



Center on  
**FAITH IN COMMUNITIES**

**“Effective Multi-Sector Collaborations for Community Transformation”**

Sagamore Institute Luncheon Symposium June 22, 2006 Indianapolis, IN

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**INTRODUCTION**

Almost twenty years ago, I organized a group of friends from graduate school to come with me on a field trip up to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. My friend, Ed, was a Washington-DC based artist who knew the gallery like the back of his hand. I offered him \$50 to give my friends and me a guided tour through the collection – everything except the modern art, which, being the philistine I am, I do not like.

Now my friends and I had had “art appreciation” type courses in college, but we remembered almost nothing. And so we benefited from Ed’s expertise, enthusiasm, and familiarity with the paintings on display. He pointed out elements in the paintings that we would like have never noticed, and spiced things up with all kinds of anecdotes about the artists, their worldviews, their love lives, and the places they were at in their careers while they composed the particular work of art we happened to be admiring. Ed helped us to see the light and the shadows, the technique, the subtle textures, the surprises, the meaning behind the images. I’ve never enjoyed a trip to an art gallery more than that one.

If I’m at all successful this afternoon, I hope that my remarks will do for you at least a little of what Ed’s tour did for me and my friends: namely, help us notice some interesting and intriguing things that were not immediately evident as we beheld the art, and thus deepen our appreciation for it. I hope as we talk about FBOs—faith based organizations—that you’ll see some new or unexpected things and perhaps gain a deeper appreciation of their role. Now FBOs have gotten a good bit of attention in the past few years in light of President Bush’s “faith based initiative.” Some of this attention has been quite negative. It has become all too common for the public to hear criticisms of partnerships between FBOs and public agencies. Among some in the media, the academy, and the Congress, there is a great deal of skepticism and fear.

**FBOs and the Public Good**

Thus our focus today – a time to celebrate the contributions made by faith-based organizations – is very important. Some pundits have suggested that the faith-based initiative has been a flop. I’d suggest that that interpretation is based on far too much attention on what has

happened inside the Washington DC beltway, and far too little attention on what has actually been happening, on the streets, for the past decade.

A variety of scholars have tried to ascertain the scope of the faith community's contribution to our nation's social safety net. According to the eminent Princeton scholar Robert Wuthnow, if you put all the findings from all those studies together, you end up with a general agreement that about 70 percent of all congregations offer social services in their communities. By social services I mean relief-oriented things like emergency financial aid or food and clothing, as well some longer-term services such as job training or mentoring or tutoring.

Dr. Wuthnow has also tried to estimate the contributions made by faith-based nonprofits (as opposed to congregations). He suggests that faith-based nonprofits invest some \$8.4 billion (after administrative expenses) in programs for those in need.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly then, at least in absolute terms, the faith community makes a very significant contribution to the public good in terms of social services provided.

But there is more to faith-based social services than meets the eye; more to their contribution to the public good than simply the social services they provide (as important as those are). There are many creative and intriguing ways that congregations and faith-based nonprofits have built partnerships with groups *outside* the faith community – with public entities like police departments and public schools and businesses and universities. And these so-called “multi-sector” partnerships are very exciting in terms of their reach and effectiveness. They are enormously interesting, and I'd like to take you on a little tour through an “art gallery” of these creative collaborations. And in each instance, we will see how through these model partnerships FBOs are making public contributions that go beyond providing social services.

## **Promising Models of Multi-Sector Collaboration**

Let me tell you first about something that has happened in Springfield, MO.

### **Convener**

Second Baptist Church, one of the larger churches in Springfield, MO, launched an initiative to explore the community's needs together with other Christian leaders – pastors, lay leaders, and businesspersons. For nine months, they hosted a once-per-month breakfast meeting at the church for these folks. At each mtg, they invited a key public official to address the group. Invitees included people like the mayor, the sheriff, the police chief, the school superintendent. The invitees were each asked to make a short presentation in which they would state what they thought was the city's main problem and then give their suggestions as to how the churches of Springfield could address that problem.

