



## **Faith in Communities: A Solid Investment**

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"FBOs" -- faith-based organizations -- are hot. Politicians, religious leaders, and media talking heads have all weighed in on President George W. Bush's ambitious "faith-based initiative." This public discussion is useful, for the faith community has long been a major contributor in the national effort to fight poverty and rejuvenate distressed communities, but its role has frequently been neglected. The issue of the faith community's proper place in public square is not only hot, but controversial.

Supporters of the Bush initiative assert that FBOs can do a better job than government agencies in curing some of the nation's social ills, such as drug abuse or teen pregnancy. Citing evidence indicating that FBOs are discriminated against or otherwise hindered by government policies, they are demanding reforms. They assert that FBOs often provide a disproportionate amount of social services, compared to the amount of government funding they garner. New public investment strategies should, in their view, be advanced to address this disparity. Many applaud the "charitable choice" guidelines, new rules attached to four federal social welfare programs since 1996, that seek to protect the religious character of FBOs doing business with government. They desire to see these "faith friendly" guidelines attached to other federal programs that underwrite such activities as housing for the low-income elderly and education for at-risk youth. Other supporters worry about direct government funding of FBOs through contracts, but in general do favor strategies aimed at directing greater public and private resources to faith-based "outposts of health and healing" (for example, through changes in the tax code).

Critics charge that the faith-based initiative is misguided. Some worry that charitable choice breaches the separation of church and state. Others believe publicly funded FBOs should not be allowed-as charitable choice permits-to discriminate in their hiring on the basis of religion. Still others contend that congregations and faith-based nonprofits will suffer from excessive government entanglement under charitable choice. Some fear a secularization of FBOs' work on the frontlines if FBOs take government money. Supporters and critics both make valid points. But much of their discussion has been "Beltway-centric": too focused on the legislative fortunes of the Bush administration's faith-based initiative on Capitol Hill and neglectful of what is actually happening, "on the streets," across America. A look outside of Washington, away from the political discussions, sheds much-needed light on the issue of faith-based social action. It offers a compelling case for greater investment in "faith in communities" as well as important insights about how to construct government-faith collaboration in ways protective of FBOs and fruitful for the disadvantaged citizens they serve.

### **Scope and Scale of Faith-Based Social Action**

The first observation "from the ground up" that can move the discussion to a more productive level is simply this: faith communities are making an enormous contribution in assisting needy families and bettering distressed neighborhoods.

The best current data we have concerning the community outreach activities of religious congregations comes from the Hartford Seminary Faith Communities Today survey (<http://www.fact.hartsem.edu>). A massive undertaking, the survey examined 14,000 congregations of diverse faith groups (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and others). The survey revealed that 85 percent of these congregations provide at least one community service. Most common are relief/benevolence activities: providing food, money, clothing or emergency shelter. But many congregations are involved in much more extensive social service efforts. Over half of the congregations are engaged in providing health care services and one-third are involved in tutoring children, ministering in prisons, offering substance-abuse programs, or providing housing for the elderly.

The Hartford study's finding more or less accord with those of a slightly less ambitious survey by Ram Cnaan of the University of Pennsylvania. Cnaan's data suggests even more congregations are active in community outreach. His study estimates that 92 percent offer at least one social service. He also estimates that one-third of all day-care programs in America are housed in religious buildings and that congregations spend some \$36 billion annually on social services.

There have been fewer studies on the contributions made by faith-based nonprofit organizations. In 1985, the Council on Foundations published a study indicating that faith-based nonprofits spent between \$7.5 and \$8 billion annually on social services – not including religious hospitals, orphanages, or adoption agencies. A 1998 study by researchers at the Aspen Institute estimated that, combined, religious congregations, national networks, and freestanding organizations spend between \$15 billion and \$20 billion a year on social services. The same study indicated that in 1994 contributions to the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities USA, Jewish Federations, YMCA, International Union of Gospel Missions, and Christian Social Service Agencies totaled \$1.7 billion.

Also available is anecdotal evidence that the sheer number of faith-based nonprofits committed to serving broken families and broken places has been increasing over the last decade. The National Congress of Community Economic Development Corporations (NCCED), for example, has seen steady growth in membership of faith-based community development corporations. Twelve years ago, the Christian Community Development Association began with 35 member organizations. Today, it boasts over 400.

Moreover, based on about five years of poking around in distressed urban communities throughout America. I have discovered that there are many small but active faith-based organizations completely "under the radar screen" that do not register in formal counts of religious social service agencies. I am not alone in this experience. Professor Michael

Mata of the Urban Leadership Institute at Claremont reports two recent experiences with professional agencies hired to do community asset-mapping in low-income Los Angeles neighborhoods. In the first instance, the agency failed to identify 21 FBOs that existed in the community. In the second, Mata lamented the firm totally missed the churches. His organization identified nearly 100 congregations and FBOs in that community.

Clearly, between the programs and resources offered by congregations and religious nonprofits, hundreds of thousands of disadvantaged citizens are being served every year. These services are being conducted both by large, well-known groups, such as Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army, and by tiny and mid-sized faith-based groups. Any constructive public engagement with the faith sector should be premised on an appreciation of the role FBOs and congregations are already playing as well as clarity about the diversity of groups active on the front lines.

