

Philadelphia Census of Congregations and Their Involvement in Social Service Delivery

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This census of congregational social services is the first attempt to identify all of the congregations in Philadelphia and their services. This article reports results from 1,376 of an estimated 2,095 congregations. It finds that 1,211 congregations (88 percent) have at least one social program. On average, each congregation provides 2.41 programs and serves 102 people per month. The primary beneficiaries are children (served by 49.2 percent of all programs). According to the census, 571 congregations (41.5 percent) collaborate with secular organizations, and 857 congregations (62.3 percent) are open to collaborating with government welfare programs. Conservatively, the financial replacement value of all congregational social services in Philadelphia is \$246,901,440 annually.

Drastic changes in the American welfare system and cutbacks in many programs have spurred calls for increased public reliance on congregations and religious-based organizations. The enactment of section 104 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (104th Cong., 2d sess., H.R. 3734; Public Law 104-193), also known as "Charitable Choice," supports and encourages increasing the involvement of religious-based organizations and congregations in pub-

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licly funded social services. Charitable Choice is a shift in the way religious organizations have traditionally related to the government in that it allows congregations that are not incorporated as regular non-profit organizations (501 [c][3] of the IRS tax code) to apply for public funds and allows congregations and pervasively sectarian groups to provide publicly funded services while maintaining a religious atmosphere (Cnaan and Boddie in press). President George W. Bush favors this legislation and will likely seek to expand social services delivered by religious-based organizations and congregations to include child welfare, education, and other human service areas. The newly established White House Office of Faith and Community Initiatives is a clear indication of this.

Historically, clergy members served their congregants and community members through pastoral counseling. Many clergy members have been trained in the seminary to serve as counselors. Often, pastoral care (such as marital counseling, visiting the sick, and crisis intervention counseling) is also a part of the informal care congregations provide (Ewalt and McMann 1962; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2001). However, actual care for the neediest members of our society by congregations is the aim of the new policies and legislation.

The study of social services provided by congregations is limited. This is not surprising since religion as an area of study remains on the margin of social work research and practice. Few social scientists study congregations and their social services, and most social workers are not accustomed to working with congregations as social service providers. In general, social work research and education have dissociated themselves from religion despite a reviving interest in religion. Ellen Netting, Jane Thibault, and James Ellor (1990) called for the inclusion of organized religion in social work education on the basis that organized religion is an important force in community change, in working with social and health services, and in policy development and implementation. Other social work scholars have also called for expanding social work research and practice to include organized religion (Allen-Meares 1989; Cnaan, Goodfriend, and Newman 1996; Cnaan, Wineburg, and Boddie 1999; Faver 1986; Garland 1992; Netting 1982; Sheridan and Amato-Von Hemert 1999; Wineburg 1993). However, not until government devolution and the passage of the Charitable Choice provision of the welfare reform legislation of 1996 has organized religion, particularly congregation-based social services, gained attention as a viable part of our social welfare system.

Religion has not become a legitimate partner among social workers in the quest to improve the life conditions of those in need. The needs of the truly disadvantaged citizens are beyond what either the public or private sector can accomplish alone. Indeed, congregations and other faith-based organizations are taking on an increased role in providing

social and community services (Ammerman 2001; Chaves 1999; Cnaan 1997, 2000*a*; Cnaan et al. 1999; Grettenberger and Hovmand 1997; Hodgkinson et al. 1993; Printz 1998). Given the continued trend of devolution and privatization of social services as well as the high religious participation of many people in the United States demonstrated by a substantial number of people who attend religious services regularly (McAneny and Saad 1993; *Economist* 1995; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2001), it is necessary for social workers, policy makers, and other social scientists to study the social service capacity of religious-based organizations and congregations. The present dearth of scholarship deprives us of the ability to effectively serve those in need. Our research is a first systematic step in providing the empirical documentation of congregations and their social services by discussing the distribution and financial value of these services.

The Methods for Studying Congregations and Social Services

Exploratory research on congregations and social services has primarily used survey research. Of the scholars who have surveyed congregations and their social services (Ammerman 2001; Billingsley 1999; Chaves 1999; Cnaan 1997, 2000*a*; Grettenberger and Hovmand 1997; Hill 1998; Hodgkinson et al. 1993; Jackson et al. 1997; Printz 1998; Silverman 2000) each takes a different approach to identify the sample, define social services, measure social services or social ministries' involvement, and collect data. Hence, the results are also different. For example, Mark Chaves (1999) uses hypernetwork procedure and reports that 57 percent of the congregations provided social services when respondents were asked to recall social services or social ministries. In other studies that use telephone interviews or mail surveys that required respondents to recognize social services or social ministries from a preselected list, the findings range from 86 percent for the Baltimore study (Hill 1998) to 100 percent for the California study (Silverman 2000).

