THE COACH: LOS ANGELES UNITED METHODIST URBAN FOUNDATION

by Amy L. Sherman

Setting the Context

In Los Angeles, from a home base in the downtown district, you could eat a different kind of ethnic food every night for six months without ever having to drive more than three miles. Perhaps here more than anywhere else, the cultural diversity of America is on display. And while particular mini-neighborhoods may be relatively homogenous—mostly Koreans here, mostly Salvadorans there—on the whole, the city is stratified by economics more than ethnicity. "The reality in L.A.," explains denominational executive and longtime student of urban ministry Linda Culbertson, "is that if you're poor, you live among the poor." Congregations interested in serving the urban poor in L.A. will inevitably have to plan for multi-ethnic ministry. Lessons learned from other cities about urban ministry done in a primarily black-white context are useful, but insufficient, here.

In this context, the Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation (LAUMUF) is by itself, and especially through its support of the Urban Leadership Institute, providing valuable help to (primarily) mainline congregations and church-affiliated nonprofits. LAUMUF's strongest contributions rest in building capacity among small, administratively immature, often ethnically based congregations and nonprofits and in training churches for effective engagement in their multi-ethnic neighborhoods. For its part, the Urban Leadership Institute (ULI), a major recipient of LAUMUF dollars and a partner in ministry, has equipped congregational leaders with both vision and practical skills for collaborative community service. Moreover, both LAUMUF and ULI have played critical and irreplaceable roles as connectors, matching frontline agencies with resources, expertise, and partners that have enabled new and/or expanded community services.

LAUMUF Described

LAUMUF's own "birth story" gives it a special ability to relate to the challenges faced by mainline urban churches in Los Angeles. At one time, the First United Methodist Church of downtown Los Angeles boasted a membership in the thousands. By 1983, the changing demographics and economics of its neighborhood, among other factors, had led to a dramatic decline in participation. In a story familiar to other historic "first" churches in urban centers, the con-

gregation faced a choice to move into the suburbs or to stay and adapt. First United Methodist chose the "stay" option, but with a twist. The church sold its property at the corner of 8th and Hope to purchase a 5-story building three blocks away at the corner of Olympic and Flower. In the 1010 W. Flower Street building, the church housed both its sanctuary and church meeting rooms and offices as well as three floors of discounted rental space for incubating new community ministry and social justice initiatives. Leftover cash from the church sale enabled it to launch the LAUMUF with an initial investment of $2 million and a dream of blessing the city. Foundation funds were granted to many of the nonprofits being incubated in the 1010 building. Additionally, over the next 17 years, the Foundation made 300 grants totaling $3.3 million dollars to some 200 faith-based and social justice agencies in the urban neighborhoods of Los Angeles, Long Beach, and the San Fernando Valley.

LAUMUF's role as a self-conscious capacity-building and financial intermediary only began in 1998. A board member explains that the shift grew out of "reality"—the need to garner outside resources beyond the Foundation's own limited assets in order to meet more adequately the funding needs of the ministries in the network the Foundation desires to serve. DarEll Weist, President and CEO of LAUMUF, also saw the need for providing technical assistance to many of the small-scale ministries. Moving into an intermediary role formally, he recognized, could advance that agenda. The frontline groups often had passionate vision and energetic individuals who could make a difference, but lacked the managerial and financial infrastructure needed to put a solid organizational footing under their work and position themselves to garner resources from private foundations.

LAUMUF continues to act as a foundation, giving grants from its own resources to underwrite a variety of programs for children and youth residing in underserved neighborhoods. In 2001, for example, the Foundation assisted 25 faith-based ministries with grants totaling $255,000. Over $1 million in grant funds have gone to support the Mildred M. Hutchinson Chair of Urban Ministry at the Claremont School of Theology. Michael Mata has held that position since 1995 and from it oversees the activities of the Urban Leadership Institute (ULI). The ULI provides formal training for faith-based leaders and has been a key in accessing major foundation resources (e.g., from the Pew Charitable Trusts) to support faith-based seminaries and Bible Institutes as well as new, multi-congregational initiatives in urban outreach.

As noted earlier, LAUMUF's main focus today is as an intermediary. Its intermediary activities include formal training (e.g., seminars on asset-based com-

munity development, financial management, grant-writing); affordable accounting/bookkeeping services; re-granting of private foundation dollars; and consulting. Over the past four years, LAUMUF has managed $1.4 million in funds from other foundations, re-granting over 95 percent of these dollars.

Frontline Ministries Served by LAUMUF

As reported by Weist, the constituent pool of the LAUMUF includes roughly 45 faith-based agencies. The Foundation primarily targets small agencies, with annual budgets of $150,000 or less. To better understand the Foundation's impact, interviews were conducted with 13 faith-based leaders representing a variety of mostly (though not exclusively) church-affiliated, small-scale frontline ministries. Given the LAUMUF's key support of Michael Mata and the Urban Leadership Institute, we decided also to interview a number of individuals and organizations served by the ULI. These included Linda Culbertson of the Presbytery of the Pacific, Janice Martin and Martin Garcia of Vision Los Angeles, Rev. Nancy Moore of CERJ (Clergy Empowering for Reconciliation with Justice), Elder Oscar Owens of West Angeles Church of God in Christ, and Gary Kraus of In Touch Leadership Project. Lengthy interviews were also conducted with DarEll Weist and Michael Mata as well as with two Board members of the LAUMUF, James Conn and Stewart Kwoh. Shorter interviews were conducted with others on staff at the LAUMUF and the ULI. Below are short descriptions of several frontline agencies we examined that have received financial support and capacity-building assistance from the LAUMUF.

