

Faith-Based Social Services

A Blessing, Not a Miracle

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*“One person with a belief is a social power
equal to ninety-nine who have only interests.”*

—John Stuart Mill

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I. Introduction

From the White House to state houses, and on both sides of the aisle, public officials are paying new attention to the role of “faith-based” social-service providers in meeting America’s social problems. The consensus that congregations and other religious institutions should play a greater role is growing, but no such consensus exists on the question of what and how much the religious community should be asked to do.

At one extreme, some conservatives claim that religious institutions can replace the federal “safety net” for the poor with private funds. At the other extreme, some liberals believe that virtually any religious use of government funds for social-service delivery violates the constitutional separation of church and state.

Both views are wrong. Faith-based social services cannot replace the safety net, but they can become a more active partner with government and other sectors of society regarding questions related to poverty, family life, and community. And they can do so without establishing a national religion or violating anyone’s freedom of religion.

This paper has three purposes:

- To describe the context of the debate over faith-based social services and to offer an alternative framework for approaching the issue.
- To describe new public-private partnerships involving faith-based social services in several states leading in this area.
- To offer public policy recommendations, based on actual state experience, for the further development of such partnerships.

Government, Civil Society, and Faith-Based Social Services

Public debate is often shaped by extreme views; discussion of government’s role sometimes comes across as the “nanny state” versus “no state.” Not surprisingly, then, when public officials talk about “faith-based social services,” they seem to be talking about those organizations as an alter-

Faith-Based Social Services

native to government. Clearly, that was the intent of conservatives like Marvin Olasky, author of *The Tragedy of American Compassion*. After the Republicans took control of Congress in 1994, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, in his short-lived call for more orphanages as a solution to poverty, cited Olasky as his inspiration.

But once you get outside the Beltway, states and communities are interested in practical solutions, not rhetoric. Partisan differences blur as communities look for what works.

Public debate is finally starting to catch up with the reality in American communities. In fact, due in part to this developing practical experience, the notion that the private sector, particularly the religious community, can somehow replace the government safety net for the poor is heard less and less often today. More and more conservatives have come to acknowledge that government must play a role. One small example: Amy Sherman, who a few years ago wrote an article for the Heritage Foundation's *Policy Review* warning of the risks to churches of government funding, has applied for a small community development block grant for Abundant Life Ministries, her faith-based job training program in Charlottesville, Virginia. Some strong proponents of a much greater role for faith-based groups, such as Sen. Dan Coats (R-IN), still see the need for a government safety net. At the same time, a growing number of liberals have acknowledged that government alone cannot solve every problem, but must recruit other resources.

In Washington, the ideological debate focuses on government's role in addressing social problems. But it isn't a question of government or the private sector; America has enough social problems to keep every sector of society busy. At the community level, Americans now realize that no sector of society can do everything and that all must work together.

Gov. Roy Romer (D-CO) described this new approach in his 1997 State of the State Address:

“Our greatest success has been when we have encouraged and motivated people to act in their own community, to act from the bottom up. That's what we've been all about here in Colorado. It's really a new way of

governing. This is not a government that takes responsibilities away from people but a government that works alongside people so that they can take responsibility for themselves. We understand that we must work together. That we must pull our own weight, take care of our neighbor in tough times, and pitch in when we need to.”

In a similar vein, Gov. George Bush, Jr. (R-TX) created a task force on “Faith in Action” which found, “Government shares responsibility for Texas' needy with civil society's other institutions...We must move beyond 'devolution'—merely parsing duties between different levels of government—and embrace genuine reform that sparks cooperation between government (at whatever level) and the institutions of civil society.”

Loren Snippe, director of the Ottawa County, Michigan, Department of Human Services, talks about a simple reason why religious congregations and organizations are so important to new community-wide partnerships: “It's a community issue, and the church is a prevalent part of the community. The churches aren't the only community resource, but they all believe they have a responsibility to help others.”

In this context, then, faith-based social services serve as a metaphor for the broader community. Their major significance in the public arena is not that they operate out of faith, but that their faith makes them communities that care about their neighbors.

Faith-based social services are already providing a great deal of service. A 1997 study conducted for the Aspen Institute Nonprofit Sector Research Fund analyzed available information on the sector (excluding schools and hospitals) and reached these conclusions:

- Faith-based social-service organizations spend between \$15 and \$20 billion of privately contributed funds a year on social services. Congregations spend about 20 percent of their privately raised funds on direct social services.
- While there is no way to accurately estimate the number of people who receive some form of social services through religious organiza-

tions, a minimum estimate would be in the tens of millions.