In this study of all the Philadelphia congregations and their social services, we build on previous work and employ a set of complementary research methods. We use both a deductive approach to assess our understanding of congregation-based social services and an inductive approach to further develop concepts and gain insight from the patterns that emerge from the data. The following methods are used in this study: in-depth interviews with clergy and lay leaders, structured surveys, and document analysis. The researchers refined the definition of a congregation throughout the process. That is, our research improved as we gained more information from our respondents, and this helped us to be more selective in identifying the criteria for a congregation. When

we began this study, we discovered that there was no comprehensive list of Philadelphia congregations from which to draw our sample, no established criteria for selecting the sample, and an insufficient definition for social services or social ministries.

Sampling Congregations: Mission Impossible

While no one knows the exact number of congregations in the United States, estimates range from a low of 200,000 to a high of 450,000. According to the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, in the United States there were 396,000 congregations in 1992 (Bedwill and Jones 1993). Currently, there is no single comprehensive list of congregations. An example that illustrates the confusion about identifying congregations is the counting of rural congregations. In 1990, the Church Membership Survey (CMS) identified 116,872 congregations in the non-metropolitan counties of the United States. Shannon Jung and her colleagues (1998) contend that problems identifying nondenominational, especially African-American, and some suburban congregations make this a low estimate of what might be 200,000 congregations.

Several factors make counting congregations difficult. First, there is not a single agreed-upon definition of a congregation, and, as all social scientists know, a loosely defined entity is difficult to measure. Second, because of the separation of church and state, U.S. congregations are not required to register with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or any other public authority or registry. Hence, there is no single source where accurate detailed information can be found about the number, size, location, and organizational structure of the nation's religious congregations. Third, congregations, like many other social organizations, go through stages of birth, death, and even mergers. For example, in a 1-month period in Philadelphia, we discovered that two new congregations were formed and that two others merged into a joint congregation. In other instances, congregations may move to a different neighborhood or change their social name and focus (Ammerman 1997; Ammerman et al. 1998). Fourth, many congregations do not trust the government or secular scholars, and they are reluctant to provide any information about themselves. Such congregations are often underreported because they are independent of any denominational structures and prefer to maintain their anonymity outside of their religious circles (Ethridge 1989). Fifth, most attempts to count congregations have been made either by denominations, which focus solely on their own congregations, or by researchers asking denominations to provide their statistics. Researchers often supplement the denominational lists with lists of congregations from the yellow pages and similar directories. As a result, small mission congregations, storefront congregations, church plants (new outreach congregations), and unpublicized fringe congregations

are consistently overlooked. Finally, many congregations are not accessible by phone, do not respond to mailed questionnaires, and operate only a few hours a week. Identifying such congregations is both difficult, time-consuming, and costly.

After almost 3 years of study, we estimate the number of congregations in Philadelphia to be approximately 2,095. To develop a working list of congregations, we originally merged two data files: the City of Philadelphia Property Tax list and the yellow pages' list of congregations. In order to identify the unlisted congregations, we applied three methods. First, we requested lists from every denomination and interfaith organization in the region. We received about fifteen different lists. We manually merged these with our master file since congregations often use various names and may give more than one address or list the clergy residence, for example. We also obtained lists of congregations from polling stations and the local Bureau of the Census. Second, in every interview, we asked clergy members or key informants to identify congregations with which they collaborate along with their telephone numbers and addresses. Given that the interviewers were paid per completed interviews, they had an incentive to identify new congregations and add them to the master list. We also enlisted the assistance of our advisory board, which is composed of religious leaders throughout the city. Advisory board members reviewed the list and supplied missing congregations that are part of their groups or known to them. Finally, our research interviewers traveled block by block through neighborhoods to identify possibly unlisted storefront churches and other congregations not on our master file. We canvassed every block of the city and discovered many congregations, especially ethnic and minority ones, that were unlisted. In combination these approaches brought us closer to a complete master list.

Our original list included 1,483 congregations. We found that at least 265 from this list were not really congregations but parsonages, convents, a video store, private residences of clergy, or simply nonexistent. Our current list includes 2,095 congregations. In other words, the first-ever congregational census in any American city revealed that the combined yellow pages and City Property Tax files identified only 1,218 of the 2,095 known existing congregations (58 percent).

To our surprise, one of our first tasks was to establish an empirical definition for congregations. We assumed that a term as widely used as "congregation" would already be accurately and narrowly defined. But that was not the case. In fact, all previous studies of congregations used lists from denominations, went to the most visible places of worship, or used directories such as the yellow pages. We define as a congregation any religious gathering that meets the following seven criteria (four of which are borrowed from James Wind and James Lewis 1994, and three are added): (1) a cohesive group of people with a shared identity; (2)

a group that meets regularly on an ongoing basis; (3) a group that comes together primarily for worship and has accepted teachings, rituals, and practices; (4) a group that meets and worships at a designated place; (5) a group that gathers for worship outside the regular purposes and location of a living or work space; (6) a group with an identified religious leader; and (7) a group with an official name and some formal structure that conveys its purpose and identity.

Our definition does not require that a congregation adhere to a monotheistic faith tradition. It is, therefore, applicable to Hindu and Buddhist traditions as well as to pagan and Satanic groups. While the presence of these faith traditions in the United States is small and even marginal, they are often omitted from public and scholarly discussion about congregations.