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Zaferia Shalom Zone Agency: Located in Long Beach, this nonprofit offers job training and placement services; operates a domestic violence education and

prevention initiative targeted to the African-American church; hosts a food pantry and "career clothes" center; operates a teen youth empowerment program focusing on financial literacy; and conducts health education classes for women of child-bearing age on the risks of drug and alcohol use and of sexually transmitted diseases. It was launched in 1992 as an outgrowth of the Wesley United Methodist Church of Long Beach. It engages approximately 300 participants in its various programs. Its 2001 budget was approximately $300,000 and it is staffed by a full-time executive director plus two other paid employees. About 10-12 volunteers also serve there regularly.

Koreatown Senior Center: Founded in 1994, this ministry began as an outreach of Hope Community Korean United Methodist Church, pastored by Rev. Peter Park. It is now in the process of incorporating as a separate 501c3 nonprofit. Rev. Park and his wife Chong are the only paid employees at present; they receive help from about seven regular volunteers. The main program focus currently is on senior literacy and citizenship classes that engage an impressive 650 students at six sites around the community. The Senior Center also provides advice and referrals to seniors making enquires about a wide variety of social services and sponsors recreational and Bible study activities. The Parks are enthusiastic and energetic visionaries; their future dreams include launching ministries to aid the homeless, the disabled, and orphans. The ministry's 2001 budget was approximately $80,000.

South Park Neighborhood Center: This impressive facility opened its doors in April of 2001. It boasts a full-service children's learning/daycare center with over 60 enrolled children; a seniors club engaging approximately 75 senior citizens regularly; a variety of community health programs including screenings, educational seminars, and parish nursing services; as well as a variety of computer skills classes from its nine-station computer lab. Full-time executive director Patricia Gomez-Alvarado focuses on recruiting a variety of nonprofit agencies to provide services and programs on-site for the benefit of community residents. She has been successful, for example, in partnering with the Asian Pacific Dispute Resolution Center; this organization provides monthly legal aid clinics. The ministry has recently submitted a grant proposal to the California Hospital Medical Center (from which the parish nurse comes) for funding to underwrite a full-time case manager for the fragile elderly, as well as a half-time nurse and half-time home health educator. Gomez-Alvarado is also in dialogue with two other medical centers that South Park hopes will offer services in the community. The South Park Neighborhood Center's proposed 2002 budget is approximately $100,000 and the ministry enjoys the support of about 20 regular volunteers.

Rakestraw Memorial Center: This community center was initially launched in 1924 and was a beehive of neighborhood energy, providing educational and recreational programs for the then all-black community. After the 1960s, the center fell into disuse and disrepair. Eventually, it was abandoned. A major renovations effort has been carried out over the past seven years, spearheaded by committed community residents such as Board member Addie Clark and her husband, who could recall the bygone glory days of Rakestraw. With major financial help from the LAUMUF (Weist has raised over $500,000 for refurbishing efforts), the building has had a major face-lift and again become a neighborhood hub. In October 2001, the Board hired Antonio McAllister to serve as full-time executive director. Last year, approximately 85 community residents, ranging from youngsters to senior citizens, regularly participated in center activities. An after-school program operates five days per week, emphasizing tutoring and sports/recreation. Seniors gather weekly at the Rakestraw Center for nutrition and exercise classes; about 18 seniors are also enthusiastic members of the Senior Dance Club. The Center's program budget for 2002 is approximately $190,000; in addition, over half a million dollars have been invested in the renovations efforts, which are now nearly complete. The ministry enjoys the consistent support of approximately 16 community volunteers who help at the Center multiple times each week. In addition, four Americorps volunteers are currently on staff.

La Trinidad United Methodist Church: This 100-year-old urban church is located in what is now a predominantly lower-income Hispanic community. Pastor Ivan Sevillano shepherds approximately 100 parishioners and has a passion for community outreach. The church operates a Headstart program for 180 children and will soon launch an after-school program for about 30 elementary school students. The congregation's current benevolence ministries focus on food distribution to needy families; often this aid is accompanied by pastoral counseling and help with life-and-job skills. Sevillano has developed relationships with two local schools (leaders from which are assisting in the development of the new after-school program) and with White Memorial Hospital. It plans to collaborate with the church in starting a training program for young mothers focusing on child health. The church's grandest vision is for the construction of an affordable housing complex tentatively called Nueva Vida Housing. The church has received intensive pro-bono consulting during the development and financial planning stages of this venture from 1010 Development Corporation, a community development corporation launched by LAUMUF dollars and expertise.

North Valley Caring Ministry: Like some of the other ministries supported by the LAUMUF, this agency has a relatively small budget ($200,000 in 2001).

But it has a larger and more experienced staff (seven employees in total counting full and part-time) and a stronger administrative infrastructure. Located about an hour outside Los Angeles in Sepulveda, the agency offers a wide variety of community services for youth and adults, including after-school programs, a food bank, and educational and health-related services. In 2001, the ministry assisted approximately 3000 individuals.