- These services consist primarily of emergency food, clothing, and shelter and services, such as counseling, designed to strengthen families, particularly those with young children.
- Religion-supported social services are designed to supplement income provided by work or by government aid.
- Religion-sponsored social service is almost exclusively local in nature. Most money spent on these services is spent in the community where it is raised. They primarily serve the poor, particularly families with young children, and working-class families, helping to prevent them from falling into poverty.
- Most programs mainly serve people without regard to their religious membership or beliefs.
- Large, high-income, suburban, and black congregations are more likely than others to provide social services. Some evidence exists that the more ideologically liberal a congregation, the more likely it is to provide social services. Among national networks, Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, Jewish Federations, and the Salvation Army are the most likely to provide services. (*See Religion-Sponsored Social Services: The Not-So-Independent Sector*, by Jim Castelli and John D. McCarthy.)

Religious organizations have expressed care for their neighbors with service and advocacy since America's earliest days. What is new is the effort across government at all levels to direct and recruit religious activity and the desire of many religious institutions to respond. Several factors have come together:

- The emerging consensus on the need to mobilize social resources to help welfare recipients become self-sufficient.
- The awareness of the role of values in becoming self-sufficient.

- The awareness that many poor people are held back by the absence of family and social networks most people take for granted.
- The pressure from faith-based social service providers to become more visible.

Welfare Changes

The turmoil over welfare for the past generation looks almost simple in retrospect. America has had a welfare program since the New Deal, but it has never had a full-fledged program to move eligible people from welfare to work. The Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC) was created to enable widows to stay home with their children, rather than work outside the home or give the children to an orphanage. Since then, society's goals for AFDC have changed as expectations for women have changed. In recent years, the program has assumed: that welfare would be a temporary solution for families; that there were enough jobs for welfare recipients; and that welfare recipients had the skills to fill those jobs. Now most Americans, including most welfare recipients, view welfare as a failure of government. But welfare is also a failure of the market, of business, and of the entire social order.

The 1996 federal welfare law and the many state plans represent an attempt to replace the 61-year-old entitlement to cash payments with a new program to move people from welfare to work. This enormous paradigm shift in U.S. social policy is the backdrop against which sharp disagreements on specific measures like time limits or a family cap play out. Even the strongest supporters of the 1996 welfare law admit it is a gamble. Nor was that law the last word on the subject—in last summer's negotiations over the balanced budget agreement, President Clinton won the important changes that mitigate the bill's impact on legal immigrants and that channel more money into the welfare-to-work transition. Nonetheless, agreement that faith-based providers are too important a community to be left out of this massive change is widespread.

Poverty and Values

Our old image of poverty was that if poor people got jobs, they would overcome poverty. But we see that many poor people today lack the skills and social knowledge to function in a workplace—how to dress, how to act, how to budget. People normally learn these things from the example of family members who work, but as long-term welfare recipients (about 50 percent of the caseload) sometimes lack such role models, fewer people on welfare seem to develop what we think of as a “work ethic.” Everyone, and especially the disadvantaged, need role models and mentors, and the religious community is a natural resource.

Networks

Poor people are often kept poor by their isolation from family and other social networks; religious organizations can provide instant networks, a virtual extended family. For example, says Margarete Gravina of the Michigan Family Independence Agency, “When someone moves from welfare to work and then loses a baby sitter or transportation, they often quit their job. Mentors help them find another baby sitter or transportation arrangement so that they can keep their jobs.”

Snippe says, “If you have a problem on your job, you’d probably come home and talk to your parents about it. They’d make a suggestion, tell you to talk it over with someone at work. We see people who need that kind of deep, natural family support system. The best we could come up with was the churches.”

According to Ronnie McDonald, associate director of the Family Pathfinders program in Texas, “Most people hear about jobs through networks. Poor people don’t have networks, and this is a way to provide them with networks. For example, one woman wanted to be a teacher. A member of the church group sponsoring her was a principal, and he got her a job as a teaching assistant. One woman has to leave for work before her kids go to school; her Family Pathfinders group gets her kids to school for her.”

Providers

Some of the pressure for a greater role for faith-based social services has come from providers and their supporters. The new Republican congressional leadership has actively pushed for such measures as the “charitable choice” provision contained in the 1996 welfare legislation. This provision is designed to make it easier for religious organizations to contract with government to provide social services without weakening their religious character, and while respecting recipients’ religious freedom.

Faith-based providers often claim that they are more efficient than government or secular agencies. No sufficient objective evidence exists to prove or disprove this claim. Some faith-based groups are effective because they are small and personal, while others are too small to be efficient. The motivation of someone who chooses a Christian substance abuse program is clearly different than that of someone who does not, making simple comparisons misleading.

But, for the most part, community leaders are not interested in comparing services; they are interested in focusing additional services on priority needs. They welcome help from any source that does the job.

The best way to understand the role of faith-based social service providers is to look at the difference between “macro” and “micro” approaches. A macro approach is something structural and all-encompassing, such as a change in law or policy or the state of the economy. A micro approach, like volunteerism, helps individuals directly, but doesn’t change the larger picture—it won’t, for example, change national statistics.