This operational definition excludes a variety of religious gatherings that are not congregations, such as retirees who spend their winters in the South and attend worship services in a local hotel while there, sports-related prayers, convents, prison ministries, religious study groups, social ministries, and campus fellowship groups that may be affiliated with a congregation. It also excludes religious crusades and revivals, which have neither a cohesive group of people nor regular ongoing meetings in a particular place. Unless they have a regular group of people attending worship services, shrines and national cathedrals are not defined as congregations because the visitors do not constitute a cohesive group. Also excluded are family devotions, Bible-study groups, regional or national headquarters of religious denominations, yearly meetings, assemblies, religious-based homeless shelters and hospices, religious chautauquas, and convocations.

In interviews we elected to use the term “social programs” over “social services” or “social ministries.” Although these terms have similar meanings, the latter is more Christian in nature, and we used it primarily for Christian churches. We refrained from using “social services” because for many religious leaders that term connotes services that are provided for or in collaboration with the government. We were also aware that social services involvement of congregations is often termed in a particular manner to each congregation, denomination, or faith tradition. Consequently, for each congregation the term “social” may have a different meaning and use.

One critical issue for this study is determining what to count as a congregational social program and what to exclude. For example, if the clergy member counsels a child who had an upsetting week at school, is this a social service program? If so, should we include it in our findings as a program? This methodological issue may explain variation in findings between studies that found low and high rates of social services offered by congregations (Chaves [1999] reported only 57 percent of congregations to provide at least one social service while Silverman

[2000] found 100 percent of the congregations to provide such a service).

When determining how to measure social services by congregations, we had to answer a series of questions. (1) Does the social service have to be registered as a separate nonprofit organization with its own 501 (c)(3) designation? (2) Does the service have to be offered on the congregational premises, or can it be offered elsewhere (such as cleaning a park or adopting a nursing home)? (3) Must the service have a budget or staff? (4) Does the service need to be provided on an ongoing basis, or can we also count sporadic or seasonal services? (5) Can another organization (such as Boy Scouts of America or Alcoholics Anonymous) use the congregational premises, and is this still considered a congregational social service? (6) Can nonmembers of the congregations be involved in the service provision? (7) Can the service be offered jointly with another congregation, social service organization, or denomination?

For this study we apply the least restrictive criteria for responses; we include a program as long as that program is designated as a social program by the congregation and is not carried out only “when needed.” So, for example, we do not count individual clergy members who counsel an upset child as a program since there is no program with a name and identity but merely a response to an erupting need. The same applies to giving a onetime cash assistance to a homeless person who knocks on the congregation’s door or a congregant volunteering at the local food bank.

We studied a wide range of social programs that are part of the congregation’s nonreligious activities. In each case, the activities that we refer to involve caring for the needs of others regardless of their faith tradition or affiliation with the congregation. We are interested in all the activities that congregations engage in to serve their members or the community. Hence, our definition of social service programs captures a broad range of social care and social development activities. We defined a congregational social program as an organized activity to help people in need that the congregation discussed and in which it decided to assist. The program can be ad hoc or ongoing, can be provided solely by the congregation or in collaboration with others, can be carried out on the congregation premises or elsewhere, or it can be simply a social program hosted by the congregation. These programs range from visiting the sick to counseling families, from health programs to social change initiatives, and they include the more highly professionalized services such as housing development and vocational training.

When asked in a general manner and without prompting, most clergy members do not recall the social programs that their congregations offer. In many interviews, we were told that a congregation has no “social services,” only to find out later that it offers day care and an after school latchkey program. At other times, clergy members or key informants

could not recall all the services since some were handled routinely by a subcommittee or group of the congregation. To avoid underreporting, we composed a list (inventory) of 215 possible programs based on our review of the literature and interviews with experts. For each program on the list, we asked the interviewees to state whether any of them were offered by the congregation. Once the interviewee answered affirmatively, we asked whether the service was offered formally or only when needed or asked for and, if formally, where, who provided the service, and whether the service was provided in cooperation with others (such as other congregations, social service agencies, public authorities, or denomination). This inventory of social programs is, by far, the most exhaustive inventory of social service areas used by any researcher to determine the social and community involvement of congregations.

Data Collection

We used three research instruments. The first part of the interview (the general form) gathered background information about the congregation, its history, membership, financial information, staff, governing structure, and relations with the wider community. The second part (the inventory of programs) compiled information about the congregations' social services. The interviewers covered 215 areas of possible social and community involvement, with numerous follow-up questions concerning the formal or informal nature of the program, where it was provided, and so on. We asked respondents to identify those services that had been offered in the past 12 months and to omit any that were no longer available. We used a 12-month time frame to ensure that seasonal programs such as summer camps and heating assistance programs would be included and that responses would reflect the current social program agenda of the congregation.

The third part of the interview (the specific program form) was used to gather information about the most important social programs provided by the congregation, up to a maximum of five programs. With regard to these five programs, the interviewee was asked detailed questions about the program's history; legal status; staffing; beneficiaries; number of times a week, month, or year it was offered; cost to the congregation; and much more. Due to the length of interviewing time, congregations with more than five social programs were asked to choose only the five "most representative of their work." We asked respondents to start with those programs that have budgets and paid staff.