At the end of the nine months, the church hosted a discussion time when they reviewed with the attendees the major themes that had come out in the process. In the end, the group

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Saving America? Faith-Based Services and the Future of Civil Society* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 141, 172.

decided that the central action it would take would be to start a multi-church, city-wide, in-school tutoring program for at-risk 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. This was an initiative that felt both ambitious and yet feasible and was relevant to what they'd heard about. You see, the sheriff had explained during his breakfast presentation that one of the key factors state planners used in forecasting how many new jail cells would need to be built was the % of 4<sup>th</sup> graders who couldn't read. That stark fact galvanized the group to focus on helping such children. Today, over 725 children are being tutored through this initiative and activity to recruit more tutors is underway.<sup>2</sup>

What has happened in Springfield, MO is not just a city-wide tutoring program, as important and valuable as that is. **What's happened is that the church was able to be a public convener** that brought together hundreds of citizens to learn about their city's needs and then respond in a positive fashion. Now all sorts of ancillary partnerships are now happening as a result of all the relationships that have been built. For example, churches that have mobilized tutors for kids have also engaged with those kids' schools in ways beyond tutoring, such as cleaning up and repairing school properties or throwing appreciation parties for teachers.

The faith community has acted as a key public convener in Springfield.

### **Portal**

Now let me take you to Boston. There, police and clergy cooperate in a project called Operation Homefront. Through Operation Homefront, participating clergy learn from teachers and social workers about particular students who seem headed for the gangs. Clergy then accompany a police officer on a visit to the kids' house to talk with his parents. Cops report that, alone, the parents might not welcome them in. But the clergy member takes the lead and typically does gain entrée into the house, and into a productive conversation with the parent. As of 2003, the program had 50 clergy involved and some 2600 families have already been reached. School officials report that they see a big reduction in gang activity among the students whose parents have been visited.

**What we see in Boston is the faith community acting as a portal for public actors.** The cops need access to the parents of suspected gang members—but often, trust between the police and lower-income residents is low. But when the cops and clergy partner, the doors can begin to open.

In a little while, you'll be hearing about some of the fantastic programs that were selected as winners in our *Partners in Transformation* competition. One of the winning groups—unfortunately the one that was not able to send a representative to us today due to schedule conflicts—is a small FBO called Pastoral Ministries of Central FL. This group is another clear example of the role that the faith community plays as a portal into populations in need. Following Hurricane Wilma, a community of about 400 Spanish-speaking sugar cane workers lost everything – their homes, their belongings, and their jobs. The Red Cross was active in central FL trying to get aid to residents. But the Red Cross, despite its tremendous resources, was not able to reach the farmworkers and other very remote poor populations and so they turned to this little Catholic group called Pastoral Ministries of Central FL. You see, Pastoral Ministries has made it its business over the past several years, in light of the many devastating hurricanes

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<sup>2</sup> Bob Roberts, Minister of Springfield, Second Baptist Church, personal correspondence, March 27, 2006.

that have thrashed Florida, to go deep into the rural farmlands and identify different communities—most of whom are served by small Spanish speaking congregations. So Pastoral Ministries could be an effective portal and distribution channel for the Red Cross.

So, we've seen so far how FBOs have acted effectively in communities as conveners and as portals.

### **Bridge**

Now let's go to Raleigh, NC. This is the birthplace for a powerful model of church and business collaboration called the Jobs Partnership. **And here we see the faith sector serving as a bridge.**

**Description:** The Jobs Partnership, which is now called Jobs for Life, is an initiative that aims to get church pastors and business leaders to come together to form a Board of Directors to oversee a job and life skills training program for the un- and underemployed. The group of pastors (typically, inner-city pastors) and business people share the volunteer mobilization work to launch a 12-week JP class. The class meets twice weekly. National office provides curriculum: KEYS and STEPS classes. Pastors take turns teaching KEYS. Church mentors are matched with participants and attend the KEYS classes with them. STEPS classes focus on job readiness issues and often have guest teachers – they speak on dress for success, interviewing, resumes, etc. Business leaders put together a jobs clearinghouse – a listing of available positions with descriptions, contact info etc. They try to create opportunities for graduates to get in for interviews. In some JP cities, they have paid internships provided by the participating businesses. In others, they have gotten churches to collect used car donations and they give cars to JP graduates. Ideally, churches “sponsor” a participant – that is, provide a mentor and welcome the person into the church fold for social activities and support.

