Clay County (19 public assistance recipients per 100 non-recipients) far outpaced the other two GTR counties (12 recipients per 100 non-recipients in Oktibbeha and 13 recipients per 100 non-recipients in Lowndes) in terms of public assistance use rates.

The pervasiveness of poverty in Mississippi and the GTR is complemented by a thriving local religious economy. Like much of the South, Mississippi's religious institutions figure prominently into many aspects of local social life (see Boles 1972; Harrell 1981; Harvey 1997; Johnson and Jersild 1996; Stowell 1998; White, and White 1995 for treatments of religion in the South). Throughout the GTR, churches — mostly Protestant and, particularly, Baptist and Methodist congregations — dot the landscape. In some rural locales, churches are the key institution through which local communities define themselves and forge social bonds.

Pastors representing 30 different faith communities in and around the GTR area participated in the in-depth interview portion of this study. One pastor served two churches, and one church at which a religious leader was interviewed failed to return its pre-interview survey. Therefore, 29 interviews were conducted in all. Profile data on the congregations are provided in Appendix A. (See Appendix B for the pre-interview survey instrument.) Sampled congregations were selected on the basis of several criteria coupled with a sensitivity to local social dynamics:

- *ethnic diversity*, including 16 Anglo churches, 11 black churches, a local Muslim mosque, and an itinerant Catholic ministry to Hispanic migrants;
- *denominational diversity*, with purposive sampling designed to account for the predominance of Baptist [N=9] and Methodist [N=9] churches in this region of Mississippi; and
- *congregational characteristics*, including membership size (ranging widely from 26 to 1,800 total members) and locale (urban areas, small towns, and rural areas).

In-depth interviews (see Appendix C for questionnaire) were conducted with religious leaders by one or more members of our research team using a semi-structured format. Although purposive non-probability samples do not permit generalizations to be applied outside the sample frame, data derived from this research strategy have a high degree of internal validity. Consequently, these data enable us to examine the meanings, motivations, and social processes associated with faith-based aid-provision and charitable choice in ways not permitted by a large, statistically random survey sample, with special attention to congregational dynamics in poor, rural areas. Our analytical orientation toward these qualitative data is consistent with the principles of interpretive social inquiry for policy-based research (e.g., Roe 1994). We used an emergent themes technique to analyze our data in the hopes of capturing the richness and nuances of the information provided in the interviews.

Study Findings

What types of relief do local religious congregations currently provide?

Pre-interview survey data on relief-provision among our purposive sample of congregations in Mississippi's GTR reveal that religious communities provide diverse forms of aid to the needy among their membership and in the local community. In Table 1, we present the percentages of all sampled congregations that engage in particular types of relief efforts. Mindful that these figures are presented only as background data, the following forms of relief are most commonly provided by congregations in our study: rental payment assistance (59%); utility payment assistance (69%); as well as the provision of groceries (72%), clothing (52%), and counseling services of various sorts (55%).

Table 1 also reveals that there are some differences in services offered by white churches in our sample when compared with their black counterparts. Interestingly, black churches in our sample provide emergency relief (i.e., cash assistance, temporary shelter) as well as educational or skills-based programs targeted at youngsters (e.g., tutoring, after-school programs) with greater frequency.

Religious leaders in this study are virtually unanimous in defining faith-based aid broadly enough to include both a material component and a non-material dimension. According to the religious leaders interviewed in this investigation, the provi-

sion of aid by religious communities should be a holistic endeavor that — unlike public assistance programs — aims to address the material needs of the disadvantaged while simultaneously providing the means for moral development and spiritual sustenance. A female pastor at an African-American Methodist Church in our sample suggested that her church's work with local elderly was quite successful precisely because this program assists older individuals "financially and then spiritually also." This black Methodist church has a jail ministry program founded on the same principle. The jail ministry entails not only visitation with the imprisoned, but a personal grooming service for them as well.

Many congregations meld material and non-material forms of relief in quite creative ways. Most religious communities in our sample offer special programs during various holiday seasons (e.g., Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter). While these programs vary in their specifics, they generally complement the provision of material aid (e.g., free dinners at the church) with ritual activities (e.g., special worship services) for those who wish to attend them.

Even forms of aid that would seem — on the face of it — to be one-dimensional often subtly combine various types of relief work. For example, inasmuch as revivals are designed to inspire religious conviction among the un-churched and the regular church-goer alike, these special ministries would seem to center around the satiation of spiritual

Table 1

| Percentages of Churches Providing Particular Types of Aid^a | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | % of All Churches (N=29)^b | % of White Churches (N=16) | % of Black Churches (N=11) |
| Rent Assistance | 59% (17) | 69% (11) | 55% (6) |
| Utilities Assistance | 69% (20) | 75% (12) | 64% (7) |
| Grocery Assistance | 72% (21) | 81% (13) | 73% (8) |
| Cash | 24% (7) | 19% (3) | 36% (4) |
| Temporary Shelter | 24% (7) | 19% (3) | 36% (4) |
| Affordable Housing | 7% (2) | 6% (1) | 0% (0) |
| Clothing | 52% (15) | 50% (8) | 55% (6) |
| Medical Services | 28% (8) | 25% (4) | 27% (3) |
| Child Care | 28% (8) | 31% (5) | 27% (3) |
| Hot Meals | 17% (5) | 19% (3) | 18% (2) |
| Elder Care | 24% (7) | 25% (4) | 27% (3) |
| Transportation | 35% (10) | 31% (5) | 36% (4) |
| Counseling | 55% (16) | 50% (8) | 64% (7) |
| Tutoring | 28% (8) | 13% (2) | 55% (6) |
| After-School Programs | 10% (3) | 0% (0) | 27% (3) |
| Other Aid | 10% (3) | 6% (1) | 0% (0) |
| <p>a: The figure bounded by parentheses within each cell is the number of churches in the numerator used to calculate the corresponding percentage.</p> <p>b: All churches include white (N=16), Black (N=11), and other (N=2) congregations.</p> | | | |

needs. Yet, the spiritual fervor often produced by such activities is often pointed toward a material outlet. At many revivals, special collections may be taken up for charitable organizations or a church's food pantry. In addition, these special services often provide pastors with a forum for the recruitment of church members into volunteer aid programs.

How do local religious communities currently provide aid to the needy?

Despite this general pattern of melding material and non-material forms of aid, many of the congregations in our study intentionally utilize one or more of four different aid-provision strategies:

- intensive and sustained interpersonal engagement with the poor;
- intermittent, direct relief to the needy;
- collaboration with para-church relief organizations;
- short-term mission trips to disadvantaged populations located in distant settings.

These four aid-provision strategies, described below, are not mutually exclusive. However, congregations often develop strong preferences for specific means of relief-provision.

Relief-Provision Strategy 1: Intensive and Sustained Interpersonal Engagement with the Poor

The first aid-provision strategy distilled from our study entails intensive, long-term interpersonal engagement with those in need. Faith communities located squarely in poverty-stricken areas frequently adopt this aid-provision strategy. For that reason, pastors who advocate this strategy of relief-provision typically do not need to look far to find the poor. In many instances, these pastors serve congregations whose own members face intersecting forms of social disadvantage ranging from racism, monthly economic shortfalls, and inadequate housing to educational deficiencies, unemployment, and job insecurity. These ministers defend what they perceive as the transformative consequences — for aid-giver and relief recipient alike — of sustaining intimate, face-to-face contact with the disadvantaged. These ministers and members of their

congregations claim to cultivate lasting friendships and a sense of solidarity with the poor through providing basic necessities and emotional support to those who face persistent poverty.

Pastors whose congregations utilize this relief strategy claim that it is amazingly effective at fighting poverty and solving problems such as drug abuse. At the same time, several of the pastors who champion this strategy as the primary means of offering relief are explicitly critical of those who eschew sustained personal engagement with the poor. These pastors imply that “hands-off” religious entities offer “boardroom” relief bereft of personal engagement.

One pastor who advocates intensive and sustained interpersonal engagement with the poor ministers extensively to Hispanic migrant workers in the local area. During our interview with him, this pastor mimicked the voice of a “hands-off” religious leader who opts for cash-based assistance in lieu of more intensive personal engagement: “‘We do a Good Samaritan program for them. But we make sure they don't come and eat with us.’” Then, adopting his own voice once again, this critical pastor offered his appraisal of this financial-donation-only relief strategy: “So, you know, the right hand is saying, ‘Here is five-hundred dollars,’ and the left hand is saying, ‘Make sure you don't spend it around me, because I'd rather not talk to you.’”

Beyond the discomfort that some privileged congregants may feel in crossing social class lines to minister intensively to the poor, many churches that do not employ this relief-provision strategy argue that they simply cannot do so because it is so time-consuming and labor-intensive. Forming and sustaining relationships with the poor — particularly those who may live in a very different part of town than the aid-giver — requires considerable time and effort. Although many pastors whose congregations do not utilize this aid-provision strategy chose their words quite carefully, such intensive relief efforts can be seen as somewhat “inefficient” despite their effectiveness. It is for such reasons that many congregations — particularly those of privilege — often opt for other relief strategies.

Relief-Provision Strategy 2: Intermittent Direct Relief

A second aid-provision strategy in which many local congregations engage entails intermittent direct relief to the poor. This aid-giving strategy is quite popular among a wide range of churches — black and Anglo, working class and middle class — and takes many different forms. In a few instances, direct relief entails some form of long-term support such as “adopt-a-family” programs. In such cases, a religious congregation or some faction of members within it decides to remain in periodic contact with a particular family that has faced long-term disadvantage.

Our study suggests that these programs sometimes emerge through informal social networks in which there is a common point of contact between an affluent sponsoring congregation and the needy family. In one case, parents in a white affluent congregation heard that the family of their child’s schoolteacher had run across a string of unfortunate circumstances (e.g., medical problems, financial shortfalls). In this instance, the child served as the common point of contact between the provider (the child’s parents in the affluent congregation) and the recipient of aid (the student’s schoolteacher).