We spent many hours in each of the 1,376 congregations we studied. The questions we used were prepared and piloted. Many of the questions were close-ended, but others were open-ended, and the responses were verified with documentation provided by the congregations. The interviews and collection of congregation documents were performed by a

group of (20–30) well-trained interviewers. A face-to-face interview was selected not only to increase the response rate but to assist interviewees with confusing questions, to probe when necessary, and to make use of additional information that can be observed while visiting the congregation.

All interviewers received both a lengthy orientation and weekly group in-service training that included the history and overview of the study, benefit to the congregations and broader community, ways to use and disseminate data, and an introduction to the survey instruments. Each interviewer was also given a training manual that documented the information outlined above with specifications and clarification for the survey instruments. For more in-depth training, interviewers observed an interview conducted by a trained researcher followed by a question and answer session. The interviewers were closely supervised and observed for the first three interviews and provided with feedback after each session. Interviewers received ongoing training and supervision through weekly meetings where questions were answered and the survey instrument was routinely reviewed. The training and supervision were to ensure that interviewers were familiar with the survey instrument, understood the intent of questions, learned to phrase questions properly, recorded responses accurately and completely, learned to probe interviewees for more complete responses, and addressed issues of confidentiality. Interviewers were also trained to understand religious customs and the language of the particular congregation being interviewed.

We also assess the fiscal contribution of congregations to social services by asking respondents to assign monetary replacement value to the services and financial support provided by the five social programs identified as most representative of each congregation's commitment to community service. The total fiscal contribution or replacement value is estimated based on the responses to questions related to the following: the congregation's financial support of the program, clergy hours, staff hours, volunteer hours, in-kind support, cost of utilities, and value of space. The imputed economic value, that is, the replacement value, is used to establish a measure of the congregational contribution to the quality of life of people in Philadelphia based on the monetary cost of replacing these programs by noncongregational entities.

Findings

Congregation Characteristics

Among the 1,376 congregations in this study, membership size ranges from a low of six members to a high of 13,000 members.¹ On average, 247 people attend at least one worship service per week per congregation. The average active membership size (people attending at least

monthly) of the congregations is 346 individuals, including children. In order to achieve reliability we ask all congregations to include children even if they are officially not treated as members. It should be noted that when children are excluded, half the congregations in our study report membership of less than 100 members. However, the mean is increased by a group of megachurches (congregations that attract more than 1,000 members each). This congregational mean number of members suggests that almost 50 percent of Philadelphia's population attends a religious congregation. The findings show that local congregations are still attracting large numbers of residents although many people prefer to drive to their congregation of choice. On average, 44.5 percent of congregation members lived within 10 blocks of the congregation's site, 37.5 percent lived within the city limits but beyond the 10-block radius, and 18 percent lived outside of the city limits. Of the 1,376 congregations in our sample, 1,237 (89.9 percent) reported that 75 percent or more of their members belong to one racial or ethnic group. The majority of the congregations in this sample were black congregations (755; 54.9 percent) and white congregations (361; 26.2 percent). This sample also included Hispanic congregations (73; 5.3 percent) and Asian-American congregations (48; 3.5 percent)

Three out of 10 congregations (31 percent) reportedly have annual budgets of less than \$50,000, and an additional quarter (26 percent) have a budget between \$50,000 and \$100,000. Only a small number of congregations (2 percent) reported having a budget of more than \$1 million a year. A slightly larger number (6 percent) reported having a budget between \$500,000 and \$1 million, while 14 percent reported having a budget between \$200,001 and \$500,000, and 23 percent between \$100,000 and \$200,000. The budgets as reported do not include building funds or school budgets.

Most congregations are well established at their current location. On average, a congregation in Philadelphia has been at its current location for 50 years. Some congregations have been in their present location for as little time as a few weeks to as long a time as 323 years.

Of the 1,376 congregations, 870 (63.2 percent) had at least one paid, full-time clergy member. Eighty-seven congregations (6.3 percent) reported two full-time paid clergy members. In addition, 76 congregations (5.5 percent) reported between three and nine full-time paid clergy members. Three hundred and four congregations (22.1 percent) reported part-time paid clergy members. The remaining congregations either had bivocational clergy members or were in search of new clergy.

Congregation Services

Out of the 1,376 congregations we surveyed, 1,211 (88 percent) reported at least one organized social program that serves the community. On

average, each of the 1,376 congregations reported providing 2.41 different community-serving programs. In total, 3,316 different programs were reported by these congregations. The 2.41 programs per congregation average is an underestimate, because we did not record complete information on more than five programs per congregation.²

Our social service inventory of 215 possible congregation services included only those programs that went beyond solely religious services such as prayer meetings or worship, whether administered formally by the congregation on its property or with help from the congregation. Table 1 documents what the city's congregations do to serve children and youth, the elderly, the homeless, and others in need. In table 1, we include only programs that were carried out by at least 14 percent of the congregations in the city.³ Almost half of the congregations reportedly offer food pantries, and more than a third of the congregations offer summer day camps, recreational programs for teens, and clothing closets. About a quarter of the congregations offer music performances, soup kitchens, and educational tutoring. In other words, congregations are mostly involved in caring for children's growth and education and in caring for poor people in the community.