**Results:** 2,100 job placements; 80% job retention rate after one year

Again, what we see in Raleigh is not just a great job training program that has helped hundreds of folks find jobs – though that is terrific. We see bridge building between the faith community and the business community, through which the two groups have accomplished more for the unemployed people of their city than they could have achieved alone.

All around the nation, we see FBOs acting as bridges. In Huntsville AL, the Southwood Presbyterian Church has formed a partnership with Lincoln Village Elementary School. This bridge has brought about a brand new science lab for the Title One School, plus tutors for half of the student body, and dramatically increased participation by parents in the local PTA. In Los Angeles, Korean Churches for Community Development has formed a partnership with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac that has led to numerous low- and moderate income families being able to own their own home. In Fresno, CA 25 congregations have partnered with local public housing authorities to establish community centers, with the result that crime has decreased in those 25 housing projects by over 60%. And if I had more time, I could tell more stories about the bridges FBOs are building, and the good that that is accomplishing.

## **Prophylactic**

A fourth example of effective multi-sector collaboration comes from Ohio, where a coalition of churches called Marriage Savers of Clark County aims at getting churches – Catholic and Protestant – to come together to sign a Community Marriage Policy. The Policy binds clergy to certain activities when it comes to marrying couples. Core elements include: 4 months minimum of pre-marital counseling, requiring a pre-marital inventory (using a questionnaire that helps couples identify their strong and weak areas and places for discussion); matching engaged couples with solid married couples for mentoring; matching troubled marriages with mentors for intervention. In Clark County, over 60 clergy have signed on to the Community Marriage Policy. With that level of participation, what happens is that it becomes difficult for a couple wanting a church wedding to be able to get one without having to go through some good pre-marital counseling. Marriage Savers also promotes the training of couples in churches to serve as mentor couples to younger marrieds or to couples in trouble. Marriage mentoring has been shown to be a very effective strategy within the church for preventing divorce. In Clark County, the divorce rate has dropped 19%.

Nationally, according to a two-year study of Community Marriage Policies in 114 counties, divorce rates show an average drop in those communities of nearly 18%.

**Here we have the faith sector acting in a prophylactic way**, protecting the community, preventing the misfortune of divorce and its associated troubles for kids. Some divorces have very negative consequences for kids and communities, and FBOs make a huge contribution to the public good when they can help prevent them.

## **Restorer**

But sometimes, bad things do happen in communities. Crime is one of those bad things – and all you here in Indianapolis are feeling this with particular force, given the tragedy here in the city on June 1<sup>st</sup>. Here too, faith communities can make a contribution. We’ve seen already how they act as conveners, as portals, as bridge-builders, and as prophylactics. The last example of their positive public roles I’ll share today is the role of **restorer**. **Faith-based organizations working in creative partnerships are making a huge contribution to community reconciliation and restoration** through a movement that began in the faith sector in the 1970s that today is now a major national and international movement. It is known as the restorative justice movement.

The restorative justice movement focuses on victims—making the simple and inarguable point that crime should be understood as harm—harm to specific victims who deserve to be heard. It also asserts that the criminal justice system should focus on outcomes—specifically the outcome of “making things right.” Offenders should make restitution to victims wherever possible. Restorative justice also focuses attention on the offender in a new way: specifically, it asks: “What must be done in order to restore this person back into the community?” It answers that question by emphasizing that offenders need to take personal responsibility for the harm they have inflicted, own that harm, repent of it, and take active measures to make things right. Perhaps most radically, restorative justice encourages victims, as they are able, to forgive the offenders. The movement never forces this, but it is willing to say publicly that, in the end,

forgiveness is a road to closure and healing, while continued rage and bitterness will likely stunt and harm the victim even further.