More common by far than the scenario described above are churches that use this intermittent aid-provision strategy to provide one-time or short-term relief to known persons suffering a discrete crisis such as a house fire, a physical accident, or the death of a relative who had no savings or burial insurance. By contrast, individuals unfamiliar to the community whose struggles are less clearly defined by a discrete crisis are quite often (1) carefully screened by a range of church-imposed aid-giving standards (e.g., call-backs on their phone calls soliciting aid, visitation at the home of the needy person to inspect their resources, an escort to the grocery store rather than the provision of cash), or (2) referred to private or public agencies that specialize in providing the type of aid that is sought (discussed in the following section). Consequently, it is difficult to overemphasize the overriding significance of congregational social networks for the disbursement of intermittent aid.

Although the vast majority of pastors said that their religious communities would not turn away non-members, tight congregational networks can sometimes promote a “help-our-own” orientation in which resources are requested by a needy person or family within that group. In some cases, leaders in religious communities may even adopt pro-active strategies of aid-giving whereby needy members do not have to solicit relief.

A religious leader at a local mosque provided an illuminating account of the way in which such social networks can operate to the advantage of community members:

Most of the people who are needy ... actually, they don’t come and ask ... We know some individual, for example, has certain problems. But he is too shy or whatever ... He is too shy to ask for help. So we will go ask his friends ... If he is in the hospital, we will ask his or her friend, ‘Does he or she have insurance?’ Then if they say, ‘Yes,’ we will say, ‘OK, does the insurance cover all of it? What is left over? Is he or she capable of doing that?’ We go through friends and we ask.

The intracongregational provision of intermittent aid is perceived to offer two key advantages. First, the thorny problem of “deservingness” among those in need is made less ambiguous through pre-existing social networks. Prior knowledge of the person in need is viewed as a form of accountability — in a word, proof that the relief will be appreciated and used judiciously by the recipient. Second, intracongregational relief enables members of the faith community to witness firsthand the ways in which their aid-giving can transform the lives of people they value and call friends. In this way, the aid-givers become the *recipients* of renewed bonds of trust and faith within their own community — bonds which are affirmed by effectively meeting the needs of its members.

However, the power of social networks in some congregations is not solely affirmative, but can be exclusive as well. The same membership circles

that enable churchgoers to support one another via this aid-provision strategy also provide the power, if needed, to deny aid requests to non-members. It is important to recognize that the term “non-member” is often code for an array of intersecting social cleavages. Because many local religious communities are such homogeneous organizations, a key outcome of this help-our-own orientation often entails the preservation of boundaries that insulate persons of different ethnic, social class, and denominational backgrounds from one another.

As might be expected, race is an especially salient theme in our interviews. Most pastors interviewed for this study conceded that race currently affects the way in which churches provide aid to the needy and would likely do so into the future. Several pastors even argued that racism is more entrenched within local churches — white and black congregations alike — than outside of them. Even those religious leaders who maintained that racial antagonism does not directly influence the provision of aid within their own churches recognized that such factors hold sway in neighboring congregations. We address this issue more thoroughly later when discussing pastoral affect toward charitable choice.

Relief-Provision Strategy 3: Collaboration with Para-church Relief Agencies

A third aid-provision strategy entails congregational collaboration with para-church relief organizations. Such collaboration can take many forms: philanthropic support of a relief agency by local congregations, often coupled with church-based referrals to the relief agency to which congregational monies are directed. Churches that engage in philanthropic support often provide a long list of local interfaith relief agencies which they support through resources (e.g., money, clothes) donated by their members or via volunteer assistance. These churches may use other relief-provision strategies in addition to congregation-sponsored philanthropy, including intermittent direct relief (as described earlier). However, pastors sometimes argued that they can often most effectively provide aid to the needy through semi-professional para-church relief organizations rather than at their own church door.

Why would faith communities opt to refer aid solicitors to para-church relief agencies? Supply-and-demand considerations regarding aid often figure prominently into such decisions. On the “demand” side of the aid-provision relationship, these centralized and standardized agencies are believed to safeguard individual churches from fraudulent, self-serving, door-to-door requests for

What is a Para-Church Relief Agency?

Para-church relief agencies are faith-based organizations that provide aid to the needy outside of a specific congregational structure. As described in our discussion of para-church agencies, local congregations often seek to coordinate their relief efforts with these organizations in ministering to needy populations. There is often a two-way relationship between para-church agencies and local congregations. Depending on their available resources, local churches may offer financial, material, or volunteer support to para-church relief agencies. In return, individual congregations may refer needy individuals to para-church relief agencies.

Some para-church relief agencies are interfaith or interdenominational in character (e.g., the Salvation Army); such organizations often have their own office and may draw staff from any of a number of different congregations. Other para-church relief efforts may be orchestrated within a particular religious denomination (see, e.g., the 1996 United Methodist Book of Discipline, pp. 423-424). There are several different para-church relief agencies in the northeastern Mississippi area. In this phase of our investigation, we are interested primarily in pastors' perceptions of their relationships with such agencies. In future work, we plan to collect and analyze data directly from local para-church relief organizations.

aid — which several pastors argued are quite common. The standardization and centralization of relief is typically used in an urban or semi-urban context where population density makes knowing one's neighbors difficult. These nonprofit agencies typically employ screening procedures, often maintain a centralized database on agency contributors and aid solicitors, are open regular hours, and are overseen by individuals judged to be competent staff workers.

In singing the praises of a local para-church relief agency, Outreach Ministries (a pseudonym), one pastor offered the following account:

We [local churches] feed Outreach Ministries. Outreach Ministries, in turn, helps the needy. They are our screening process. If I have a question about somebody [pause]. Let me explain this to you. I am a sharp guy. I know how to read a phone book. I know how to go to the Yellow Pages under "churches." If I want to make five to ten thousand dollars in a week, I start calling every church in [county]. If I can get into every church in [county], 38 of them, it's feasible to come up with five or ten thousand dollars worth of food or things that I could sell ... By taking them to Outreach Ministries, there is a master file maintained there. That's one of the places I can call to check on people to see if they are abusers of the system.

Concerns about fraud are not the only reason that many congregations use para-church relief agencies. On the "supply" side of the aid-provision relationship, various types of congregational dynamics make para-church relief agencies an attractive option. First, some churches have limited benevolence funds, and are simply not able to address "desperate, dire" aid solicitations of over \$300 to \$500. In such cases, these churches will often provide a referral to a para-church relief agency rather than exhaust their benevolence funds completely.

Second, leaders in some churches that utilize this aid-provision strategy comment on the time constraints faced by their members — many of whom are in dual-earner households where couples strug-

gle to meet their own family obligations. A religious leader from a large white Methodist church composed of middle-class members offered the following account of their membership: "We do have a lot of generous, giving people here who are very concerned about others. It is a very caring and loving church." However, when asked about the prospect of church members participating in expanded aid programs, she reacted with some caution and hesitancy. Although this church has some "gifted" retirees who are active in aid programs, she explained that many of her congregants are in families where both spouses are employed full-time: "You know, time, of course, is an issue for everyone nowadays with all of the working folks we have." In light of the fact that they support a plethora of nonprofit and interfaith relief agencies with philanthropic donations, this church often refers individuals requesting aid to these agencies. According to such reasoning, the church "already supports" aid to the needy through such donations and need not duplicate its efforts too vigorously with direct aid offerings.

When employed as a key mechanism for relief-provision, philanthropic aid-giving can inadvertently establish and maintain social distance between congregational members and the poor. Based on this aid-giving strategy, responsibility to assist the poor can unwittingly be shifted from the local congregation to a para-church relief agency that may function very differently from the former. This outcome is precisely the opposite of that which is desired by Marvin Olasky and other proponents of charitable choice — i.e., a *particular local religious community* acting as a conduit for the provision of material resources, social networks, and moral values through *face-to-face contact* with the poor.

Finally, pastoral referrals to para-church relief agencies may sometimes be motivated by a desire to quell membership concerns about the use of congregants' donations to the church. Are members' donations for relief efforts and church programs being used effectively? To be sure, no pastor admitted to providing referrals to para-church agencies simply because he or she feared confronting uncomfortable questions about the use of member donations. Nevertheless, such a scenario is not altogether unfathomable.

Our interviews are replete with references to the complex machinations of power that characterize the relationships between local pastors and the congregations they serve. Several pastors, especially those at Methodist and Baptist churches, even stated quite straightforwardly that the church belongs more to the congregants themselves — and long-time members in particular — than to pastors who often serve itinerant appointments in which they are transferred every few years. At times, power dynamics center squarely on the use of member donations. It is quite possible, then, that local skirmishes about the usage of donated funds sometimes encourage pastors to rely on para-church relief agencies — thereby circumventing the thorny fiscal issues that might otherwise emerge between pastors and the congregations they are charged to serve.

Relief-Provision Strategy 4: Short-Term Distant-missions

Several churches employ a fourth aid-giving strategy by offering their membership the opportunity to participate in distant-missions — either to some location in the U.S. (typically a one-day trip by car) or to an impoverished country abroad. One large white affluent church offers a variety of missions on the domestic scene and abroad — a week's relief work at an inner-city mission in Texas; ministry to needy persons living in Appalachia; several weeks of participation at a Christian aid-giving agency in Central America, among others. This church employs a distant-missions relief strategy in combination with an array of other aid programs: "one-shot" funds for discrete crises, a grassroots adopt-a-family initiative begun in a Sunday school class, referrals to a local interfaith relief agency that this church helped to organize, and local volunteer efforts with (among other organizations) Habitat for Humanity.