We gathered data on 10 potential beneficiary groups and allowed multiple listings: a single program may simultaneously serve young children and their older siblings or parents. As table 1 indicates, congregation services and programs place needy children and youth first. Almost half of the congregational social programs served children (49.5 percent), youth (43.6 percent), and the community at large (48.6 percent). Families (42.1 percent) and people with low incomes (38.1 percent) came next. One-quarter of the programs served the elderly (26.1 percent) followed by people with addictions (16.9 percent) and people with disabilities (16.1 percent).

While we report mostly formal programs, the informal care delivered by congregations is an important facet of their work. Clergy and, in some cases, staff members are often empowered by the congregation to financially assist poor and homeless people on an ad hoc basis. Congregations generally consider these financial gifts to be benevolent activities rather than distinct social ministries or programs. In most congregations we were told that the clergy member is authorized to provide a modest support to poor and homeless people as needed. Referrals are another important form of informal service provided by congregations and especially by veteran clergy members. This informal role makes the clergy members and congregations in the United States brokers between the service system and the local residents.

Table 1

30 EXAMPLES OF 215 SERVICES PROVIDED BY
CONGREGATIONS IN PHILADELPHIA (PERCENTAGE
OF CONGREGATIONS PROVIDING SERVICE)

Type of Service	Total (%)
Drug and alcohol prevention	14.1
Neighborhood cleanup	14.1
Blood drives	14.2
Job counseling and placement	14.3
Street outreach to the homeless	14.3
Mentoring/rites of passage	14.8
Computer training (for youth)	15.4
Health screening	15.4
Crime watch	15.4
Parenting skills	15.8
Scout troops	16.5
Health education	16.9
Interfaith collaboration	17.0
Premarriage counseling	17.5
Day care (preschool)	17.6
Shelter for homeless people	17.9
Marriage encounters (retreats)	17.9
Recreational programs for seniors	18.3
Community bazaars and fairs	19.2
Neighborhood associations	20.3
After school care	20.4
Programs for gang members	20.9
Choral groups	20.9
Prison ministry	21.2
Visitation/buddy program	21.8
International relief	22.3
Educational tutoring	24.0
Soup kitchens	24.1
Music performances	26.2
Summer programs for teens	27.4
Clothing closets	33.8
Recreational programs for teens	35.0
Recreational program for children	35.5
Summer day camp	38.2
Food pantries	46.8

Congregation Beneficiaries and Volunteers

The data from the 1,376 congregations we surveyed indicate that, on average, each congregation-sponsored program serves 39 members of the congregation as well as 63 people residing in the community who are not members of the congregation.⁴ In other words, congregations tend to serve others more than their own members at a ratio of 1 : 1.6. While this ratio shows congregations to be more “serving others” than “exclusive clubs,” this distinction is often meaningless since the

service to society is the same whether or not the beneficiary is a member of the congregation. Consider the case of low-income, minority-dominated neighborhoods without banking services, whose residents are often unable to obtain loans. If a congregation establishes a credit union that serves more than 200 local families who are, by law, also formally members of the congregation but rarely attend worship services, is this not a major social service for the community? In fact, 40 percent of credit union organization members are faith-based.⁵

On average, 16 members of each congregation (paid staff as well as volunteers) are involved in social service delivery, joined by nine volunteers who are not members of the congregation. Hence, congregations not only serve others in the community but also do something to feed a civic culture that increases citizen involvement and enhances the quality of life in most communities.

Congregations and Charitable Choice

Charitable Choice removes the barriers that would prohibit congregations without a separate 501 (c)(3) organization to contract with the government to provide social services. While we are unsure about its future in the face of a recent legal challenge filed by the American Jewish Congress in Texas on July 24, 2000, this is a most important program policy for congregations and social services alike (Cnaan and Boddie in press). Of the 1,376 congregations we surveyed, 107 (7.8 percent) reported being familiar with Charitable Choice, 38 congregations (2.8 percent) reported holding discussions about whether to apply for grants under its terms, and only seven congregations reported having formed a committee or group to draft a grant or contract proposal.

To our knowledge, as of May 2001, only one congregation in Philadelphia, and probably in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, had directly applied for and received a government grant or contract under the Charitable Choice provision. This congregation, Cookman United Methodist Church in North Philadelphia, provides services for women under the welfare-to-work transition program. Still, interviewers explained Charitable Choice and asked the following question: "If not actively involved with Charitable Choice, would your congregation consider applying for government funds under the provisions of Charitable Choice?" Some 841 congregations (61.1 percent) answered in the affirmative, indicating that the prospect of providing publicly funded social services is theologically and organizationally an accepted possibility. The others, 38.8 percent of the congregations, reported that their theology and worldview oppose collaboration with the government.