Greater involvement by faith-based organizations is a micro approach that is part of a macro approach. The macro approach is the paradigm shift of a new societal effort to create a program to move people from welfare to work. As an important sector of society, faith-based organizations can play a critical role in successfully implementing the new paradigm. But the new paradigm won’t rise or fall on the backs of faith-based organizations alone.

II. The States and Faith-Based Social Services

American religious institutions have always played a vital role in helping the poor, the needy, and the plain unlucky. Faced with the unprecedented challenge of moving millions of welfare recipients into jobs, the need for close collaboration between government and faith-based institutions is greater than ever. This section, while not exhaustive, highlights several states that have taken steps to make faith-based services a strategic component of their effort to move low-income families from welfare to work.

Mississippi

In early 1995, Gov. Kirk Fordice (R-MS) launched “Faith and Families,” the first public program in the country to use religious congregations to help people move from welfare to work. The program immediately became controversial, more for some of the rhetoric surrounding it than for what it did.

Fordice, who speaks of America as a “Christian Nation,” uses explicitly religious language to describe the program: “What is going on here is the spirit of God. I think God caused this in large part. I am convinced of it.”

Some critics, troubled by most of the initial welfare families joining their sponsoring churches, say Faith and Families violates the separation of church and state. Others call it a dis-

traction which can never replace government programs.

The current director Rev. Ron Moore, who co-founded Faith and Families, notes that the program is open to people and congregations of all faiths. “Every single congregation in this state has something to contribute,” he says. “This was never an attempt to place welfare reform in the congregations,...But the churches are a relevant part of a vital community.”

There are 38,000 families on welfare in Mississippi—Faith and Families targets 14,000 of those families whose head of household must work or risk losing benefits. When a congregation volunteers to take part in the program, it chooses a family from a list of eligible families in its community. Congregation members provide families with counseling, child care, transportation, or help with resume writing or job interviewing skills.

Moore says many welfare recipients need “life-coping skills” and many need to be motivated to look for a job; the average recipient in Mississippi is on welfare four-to-six years. They also need ongoing support. “The state can’t provide that,...A caseworker has 250 families. We want to reverse that so that 200 people in a congregation can help one family.”

Moore says it’s easier to find jobs for welfare

Faith-Based Social Services

recipients than to get them the support they need. “On the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the casinos can’t find all the people they need for restaurant and service jobs. They’re reaching deep into the AFDC [welfare program] base for people.”

In a little more than two years of operation, 529 families and 345 of Mississippi’s 5,500 congregations have taken part in the program; 82 women have found jobs and 77 have left the welfare rolls.

Reverend Moore sees the program as a success. Each family who leaves welfare saves the state \$12-15,000 a year in benefits and costs. Savings so far have easily outpaced the \$225,000 the state has spent on Faith and Families since it began. The Southern Baptist Convention, with 2,300 churches in Mississippi, will soon participate in Faith and Families, and nonreligious organizations, like Samaritan Clubs and Rotary Clubs, are also adopting welfare families. Some work with Faith and Families and some work alone.

Michigan

Gov. John Engler (R-MI) has been an enthusiastic supporter of faith-based social services. Michigan’s expanded use of faith-based social services has had two main components: 1) a contract with the Salvation Army to run homeless programs for the state; and 2) the inclusion of religious organizations in Project Zero, a test program that recruits community volunteers as mentors for welfare mothers.

Homeless Program

Michigan’s legislature created the homeless program in 1991 to blunt criticism of the decision to end the state’s General Assistance grants (cash assistance to individuals ineligible for federally funded welfare). The homeless program was designed to increase shelter space to address the needs of former General Assistance recipients who became homeless after losing the cash grant. The state pays the Salvation Army \$10 per night per person; the Salvation Army provides a bed and two meals.

“It’s a band-aid,” says Len Krugel, who admin-

isters the program for the Salvation Army. “We don’t do mental health, we don’t do family reunification. But we don’t get credit for what we do. No one has frozen to death in Michigan.”

Krugel says the Salvation Army program is efficient because it has no eligibility requirements and therefore, no bureaucracy. “If you live in Michigan and have a six-figure income and a burning desire to stay in a homeless shelter, we’ll give you a bed and two meals...If we had an eligibility requirement with appeals, it would cost more than \$10 a night.”

In 1997, the Salvation Army will receive \$11.5 million for 1.5 million nights of care. There is no way to know how many people are served. “Many people are here longer than the 30 days that qualifies as ‘temporary’ shelter because there’s a shortage of low-income housing,” Krugel says.

As Krugel points out, the Salvation Army is not an organization, but a church, with 1,600 ministers and 250,000 members. It works with other religious faiths in running its programs. But the Salvation Army has no religious requirement for the people it serves. “The spiritual component is there for those who want it...but it is not a requirement either in programs with government funding or in programs funded by the Army only.” Krugel, who is Jewish, is a living refutation of the claim that the staff of a faith-based organization must practice the sponsoring organization’s faith. By his own account, he has never been pressured to take part in religious services in his 14 years with the Army, but he can cite chapter and verse of the Salvation Army’s history and commitment to help “the least of these.”