Often, distant-mission trips are coordinated through pastors or adults who work with the youth in privileged congregations. Indeed, several churches in this study sponsor distant-missions for their youth that involve a "pilgrimage" to highly disadvantaged populations (e.g., inner-city children, residents of dilapidated homes in nearby cities). The aim of these missions is transformation on several levels.

First, the relief work performed on these distant-missions is designed to effect a small-scale social transformation of the disadvantaged community through intensive (though temporary) relief work performed by the volunteers. Second, distant-missions can promote spiritual transformation for aid recipients, as well as for the congregational members whose faith and camaraderie are enriched by the extraordinary challenges that they collectively confront on such sojourns. Third, some youth-oriented distant-missions are underwritten in part by young congregants' fund-raising activities (e.g., selling flowers to other members, which symbolically represent the "planting" of mission "seeds"). In such cases, these missions teach youngsters lessons about the cultivation of values such as hard work, thrift, and self-sufficiency.

Finally, such face-to-face ministry to the very poor serves as a "getaway" — i.e., a break from the everyday grind — for church youth that is at once educational, morally challenging, and even fun. Such mission trips often include a day or so of recreational activities in which participants consume distinctive aspects of the distant culture which might otherwise not be available to them in small Mississippi towns.

Like the first aid-provision strategy outlined in this section (i.e., intensive engagement), distant-missions require intimate contact with the poor and can promote spiritual transformation for all parties involved. Reflecting on the impact of these types of programs at his large Anglo church, one pastor concluded: "[The youth] become sensitive. When they have the opportunity to work with poor people, they begin to see people and not just the situation or something they have heard. They identify with people."

Such relief work can therefore subvert common misperceptions about poverty through experiential knowledge that attaches faces, bodies, and names to an otherwise abstract group of people — namely, "the poor" — who would otherwise appear foreign to those from a middle-class upbringing. However, at the same time, such outreach efforts entail a pilgrimage that propels the aid-giver *outside* of his or her own community.

Do these distant-mission pilgrimages lead to a more permanent transformation that manifests itself in local social action once the sojourner returns home? One local leader of distant-missions suggested that, while his church strives to effect permanent changes via these programs, such trips may enable members of affluent faith communities to avoid confronting the uncomfortable reality that local social hierarchies sustain their privileged position back at home.

Pastoral perceptions regarding the feasibility of charitable choice: How do religious leaders assess the prospect for program effectiveness if charitable choice is implemented?

Having explored the means of relief-provision currently utilized by local congregations, we now turn our attention to examining pastoral affect toward the implementation of charitable choice initiatives in Mississippi's GTR. As part of our congregational profile of sampled churches, Appendix A (see page 34) reports thumbnail summaries of pastoral familiarity with and affect toward charitable choice. This information is distilled from interviews with local religious leaders.

A vast majority of pastors in our sample — 23 to be exact — claimed familiarity with “the idea that churches might become more involved in the restructuring of public welfare.” Four pastors were unfamiliar with this proposed initiative. Although only four pastors plainly stated their lack of familiarity with this proposal, a few pastors who claimed familiarity with political discussions of church-state relief partnerships had very limited knowledge of such an initiative. In such cases, we speculated that we may have introduced them to the idea for the first time during our interview and surmised that these religious leaders hesitated to acknowledge their unfamiliarity with this issue. Interestingly, some of these pastors were favorably disposed to the plan of faith-based welfare reform after we had apparently introduced the idea to them.

Pastors at 12 congregations were, in general, favorably disposed toward such an initiative. Yet, as discussed more fully in the sections that follow, even those pastors who were most favorably disposed

toward charitable choice initiatives expressed reservations about this program. Religious leaders from 11 congregations expressed such a profound ambivalence toward faith-based welfare reform that their responses defied categorization as “favorably disposed” or “opposed.” Many of these religious leaders simultaneously raised concerns and hopes regarding such an initiative. Four local pastors were expressly opposed to a church-state aid-provision partnership. These pastors either argued that their congregations would be unwilling to participate in this venture or harbored very serious reservations about church-state collaborations.

In addition, it is quite noteworthy that many more black pastors in our sample are quite favorably disposed toward charitable choice initiatives. Data on charitable choice familiarity and affect presented in Appendix A is summarized as a two-by-two diagram in Table 2. Pastors representing black churches favor charitable choice more frequently by a margin of over five to one. Among 14 white pastors for whom we have such interview data, two (14%) favor charitable choice. The majority of white pastors (57%) are quite ambivalent about such an initiative. Among the 11 African-American pastors in this study, eight (73%) are favorably disposed toward charitable choice.

These findings, based on our non-probability sample of religious leaders, are presented not for the purpose of generalizing from them. Rather, they serve as background information through which we can interpret charitable choice affect and related themes that emerge from a more thorough analysis of interview transcripts.

What factors shape pastoral affect toward charitable choice initiatives?

With the foregoing overview in mind, we now seek to explore the nuances in local religious leaders' orientations toward charitable choice and discuss several factors affecting pastoral evaluations of this initiative. Our data suggest that pastoral affect toward charitable choice can be traced to several interrelated factors, including:

- evaluations of previous relief efforts complemented by specific congregational-denominational dynamics;

Table 2

| <p style="text-align: center;">Percentage of Pastors Familiar with and Favorably Disposed Toward Charitable Choice by Race^a</p> | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <p>Pastors Familiar with Charitable Choice</p> | <p>Pastors Favorably Disposed Toward Charitable Choice</p> |
| <p>White Pastors (N=14)</p> | <p>79% (11)</p> | <p>14% (2)</p> |
| <p>Black Pastors (N=11)</p> | <p>91% (10)</p> | <p>73% (8)</p> |

a: Percentages calculated on available interview transcript data using questions 6, 13, and 16 (see Appendix C). The figure bounded by parentheses within each cell is the number of churches in the numerator used to calculate the corresponding percentage. Because our data are drawn from a non-probability sample, these figures are designed simply to set the context for our analyses of interview transcripts.

- attitudes concerning race-ethnicity, the poor, and social inequality; and
- beliefs about the government and its responsibility toward the poor.

In the remainder of this report, we discuss the relationship between each of these factors and pastoral affect toward charitable choice.

Notably, we do not contend that these factors “cause” pastors to favor or disfavor charitable choice in a lockstep fashion. Rather, we argue that pastors’ perceptions and experiences regarding these topics act as interpretive frames through which these religious leaders gauge the prospects for charitable choice. Because pastors often have a range of perceptions and experiences about this complex set of issues, many of them advance con-

flicted feelings concerning the implementation of charitable choice initiatives despite an overall positive or negative orientation toward faith-based welfare reform. Where possible, we seek to highlight how such conflicted feelings manifest themselves. In doing so, we often illustrate our findings with reference to specific congregations in our study.

Previous Relief Experience and Congregational-Denominational Dynamics

During each of our interviews, pastors were asked to evaluate current and previous congregational relief efforts. These same religious leaders were also asked to describe several salient characteristics (e.g., church structure, decision-making processes) in their congregations. Both of these factors provide crucial lenses through which religious leaders assess the viability of implementing charitable choice pro-

grams in their congregation or in local religious communities. To begin, pastors who speak positively about their congregation's previous aid-provision efforts frequently are optimistic about the prospects for implementing effective charitable choice programs through their churches. At first blush, this finding is straightforward and intuitive: Those programs that were perceived to work effectively in the past are anticipated by religious leaders to be similarly effective under charitable choice.

Nancy Evans, a black female pastor at an African-American United Methodist church, serves as an excellent illustration of this perspective.² When asked if members of her congregation would be willing to participate in aid programs that involve the state, she said that her members are more than willing — they are also able and wish to live up to their distinctive congregational legacy. The “myriad of professional people in my church,” she said, provide her with “a wealth of people that I can tap to oversee such programs.” “People here want their church to be more involved,” she contended. “They just don’t want the door shut during the week. They want to be more involved. That church — they used to call it the Civil Rights church. That church has always ... been about improving.”

Like many religious leaders who are favorably disposed toward charitable choice initiatives, Pastor Evans’ church has also participated successfully in local para-church relief efforts. Pastors appointed at churches that have had generally positive experiences with para-church or interfaith relief agencies often express more optimism about the prospects for providing relief collaboratively with the government under charitable choice. In some cases, para-church connections have convinced pastors and congregants that they can cooperate effectively with persons situated outside of their congregation whose views may not mirror their own.

To be sure, para-church relief efforts are sometimes marked by conflicts based on theological or other denominational differences. Yet, in the end, many of the religious congregations in our study that remain active in such agencies argue that they can

genuinely benefit the needy. Given the dearth of full-time black ministers in her small town, however, Pastor Evans warned that charitable choice monies routed only through para-church agencies could unwittingly promote racial stratification. Because black pastors in the area tend to be bi-vocational ministers who are employed outside the church, a para-church-only strategy for implementing charitable choice would unfairly favor congregations — specifically white congregations — with full-time professional clergy.

Interestingly, stories of relief program success offered by such pastors are often complemented by discussions about select program failures. Pastor Evans said that her church has indeed suffered some setbacks where aid-provision is concerned. Quite notably, though, she traces those setbacks not to a lack of time, skills, or motivation on the part of her congregants. Relief-provision in Methodist churches is based largely on fixed apportionments, and this particular church simply did not have enough funds available at key times to perform all desired relief work. One of the programs that had to be disbanded was a church-run child-care center. The money needed to bring the child-care center into compliance with local day-care standards was simply not available. Pastor Evans would also like to begin a program for victims of domestic violence — preferably with a trained counselor. If additional funds were made available to her church through charitable choice, these are the types of programs she would seek to reinstate or launch anew.