Among those that answered no, some reported theological reasons. For example, one clergyman explained his refusal by stating, "I will not be able to speak about the Bible." Others refused to consider collabo-

rating with the public sector because of reported negative experiences with government agencies. Yet others are too small and cannot see themselves applying for public money and dealing with the bureaucratic demands that come with such collaboration.

With Whom Do Congregations Collaborate?

Congregations may choose to collaborate with other organizations to provide social and community services. These organizations may be other congregations, government agencies, or community organizations. The purposes of the collaboration often include sharing space, sharing financial resources, or sharing staff and supplies. To put their social service collaboration in perspective we also asked about collaboration in worship services.

Only 186 congregations (13.5 percent) informed us that they hold worship or prayer services in collaboration with others. When we asked the interviewees if they collaborated with other faith-based organizations to develop and deliver community service programs, nearly a third of the congregations (499; 36.3 percent) responded in the affirmative—almost three times the number of congregations that performed prayer services together. And, somewhat surprisingly, an even slightly larger number of congregations (552; 40.1 percent) reported collaborating with secular organizations for the purpose of delivering a service or running a program.

Congregation Replacement Value

The findings from our study demonstrate that congregations are active in caring for the well-being of others. But, one question remains unanswered: “What is the actual financial value of their services?” The only way to answer this question is by posing a different question: “What would the social service sector in Philadelphia look like if all congregations closed their doors?” That is, “What would be the cost of replacing all the social and community services provided by community-serving ministries of congregations in Philadelphia?”

By replacement value we do not mean how much it costs the congregations to run their programs in dollar terms. What we mean is how much it would cost others to provide the same services or programs at the same level when they do not have a congregational property and member volunteers at their disposal. The fact that a congregation pays a mortgage for a building in which a social program is offered means only that the value of the space is a congregational contribution that in the real world has a financial value. Similarly, if the clergy member invests time in a social program, his or her salary should be recognized as paid by the congregation that allows him or her to spend work time in providing community-oriented services.

Our analysis of replacement value takes into account seven costs associated with social programs provided by local religious congregations: (1) financial support by the congregation for the program, (2) the value of in-kind support (such as transportation, food, clothing, printing, telephone, and postage), (3) the value of the utilities for programs that are carried out on the congregation's property (including wear and tear, heating, cooling, electricity, and cleaning), (4) the estimated value of renting an equivalent space from a commercial vendor for programs that are carried out on the congregation's property, (5) the number of hours clergy members invest in the programs, (6) the number of hours that staff members (program directors, secretaries, and other congregation employees) invest in the program, and (7) the number of hours invested by volunteers in carrying out the programs.⁶

For each program we assessed the estimated value of its cost per month. We multiplied the number of clergy hours by \$20 and those of staff members by \$10. As for volunteers, we used the standard established by the independent sector of \$11.58 per volunteer hour. It should be noted that in the many cases where the interviewees could not provide us with an assessment of cost, we assigned the value of zero cost. In addition, we used up to five programs per congregation; hence, congregations with more than five programs are not fully represented here. In other words, our replacement value should be regarded as a very conservative estimate. We also asked if the program yields any income, either in cash or in-kind, to the congregation. We aggregated the sums that were reported and deducted them from the total estimated value to obtain the net total replacement value of congregation social services and programs.

As summarized in table 2, the monthly replacement value of a Philadelphia average congregation is estimated at \$9,821.06. The dollar values presented in the third column of table 2 (average cost per program) were multiplied by 2.41 (the average number of programs per congregation) to reflect the average replacement value of the social services provided by a congregation. We converted the monthly values from this table into annual values (multiplying the sum of \$9,821.06 by 12 months), and thereby obtained an annual replacement value of \$117,852.72. Given that our work so far shows that there are about 2,095 congregations in Philadelphia, and assuming (as we do) that our sample of 1,376 congregations is highly representative of the city's congregations, we would assess the annual replacement value of the entire body of congregations at \$246,901,440.

For five reasons, the true replacement value of Philadelphia's congregations is arguably many times more than a fifth of a billion dollars annually. First, as we have already explained, our estimate does not count more than five programs per congregation and employs conservative measures of alternate building space, personnel, and so forth. Second,

Table 2

MONTHLY REPLACEMENT VALUE OF AN AVERAGE PROGRAM AND CONGREGATIONAL
SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS ($N = 3,316$)

Source	Percentage of Programs Reporting Cost	Average Cost per Program (\$)*	Average Cost per Congregation (\$) [†]
Financial support by the congregation	53.8	610.34 (1,914.3)	1,470.92
Value of in-kind support	58.1	235.27 (897.7)	567.00
Value of utilities for programs	59.7	258.91 (774.3)	623.97
Estimated value of space used for the program [†]	68.1	814.42 (1,747.8)	1,962.75
Number of clergy hours (@ \$20)	59.5	317.67 (1,395.1)	765.58
Number of staff hours (@\$10)	29.7	449.17 (391.7)	1,082.50
Number of volunteer hours (@ \$11.58)	78.8	1,512.38 (2,341.8)	3,644.84
Total		4,198.16	10,117.76
Income to the congregation	9.6	123.11 (221.2)	296.70
Total net replacement value		4,075.05	9,821.06

NOTE.—Standard deviations (in parentheses) are relatively high for two reasons. First, although we truncated the maximum values in each category, there were congregations with a value of zero and others at the highest possible level. For congregational support and value of space, we limited the maximum monthly to \$10,000 even though some programs were reported to cost more. Clergy and staff hours were truncated at \$5,000 monthly. The value of in-kind support and estimated cost of utilities was again truncated at \$5,000 each. Second, in the case of clergy hours, staff hours, and volunteer hours, the standard deviation is also a reflection of the fact that the original values were multiplied by their hourly dollar values.