Welfare Reform/Project Zero

Project Zero is a pilot program that focuses on six counties in Michigan. It targets those welfare recipients expected to work, identifies barriers to work, and develops new strategies to remove those barriers. The program includes “mentoring,” the matching of welfare recipients with volunteers working through community organizations, including religious organizations.

Margarete Gravina of the state’s Family Inde-

pendence Agency (FIP) says part of the program involves a change in the way social service caseworkers relate to clients. In the past, a family would deal with three social workers, each with a different speciality. Now, one caseworker deals with all of a family's needs, and each caseworker handles fewer cases.

A survey of 717 recipients in the target group found lack of child care was the primary obstacle to work, followed by transportation problems and medical problems. As a result, Project Zero has focused on child care and transportation issues.

For example, many jobs available to people coming off of welfare fall outside of the traditional eight-to-five workday when there is a lack of adequate child care available. The FIP contracted with the Campfire Boys and Girls in one county to develop child care for nontraditional hours. The program has been so successful, that other child care providers have launched similar programs to compete.

And while transportation problems differ from place to place—"in the rural areas, there's no transportation, and in the city people are afraid to wait at the bus stops"—transportation is a problem everywhere. As a result, the Salvation Army has developed nontraditional transportation programs. Noting that the state has closed a number of mental health institutions, Krugel says "they all had 9- and 15-passenger vehicles. Now we have them, and we use them to get people to work."

The mentoring program is designed to provide support for former welfare recipients and their families. Project Zero has awarded two contracts for mentoring programs, one for \$375,000 to the Salvation Army and one for \$100,000 to Good Samaritan Ministries, an ecumenical organization in Ottawa County.

Snippe, of the Department of Human Services, says "Getting a job is the easiest part of it in Ottawa County." Project Zero focuses on transportation, child care, and family support from faith-based organizations to help enable a welfare recipient to keep a job. "We provide 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week transportation for the first six weeks on a job...That gives people time to find a regular arrangement. We get a written agreement from three child-care providers—a

primary provider, a back-up provider, and someone who can take care of a child when he or she is sick. That way there are no surprises when someone calls and says 'I need you to take care of my child today.'"

The family adoption plan is modeled on the congregation-based program used to resettle Indochinese refugees after the Vietnam War. Then, a congregation, working with a national immigration organization (most were religious organizations), would "adopt" a family and help them find a home, a job, and the services necessary to get established. Under Project Zero, the hope is that when a former welfare family faces another crisis, it will turn to its congregational sponsor for help instead of turning to public assistance.

Good Samaritan is the founding organization of a national network called Love, Inc., which stands for "Love In the Name of Christ." On March 17, 1997, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that part of the Good Samaritan training manual for church members gave specific advice about using the Project Zero contact to bring people to Christ. The *Journal* said that Good Samaritan officials pulled the section from the manual after being questioned about it, but Snippe says he had already ordered the section removed. "We understand that if someone asks a church member why they're helping them without getting anything out of it that the church member will talk about their faith and invite the person to join. If they join, fine. If they don't, we expect the church to accept that. We know that the churches want to help the poor and to evangelize. We want them to help for helping's sake." Snippe has referred about 25 percent of Project Zero families, about 100, to Good Samaritan.

Overall, state officials are happy with the program. Governor Engler says, "Project Zero is helping welfare recipients join the economic mainstream." A report issued in March 1997, found that 54 percent of targeted clients in the six Project Zero counties had earned income, compared with 37 percent in the rest of the state.

Maryland

Maryland has seen both more contention and

Faith-Based Social Services

more cooperation than most other states over the issue of creating new partnerships with faith-based organizations. At the heart of the discussion are three congregation-based organizations affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the community organizing group founded by the late Saul Alinsky.

Interfaith organizations bring together congregations from different denominations to focus on problems in a particular city or neighborhood. The oldest and strongest IAF-affiliated group in Maryland is Baltimoreans United for Leadership Development (BUILD). A newer group in Prince Georges County and a fledgling group in Montgomery County work with BUILD on statewide issues.

One such issue is the state's new welfare law. The law provides that in certain situations—when a welfare mother has another baby after being on welfare for 10 months, or when a parent fails to meet drug or job requirements—a third party will administer benefits for the family. The state legislature anticipated that faith-based organizations would play this third-party role.

But the IAF groups mobilized 250 active congregations to refuse to act as third parties, and a state human services worker says recruiting churches has been “a hard sell.” Sister Jo Ann Villademoros, social justice minister at Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church in Potomac and a leader of the Montgomery County IAF group, says the state's religious leaders were not consulted about the third party provision before it was passed. She says the provision would make congregations the state's enforcement arm: “We don't relate to people in that punitive way.”

At the same time, however, the IAF groups have responded to welfare reform in a different way: by pressuring government and employers to prevent employers from cutting their payrolls by replacing present workers with former welfare recipients whose salaries are subsidized with public funds.