The source of such overriding optimism in this interview and others like it is located largely in perceptions about congregational dynamics within these pastors’ churches. As noted above, Pastor Evans argued that her congregants have the time, ability, and motivation to engage in extensive relief-provision: “I am telling you there is so much they could do. There is so much they could do. And then I think they would be able to attract more people that way ... I mean, I have people who are in my congregation who know this community.” Pastor Evans’ optimism, however, is accompanied by a strong admonition concerning the implementation of charitable choice through local congregations — particularly Methodist churches:

² The names used to refer to religious organizations and individual pastors in this report have been changed to preserve the anonymity of our subjects.

I think [government officials] need to be careful not to really allow the ministers to do everything, but allow the people [in the congregation] to get more involved ... In the United Methodist Church, they have what they call an itinerancy position. The ministers move constantly. If you want any program to be in place, to work, and to have long-term effects, you are going to have to have the people [in the congregation] involved more. The people who are in the church [need to be involved because] they are going to be there for longer amounts of time.

Such references to member involvement, often advanced by Methodist and Baptist ministers, underscore the importance of congregants in implementation of charitable choice initiatives. Many of these pastors readily concede that successful aid programs are predominantly dependent on member participation and the long-term commitment of congregants.

In other denominations where local religious leaders enjoy longer pastoral tenures, member involvement is still considered important for successful congregational relief. However, given their lengthier appointments, such pastors exercise more congregational authority than many of their itinerant counterparts in differently structured denominations. Such pastors might be in more of a position to oversee the implementation of charitable choice monies run through their congregations.

Elder Cornelius Smith, who has served as pastor of a large all-black congregation (Temple Zion—Church of God in Christ) for 18 years, is quite favorably disposed toward charitable choice. Much of his favorable disposition toward faith-based welfare reform stems from positive previous experiences. His church, which he said serves about 500 persons per month out of its food pantry, also claims great success in moving public assistance recipients out of welfare dependency. Elder Smith often addresses this very issue in his charismatic sermons:

All I can tell you is two-thirds of our people when they came to us were on welfare. It is my Sunday morning sermon at some points

[that is] on that [topic]. [I tell my congregants:] “If you are on welfare, get off as soon as you can because welfare is limiting your future. Welfare is hampering your success.” That’s how I teach it. I tell them this. “It is not God’s will for you to be on welfare. And it insults God for Him to be our Father, [for] us to trust in Him, and we have to have a handout every day of our lives.” So, therefore, I teach it is essential to us growing, to being proper witnesses, that we don’t find ourselves on welfare. And I would dare to say [that] out of the numbers we called to you earlier [i.e., out of the two-thirds who came to the church on welfare], I would dare to say that less than 10 percent are on welfare.

How are these same factors — i.e., previous aid experience and congregational-denominational characteristics — related to pastoral pessimism toward charitable choice? Pastors who deem previous experiences with congregational relief as largely unsuccessful often carry this pessimism into their evaluations of prospective charitable choice initiatives.

Pastor James Holt, a United Methodist minister of a modest-sized white rural church, said that his church “should be” more involved in relief, even as he concludes “but I don’t think it will be.” Based on his experience, Pastor Holt argued that lofty theological ideals about Christian service to others simply do not motivate many of his members to participate in aid-provision programs. He suspects such patterns would continue under charitable choice:

I think, in one sense of the word, churches ought to be very involved in this area out of concern for other people. But at the same time, I’ve had some reservations about whether we will become much more involved than we already are. A lot of time at the grassroots level, people may say, “Yes, we need to be involved.” But as far as really volunteering for work or increasing their giving to do so — that’s where the problems usually begin. Not to mention agreeing on what those needs are that need to be met

and who those people are that need to be helped. So as voluntary as the church is in depending on a consensus rather than a mandate, it is going to be difficult, I think, to get the churches involved in any significantly increased level.

Interestingly, then, Pastor Holt's account again highlights the importance of three keys for member involvement — time, ability, and willingness — in successful relief programs and, ostensibly, effective charitable choice initiatives. According to Pastor Holt, his congregants would lack the last of these elements and, for that reason, would be unlikely to participate. Indeed, this congregation has not participated in para-church relief efforts for many of the same reasons. Moreover, given the way in which decisions are made in this particular church — by “consensus rather than [by] a mandate” — disputes often preclude unified action. Finally, congregants in this church have to be stirred into action by an issue that *they* define as a problem, not issues that are defined *for them* as in need of a solution. Pastor Holt surmised: “At the present time? No, they would not have the motivation. The motivation would have to come. It would have to be — they would have to be challenged by something they really see as a problem ... A problem they care about before even the challenge comes.”

Taken as a whole, our interview data reveal that pastoral affect toward charitable choice is partly contingent on religious leaders' appraisals of prior relief work. Evaluations of previous relief programs — conducted alone or in tandem with other congregations — often frame pastoral expectations about charitable choice. Moreover, each of three key elements — time availability, possession of skills, and willingness to participate — seem necessary for successful relief efforts and, by many accounts, would be needed for the implementation of effective charitable choice programs.

Finally, pastoral expectations of charitable choice also seem to be shaped by denominational and congregational norms ranging from pastoral tenure and relief-funding mechanisms to church-based decision-making patterns. Where the latter issue is concerned, congregant involvement in relief efforts seems to be a necessary ingredient for successful

aid programs, but a thorough-going commitment to decision making by consensus can sometimes invite congregational paralysis.

Attitudes concerning Race-Ethnicity, the Poor, and Social Inequality

A second set of factors that appear to influence pastoral affect toward charitable choice initiatives centers on perceptions about race-ethnicity, the poor, and social inequality. Recall that many more African-American pastors in our sample are quite favorably disposed toward charitable choice than their white counterparts — the latter of whom are typically ambivalent about this initiative. Like charitable choice affect, references to racial attitudes among our sample of pastors are situated on a complex continuum.

Some white pastors argue that racism is still quite prominent in Mississippi and explain why charitable choice would not work for that very reason. As it turns out, impediments toward charitable choice participation at Pastor Holt's United Methodist congregation are not solely reducible to those specified above (i.e., evaluations of previous relief experience and congregational or denominational dynamics). Pastor Holt is one of the few pastors in our study who stated forthrightly that members in his rural, all-white congregation would likely view government standards mandating a color-blind allocation of aid as coercive. When asked if attitudes about race and ethnicity would affect the routing of welfare services through local congregations, Pastor Holt replied unabashedly:

Yes, definitely. Well, it would affect it even in the beginning — if [charitable choice] was accepted to be [worthy of member participation] — for them to get involved. That is one way it would be affected. I don't feel my church would accept [block grant money] because of their attitude. They would simply turn it down. I feel there might be some churches, though, that might accept it. But their attitudes about the way they handled it and who they helped individually would shape [pause]. In other words, they might consider some persons unworthy of help and kind of refuse help. Or [they might] formulate their guidelines

so that these people would be excluded. And their attitudes toward race might be one of those guidelines.

According to Pastor Holt, this racially insular implementation of charitable choice would simply be an extension of the way that church-based aid is currently provided. Like many pastors in our study (black and white), he said that current efforts at church-based relief are “most definitely” affected by attitudes about race and ethnicity. Notably, though, Pastor Holt charged that *his own* congregation would probably participate in such practices under charitable choice: “I have not seen them work across racial lines to help locally.”

Interestingly, some white pastors argue that racism is no longer a prominent feature of Mississippi social life or, at least, maintain that racial prejudice does not mark congregational aid distribution. Such arguments could indirectly preclude these pastors from supporting charitable choice outright for reasons which, *prima facie*, seem unrelated to race.

Pastor Robert Davidson at Main Street Southern Baptist Church is ambivalent about charitable choice being routed through local churches — apparently for reasons other than race. Citing several instances of church fraud, he said that “sometimes the unscrupulous have a unique way of getting into those things.” Pastor Davidson firmly believes that racism does not currently affect aid-provision in Mississippi churches and would not do so under charitable choice. When asked if race would affect the disbursement of funds to churches or, ultimately, to the needy, he responded point blank:

No, because any group involved in [providing] aid today, to anyone, has long since dealt with that one ... I'm a Southerner. [I] grew up in the South, [and] have lived in a lot of other places, but [pause]. Southerners have always seen themselves as having to help, say, the black community. You know, the old plantation owner, he did it. The farmers did it. It's always been there. And so, race has — in my own lifetime — has never been a problem in relationships. Even when you had the active Ku Klux Klan

and the marchers and everything, there's always been a desire to help. And I don't think that's ever been on a racial basis.

Using such language, Pastor Davidson suggested that even during tumultuous times — Klan activity and public protest (perhaps Civil Rights activity) — white Southerners have “always seen themselves as having to help ... the black community.” One of the most striking features of this narrative is the way in which it portrays whites as the benevolent agents of aid-giving and depicts “old [Southern] plantation owners” — popularly viewed as a source of black oppression — in a positive light.

The vast majority of black pastors in our study, as noted, are favorably disposed toward charitable choice. Black religious leaders in general and a white Catholic priest with a ministry to impoverished Hispanic migrants argue that racism is persistent in Mississippi, but remain optimistic that certain safeguards could ensure that charitable choice initiatives address the needs of the poor. Elder Smith from Temple Zion–COGIC, an African-American congregation mentioned earlier, believes that race remains salient for Mississippi blacks and argued that charitable choice funds should be distributed based on need:

A while back a large white church in Mississippi came to me ... [A pastor from that church inquired:] “Can we funnel our assistance programs through you?” I saw this as a great opportunity to get more money to more people. I said, “Certainly. What are you talking about putting through?” This was a large church. This church probably does three million [dollars] a year or more, so [it is] a large white church. And so I said, “What are you talking about money-wise?” And the pastor said to me, “We will give you \$4,000 a year.”