Pico Union Shalom Ministry: This tiny "mission church" has the big vision of serving as a catalyst for community mobilization in one of L.A.'s most crime-ridden neighborhoods. Rev. Jennifer Gutierrez is applying her experience as a community organizer to the task, and has helped to host bloc club meetings with local social service agencies and the police. To address one of the neighborhood's primary problems—gang activity—the church has launched a wrestling program among middle-school age boys (the local, resource-scrapped middle school provides no sports programs). The program has helped to engage the participation of many parents, who have banded together to raise funds for transportation, uniforms and other needed supplies. Though the smallest of the agencies we interviewed, Pico Union has a major asset: the church building and valuable real estate. Like La Trinidad, Pico is receiving major consulting help from expert staff at the 1010 Development Corporation. Pico's dream calls for investing the money garnered from selling part of the church property in an affordable housing complex of 20-30 two and three-bedroom apartment units. The complex would be modeled somewhat on the successful South Park Neighborhood Center and like it, would include a child-care facility. The congregation will continue to have a place to worship because the development plan includes a multi-purpose worship room as well as a small prayer chapel.

The Impact of LAUMUF

Funding. The Foundation has assisted its constituent ministries with direct financial grants ($235,000 to 23 agencies in 2001); with funds secured from private foundations and passed through to the frontline agencies (over 95 percent of a total of $1.4 million dollars has been re-granted to grassroots groups since the LAUMUF began acting as an intermediary in 1998); and with introductions to donors and professional grant-writing help that have resulted in several successful proposals.

Three organizations (Zaferia Shalom, Rakestraw Memorial, and the Koreatown Senior Center) credited the LAUMUF for significant grants they had acquired. Zaferia director Viki Sparks noted that the Foundation had provided a professional grant writer who wrote a successful proposal to the state of California for

$200,000 to underwrite a major job training initiative. The grant writer has also developed a $230,000 proposal for a three-year school readiness program that Zaferia hopes to establish to serve African-American, Cambodian, and Hispanic pre-schoolers. This proposal is currently under review by the grant-making body.

Over the past few years, DarEll Weist has been instrumental in raising over $500,000 to underwrite major renovations efforts at the Rakestraw Memorial Center. Board member Addie Clark also credits the Foundation with her successful bid for a $13,600 Emergency Food and Shelter grant for Rakestraw. With the tools she learned from the Foundation's grant writing workshops, "my proposals got stronger and stronger each year," Clark reported. In 2002, the city cut most other groups' proposals but granted Rakestraw the full amount requested.

With help from a professional grant writer supplied by the Foundation, the Koreatown Senior Center acquired $32,000 in grants from various national agencies within the United Methodist Church denomination. Through a contact initiated by Weist, the ministry also now enjoys monthly financial support of $250 from the Los Angeles Methodist district office. With help from Foundation consultant James Conn, Koreatown Senior Center has also prepared a joint proposal with two other United Methodist congregations for the

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California Department of Education for a program focusing on literacy and ESL classes for senior citizens and young single moms. That proposal is currently under review.

From its own charitable resources, the Foundation often supplies modest but critical grants to these kinds of small-scale ministries. $3000 underwrites Pico Union's wrestling program for middle-school aged boys, keeping these youth out of gangs in the city's most gang-prone neighborhood. Grants of $5000 each have allowed the South Park Neighborhood Center to launch a new teen program, the Koreatown Senior Center to offer literacy classes, and Zaferia to sponsor a summer camp for kids. Many charitable foundations, explains Conn, simply do not have the time to look for granting opportunities among front-line agencies with capacity to manage only donations of $50,000 or less. The LAUMUF sees its niche as equipping just these sorts of ministries. It is willing and able to grant funds to these groups in dollar amounts suited to their capacity.

In its role as a financial intermediary, the Foundation has secured major funding from the California Wellness Foundation to build capacity among four grassroots agencies well-positioned to provide preventative health care services in underserved neighborhoods. The South Park Neighborhood Center, North Valley Caring Ministry, Zaferia, and Rakestraw each receive between $10,000 and $20,000 for two years. The money helps to underwrite the salaries of full-time executive directors at each agency as well as their health-related programs (at Rakestraw, for example, this involves nutrition and exercise classes for senior citizens; at South Park, it underwrites monthly health screenings of various types for community residents of all ages).

The executive director salary support has made a critical difference for some of the agencies. Viki Sparks of Zaferia, for example, explains: "We went from a part-time executive director who already had a full-time job, who was trying to give his best to Zaferia, to having, for the first time, a full-time director. I can spend all my time [here], making connections, working with the community, building those relationships. And it simply would not happen without a full-time person."

LAUMUF has often been the lead funder of new ministries or initiatives, paving the way for other donors to follow. Noemi Dano of 1010 Development Corporation recalls, "It was difficult getting originating funding for 1010; people want to know your track record, and if you are a new organization, you don't have one yet." LAUMUF provided that seed money, committing $300,000 over five years. Today, 1010 is making possible progress on the

dreams of congregations like La Trinidad and Pico Union, which can turn their valuable but under-utilized real estate into desperately needed affordable housing in Los Angeles' incredibly tight housing market. Addie Clark remembers when the rebuilding of Rakestraw Memorial was a dream only. "When we started, we had zero funds. And if you don't have any money, you can't get any money," she laments. "But once you get money, money generates other money." Weist helped locate seed funding—$216,000 from the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries—and had LAUMUF serve as Rakestraw's fiscal agent. The Foundation has also supplied Rakestraw with a professional grant-writer to pursue what Clark calls the "big" money—foundation grants over $100,000. "This is an asset, since our organization does not have the funds to pay for expensive grant-writers," Clark says with gratitude. The help paid off with a successful $175,000 proposal to the Amateur Athletic Foundation.