One of the oldest restorative justice initiatives in the U.S. is in Batavia, NY. There, since 1981 restorative justice has been on display through a collaboration between the Genesee County police department and the community's various congregations. The "Genesee Justice" initiative involves, first, faith-based services to crime victims. This includes grief counseling, church-based prayer and memorial services, and several avenues for victim involvement in the criminal justice process—such as victims speaking at sentencing or at parole hearings. Second, Genesee Justice sponsors victim-offender conferences in which the two meet face to face, along with a trained mediator from the faith community. In these sessions, victims have opportunity to share their feelings about the crime and the harm it caused and to ask the offenders questions. Offenders have the chance to apologize and to talk about their experiences in the past and how the crime has affected them. Third, Genesee Justice oversees special "alternative sentencing" programs through which justice officials, offenders and victims devise community service sentences rather than jail time (or with a mix of some limited jail time). In drug cases, the alternative sentencing arrangements may involve substance abuse treatment, community service, and making reparations to victims.

It is important to note that Genesee Justice is not a single, lone example of this new way of thinking about justice. Genesee Justice is one of roughly 300 restorative justice initiatives around the nation.<sup>3</sup> FBOs like The Center for Community Justice in Elkhart, IN and Rhode Island Victim Offender Restoration train mediators for victim-offender conferencing. The interdenominational program Neighbors Who Care provides church volunteers to repair property damaged by crime or help victims move. Victims to Victory in Memphis recruits church volunteers to provide victims with personal companions to accompany them to hospitals and court hearings and to run grief support groups. Brothers Against Domestic Violence in Milwaukee provides bodyguards to women involved in adjudicating domestic violence cases. Today in KS, PA, CA, MA, NY, NC, FL, and MO, police and court systems are incorporating various elements of restorative justice. And if the statistics from Genesee Justice are indicative, these movements are saving tax payers millions of dollars, creating millions of hours of valuable community service, engaging thousands of victims in meaningful ways in the legal proceedings, making possible real restitution to crime victims, and fostering true rehabilitation among thousands of offenders.

## **Conclusion**

Well, let me bring this tour of faith community collaborations to a close. It has been a great pleasure and privilege for me over the past several years to become acquainted with this amazingly broad variety of partnerships: FBOs working with police, with FEMA, with Fannie Mae, with hundreds of public schools, with the Department of Labor and HUD, with local and state government social welfare agencies, with secular universities, banks, hospitals, and prisons. Hopefully this little tour has given you a taste of the good results that have come from these partnerships.

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<sup>3</sup> Mark S. Umbreit and Jean Greenwood, *National Survey of Victim Offender Mediation Programs in the United States*, (Prepared for U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime), September 19, 1998.

In a few minutes, we're going to have our awards ceremony for this year's winners of the *Partners in Transformation* competition. These FBOs—like the ones I've just been speaking about—have crafted creative and effective collaborations that have led to real help for real people. It is our pleasure at the Sagamore Institute to highlight their good work and publicize it today. Because this is something that our media, our academies, and our Congress need to see more clearly. My years “on the ground” fraternizing with FBOs has convinced me that the nature, creativity, extent, and faithfulness of FBOs is not adequately appreciated by much of the media and by many people who simply are not familiar with faith communities. And at the same time that the media and many members of the US Congress have offered skepticism, fear, or criticism of faith-based initiatives, I've witnessed that the staff and leaders of a variety of public institutions—whether people working in the juvenile justice system, at Title I schools, in the mayor's office, at the police station, or the county welfare office—are eager to work with the faith community and enthusiastic about already-existing partnerships.

In short, what I've seen is that the closer you actually come to the problems—the more you listen to the people in need, to the agencies that are tasked to provide services; to the cop on the street and the warden at the jail and the counselor at the school—the less fear and worry and prejudice against the faith community you find. Put differently, from my vantage point, “faith based initiatives” are the most controversial inside the Beltway, in the halls of the academy, and inside the newsrooms at the major media outlets. On the streets, a much greater attitude of openness, experimentation, appreciation, cooperation, and shared focus on the needs is what typically prevails.

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