* In order to assess the real replacement value of each source of cost for a social program carried out by a congregation, we added up all the values provided and divided the sum by the total number of reported programs (3,316). For example, in the case of assessing the average cost of utilities, if the interviewee reported that the congregation had no such cost, as the building is heated or cooled and maintained regardless of the program, or if the interviewee could not assess the value of the utilities, we assigned this program the value of zero in utilities and added this value (zero) to the overall sum and then divided the overall sum of utilities' cost by the total number of reported programs. The percentage of zero values for each source of cost in the replacement value analysis can be determined by subtracting the percentage in the second column from 100.

[†] The sums in this column are derived from multiplying the cost of each item in the previous column (average cost per program) by 2.41 (the average number of programs per congregation). The sums represent the average congregational replacement value per source and in total. As numbers were rounded to cents, in some cases the totals of the two columns are slightly off.

[‡] For the estimated value of space, we asked the interviewees, "What would be the value of an equivalent space used by the program if rented outside the congregation?" In some neighborhoods, we enlisted the help of professional real estate agents to assess such values, in other cases we used the values the congregation charges outsiders to use its facilities, and at other times we asked the interviewee to assess this value. Some congregations underwent strategic planning or financial reorganization and knew exactly the real value as they planned or discussed the possibility of renting out space. Other congregations stated that "no one will want to rent any space in this neighborhood, and there is no value to the space," in which cases we assigned the value of zero (for about one-third of the programs no value of space was reported). As noted above, congregations that reported an excessive amount of space value (over \$10,000) were estimated at this level only. These programs included day centers, community schools, homeless shelters, nursing homes, or health clinics.

numerous informal aspects of congregation help are not counted. Many forms of help, ranging from onetime rent-payment assistance to a community resident to ad hoc counseling, are not factored into the estimate of congregations' replacement value. Third, the time clergy members volunteer at other community-serving organizations is not counted. Many clergy members who are paid at full salary by a congregation volunteer in hospitals, schools, police departments, community groups, and sit on civic boards, all at the expense of the congregation. Fourth, as explained in the note to table 2, we truncated the reported values to avoid the inclusion of what may have been outliers even in cases where the congregation insisted that the numbers are reliable and accurate. Finally, this sum does not count the many spin-off services that started as congregational programs and grew into major social services.

Finally, we asked, "What percentage of the annual operating budget is earmarked for social services?" For the 957 congregations that answered this question the mean was 23.2 percent. In other words, about two-fifths of the congregation's annual budget (excluding capital campaigns and schools) is designated to contribute to the quality of life of people in the community and in the city beyond the cost of maintaining the congregation property and staff.

Conclusions

The findings from this study demonstrate that congregations are vital to the social fabric of Philadelphia and take a major role in caring for the needs of people in the neighborhoods. In many ways congregations are the social safety net of people in need. From mentoring programs for children to feeding the hungry, congregations are the most visible and frequent community institution to which people in need apply. Often the first response is a modest financial support and, if needed,

longer term help or even referrals to secular social services. We found that congregations serve mostly children and youth, families, the community at large, and poor people. Congregations are also highly involved in caring for people with addictions and physical disabilities. In essence, their array of social care mimics that of most secular social service agencies although most of them do not employ professional social workers.

Whereas American corporations, on average, designate only about 1 percent of their pretax net income for charitable contributions (Galaskiewicz 1997), congregations can be accounted the most charitable in supporting social programs that benefit the community. More than two-fifths of their budget is earmarked to assist people in need and to improve the quality of life of people. Their impressive network of services covers almost every facet of human need and is available throughout the city in every neighborhood where people reside. This finding is corroborated by data from a national public opinion poll commissioned by the Pew Center for the People and the Press (1996). Eighty-seven percent of the church-going respondents cited the plight of the poor as the issue most frequently discussed by their clergy members.

The United States increasingly looks to local congregations as the great hope for revitalizing its communities. Our study shows that congregations are already seriously involved in meeting people's needs. From a public policy standpoint, this raises two questions: first, Is the use of religious congregations as a safety net and as a major element in our welfare system both practical and warranted? Second, Are congregations capable of fulfilling the responsibility thrust upon them by society?