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Training. With only one exception, the ministry representatives we interviewed rated the training seminars offered by the Foundation as excellent and relevant. Grassroots leaders we interviewed had attended workshops on grant-writing, fund-raising, and Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). (LAUMUF consultant James Conn is a certified ABCD instructor and leads all of the ABCD training sessions.) Participants in the ABCD seminars nearly uniformly reported that the class had opened their eyes to seeing their communities in a fresh light. Several offered practical examples of how they are applying the ABCD approach.

Jennifer Gutierrez of Pico Union and Patricia Gomez-Alvarado of South Park, for example, are in the beginning stages of launching new programs based on the talents of specific individuals they identified in their neighborhoods. Gutierrez has recognized that many Hispanic women in her neighborhood have various "home economics" skills–baking, crafts, weaving, etc.—and is planning an initiative through which the women can gather and learn these skills from one another. The core of the ABCD approach, she explains, is recognizing that distressed communities have assets and not only needs/problems. Bringing neighbors together to share their assets and skills builds their confidence and, over time, can even help to improve the community's image, as

those outside it begin to see more clearly those talents on display. Gomez-Alvarado reports that the ABCD seminar has helped her to think creatively about how to build on the native assets of the neighborhood. She has negotiated an arrangement with a musically talented resident through which the resident will provide free weekly music classes at the child-care center in return for free space at South Park from which to offer paid lessons.

Viki Sparks reported that the ABCD training helped her see resources she might otherwise have missed, because she comes from "more of an institutional and social work perspective." The ABCD course has focused her attention on individuals in the community who can be recruited as volunteers to share skills at Zaferia or exchange skills with other residents for mutual benefit. "Everybody knows about finding an individual who's a CPA and getting that person on your board," Sparks reflected. But matching a community resident with care-taking skills with a neighbor whose spouse is getting Alzheimer's but is not yet at the point, medically, where they could qualify for professional full-time help, she explained, is a fresh way of applying the value of individual's gifts.

Rakestraw's entire Board has gone through the ABCD training, and according to Addie Clark, through it, has caught a vision for energizing the neighborhood's bloc clubs. Rakestraw has now facilitated meetings between community residents and the police and Clark has seen two tangible results: less graffiti in the neighborhood and greater willingness by residents to report youth who are consistent troublemakers. Impressed with what she had learned, Clark recruited about 40 other neighborhood leaders to participate in the ABCD seminars. "The other thing I have learned [through it]," Clark reports, "is that the duplication of effort is just a waste of time. The training has enabled us to reach out and embrace other groups," facilitating collaboration in the provision of complementary rather than redundant services.

Larger-scale secular nonprofit agencies often are led by staff who have had formal training in business or nonprofit management. This is less often true of directors of small, faith-based ministries. Leaders such as Rev. Gutierrez of Pico Union and Rev. Park of the Koreatown Senior Center have received a formal theological education but lack training of the sorts offered by the LAUMUF. Add to the mix the fact that small agencies cannot afford to send their staff to expensive training courses offered at community colleges or by the United Way, and the fact that grassroots ethnic agencies are often unaware of such opportunities "from the mainstream," and the capacity-building role that intermediaries like the LAUMUF play becomes even more critical. Moreover, the training is presented not only through formal seminars but is embodied in

the relationships that DarEll Weist and James Conn have built with the grassroots leaders. The ministry representatives repeatedly noted that these men have taken the time to understand them and their ministry context. They feel "known" by Conn and Weist and believe that the two offer advice that is relevant and tailored to their specific concerns. The genuine relationship that exists also affords an accessibility that would be missing if these ministry leaders simply attended the occasional nonprofit management workshop offered by the United Way. "If there's something I don't know how to do, things that pastoral training didn't cover," Jennifer Gutierrez said simply, "I can ask." Rev. Park is equally matter-of-fact, reporting that the kinds of training he has received "is not available at all within the Korean community." He can go to his fellow pastors for advice on some issues, but these men lack the specific expertise—on budgeting, on ministry self-assessment—offered by someone like Weist.

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Networking. Though difficult to measure, the value of "getting connected" by the LAUMUF to donors, potential ministry partners, sources of volunteers, pro bono experts, and new ideas was emphasized repeatedly by the ministry directors interviewed.

First, peer-to-peer networking has occurred among the ministry directors attending LAUMUF seminars, and has produced a number of tangible benefits for the ministries and the families they serve. Jennifer Gutierrez learned of the food pantry at Rakestraw and has referred families from Pico Union to it for assistance. She also became acquainted with the parish nursing program Gomez-Alvarado had developed for the South Park Neighborhood Center; now that nurse is developing a program in Pico Union. Viki Sparks reports that she made some Spanish-speaking friends through the seminars and these individuals are now giving her advice about which Spanish-language versions of various software programs she should purchase for Zaferia's ESL and literacy programs. Sparks is also collaborating with two other ministries in a joint proposal to secure funding to underwrite the services of a full-timer computer consultant. Once hired, this individual will help to upgrade and maintain computer labs at each of the three ministries—a service that no one ministry could have afforded on its own. And Addie Clark says that it was through a contact met at the seminars

that she learned that Antonio McAllister would be an excellent candidate for the position as Rakestraw's new Executive Director, since he could navigate both the Hispanic and African-American communities.