I was insulted. I stood up and walked out, and he said, “What is the problem?” I said, “I am insulted.” ... At this time our gross income was roughly two-hundred thousand [dollars] a year or a little better. I said, “We spend anywhere from \$14,000 to \$20,000 in helping people already. You mean to tell

me you are going to offer me \$4,000 a year to run all of your people through us? Your problem is you simply want to rid your lobby of a certain kind of people and put them in my lobby. You are not serious about the problem. So, when you want to spend some real money, we will talk." So I think the problem we are going to have is that if the government is going to do this, there has to be some real strict guidelines on how the money is appropriated at a state level so that it won't get into the wrong hands and the wrong churches [but] will get to where the people really need it.

As indicated by this quote, Elder Smith — who is quite favorably disposed toward charitable choice — has had previous experiences whereby some privileged churches have sought to "buy out" of social responsibility for very small sums. Given the racial dynamics evidenced in the foregoing narrative, Elder Smith concluded that if charitable choice is to be implemented, the program will require "some real strict guidelines ... so that [the funds] will get to where the people really need it."

Similarly, Father Dejean — an itinerant Catholic priest who ministers to Hispanic migrant workers in the local area — argued that there are currently many racial and class-based biases targeted at the poor. Yet, like Elder Smith, he also expressed a generally positive affect toward charitable choice. He began by describing racism as "prejudice plus power," but proceeded to argue that religious conviction can provide solutions to such social problems:

We hear people ... say, "Why can't [the poor] be better off? Why can't they manage their money better? Why can't they get out of poverty? Why do we have to provide subsidies? Why do we have to help them?" You know, the prejudice and the racism is so ingrained. I define it as "racism is prejudice plus power" ... It's only when they have begun to share in their common humanity that the power stops, and the higher and lower people begin to be equal ... [which is] the message of the gospel.

Could the "message of the gospel" be spread more effectively under charitable choice despite local racism and antipathy toward the poor? Father Dejean is enthusiastic about the potential of such a program to motivate people to embody scriptural teachings more fully. He asserted that individuals in rural locales "have a greater sense of community than [their counterparts] have in larger churches in urban areas.". If charitable choice were to be implemented, he imagines organizing "some government-sponsored programs for gardening [such as food cooperatives]. You don't have to carry the food for miles and miles. It's right here. Subsidize co-ops and gardens for good and reduce for the little people all these costs." He also spoke of expanding the churches' current aid programs for single mothers with children, as well as skills-based classes in bilingual education, self-esteem, cooking, sewing, parenting, and money management. He believes that there would be an abundance of volunteers nearby if federal funds were forthcoming.

In sum, is it noteworthy that black pastors we interviewed are much more favorably disposed toward charitable choice initiatives whereby public monies could be routed through local religious congregations. Although these pastors argue that racism remains a salient part of the African-American experience in Mississippi, many of them strongly believe that charitable choice — if implemented so that funds are delivered judiciously to those who need them most — could help to fight poverty on the local level. With few exceptions, then, pastors we interviewed argue that racial attitudes currently affect congregational relief-provision in local religious communities and will continue to do so under charitable choice. Among black pastors, such admissions rarely translate into negative affect toward possible church-state aid-provision partnerships.

Beliefs about the Government and Its Responsibility toward the Poor

A final factor that acts as an interpretive frame for charitable choice affect among pastors we interviewed may be best described as beliefs about the government and religious leaders' assumptions about government responsibility toward the poor. Many of the pastors in this study who are negative-

ly disposed or ambivalent toward charitable choice cite the perceived fraud and waste associated with government assistance programs as a cause for concern with faith-based welfare reform.

Pastor Davidson, the white minister at Main Street Southern Baptist, is (like most Anglo pastors in our sample) ambivalent about charitable choice. Part of his ambivalence stems from the perceived outcome of public assistance programs begun during the War on Poverty: “We’ve basically raised up a culture that says, ‘We really do deserve the money and you don’t deserve anything from us.’” He added: “Since the 1960s, it has been a problem because we’ve developed a culture to allow people who really don’t want any accountability required [of them].” He links this anti-accountability orientation to the problems his church has had in the Faith & Families of Mississippi program. Like a handful of other large white churches in our study, he said that the families his church selected from a list of Faith & Families profiles do not show up at the church when assigned to do so: “I think a lot of times, if a person realizes maybe if they are going to get involved in having a church and a mentorship, they are probably going to have to change some things in their lives. And they are going to have to face some responsibilities they don’t want to face.”

Pastor Davidson conceded that long-standing public assistance programs had altruism and “want[ing] to help” as the initial “basis of the program.” Yet, he argued that this system has, since that time, become profoundly corrupt: “The welfare system basically operates in America today not for the poor person, but for the administrators.” He asserts that such corruption is currently not incidental, but intrinsic to federal government programs: “What is it they say? That something like twenty-something percent of all federal welfare money is gulped up in fraud. In dishonesty.” Consequently, Main Street’s pastor reviles big government and strongly supports political devolution: “Most of those people [in the federal government] got those jobs through political appointments. They were put there to do just what they’re doing — that’s to lie, cheat, and steal ... I don’t have a lot of appreciation for [federal government workers].”

Not all pastors who are ambivalent toward charitable choice — and, for that matter, not all white religious leaders — are so strongly supportive of political devolution or overtly critical of government poverty programs. A local religious leader of a predominantly white Latter-Day Saints congregation assessed public assistance programs like AFDC as “largely an excellent idea that has been, I guess, sloppily implemented.” For both ethical and economic reasons, this pastor personally remains fully in favor of providing a “safety net” for the poor. However, he highlights the impersonal character of welfare programs by enlisting the provision of medical care as a metaphor:

The reason that I say [welfare] has been sloppily implemented is that it’s become a program that’s very difficult to control and to make sure that the aid is going always to help people who need it ... And so, because of that sort of slack oversight, there’s grown up to be a fairly significant abuse of the system. The difficulty with reforming it, then, is that you really don’t want to wipe out the people that it’s intended to help. And, of course, everybody says, “We’ll just cut off the fat.” But everybody has a different definition of fat, so that’s a difficult thing.

A comparison, I guess, that comes to my mind is that you would never ask a physician to prescribe addictive medication for somebody over the phone. And yet our welfare system is set up so that payments flow, in many cases, anonymously and continuously without — I mean, they fill things out and they have caseworkers, but there’s not the person-to-person contact with people who are really involved in the [welfare recipients’] lives that you really need to administer the thing well.

This religious leader’s ambivalence about charitable choice, then, combines hope and caution. Consistent with the views expressed above, he believes that churches — as local community organizations — may be able to administer aid more effectively. Yet, he is quick to concede the difficulty associated with predicting the viability of such a potentially complicated collaborative relationship.

Black pastors are equally critical, and often times more so, regarding public assistance programs that predated welfare reform. However, such criticisms of pre-PRWORA government programs are often coupled with defenses of particular aspects of public assistance. Overall, such assessments of public assistance programs did not erode these pastors' favorable disposition toward charitable choice. How are we to explain these distinctive findings?

To begin, popular images of "welfare fraud" and the stereotypical "welfare recipient" are quite often criticized by black pastors. While several black pastors concede abuse among welfare recipients of various ethnic backgrounds, many of these same religious leaders argue that "welfare fraud" is all too often narrowly understood. Indeed, several of these pastors allege instances in which welfare fraud — when understood in a broader and more practical sense — has been perpetrated by privileged whites who apparently extract benefits indirectly from welfare recipients. Among the most common examples cited are white landlords who artificially inflate rental prices in public housing for local blacks, and small-scale merchants who effectively keep retail prices high in order to absorb the monies of welfare recipients in nearby neighborhoods.

From this vantage point, both blacks and whites as well as both rich and poor have been beneficiaries of public assistance programs — programs, in the view of these pastors, that generate widespread abuse not restricted to the formal recipients of such state-sponsored aid. One black pastor who said he has personally seen such incidents commented on the centrality of public assistance monies to local economies and the financial fallout from welfare reform: "White people will be crying [about welfare reform]. It will be the mom-and-pop grocery stores who have been taking the food stamps and taking the welfare checks the first of every month [that will be adversely affected by welfare reform]. They will be going broke."

In addition, several of these black pastors cited welfare *dependency* as a major concern in previous public assistance programs but simultaneously suggest that "dependency" is a fact of life for devout Christians. One of these pastors argued outright that long-term reliance on public assistance is

the wrong kind of dependency, whereas dependency on God is justifiable and necessary. Such notions lend themselves to support for charitable choice if this initiative is viewed as a program that promotes a socially productive dependency on God or one's co-religionists — rather than an unproductive dependency on the state — while using public monies to achieve these ends.

Finally, in offering a counterpoint to those who argue that "big government" is the source of all social ills, some black pastors defended continued government involvement in anti-poverty work. Like all pastors in our study, Elder Smith has some misgivings about charitable choice. However, his generally favorable disposition toward it stems in part from his experience as a black Southerner who came of age during the Jim Crow era. Given his own life experiences, Elder Smith saw the positive involvement of the federal government in facilitating the demise of blatant Jim Crow segregation in the South:

Whenever I hear people in Congress and the senators say things like, "We have to make government smaller and give power back to state governments" [pause]. To a Southern black person [pause]. Whenever I hear them say those kinds of terms, I know that means that [political power and resource control] is going to be put in the hands of the good old boys. It is going to be handled the way it was handled all the time. And the people who need [help] most won't get it. And so for that reason, I opt to say, "Let's keep the government [big]." I too would like to see a small government. But I would like to see a more fair system to where the government could be smaller because we have rectified the problem [of] each state being able to discriminate when they want to.

In sum, charitable choice affect is influenced by pastoral views of the government and religious leaders' assessments of prior public assistance programs. Several of the pastors who are opposed to or ambivalent about the prospects for charitable choice find crucial flaws in previous public assistance programs, and some of these religious lead-

ers express anxiety about collaborating with the government for this very reason.