At a meeting with some 300 IAF members last May, Maryland Gov. Parris N. Glendening (D) agreed to issue an executive order barring employers from hiring taxpayer-subsidized welfare recipients to replace workers already on the job. This made Maryland the first state to explicitly

forbid employers to use workfare, tax credits, and other welfare reform incentives as tools to cut payroll costs. “It doesn't do us any good to talk about declining welfare rolls if we are forcing other people into unemployment,” Glendening said. “Our intention is to state very clearly: It's illegal, it's against the policy of the state of Maryland, and it is immoral.”

Despite the IAF opposition, a number of religious congregations have become third parties working with welfare recipients and the state Department of Human Services. “The faith community has been very forthright about what it can and cannot do,” says Susan Seling, acting director of the state's Office of Adult and Family Services. “Many don't want to be simply check writers. They want to become more involved with the family unit to provide support.” Congregations and state lawyers also had to work out some concerns about liability in family involvement, she says.

Maryland is working with the faith community in two other areas related to welfare reform:

- The state consulted with representatives of more than 60 community organizations “from Planned Parenthood to the Catholic Conference” to develop its plan for preventing out-of-wedlock births. The plan is also designed “to improve outcomes for the children who are born to single parents.”
- The state brought representatives of the faith community and leaders in fighting domestic violence as part of its “domestic violence option” under the 1996 welfare law. Under the program, the state screens for victims of domestic violence among new applicants for benefits. Many women apply for welfare because they are fleeing domestic violence and they need help dealing with that before they can go to work. She says the faith community learned about the nature of domestic violence and the fact that “these women are dying.” This was important because some churches still counsel abuse victims to stay with their husbands no matter what, and “that's just not an option in a number of cases.” At the same

time, the domestic abuse professionals came to appreciate that religious counseling can be very valuable, particularly for women who will only turn to their church for help.

Texas

In Texas, both the Republican governor and Democratic state comptroller have created programs focusing on increased use of faith-based social services. Gov. George Bush, Jr., has issued an executive order calling on state agencies to make greater use of faith-based social service providers and introduced legislation to make some changes favorable to the groups. John Sharp, the state comptroller, has created the Family Pathfinders program, a mentoring program partly inspired by Mississippi's Faith and Families and similar to Project Zero in Michigan.

Bush appointed a 16-member task force, with heavy representation from faith-based providers, to recommend ways to expand the relationship between government and faith-based groups. In December 1996, he issued an executive order urging state agencies to use the "charitable choice" provision in the federal welfare reform bill that gives states the option of using private and religious charities for welfare services. Through charitable choice, Bush said, welfare recipients could receive vouchers redeemable at their choice of state or private providers for services such as child care or job training.

Bush said, "Government should welcome the help of faith-based institutions. Church and state should work together with respect for our differences and reverence for our shared goals...The state should not be so process-oriented that it stifles good programs that produce results. As long as basic health and safety standards are being met, then faith-based organizations should be given the chance to make a difference."

Among the other recommendations that Bush asked the Texas legislature to consider are:

- Allowing faith-based groups to be accredited and regulated by respected non-government organizations whose standards meet or exceed state licensing standards.

- Exempting from state regulation all faith-based chemical and alcohol rehab centers that offer nonmedical treatment such as counseling and prayer.
- Allowing more spiritually-based programs at state prisons, as well as privately-run faith-based correctional facilities aimed at rehabilitation and responsibility through redemption.
- Clarifying Texas law to provide specific litigation immunity to medical professionals who work with charities or faith-based groups to provide free care to needy Texans.

Inner Change

In December 1996, the Sugar Land Jester II minimum security prison in Houston became the first prison in the country to turn its prerelease program over to a faith-based organization. The prison's board of directors unanimously approved a proposal by Prison Fellowship, founded by Charles Colson, to run the program for up to 200 inmates. Board member and former board chairman Carol Vance, a former Harris County district attorney, brought the proposal to the board.

The program, known as Inner Change, combines counseling for inmates with restitution for victims. It is modeled on a program Prison Fellowship has run in more than 80 prisons in Brazil over the past 20 years. Inmates in that program have a recidivism rate of only 5 percent, compared with almost 50 percent in Texas.

Raymond Roberts, director of the program describes it as "a Christ-centered values-based prerelease program to support inmates through their spiritual and moral transformation." The Texas Department of Criminal Justice will not pay for the program. Prison Fellowship and Houston area churches are responsible for the estimated \$1.5 million a year budget.

The program is voluntary and open to non-Christians, although the content includes Christian Bible study. The program will cover an inmate's last 18 months in prison and first six months in the community. Roberts says the daily program includes teaching "life skills," such as

how to build self esteem, control anger, and relate to other people. It also includes counseling to enable inmates “to embrace the painful issues in their past and let them go.”