Second, these young executive directors have been educated by Weist about training opportunities offered by a variety of secular groups. Gomez-Alvarado reported that she has spent much time in the library of one of L.A.'s nonprofit resource centers. Additionally, through a training she attended with staff from the 1010 Development Corporation, she made a contact with a woman from the L.A. Chamber Orchestra, learning that the orchestra occasionally offered free concerts. Gomez-Alvarado has already scheduled one to take place at South Park later this summer. She was also introduced to staff from El Rescate through these means and has referred immigrants residing in the South Park community to this agency for legal aid. Rev. Park notes that DarEll Weist helped him to make contacts at local universities from which the Koreatown Senior Center can draw potential volunteers and interns. Through Weist, Park has also gotten acquainted with a homeless ministry sponsored by the United Methodist Church. He plans to partner with this ministry in the future, since Koreatown's long-term objectives include increasing outreach to the homeless.

Third, Weist and Conn have connected some of these groups to resources within the United Methodist denomination. Peter Park, under Weist's tutelage, is undergoing the process of joining his congregation officially to the United Methodist denomination. This will make possible his approach of individual UMC congregations for financial support for the Koreatown Senior Center. Addie Clark learned of potential resources from the denomination for Rakestraw's rehabilitation.

Mentoring/Coaching. In our interviews, we repeatedly pressed the agency directors for measurable, tangible examples of the ways LAUMUF has helped them "to do what they do better." Their answers, of course, appear above—they have received money, training, connections, tools. But most were eager to underscore the less tangible, but no less valuable, service they have received: coaching and encouragement. Patty Gomez-Alvarado recalls a conversation early on in her tenure as South Park's executive director. She and Weist were walking to a community meeting that would gather a number of businessmen from the area. Weist gave her some background on the group, and counseled her to choose language that would resonate with the kinds of concerns these individuals had about the neighborhood. In some settings, idealistic vision-casting and inspirational talk about social service provision is appropriate, she learned; in others, stakeholders want to hear their bottom-line concerns about security

and real estate values addressed. Gomez-Alvarado believes her public speaking skills, in terms of effectively navigating diverse audiences, have been enhanced through Weist's sage advice.

For Peter Park, Weist's candid assessment that vision was outgrowing organizational capacity marked a fundamental shift in the Koreatown Senior Center's work. Park feels he understands now much better just how important getting the administrative house in order is, and how appropriate attention to these issues (board development, strategic planning, designing targeting fund-raising efforts) will make possible the big dreams he and his wife have for expanding the ministry's programs in the future. Whether Park would have willingly cut back on frontlines ministry activities to concentrate on "behind-the-scenes" concerns without Weist's encouragement is unclear. Constructive criticism from Weist has been healthy, and the Parks can receive it willingly because of the relational investment Weist has made. They feel he deeply knows and understands the ministry and can therefore give relevant advice.

Addie Clark reports that Weist has mentored her on financial management issues and even taken the time to introduce her to "Quicken," a software program offering small businesses and nonprofits with simple accounting and record-keeping functionalities. Pastors Gutierrez and Sevillano report that without the pro bono consulting help of 1010 Development Corporation, their dreams of building affordable housing could never get off the ground. Viki Sparks of Zaferia perhaps summed up the importance of Weist's coaching best:

> *It's really the consulting piece, the "how do I do this?" or "I feel miserable about that," and the coaching that's gone on, that's really important. It sounds so esoteric, but it's so critical, because you sometimes feel like you're at the bottom of a huge hole and you're trying to dig your way up, and you can feel very alone and overwhelmed by all the obstacles. Having Jim [Conn] come out, or calling DarEll [Weist]—it's just huge support…I've been thinking about how lucky I am, because I realized just how hard it is to grow an agency and how I probably couldn't pull it off without the huge support they give. You know, [people] talk about how many nonprofits and small businesses fail, and I get it—I get why. And I think the [coaching] is going to be the determining factor for those of us that survive.*

The Impact of the ULI

As noted earlier, LAUMUF has given consistent and generous financial support to the Urban Leadership Institute, founded and directed by Michael

Mata. ULI itself serves as an intermediary. Like the LAUMUF, ULI engages in training and networking. Unlike it, ULI's constituents have often been heads of major multi-church initiatives rather than small, individual churches or FBOs. To learn more about ULI's contributions in building capacity among Los Angeles' faith community, we interviewed both grassroots practitioners and leaders of some of these larger institutions (a denominational executive with the Presbyterian Church USA and staff of Vision L.A., an initiative of World Vision).

Consulting/Program Design. Much of ULI's influence rests on Michael Mata—his innovative ideas, skills as a convener and teacher, and his seemingly endless Rolodex of contacts. If anyone knows what the faith community is doing in Los Angeles to fight poverty and minister effectively in the multi-ethnic smorgesboard that the city is, it is Mata. Documenting his influence with specificity was challenging, though, because often, his most valuable contributions came in the form of a key piece of advice or word of warning at the outset of a new initiative that steered the ministry in a particular direction that was later determined critical. Mata's work with Gary Kraus at In Touch Leadership Project is a case in point.