Pastors who are quite favorably disposed toward charitable choice often concede that previous public assistance programs were marked by significant shortcomings. However, these pastors — many of them black religious leaders — also contend that a thorough-going reversal of public policy will not necessarily redress poverty-related problems. It is in this spirit that many African-American pastors express support for charitable choice, a program that would entail collaborative anti-poverty work on the part of the state and local religious communities. Religious leaders who support charitable choice do indeed believe that potential problems could surface with such an initiative. But they also contend that religious communities could initiate or expand anti-poverty efforts with the infusion of resources that might be forthcoming under such a program.

Lessons Learned

This research study has sought to examine the feasibility of incorporating religious communities located in rural Mississippi's GTR into welfare reform. As noted, the "charitable choice" portion of the 1996 welfare reform law identifies religious congregations as a prospective provider of social services in states that consider routing block grant monies through local nonprofit agencies. Our feasibility study of charitable choice initiatives drew on analyses of in-depth interview data collected from pastors representing 30 religious congregations in GTR. Among the research questions we have sought to address are the following:

- What types of aid do faith communities currently provide, and how do local religious leaders define the concept of "aid" or "relief?"
- What are the strategies that local religious congregations currently utilize to provide relief to the needy? How are these aid-provision strategies perceived to differ from public assistance programs?
- In the wake of welfare reform, what are religious leaders' views of the prospects for charitable choice initiatives succeeding in poverty-stricken rural areas? What factors influence local religious leaders' perceptions concerning the prospect for charitable choice initiatives?

To summarize our findings, we found that pastors typically define religiously based aid in holistic terms that, ideally, should address both material

and non-material needs. Yet, despite pastoral consensus on the general goals of religious relief-provision, local congregations currently employ an array of aid giving strategies to meet this goal. We detailed four relief-provision strategies used by local religious communities: (1) intensive and sustained interpersonal engagement with the poor; (2) intermittent direct relief to the needy; (3) collaboration with para-church relief agencies (e.g., via congregational philanthropy or referrals); and (4) short-term missions trips, often involving church youth, to the poor in distant locales.

Next, we found that although the preponderance of pastors in our sample are familiar with faith-based welfare reform initiatives, these religious leaders evince wide-ranging evaluations concerning the prospects for implementing charitable choice within their home congregations and local faith communities. Consistent with previous survey research on this topic, black pastors in our purposive in-depth interview sample express more positive affect toward charitable choice when compared with their white counterparts. However, regardless of their general orientation toward charitable choice, virtually all pastors express a mix of hope and trepidation about this initiative. Pastoral affect toward charitable choice can be traced to several factors, including:

- *evaluations of previous relief efforts complemented by specific congregational-denominational dynamics* — positive evaluations of prior experiences with relief-provision and the exis-

tence of key congregant resources (time, skills, and motivation) are linked to generally favorable pastoral dispositions toward charitable choice;

- *perceptions about race-ethnicity, the poor, and social inequality* — although most religious leaders concede that racism and social inequality are still salient features of social life in Mississippi, those who have seen religious convictions foster positive change in these areas were generally more optimistic about the prospects for charitable choice; and
- *beliefs about the government and its responsibility toward the poor* — although all pastors (black and white) expressed assorted criticisms of previous public assistance programs, those who recognized the positive role that the federal government can play in fighting poverty seemed more apt to consider entering into a charitable choice partnership with the government.

Our analyses of these in-depth interview data were not guided by the principles of variable analysis or cause-and-effect logic. Rather, we sought to reveal how pastoral experiences and perceptions serve as interpretive frames through which religious leaders evaluate the prospects for charitable choice. Given the recent genesis of charitable choice initiatives, additional research on this fast-evolving policy issue is certainly needed. Nevertheless, several significant lessons can be distilled from the present study.

Recommendations

1. State-level policy-makers should recognize that there is no single type of congregation that is ideally suited to participate in charitable choice.

Our study has demonstrated that, even in a small geographical area, many different types of aid-provision strategies flourish across religious congregations. It is quite likely that congregations which dramatically vary in denomination, size, and preferred aid-provision strategies can participate effectively in charitable choice if a critical mass of members from these faith communities have the available time, skills, and willingness to do so. Consequently, state-level policy-makers should consider the value of including a diverse range of congregations in charitable choice initiatives within any given area. Taken together, a diverse group of qualified congregations can offer a broad array of social services to the needy and may enlist a more variegated portion of the local religious population in relief efforts.

2. The preservation of religious diversity on the local scene should be an important consideration in awarding charitable choice funds.

Policy-makers should not assume that the dominant faith tradition in a particular geographical area will be the most effective point of delivery for faith-based social services. Our study of religious communities in northeastern Mississippi revealed that relief-provision can be undertaken effectively by regionally dominant faith traditions (i.e., Baptist, Methodist), as well as by denominations which feature fewer local congregations in the rural South

(e.g., Church of God in Christ, Roman Catholic, Muslim). Consequently, care should be taken to survey the religious landscape in an area without assuming that the congregation with the most members or the denomination with the most churches will function most effectively as social service providers.

Indeed, efforts designed to protect religious diversity in awarding charitable choice funds might improve the quality of relief that many local congregations provide. A great deal of sociological research suggests that congregations and denominations which function as an organizational monopoly in a local “religious market” actually operate less effectively — much like business monopolies — because of reduced competition for adherents. To be sure, sociological uses of a “religious marketplace” metaphor are limited inasmuch as congregations are not for-profit entities. However, including a diverse range of faith communities in charitable choice might prevent dominant faith traditions from further consolidating their advantage over other religious communities and may ensure that the anti-poverty commitment of many different local religious communities remains robust.

Because religious pluralism tends to promote greater involvement in and commitment to local faith communities writ large, policy-makers should seek to ensure congregational and denominational diversity under charitable choice. Moreover, the dispersion of resources across various congrega-

tions and denominations might also ensure that the ethnic and socio-economic homogeneity that is characteristic of many faith communities would not undermine one primary intent of charitable choice — namely, broad-based relief to diverse groups of people.

3. Faith communities should educate themselves about their rights and responsibilities as potential social service providers under charitable choice. In doing so, religious congregations can examine the avenues available to them for charitable choice participation while weighing the apparent advantages and disadvantages of this program.

Many of the religious leaders in our study were aware of aid-provision partnerships between the government and local religious communities because of Mississippi's path-breaking initiation of its Faith & Families program. Understandably, however, many religious leaders on the local and national scene do not understand all of the legal complexities — including faith communities' rights and responsibilities — associated with the charitable choice initiative outlined in Section 104 of the 1996 welfare reform law.

Faith communities can best gauge their opportunities and willingness to participate by familiarizing themselves with the dynamics of charitable choice legislation. An informative brochure on this topic (titled "A Guide to Charitable Choice") is available from the Center for Public Justice, a Christian civic education and policy research organization [phone: (410) 571-6300; postal address: P.O. Box 48368, Washington D.C. 20002-0368; online address www.cpjustice.org]. Local faith communities can also contact TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) representatives at their state's Department of Human Services to ascertain the status of charitable choice implementation within their area.

Faith communities should be mindful that the religious character of their organization cannot legally be used as a criterion to exclude them from competition for purchase-of-service contracts among local nonprofits — provided that their state purchases social services from local nonprofits. Regardless of the state-level opportunities for faith-based welfare reform, congregations should be aware that charitable choice legislation is currently

supported by leading presidential candidates in both parties. The vagaries of candidate nominations and presidential elections notwithstanding, faith communities located in states that have not implemented charitable choice legislation thus far may have expanded opportunities to explore such options in the future. It is possible that political momentum for these programs will continue to build during the current election season.

4. Post-implementation evaluation studies of charitable choice may help identify positive and negative social outcomes of such programs. Evaluation studies might provide valuable insight into the improvement of welfare reform initiatives such as charitable choice.

Given the fact that charitable choice is a new policy initiative, we recommend that states which utilize religious communities as social service providers evaluate the outcomes of charitable choice partnerships using the same criteria employed to assess anti-poverty alliances between the government and nonprofit organizations from whom it purchases services. Post-implementation evaluation studies of charitable choice programs could be helpful to ensure that both public and congregational resources are being used in a manner that is beneficial to all involved parties (the faith community, the government, TANF recipients). In addition, such studies might call attention to some of the most innovative and effective anti-poverty strategies utilized by religious communities which participate in the program. Therefore, as charitable choice becomes an increasingly popular consideration for many different states in this era of welfare reform, government officials should be prepared to monitor carefully not only the economic outcomes associated with this program but also its social impact on grassroots religious organizations and local communities.