The program began operation in April 1997 with about 40 inmates volunteering to join the program. Ten withdrew of their own accord and one was asked to leave. One inmate in the program is a Muslim and the rest are Christians, mostly Protestants, Roberts says. The program will serve 100 inmates by the end of its first year and 200 by the end of its second year.

Nationally, Prison Fellowship’s ministry programs serve 200,000 inmates in 90 percent of U.S. prisons. Prison Fellowship has 280 employees and 46,000 volunteers.

Family Pathfinders

John Sharp, the Texas comptroller of public accounts, launched the Family Pathfinders program as a follow-up to extensive welfare reform legislation that Sharp helped to write. Sharp based Family Pathfinders on Mississippi’s Faith and Families program. Brother Richard Daly, director of the Texas Catholic Conference, says Sharp was also influenced by conversations with Bishop John McCarthy of Austin about Parish Social Ministry, which involves Catholic parishes in the surrounding community. McCarthy chairs the Family Pathfinders advisory council.

There are more people on welfare in Texas (561,000) than in Mississippi, though they make up a small percentage of the state’s much greater population. Sharp sees Pathfinders as a follow-up to the Work First program: welfare recipients with at least a ninth-grade education and no children under age three must take part in a five-week program of training in interview skills, resume writing, personal appearance, and other job-related skills. For the last four weeks of the program, they attend seminars and must apply for at least 10 jobs each week.

Family Pathfinders focuses on people in Work First because “the clock has started ticking for them” in terms of a benefit cut-off, says Ronnie McDonald, Pathfinders’ assistant director.

Sharp says, “Family Pathfinders links Texans receiving public assistance with a wide range of civic clubs, congregations, and corporations.

These groups have a unique ability to supplement state aid with the kind of one-on-one, personalized help no government can provide. It complements the work these groups already do by helping them target specific families on public assistance and focus on their immediate goals. And it underscores the fact that a sound family structure is at the heart of real welfare reform.”

“We ask organizations to come up with five or six people who are assigned to one person who is desperately trying to get off welfare,” Sharp says.

Volunteers can help people find child care, housing, transportation, or a job; help with parenting and budgeting skills; and, according to Sharp, be “a friend to talk things over with.”

McDonald says the program has two purposes, helping mothers and educating the community about welfare. The goal is to connect 1,000 people with Pathfinder organizations over three years. So far, more than 140 agencies in 77 communities have become involved; of which approximately 70 percent are religious organizations. The Lions Club is the most active community organization. The program had trained 1,262 volunteers by early 1997; the training program lasts four hours. Family Pathfinders asks organizations for a one-year commitment so that they can help people after they get a job.

Family Pathfinders has no independent budget; it is run out of the comptroller’s office, which cooperates with the state’s Department of Human Services and Workforce Commission.

Colorado

Much of the increased public involvement of religious organizations in Colorado relates directly or indirectly to Gov. Roy Romer’s efforts to focus the state’s attention on the needs of children. Romer’s efforts involve new government programs and additional funding, but Romer has also forged new partnerships between government and other sectors of the community on a number of issues designed to help children.

Bright Beginnings

The best example of this approach is Colorado’s Bright Beginnings, a nonpartisan, non-govern-

ment program to focus resources on children from birth to age three. Romer co-chairs Bright Beginnings with Brad Butler, the retired chairman of the board of Proctor & Gamble. The program's budget comes from corporations, foundations, and individual donors and receives no government money.

Among Bright Beginnings' stated goals are:

- to assure that every child born in Colorado has access to affordable and high quality health care, including appropriate immunizations;
- to ensure that every child born in Colorado is born to a mother who has received appropriate prenatal care;
- to expand access to affordable and developmentally appropriate infant and child care for every parent;
- to promote child- and parent-friendly work places so that parents can balance work and family responsibilities.

The program's first priority is "Warm Welcome," with the goal of eventually welcoming every new-born child in Colorado with a team of people who can put its family in touch with any public or private resources needed to get the child off to a healthy start. The idea is based, in part, on a practice in England.

Seth Grob, former director and now a consultant to Bright Begginings, says religious organizations and other community groups are part of the program. "Religious groups are recruiting parishes, getting parents to sign up, and donating gifts."

Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Mormon congregations participate in the program. "A few churches saw this as an opportunity to proselytize and were rejected," he says, "but they were few and far between."

In its first year, 1996, Bright Beginnings trained 250 volunteers who visited 1,000 families in 28 counties. The program's goal is to visit 5,000 families in 1997. Bright Beginnings is behind schedule on visits, with only 700 during the first quarter of the year, but the program is now ahead of schedule in training volunteers and will

probably meet its goal.

Volunteers check to see that babies get the necessary immunizations during their first year. So far, volunteers have referred 15 percent to 20 percent of families to community resources.