Kraus' agency provides full scholarships and personal mentoring for inner-city high school graduates seeking a college education. In Touch Leadership Project supports the students through two years of community college or vocational school through generous financial aid (the scholarship covers tuition, books, transportation expenses, class-related expenses such as tools for a car repair class, and other costs). It also links each student with an academic mentor/tutor and a spiritual mentor.

Kraus came to our interview with a typewritten list of the ways the ULI has served him and his ministry. He reported that through a contact Mata facilitated with a local foundation, the ministry garnered a $20,000 grant. Mata has also connected Kraus with seminarians from Claremont who have become unpaid interns at In Touch Leadership Project. Even more importantly, Mata has been a critical "door opener" for Kraus in connecting with student candidates. The ministry recruits from inner-city churches, looking for students with both academic aspirations and spiritual rootedness. Kraus is white and from the suburbs; Mata has helped to introduce him to many minority, inner-city congregations. "His connections made it so much easier, and less time-consuming," Kraus says, and also gave him credibility in the eyes of the pastors. But Kraus wanted to emphasize that Mata's best help could not easily be recorded in a written list of "measurable deliverables." It was the way Mata

helped Kraus think through how to go about the ministry that has made the biggest difference.

The two became friends in 1993, when In Touch was "in the conceptual stage," Kraus explains. Kraus says he could have easily launched the new ministry in a way that would not have emphasized the building of personal relationships with the students. Mata convinced him that the relational aspect was the most important of all. Thus, the program developed with an emphasis on the two mentors per student in addition to the scholarship money. Kraus is firmly convinced that this approach is the factor explaining the ministry's impressive success rate. Students involved with In Touch have an attrition rate of only 20 to 25 percent (that is, fully 75 to 80 percent of the students complete their college degree). This compares with an average community college attrition rate of 60 percent. "It's the relational support," Kraus argues. That's what makes the difference.

Linda Culbertson of the Presbytery of the Pacific described another example of Mata's help in shaping a significant new initiative, the Hollywood-Wilshire Cluster. The concept of "cluster" ministry was not invented by Mata, but the work of this particular cluster has been achieved and directed under his personal leadership. The cluster is composed of six Presbyterian congregations and four community organizations all focusing on ministry in the two square-mile radius of the Hollywood-Wilshire neighborhood near downtown L.A. Launched in 1995, the cluster is attempting community development ministry in one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the entire United States. The churches involved reflect that diversity—through the initiative, Koreans, Taiwanese, whites, Hispanics and others are joining hands to address community problems. The idea, Mata explains, is to help these congregations and agencies "see themselves as a part of the same parish ministry, but having different expressions of that ministry within a very defined geographic area."

Culbertson is enthusiastic about the fruit of the cluster's work. Prior to the initiative, she explains, these congregations were isolated from one another and were almost completely unengaged in community outreach. Today, all six of the cluster churches have launched new community-serving programs. The Korean congregation, for example, boasts an after-school tutoring program for the mostly Hispanic low-income children of the area. The Taiwanese church hosts a Friday night "coffeehouse" for neighborhood teens. Immanuel Presbyterian, begun as an immigrant church, has caught a vibrant, multi-cultural vision and started a variety of new initiatives. In addition, through the cluster's work, two new nonprofit social service agencies have been established in the

community. And, following the September 11th tragedies, the cluster has become a main center for inter-faith dialogue in Los Angeles.

The cluster's influence, Culbertson stressed, reaches beyond the differences it is making among the involved partners and in the Hollywood-Wilshire community. It is serving as a kind of "think tank" for the Presbytery, a learning laboratory in which diverse groups have struggled to communicate, share power, and cooperate to achieve common goals. She believes that the challenge of diversity is greater in this neighborhood than just about anywhere else; thus, if the cluster can be proven successful here, it could be a fruitful model for all of Southern California.

Other leaders of major faith-based efforts credit Mata's consulting work for fashioning their new programs. Under Mata's tutelage, Elder Oscar Owens of the mega-church, West Angeles Church of God in Christ, has created an urban ministries "track" within the Bible Institute he directs. Mata pointed him to curriculum and guest speakers, helped him design the overall structure of the course, and gave him new teaching tools (specifically, Mata's innovative learning exercise called "exegeting the community"). "Michael Mata, more than anyone else," stresses Owens, "has introduced me to the world of urban ministry." Through Mata, Owens has been acquainted "with the issues and the trends on an academic level," discovering the authors and ideas that will best equip lay people and ministry leaders in his classes. The Institute graduates approximately 100 students each year in its two-year degree program. Many go on to leadership positions within urban and minority congregations and church-affiliated nonprofits. Owens argues that these students are more ready to face the challenges of their urban context successfully, given the specialized training they have received. Many, he explains, are so familiar with the urban environment that they are like fish in water—not particularly aware of the water. The training helps them to develop a more intentional examination of inner-city life, and has caused some light bulbs to turn on for them. "They've become more self-reflective about the urban environment they live in…their eyes start coming open to things," Owens explains.