It is important to remember that the congregations in our study own their social programs. Lay members and clergy members alike perceive these programs not as a response to a public request for service provision but as a response to a need identified by the congregation. Those who deliver the service may not be professionals, but they are committed volunteers willing to work on behalf of those in need. Public expectations of congregations as service providers may well stamp out the voluntary spirit that distinguishes American congregations. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers serve without remuneration in order to serve others; if public funds are targeted for congregations, however, and paid professional staff begin running programs, then there is a risk of the loss of these highly motivated volunteers as congregational social services change from an expression of faith to yet another professional agency. Thus, while the potential for government funding in support of congregational social services will be an important issue for decision makers in the twenty-first century, there are certain negative aspects that must not be overlooked. As Robert Franklin (1997) notes: "For churches, the relationship is the system. Through relationships, the work of the church

is accomplished. Churches do not need to become bureaucratized to fulfill their mission” (p. 109).

We must not lose sight of the fact that congregations are not welfare agencies. Religious congregations cannot reasonably be expected to cure all of the nation’s social problems. They cannot eradicate poverty, prevent substance abuse, or end crime. The nation’s congregations are too small and too loosely structured to deal on their own with the myriad problems in today’s society. How then do we put the involvement of congregations in service provision into a realistic perspective? One way is to ask, What would life in America be like if there were no religious congregations? The nation would lose its social safety net and what the Supreme Court has called “a beneficial and stabilizing influence in community life.”

Even with our census of congregations, we still need systematic studies of the “secondary benefits” of how community-serving ministries reach those most in need. Further empirical research into both the extent and the effectiveness of congregations’ social and community involvement will be necessary if we want to know just how big the replacement value of this unheralded service sector of civil society might be and how best we might support and strengthen it on behalf of the urban poor and for the good of all city residents.

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Notes

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1. We analyzed the data when we completed interviewing 401 congregations, again when we had completed interviewing 877 congregations, and again when we completed interviewing 1,044 congregations. The interim findings are available in three CRRUCS (Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civic Society) reports. The results reported in this article show marginal variations from the previous three analyses. This indicates that interviewing a much larger sample did not change the results. Hence, we assume that the reported findings represent the population of congregations in Philadelphia. The three reports are Cnaan (2000*b*, 2000*c*) and Cnaan and Boddie (2001).

2. We define a social program as an organized activity by the congregation or on its premises that was discussed and approved by the members or leadership (not an ad hoc response), that has a name and identity, and that is not part of the core religious requirement or propagation of religion per se. For example, a Bible class for the benefit of elderly lonely people is not considered a social program since its mission is purely religious. Furthermore, a congregation choir is not considered a social program unless it performs routinely to entertain people in secular events such as community parades. Clearly, many programs have a religious flavor to them. For example, a summer day camp that allows poor parents to be at work and know that their kids are safe and are educated with swimming, archery, art, and book reading may also contain religious teaching and saying grace before meals. In the latter case, as long as the social service is evident, we count it as a social program; if the program focuses on religious training or worship, we do not count it as a social program. In this spirit, ecumenical coalitions in Philadelphia that work on reducing racial tension and combating urban blight are also considered social involvement. As such, each reported program in this section of the study ($N = 3,316$) serves the social or personal needs of its beneficiaries but may include a religious component.

3. Additional findings of interest are programs offered by fewer congregations in the following service areas. In the field of health care: HIV/AIDS (11.3 percent), AA (13.2 percent), sex education (7.9 percent), immunization (5.4 percent), and sickle-cell anemia education and support groups (3.8 percent). In the field of child care: latchkey programs (13.4 percent) and nursery schools (10.8 percent). In the field of education: operating schools (7.1 percent), tutoring for children (10.1 percent), computer training for children (15.1), sites for Head Start programs (2.3 percent), adult literacy programs (12 percent), preparation for the General Education Development test (high school equivalency) (12.3 percent), and computer training for adults (14.5 percent). In the area of advocacy and social change: organizing against drug trafficking (8.3 percent), poverty/welfare rights advocacy (13.7 percent), school choice (9.7 percent), civil rights (11.7 percent), affirmative action (8.6 percent), social justice (15 percent), and voter registration (16.2 percent). Finally, in the area of community economic development: credit union (3.5 percent), job training (12.2 percent), recruitment of new business (10.2 percent), commercial ventures (2.4 percent), business incubation (3.7 percent), investment clubs (2.9 percent), new building initiatives (7.1 percent), and housing rehabilitation (9.8 percent).

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4. The number of beneficiaries for yearlong programs is calculated on a monthly basis. For programs carried out seasonally, this number reflects the total number of different beneficiaries who would benefit over the year.

5. For more information, see the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions (1997).

6. In order to ensure against twice counting the support to programs coming from the outside and to ensure counting the "net contribution" of the congregation, we applied two methods. First, we asked the interviewees not to include external support (cash or in-kind) in their report of the program's budget. Second, we asked the interviewees to report all external sums of money to the studied program (including fee for service), and then we deducted these sums from the total reported replacement values (see bottom two rows of table 2). It should be noted that with the exception of the financial support by the congregation, none of the seven items is included in the congregational operating budget. Furthermore, in many cases the financial support came directly from specific funds or offerings and was not included in the congregation's operating budget.