Diana Romero Campbell, who runs Warm Welcome, says religious involvement varies across the 13 sites statewide. She estimates that about 20 percent of the presentations the program makes to community groups are to religious groups that then provide about 20 percent of the volunteers and about 30 percent of the gifts donated for newborns. Campbell says Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches are the most active.

Among nonreligious community organizations, the Junior League is very active; other active groups include the Optimists Club, Kiwanis, and United Way.

Bright Beginnings is a spin-off of the Colorado Campaign for Children, composed of religious groups, business groups, service clubs, and other community organizations. The campaign draws attention to children's issues, trains volunteers as children's advocates, and supports "child-friendly" legislation.

The Colorado Covenant with Children

The Colorado Council of Churches launched the Covenant to "meet the physical, moral, and spiritual needs of children and families by the year 2000." The Rev. Lucia Guzman, director of the Council of Churches, says the council chose the word "covenant" because of its use in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions, and the Covenant is reaching out to all 7,000 congregations in Colorado.

The Covenant urges congregations to become advocates for children and to publicize, expand, or create programs for children. In August 1996, the Covenant distributed a listing of the known faith-based programs for children in 14 communities across Colorado. Programs described included education, shelters for abuse victims, violence prevention, housing, and substance abuse treatment.

Governor Romer and his wife serve on the Covenant's host committee, and the governor's

office distributes copies of the program listing.

Guzman says, "Some foundations who have not funded religion in the past have given money to the Covenant because they see the faith community having an opportunity to become once again an integral component of the wellbeing of the community."

Virginia

Gov. George Allen, Jr. (R-Va.) launched a campaign to recruit the state's religious community to help implement welfare reform at a summit attended by 400 people in September 1995. The initial reaction was cool. In the politically charged climate of the debate over federal welfare reform, many of Virginia's religious leaders saw Allen's effort as an attempt to dump government's responsibilities on the churches.

The religious community's response was much more enthusiastic, however, as communities across the state began to address welfare reform. Virginia's Department of Social Services (DSS) laid out a detailed plan for each of its 124 branches to involve local government, businesses, religious organizations, and other community groups in an organized effort to provide jobs and support to able-bodied welfare recipients.

Dee Dee Damschroeder, Virginia's community resource coordinator, says every area of the state will have launched such a process by the end of 1997. "Faith-based groups are involved in almost all of them, although there's a wide difference in depth of involvement."

According to Damschroeder, the state didn't offer one blueprint for every community, but asked each community to assess its own needs and develop its own plan. She began by training DSS workers in the do's and don'ts of working with volunteers. For example, she says, "We have to begin by celebrating that we recognize how much they've already done. That's basic volunteer management."

Damschroeder urges communities to involve as many groups as possible; a manual tells orga-

nizers to ask everyone they invite to recommend someone else to invite. These community steering committees are also nonpartisan because "the problems are nonpartisan," she says.

The program emphasizes community mentoring of welfare recipients, but also stresses planning and assessment. Damschroeder notes that more than 100 churches in Fauquier County in Northern Virginia became part of a community steering committee and mentoring program. But as the committee studied available services in the county, they found no shelter for abused women and children. They worked together to open Ester House, a transitional home for abused women and children.

In Fairfax County, Community Ministry is organizing teams of mentors—three-to-five per welfare family—to help the families become self-sufficient. Community Ministry commits to work with each family for two years and asks mentors to commit to one year of volunteering.

Scott Oostdyk, deputy secretary of Virginia's Department of Health and Human Resources, sees this community outreach as a major part of welfare reform. Thanks in part to a booming state economy, Oostdyk says Virginia cut the welfare rolls by 30 percent, saved tens of millions of dollars, and targeted additional resources to people still on welfare.

He also studied the role the federal welfare law's charitable choice provision could play in Virginia, but concluded that additional direct contracts would not help in the short run. In the long run, he says, there may be some cooperation with faith-based substance abuse treatment providers.

But he says the provision doesn't have much impact on the kind of mainline religious providers who have had government contracts in the past. The main thing the provision does is encourage evangelical Christian groups who have not contracted with government before to do so. But, "a lot of evangelicals still don't want to have anything to do with government, and those that are new to hands-on work need time to gear up."

III. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

As often happens in American public life, an idea, once taken seriously, develops in ways its originators did not expect. Such is the case with the push for greater use of faith-based social services.

Many conservatives have made unwarranted claims about the capacity of faith-based institutions to provide social services. They began with a great deal of theory, very little experience, and a number of biases that led them astray:

- Government is beyond redemption and should be used as little as possible.
- The mainline religious community with its long history of providing social services, often in cooperation with government, is a pawn of government.
- The religious community is unsullied by contact with the outside world, but has almost magical answers to poverty and other social ills.
- People are poor because they lack faith.

With this flawed beginning, conservatives issued a series of papers and detailed policy recommendations designed to radically change

America's funding of social services and even its tax system. The Republican Congress passed the Charitable Choice provision in the 1996 welfare law. Conservatives who long warned of the "unintended consequences" of liberal policies offered wave after wave of radical change based only on their own assumptions.