Martin Garcia, manager of Vision L.A.'s new Hispanic initiative, is a protege of Michael Mata, having studied under him at Claremont School of Theology. The initiative's goal is to network Hispanic pastors throughout the city to collaborate in the fight against poverty. A few networks currently exist, but these are usually limited to members of the same denomination and typically focus only on fellowship and prayer rather than joint, sustained, community-focused projects. Garcia's goal is to gather an ecumenically diverse coalition that will be

very active in tangible community development programs. Garcia has witnessed Mata serving as a bridge between L.A.'s mainline and evangelical communities, and is attempting to imitate that. "If you go to the Urban Leadership Institute," Garcia explains, "you can see people from Pentecostal churches and Evangelical denominations who work in Skid Row, and at the same time you can see at the table people like clergy from the [Episcopal church]…you can see Nazarenes and Presbyterians and very liberal people…and very conservative people. The interesting thing is that we are all seated at the table." Given the L.A. context, learning the skills to navigate a very diverse group of faith traditions is critical, and Garcia has acquired this facility not only through Mata's lectures but also through his lived-out example.

Garcia's proposed coalition will also involve a significant training component to build the capacity of Hispanic leaders and ministries. He has relied heavily on Mata in designing this. The course will span four modules over several months, with the emphasis on aiding church leaders in turning their visions into realities. Topics will include organizational development, church and community assessment, and strategic planning, among others.

Research and Advocacy

ULI also serves the wider faith community and public policy sectors by conducting research with an eye toward recognizing what others may miss. For example, LAUMUF holds a grant from the California Endowment to evaluate the Foundation's ABCD training. Weist approached three research groups to conduct the research but none would accept, citing their ignorance of the faith community. So, Weist turned to the ULI. ULI has hired independent evaluators who are currently conducting interviews. Mata and Weist also participate in Los Angeles Urban Funders, a roundtable of 30 charitable foundations in the Los Angeles area that formed in 1992 after the L.A. riots to see if they could make a positive difference. Their focus is on three communities, including two neighborhoods in South Central L.A. Mata and Weist recognized quickly that the faith community was not well-represented; indeed, LAUMUF is the only faith-based foundation at the table. Weist convinced the group to hire ULI to conduct research in the two south-central neighborhoods, to identify all the churches there. Urban Funders estimated Mata would find perhaps 20 to 25 congregations. He located over 70 in both, ranging from storefronts to steepled churches. Mata could find the congregations because of his street-level savvy and contacts, uncovering ministries often "under the radar screen" of other observers. Armed with addresses and contact information for all these congregations, LAUMUF was able to begin inviting these church leaders to the

table at Urban Funders' meetings. These leaders now have a voice, whereas before they were completely neglected.

Training/Conflict Transformation

Unfortunately, for many Americans, memories of the L.A. riots are as sharp as recollections of the L.A. summer Olympics. The riots symbolize, of course, the pressure cooker that a place like L.A. can be, given the close proximity of incredibly diverse cultures and languages set on top of the common urban problems of violence, poverty, racism, and hopelessness. L.A.'s Christian community faces enormous challenges of living out the faith's ideals—justice, reconciliation, care for the needy—in a context where the differences and diversity exist not only outside the Church, but inside it as well. Powerful, effective, community-transforming work can only be conducted by congregations able to navigate the cultural differences among their own members and between their parishioners and the church's neighbors. Capacity building among faith groups, in short, must involve this skill set in a setting like Los Angeles.

In this context, the ULI's "Conflict Transformation" program is proving a powerful asset. A remarkable 1000 people in the Los Angeles area have been exposed to or trained in the conflict transformation approach since 1998. The program is modeled on one developed by the Plowshares Institute and used to train 400 grassroots leaders for peacemaking in South Africa. In its full-orbed form, it involves teaching/training, group meetings and discussions, field trips, and retreats. ULI gathered together a group of twenty faith leaders interested in the program; this group eventually formed CERJ—Clergy Empowering for Reconciliation with Justice—in 1996. The CERJ members made a five-year commitment—two years of training and three years of implementation.

Members of the first graduating class are putting their training to work in various ways. One member has developed a mediation program among a network of churches and a public high school. Another, a Catholic priest, has led an initiative bringing together the two main churches in his parish–an English-speaking African-American congregation and a Spanish-speaking Latino congregation—for three days' training. From this, a new collaboration emerged and the two churches have conducted a "Good Neighbor Campaign" in the parish to get community residents—black and Hispanic—talking and working together.

From 1998-2000, ULI put together condensed versions of the conflict transformation training to serve a wide number of congregations. In 2000, the

intermediary shifted back to a focus on more in-depth, longer-term training for a smaller number of participants. Currently, ULI is working with a Christian high school; a neighborhood association in Pasadena; a Presbyterian congregation that desires to launch new ministries among its now primarily Hispanic neighborhood; and members of the Hollywood-Wilshire cluster.

Mata's assistant, Kathleen Chuman, reports that increasingly ULI is being approached by leaders from "church-cohabitation" congregations. Typically, these are mainline, white congregations whose membership has declined and whose buildings are located in ethnically changing neighborhoods where the percentage of minority residents has grown substantially. A Cambodian group or Spanish-speaking group might approach the "white church" for permission to share the physical church building (with one group, for example, holding worship services on Sunday morning and the other on Sunday afternoon). Rev. Nancy Moore pastors such a church in L.A., and draws upon all she has learned through the conflict transformation course to navigate the relationship—which can be strained by cultural differences and miscommunications. Church-cohabitation is growing, and Chuman notes that ULI plans to develop case studies to use as part of the conflict transformation training sessions that will specifically address issues related to church-sharing. "We're not specifically going to target churches who want to do that; they've actually been coming to us. They've been wanting to know if we can help them with that situation. If we develop this specialty, I don't think we'll have any lack of people who might want it."