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Appendix A

Profile of Sampled Religious Communities^a

| Interview # ^b | Denominational Affiliation | Pastor/Leader Characteristics | Membership Characteristics ^c | Location ^d |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1 | United Methodist | White male 58 years old Seminary M.Div | White (99.5%) 1800 total members 1200 active members HH Inc: \$50K+ | Urban |
| 2 | United Methodist | White male 46 years old No seminary B.A. | White (100%) 550 total members 280 active members HH Inc: \$30-50K | Urban |
| 3 | United Methodist (2 churches served by pastor, designated as CH1 and CH2) | White male 49 years old No seminary Some college | CH1: White (100%) 140 total members 65 active members HH Inc.: \$30-50K CH2: White (100%) 110 total members 30 active members HH Inc: \$20-30K | CH1: Semi-rural CH2: Semi-rural |
| 4 | United Methodist | White male 55 years old Seminary M.Div. | White (100%) 96 total members 60 active members HH Inc: \$10-20K | Rural |
| 5 | Southern Baptist (SBC) | White male 58 years old Seminary M.Div., D.Min. | White (99.9%) 2300 total members 1600 active members HH Inc: \$30-50K | Urban |
| 6 | Southern Baptist (SBC) | White male 47 years old Seminary D.Min. | White (100%) 950 total members 375 active members HH Inc: \$30-50K | Urban |
| 7 | Southern Baptist (SBC) | White male 40 years old Seminary Biblical Studies | White (100%) 372 total members 200 active members HH Inc: \$20-30K | Rural |
| 8 | Southern Baptist (SBC) | White male 36 years old Seminary M.Div. | White (100%) 150 total members 90 active members HH Inc: \$20-30K | Semi-rural |

| Facilities ^e | Budget | Types of Aid Provided ^f | Number of People Helped/ Month | Charitable Choice Familiarity and Affect |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 8 offices 40 classrooms Kitchen: 400 | \$1.3 million | 1,2,3,5,9,10,11 | 50 | Familiar Ambivalent |
| 3 offices Kitchen: 200 | \$220,000 | not specified | not specified | Unfamiliar Ambivalent |
| CH1: 1 office 8 classrooms Kitchen: 150 CH2: 3 classrooms Kitchen: 100 | CH1: \$60,000 CH2: \$42,000 | CH1: 1,3,7,12 CH2: 7,12 | CH1: 4 CH2: 0 | Familiar Favorable |
| 1 office 3 classrooms Kitchen: 100 | \$50,000 | not specified | "periodic help" | Familiar Unfavorable |
| 10 offices 50 classrooms Kitchen: 200 | \$1.4 million | 1,2,3,5,8,13 | 20 | Familiar Ambivalent |
| 8 offices 45 classrooms Kitchen: 200 | \$630,000 | 1,2,3,9,11,13 | 130 (incl. 100 for day-care) | Familiar Unfavorable |
| 2 offices 20 classrooms Kitchen: 200 | \$141,000 | 2,3,7,11,12,13 | 8 | Familiar Unfavorable |
| 2 offices 11 classrooms Kitchen: 200 | not specified | 1,2,3,4,8,13 | 1 | Unfamiliar Favorable |

Profile of Sampled Religious Communities (continued)

| Interview # ^b | Denominational Affiliation | Pastor/Leader Characteristics | Membership Characteristics ^c | Location ^d |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 9 | Catholic (Parish) | White male 46 years old Seminary Th.M. | Wh (84%); BI (10%); Hisp (4%); Asian (2%) 1158 total members 740 active members HH Inc: \$30-50K | Urban |
| 10 | Catholic (Parish) | White male 49 years old Seminary M.A. | Wh (85%); Hisp (6%); BI (3%); Asian (3%) 1600 total members 1000 active members HH Inc: not specified; upper-middle class | Urban |
| 11 | Latter-Day Saints | White male 35 years old No seminary Ph.D. (secular) | Wh (94%); BI (3%); Asian (3%) 300 total members 120 active members HH Inc: \$20-50K | Urban |
| 12 | Presbyterian (PC-USA) | White female 47 years old Seminary M.Div. | White (99%) 265 total members 150 active members HH Inc: \$30-50K | Urban |
| 13 | Presbyterian (PCA) | White male 32 years old Seminary M.Div. | White (100%) 350 total members 200 active members HH Inc: \$30-50K | Urban |
| 14 | Presbyterian (PC-USA) | White male 51 years old Seminary M.Div.& D.Min. | White (99%) 170 total members 112 active members HH Inc: \$30-50K | Urban |
| 15 | Presbyterian (PC-USA) | White female 58 years old Seminary M.Div. & Th.M. | Wh (95%); BI (5%) 26 total members 50 active members HH Inc: ranges from under \$10K to over \$50K | Urban |
| 16 | United Methodist | Black male 44 years old Seminary M.Div. | Black (99%) 409 total members 225 active members HH Inc: \$30-\$50K | Urban |

| Facilities ^e | Budget | Types of Aid Provided ^f | Number of People Helped/ Month | Charitable Choice Familiarity and Affect |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 5 offices 12 classrooms Kitchen: 250 | \$480,000 | 1,2,3,4,5,7,10, 11,13 | 15-20 | — |
| 3 offices 12 classrooms Kitchen: 200 | \$250,000 | 1,2,3,8,12,14 | 25 | Familiar Ambivalent |
| 1 office 13 classrooms Kitchen: 150 | \$3,000 | 1,2,3,7,8,9, 10,12 (as needed) | 2 families | Familiar Ambivalent |
| 2 offices 10 classrooms Kitchen: 175 | \$188,000 | 1,2,3,6,7,9, 13,16 | 10 | Familiar Ambivalent |
| 3 offices 20 classrooms Kitchen: 100 | \$270,000 | 1,2,3,9,13 | 6-12 | Unfamiliar Ambivalent |
| 2 offices 9 classrooms Kitchen: 200 | \$200,000 | 2,3,7 | 2-5 outsiders to church | Familiar Unfavorable |
| 1 office 3 classrooms Kitchen: 50 | \$70,000 | 1,2,3,4,7, 13,14 | 3 | Familiar Ambivalent |
| 2 offices 10 classrooms Kitchen: 100 | \$165,000 | 2,3,8,9,10 11,13,14,15 | 10-12 | Familiar Favorable |

Profile of Sampled Religious Communities (continued)

| Interview # ^b | Denominational Affiliation | Pastor/Leader Characteristics | Membership Characteristics ^c | Location ^d |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 17 | United Methodist | Black female 60 years old Seminary Degree-seeking | Black (100%) 106 total members 50 active members HH Inc: \$20-30K | Urban |
| 18 | United Methodist | Black male 46 years old Seminary M.Div. | Black (98%) 205 total members 150 active members HH Inc: \$30-50K | Urban |
| 19 | United Methodist | Black female 45 years old Seminary M.Div. | Black (100%) 206 total members 150 active members HH Inc: \$20-30K | Semi-rural |
| 20 | Missionary Baptist (National Baptist Convention) | Black male 57 years old Seminary B.A. | BI (90%); Wh (5%) 525 total members 350 active members HH Inc: not specified; middle/upper-middle class | Urban |
| 21 | Baptist (National Baptist Convention) | Black male 43 years old Seminary Th.M. | BI (95%); Wh (5%) 500 total members 375 active members HH Inc: \$30-50K | Urban |
| 22 | Missionary Baptist (National Baptist Convention) | Black male 69 years old Seminary B.A. | Black (100%) 300 total members 200 active members HH Inc: under \$10K | Urban |
| 23 | Baptist (National Baptist Convention) | Black male 38 years old Seminary Certificate | Black (100%) 200 total members 125 active members HH Inc: \$20-30K | Rural |
| 24 | Baptist (National Baptist Convention) | Black male 48 years old Seminary Degree not specified | Black (100%) 50 total members 35 active members HH Inc: \$10-20K | Rural |
| 25 | Church of God in Christ (COGIC) | Black male 45 years old No seminary | Black (99%) 400 total members 350 active members HH Inc: \$30-50K | Urban |

| Facilities ^e | Budget | Types of Aid Provided ^f | Number of People Helped/ Month | Charitable Choice Familiarity and Affect |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1 office 5 classrooms Kitchen: 150 | not specified | 1,2,3,4,7,14 | 3 | Familiar Ambivalent |
| 2 offices 8 classrooms Kitchen: 150 | \$110,000 | 1,2,3,7,9, 10,11,12, 13,14,15 | "infinite #" | Familiar Favorable |
| 2 offices Kitchen: 100 | \$58,000 | 3,4,7,9,11, 12,13,14 | 10 | Familiar Favorable |
| 2 offices 8 classrooms Kitchen: 300 | not specified | 1,2,3,5,8 | 5-10 | Familiar Favorable |
| 2 offices 5 classrooms Kitchen: 60 | \$120,000 | 2,3,5,12,13, 14,15 | 10 | Familiar Ambivalent |
| 2 offices 7 classrooms Kitchen: 200 | not specified | 4 | not specified | Familiar Favorable |
| 1 office 3 classrooms Kitchen | \$60,000 | 1,2,3,7 | 25 | Unfamiliar Favorable |
| 1 office 2 classrooms Kitchen: 50 | not specified | 7,13,14 | 4 | Familiar Ambivalent |
| 5 offices 16 classrooms Kitchen: 300 | \$300,000 | 1,5,7,8,13 | 500-600 | Familiar Favorable |

Profile of Sampled Religious Communities (continued)

| Interview #^b | Denominational Affiliation | Pastor/Leader Characteristics | Membership Characteristics^c | Location^d |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 26 | Church of God in Christ (COGIC) | Black male 43 years old No seminary | Black (100%) 200 total members 100 active members HH Inc: \$10-20K | Urban |
| 27 | Muslim (North America Islamic Association) | Middle Eastern male 40 years old No formal religious training | International (71%); Asian (15%); BI (10%); Wh (2%) 200 total members 150 active members HH Inc: \$10-30K | Urban |
| 28 | Catholic (Hispanic Ministry) | White male 49 years old Seminary M.Div. | Hispanic (98%) 300 total members 150 active members HH Inc: \$10-20K | Rural |

a: With the exception of the last column, this table was prepared from pre-interview survey information taken from pastors or religious leaders in our non-probability sample of local religious congregations. Charitable Choice Familiarity and Affect were estimated from responses to interview questions 6, 13, and 16 (see Appendix C). We use these multiple questions to estimate familiarity with and affect toward charitable choice in order to improve the validity of these data. The final row in this table (interview #28) counts a multi-church Hispanic Ministry as one entity for the purposes of our sample.

b: The assigned interview number does not reflect the order in which churches were surveyed or interviewed.

c: Where needed, "Wh," "BI," and "Hisp" are used to abbreviate "White," "Black," and "Hispanic," respectively. "HH Inc" represents the typical household income within the congregation as reported by the key informant; the figure provided represents annual income, where \$xK stands for x thousand dollars.