Some conservatives envisioned a system in which a shrinking government would turn responsibility for the poor—sometimes with government funds, sometimes without—over to the churches who would end poverty by bringing people to Christ. That hasn't happened, and it isn't going to happen.

The experience of the states examined here—states run by both political parties across a wide ideological spectrum—refutes the conservatives' basic assumptions:

1. People are not poor because of a lack of faith; they are poor for a variety of reasons including a lack of jobs, good work habits, or the support—child care, transportation, health care—that enables them to get and keep jobs. Even when a weakened work ethic or emotional issues are factors in holding people back, faith is not a magic cure. On an individual level, faith can move mountains, but

faith is not something that people can give to or force upon one another. Faith is not a magic solution to social problems. To the degree that faith-based groups emphasize personal responsibility and related virtues, they only emphasize the civic virtues all Americans profess. In every part of America, faith creates communities of people who believe they have a responsibility to help others, and that help may take many different forms. What is important, as Michigan's Loren Snippe points out, is that "they help for helping's sake."

2. The religious community is not and does not want to be isolated from the rest of the community. Countless examples of cooperation already exist, with enormous potential for more to emerge. Integrating faith-based providers as part of a community-wide response affirms both the community and all its members. Being a partner can mean a formal, even financial, relationship, or it can mean working independently toward explicitly shared goals.
3. Mainline religious groups often maligned by conservatives are the most prominent religious groups involved in new partnerships.
4. The Charitable Choice provision seems likely to have only a marginal impact. It does almost nothing for religious groups who have already worked with government and serves primarily as an invitation to Evangelical Christian groups to become more involved. But many Evangelicals—such as the leadership of the International Union of Gospel Missions—still want nothing to do with government. And Evangelical churches looking to get involved for the first time need time to develop expertise and resources.
5. Welfare reform at both the federal and state levels has sparked the religious community, business, and the rest of the nonprofit sector to join with government in implementing welfare reform. Many of these groups were on opposite sides of key provisions and will be again, but they all work together to deal with the *fait accompli* of the new welfare law.

6. Poverty does not have a one-size-fits-all solution, whether it comes from government or conservative think tanks. Communities must analyze their own needs and build on their own strengths.
7. And, finally, energizing faith-based organizations does not replace government, it energizes government as well. When new community-wide partnerships tackle problems, they not only break down walls between the community and welfare recipients, they break down walls between the community and government. Officials in Michigan and Virginia, for example, note that social workers have been liberated by new approaches that allow them to deal more directly and creatively with clients.

The new community partnerships emerging today do not point toward any major specific policy changes. As communities have more experience and patterns emerge, such policy changes may become clear. The major change taking place today is a change in culture. More and more Americans of all political persuasions are realizing that government and the other sectors of society, including religious institutions, cannot get along without one another if the nation is to reduce poverty and increase self-sufficiency. The confluence of developments which can be described under the umbrella of "welfare reform" has gotten Americans working together across political lines. The most important step right now is to endorse and encourage these conversations and the solutions they create.

While each state and each community must address its own situation, the experience of new partnerships so far suggests a number of common sense recommendations that can be useful to policy makers across the country.

- **Be realistic.** Faith-based social services are a blessing, not a miracle. No one should look to faith-based social service providers for a magic cure to poverty and other social problems. Claiming that they can replace all or a major part of the government safety net raises false expectations and creates resentment among religious organizations.

- **Build partnerships based on mutual respect.** Do your homework; consult; invite; unite, don't divide. Involving faith-based providers demands more tact, not less.
- **Protect religious freedom.** No inherent conflict exists between religious freedom and greater involvement of faith-based providers in community partnerships. Americans should never feel their religious freedom threatened by government, and faith-based providers must never make services depend upon a faith commitment.
- **Train and prepare staff, volunteers, and welfare families.** Mentoring programs for welfare families are popular, but they work best when everyone understands their roles and has clear rules of behavior. Communities must create safeguards so that no volunteer abuses a client and no client abuses a volunteer.
- **Assess, plan, target.** One of the most hopeful signs in new community partnerships is the degree to which communities assess their needs, set priorities, and marshal resources around those priorities.
- **Use common sense in regulation.** Many new partnerships, such as the mentoring programs of Colorado's Warm Welcome, aren't subject to government regulations. But questions raised by providers about regulations have merit. Some issues, such as the cost of unnecessary regulations, affect all small providers. Others involve specifically religious issues.

The massive changes created by the welfare law require that the nation create a new employment system that supports welfare recipients who move up the ladder of work. Creating a work-based system to support all low-wage workers requires that we mobilize all of our community's resources. This is too big a job for government alone. The civic and religious institutions in our communities are assets that can contribute to the transformation of the old welfare system into a new employment system. Religious institutions are already playing a large part in the effort, and can play an even larger role if we overcome ideological prejudices on the left and right of the debate.

About the Author

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