The resources and skill set provided by Mata and the ULI—street-level knowledge of a wide range of ethnically and denominationally diverse efforts in community ministry; personal relationships with the leaders of these different efforts; ability to navigate and work collaboratively with mainline and evangelical organizations; facility in training faith groups to adapt to change within their neighborhoods and within their own congregations—are unique, according to Linda Culbertson of the Presbyterian of the Pacific. "If we are going to be the church in the city, Culbertson argues:

> *then [continuing] to work the dynamics of partnership with the community is important. And I see the Urban Leadership Institute as being a viable component of that. [The denomination] doesn't have the ability to do that kind of thing. We don't have that kind of experience. We need people who have that kind of expertise, and experience of church and culture [issues] specific to the dynamics of city transformation…It's much more than knowing the kind of basic [urban ministry] skills that we have. It's back to looking at the complexities of urban city life…So I think that organizations*

like the Urban Leadership Institute become even more important in a context in which there needs to be many resources in order to provide leadership.

Conclusion: Credible, Nimble Bridge Builders

Facility in navigating cross-culturally is needed, as are street-level knowledge of the players and wisdom in discerning when to move forward with new initiatives and how to recognize and quickly seize opportunities for new collaborations. Small, focused organizations like the Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation and the ULI are nimble in a way that large denominational bureaucracies are not.

Culbertson's comments point to the reality that not just any organization can serve effectively as an intermediary. Despite her denomination's resources and keen interest in bringing about positive transformation in Los Angeles, it cannot carry out, alone, the task of capacity-building for successful urban ministry even among its own congregations. Some of the skills required for doing so are specialized—especially in the extreme cultural diversity of the Los Angeles context. Facility in navigating cross-culturally is needed, as are street-level knowledge of the players and wisdom in discerning when to move forward with new initiatives and how to recognize and quickly seize opportunities for new collaborations. Small, focused organizations like the Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation and the ULI are nimble in a way that large denominational bureaucracies are not. Culbertson may be passionate about capacity building, but her job includes many other responsibilities and competing priorities. Weist chuckles over the fact that even those United Methodist denominational agencies charged with urban ministry missions often look to him for information about

which local Methodist ministries and churches to fund or for help publicizing their resources. Weist is simply closer to the action and his Foundation exerts 100 percent of its energies on community development, while for the denominational agencies, this is one of several tasks on the corporate "to do" list. And denominations themselves, given their size and structure, are ill-equipped for fast-track decision-making and movement. As Mata put it, denominational organizations can do some good work in capacity-building, but suffer from a "dinosaur problem:" they are by nature big and slow.

Beyond their nimbleness, though, intermediary leaders like Mata and Weist are, perhaps even more importantly, "closer to the ground-level." They know who is doing what—including the "who's" whom other observers miss. Mata tells of a professional firm that was invited into a Los Angeles neighborhood to conduct a survey of the community's assets. After months of work, the company revealed its findings—and their final "asset map" failed to include dozens of the churches in that neighborhood. Many of these congregations were simply "under the radar screen," invisible to the eyes of those without genuine connections to and street-level intimacy with the local community of believers. Janice Martin of Vision L.A. recalled how World Vision sought out Michael Mata at the beginning of the Vision L.A. project, to identify and mobilize faith leaders committed to fighting poverty. The group Mata put together, she reports,

From the top down, or outside-in, observers most readily see the "kingpins;" from the bottom-up, or inside-out, researchers can find the "worker-bee" Good Samaritans energizing dozens of small-scale but highly personalized and in-depth community healing ministries. Possessing this street-level knowledge is one characteristic distinguishing effective intermediaries from ineffective ones.

"was not a traditional network that people would suspect. It was not the 'kingpins,' if you will, of the faith community, the people who receive the spotlight most often." It was grassroots leaders with less talk and publicity but more deeds and credibility.

From the top down, or outside-in, observers most readily see the "kingpins;" from the bottom-up, or inside-out, researchers can find the "worker-bee" Good Samaritans energizing dozens of small-scale but highly personalized and in-depth community healing ministries. Possessing this street-level knowledge is one characteristic distinguishing effective intermediaries from ineffective ones. And the LAUMUF and the ULI not only possess this knowledge, they have personal relationships of trust and credibility with these grassroots leaders. This has afforded them "entry" into communities and won them a hearing in a context where the messenger is often as important as the message. Capacity will not be built effectively by any group, if it does not know (1) where to find those ministries that need the help; (2) understand what specific kinds of assistance are most needed; (3) have the ability to communicate with such groups in understandable, culturally relevant language; (4) know what resources and potential ministry partners exist for these groups; and (5) possess the trust of those groups. In Los Angeles, the LAUMUF and ULI are marked by these critical characteristics. And the poor of the city have benefited, since, under these intermediaries' leadership and aid, new community ministries have been developed and existing ministries have been networked and strengthened.