d: The term "urban" takes on a particular meaning in the rural South. Urban designates a church located in a county seat.

e: The figure following kitchen (e.g., "Kitchen: 200") describes the approximate number of persons that the kitchen facilities can serve.

| Facilities ^e | Budget | Types of Aid Provided ^f | Number of People Helped/ Month | Charitable Choice Familiarity and Affect |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 3 offices 4 classrooms Kitchen: 75 | not specified | 1,2,3,4,5, 12,13 | 200+ | Familiar Favorable |
| 2 offices 4 classrooms Kitchen: 200 | \$5,000-\$10,000 | 16 ("For needy according to their need; social support") | "Depends on # of needy" | Familiar Favorable |
| 1 office 3 classrooms | not specified | 2,6,7,8,12, 13,16 | 20 | Familiar Favorable |

f: The numerical references listed under "Types of Aid Provided" conform to the following key:

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 – HELP PAYING RENT | 10 – HOT MEALS |
| 2 – HELP PAYING UTILITIES | 11 – CARE FOR THE ELDERLY |
| 3 – GROCERIES | 12 – TRANSPORTATION |
| 4 – CASH | 13 – COUNSELING |
| 5 – TEMPORARY SHELTER | 14 – TUTORING |
| 6 – LOW-COST HOUSING | 15 – AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS |
| 7 – CLOTHING | 16 – OTHER (Specify) |
| 8 – MEDICAL SERVICES | |
| 9 – CHILD CARE | |

Appendix B

Pre-Interview Survey Administered to Religious Leaders

Interview Code No.:
Initials of interviewer:
Date:
Time:.

Before we begin the interview, I would like to obtain some information about your religious congregation and your opinion about various topics.

Please place an "X" in the appropriate spaces and fill in the blanks to the best of your ability.

PASTOR INFORMATION

1. What is your: a. Age? b. Race/ethnicity? c. Gender? M__ F__
2. Beginning with first grade, how many years of schooling have you completed?
3. Were you trained at a religious institution/seminary? If so, where? What degree (if any) did you receive?
4. How long have you been pastor of this church?
5. Where did you serve as pastor before coming to this church (location, denomination)?
6. Is your church affiliated with a para-church group or larger religious network? If so, which one(s)?

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

MEMBERSHIP AND ATTENDANCE

1. What is the total membership of the church?
2. How many of those members would you consider active members?
3. At a typical weekly service, approximately how many people are in attendance?
4. On which days of the week do you have services? (Sunday through Saturday provided as response categories)
5. What types of services do you have on each day?
6. Estimate what percentage of your congregation is in each age category:
___ % Under 20 ___ % 20-34
___ % 35-49 ___ % 50-65
___ % over 65

*Pre-interview survey was self-administered prior to the interview. Given space considerations and readability, the survey was reformatted for this appendix. The specific questions asked on the pre-interview survey have been retained here.

7. Your church membership is approximately ___% male and ___% female.
8. Do you have any services that primarily draw men or women? If so, what are they?
9. At a typical service, your congregation is (estimate percentage)
 - ___% European-American/White
 - ___% African-American/Black
 - ___ % Asian-American/Asian
 - ___% Hispanic (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban origins)
 - ___% American Indian
 - ___% Other (specify)_____

OCCUPATION

10. The most common occupations in your congregation are
 - ___ white collar/professional
 - ___ skilled workers/technicians
 - ___ service workers/retail/sales
 - ___ laborers
 - ___ homemaker
 - ___ unemployed
 - ___ other (specify)_____

INCOME

11. How would you describe your congregation?
 - ___ working class/low-income
 - ___ lower middle class
 - ___ middle class
 - ___ upper middle class
 - ___ upper class
12. A typical household of your congregation earns:
 - ___ under \$10,000
 - ___ \$10-20,000
 - ___ \$20-30,000
 - ___ \$30-50,000
 - ___ over \$50,000

AID PROVIDED BY THE CHURCH

13. Which of the following types of aid or services does your church provide on a regular basis?

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> HELP PAYING RENT | <input type="checkbox"/> HOT MEALS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HELP PAYING UTILITIES | <input type="checkbox"/> CARE FOR THE ELDERLY |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GROCERIES | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CASH | <input type="checkbox"/> COUNSELING |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TEMPORARY SHELTER | <input type="checkbox"/> TUTORING |
| <input type="checkbox"/> LOW-COST HOUSING | <input type="checkbox"/> AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CLOTHING | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (Specify)_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MEDICAL SERVICES | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CHILD CARE | _____ |

14. In a given month, how many people does your church help? _____

ANNUAL CHURCH BUDGET

15. The yearly budget of your church is \$_____.

CHURCH DEBT

- 16. Does your church have a debt?
- 17. If so, how large a debt do you have?
- 18. How many years will it take to pay it off?

FACILITIES

- 19. What is the size of church buildings (overall square footage)?
- 20. What is the seating capacity of your church?
- 21. How many classrooms does your church have?
- 22. How many offices does your church have?
- 23. Does your church have kitchen facilities? If so, how many people can be served out of your kitchen?
- 24. Does your church have a playground? If so, how many kids can it accommodate?
- 25. Does your church have bathroom facilities? If so, how many toilets?
- 26. Does your church have insurance? If so, what type(s) of insurance? What is the amount of coverage?

Appendix C

Interview Questionnaire for Religious Leaders*

1. To begin, tell me a bit about the history of your church and what your church stands for.
2. How is your church organized? What positions does your church have, and how are decisions made in your church?
3. What type of social service programs (e.g., outreach, mutual aid, relief or missionary work) does your church currently offer? How active are these programs? At whom are they targeted and by whom are they staffed? Is your congregation involved in any community based or inter-church relief programs? Have you heard of Mississippi Faith and Families? If so, what has been your experience with that program?
4. Which of the church's outreach or aid programs have been successful and which have not? What factors have contributed to their success or failure?
5. What do you think of government-sponsored public assistance that is currently in place in our society? Do you think churches might be able to provide aid in ways that the government cannot? How do churches provide aid differently than that provided by the government? (PROBE: Do churches provide *different* types of aid? Do churches use *different means* for delivering assistance to the needy?)
6. Have you heard of the idea that churches might become more involved in the restructuring of public welfare? What do you think of that idea? What do you think would be the outcome of such a program? Do you think the members of your congregation would or could support such a program?
7. Suppose your church was given a block grant from the state to provide additional aid to the needy in the community. What types of aid could your church provide with such a grant? How would the church use those funds? Who do you think should make decisions concerning how that money is used?
8. What standards do you use when deciding to give aid? Would those standards change if public money were used to expand your aid programs?
9. If welfare services were to be routed through local churches, do you think attitudes about race or ethnicity would affect the way in which such aid is distributed? Do you think that race currently affects the distribution of aid provided by Mississippi churches?
10. In deciding to take people off of aid, what rules do you currently apply? Do you think these rules would change if you had additional funds at your disposal to provide aid?

**Interview questionnaire adapted as needed to fit congregational context.*

11. Do you think your church, or churches in general, can help people get off welfare? Do you think a joint effort among churches would be effective in this regard?
12. Many people living in poverty are single mothers and their children, as well as the elderly. Do you currently provide aid or services to these types of individuals? If so, how effective have these programs been? Would additional funding enable you to initiate or expand the aid provided to these groups of people?
13. If your church were to cooperate with the government in providing welfare services, would you have any concerns about such an arrangement? Would members of your congregation support this arrangement?
14. How will members of your congregation be affected once welfare support is no longer available to current recipients?
15. Suppose an increasing number of non-members came to your congregation seeking aid. What do you think would be the reaction of your church to these non-members' efforts to seek aid?
16. What are your views concerning the separation of church and state? If the church did play a role in providing welfare services, how might your views about the separation of church and state affect the program?
17. Thinking back over the past several years, what has been the single biggest change in the way you minister to your congregation? What has brought about this change?
18. Do you think that religion is more or less important in this country today than it was twenty years ago?
19. What programs does your church offer youth? In what ways, if any, does your church minister to the youth in your congregation?
20. Finally, I am curious about your general impressions of religion in America today. What do you think are the most important issues that are influencing religion at the national level? How do you think religious communities should respond to the issues/challenges you have identified?

About the Authors

John P. Bartkowski is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Mississippi State University. Much of his current research examines the relationship between religious involvement, social inequality, and family life. Bartkowski is particularly interested in the social, cultural, and economic resources that religious congregations in rural areas provide to their membership and vulnerable populations within their local communities. His other research has examined the motivations and community-level impact of grassroots neighborhood activism in Austin, Texas. He is currently completing a research project exploring the impact of Promise Keeper affiliation on evangelical men and their family relationships. His published work has appeared in *Social Forces*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *The Responsive Community*, *The Sociological Quarterly*, *Journal of Family Issues*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Gender Issues*, *Sociology of Religion*, other scholarly journals, and various edited volumes. Bartkowski has just completed a book manuscript, *Remaking the Godly Marriage: The Discourse and Negotiation of Gender Relations in Evangelical Families*. He is currently co-authoring a monograph based on this research project (with Helen A. Regis).



Helen A. Regis is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Louisiana State University. Her key interests center on the relationship between the state and local communities, and the processes involved in the construction of civil society within the U.S. and abroad. She has conducted extensive ethnographic research on the interaction of medical practices, religious beliefs, family life, and public policy in Cameroon, Africa. Her forthcoming book on this topic is titled *The Fulbe of Northern Cameroon: Cultural Pluralism in Everyday Life* (Westview Press). On the domestic scene, Regis has explored the significance of social clubs and mutual aid societies among working-class African-Americans living in New Orleans. Her most recent work on this topic has appeared in *Cultural Anthropology*, and she is currently writing a monograph based on this research. Regis is also co-authoring a monograph (with John P. Bartkowski) based on the research reported here.



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