### **Does It Work?**

The second observation helpful to the debate about the role of FBOs is that there is considerable anecdotal evidence, as well as a small, but growing, body of empirical research, as to their effectiveness. The anecdotal evidence has been sketched out by a wide number of observers and scholars; a literature review of much of this work is available in my book, *Reinvigorating Faith in Communities*. This data includes book-length studies of individual congregations, such as *Upon This Rock: The Miracles of a Black Church* by Samuel Freedman and Howard Edington's *Downtown Church: The Heart of the City*. A number of more recent books – *Churches That Make a Difference* by Ronald J. Sider et. al., Robert Woodson's *The Triumphs of Joseph*, my *Restorers of Hope*, Nile Harper's *Urban Churches, Vital Signs*, and Carle and DeCaro's *Signs of Hope in the City: Ministries of Community Renewal* – provide detailed portraits of the community outreach efforts of many diverse congregations. Articles published in various religious periodicals (e.g., *Christianity Today*, *The Christian Century*, *Prism*), secular magazines such as *Newsweek*, *The American Enterprise*, *Philanthropy*, *Reason*, and *Policy Review*, and a host of newspapers, have highlighted the successful work of faith-based nonprofits engaged in everything from rehabilitating prisoners and wooing kids out of gangs to mentoring welfare recipients and fixing broken inner-city schools.

One faith-based program highlighted in a number of media accounts is the National Jobs Partnership. This organization operates job training and mentoring programs in over twenty U.S. cities and boasts an 83 percent job retention rate among its 1100 graduates – many of whom are former welfare recipients and most of whom faced multiple barriers to employment, such as homelessness, a criminal record, or substance abuse issues. This compares very favorably with job retention rates achieved by government programs. For example, a study of job retention rates of 1,836 welfare recipients in job training programs in four cities (Chicago, Portland, Riverside, and San Antonio) revealed that just over 39 percent retained their jobs one year following the training program. Another reasonable comparison of the Jobs Partnership's achievements is with the job retention rates reported among individuals that have exited the welfare rolls under various state welfare reform programs. In state-sponsored "leaver" studies examining how welfare-to-

work clients are faring, New York reported 50 percent job retention rate for its clients; Arizona, 53 percent; and Wisconsin, 68 percent. The Urban Institute's estimates are more optimistic; nationwide, they estimate employment among welfare "leavers" at 64 percent. Clearly, none of these comes close to the Jobs Partnership's 83 percent job retention rate.

As for empirical studies, the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society (CRRUCS), directed by John Dillulio, is the leading organization. CRRUCS has published several important studies in the past two years. One examines the role played by African-American churches in reducing deviance among inner-city youth and concludes (in layman's language) that black kids who live in dysfunctional neighborhoods are less likely to get involved in crime if they go to church. A second CRRUCS study demonstrated that black inner-city kids who are involved in religious activities are less likely to take illicit drugs. Importantly, the student also found that these "churched" inner-city kids were less likely than non-religious, better-off suburban kids to be using drugs. Both studies cite a few other scholarly inquiries on related questions, but lament the general dearth of attention to the "faith factor" in academic research. A third CRRUCS study examined the influence of religious engagement on inner-city youth's school performance, and found that religious involvement aids the resiliency of such teens. That is, involvement by inner-city adolescents in churches is much more likely to contribute positively to their academic progress than is involvement in religious activities by wealthier suburban kids. Attending church, the researcher found, helps teens to stay on track in school and assists them in improving their educational status.

Several empirical studies have evaluated the work of Prison Fellowship, a national faith-based ministry launched by former Nixon White House official, Chuck Colson. Prison Fellowship was founded 25 years ago to equip churches in reaching out to prisoners and their families and to promote biblical standards of justice in the criminal justice system. A 1996 study by the Center for Social Research considered the impact of prisoners' participation in Prison Fellowship activities on their likelihood of incurring prison infractions. At the Lieber Prison in South Carolina, 19 percent of the inmates had participated in Prison Fellowship activities. Less than 10 percent of these inmates incurred prison infractions, compared to over 23 percent of inmates who had not participated.

Perhaps more important are the recidivism studies that have been conducted. A 1997 NIH study found that former inmates in New York state that had participated in Prison Fellowship Bible Studies were nearly three times less likely to be re-arrested during the 12 months following their release than were a comparable group of inmates who had not attend Prison Fellowship programs. The so-called "Loyola Study" of Prison Fellowship (1995) tracked recidivism data over an 8-14 year follow-up period for 180 graduates of the Prison Fellowship Washington Discipleship Seminar, matched against a comparison group of 185 inmates who did not attend the seminar. Seminar graduates had lower rates of recidivism than did the control group. Among women the findings were particularly impressive: 19 percent of the Prison Fellowship attendees recidivated, compared to 47 percent of the control group women. For men, the comparison was 45 percent for Prison Fellowship graduates versus 52 percent for the control group.

A handful of studies have also been conducted on the effectiveness of Teen Challenge, a faith-based drug rehabilitation program. An early study (1976) by the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that an astonishing 86 percent of Teen Challenge graduates remained drug free seven years after their graduation from the program. This compared to a success rate in the single digits for government-run, secular programs. A follow-up study in 1994 surveyed alumni of Teen Challenge over a 13-year period and documented again very high numbers of graduates who had remained drug free. Even though 72 percent of the participants in the study had failed in other drug rehabilitation programs before entering Teen Challenge, 67 percent of those who graduated were continuing to abstain from drug and alcohol use. The most recent assessment of the ministry was conducted by a Northwestern University Ph.D. candidate. His dissertation showed that 86 percent of those who complete the Teen Challenge program have remained drug free and that nearly all had escaped the "revolving door phenomenon" of substance abuse treatment.

The anecdotal and limited empirical evidence give plausibility to the idea that some faith-based approaches do indeed work well, though additional rigorous empirical studies are needed before any broad-ranging claims about the superiority of faith-based approaches over others can be justified. After all, in Dillulio's witticism, the plural of anecdote does not equal data. Nonetheless, a body of evidence suggesting the power of FBOs appears to be gradually accumulating.

### **Why Does it Work?**

To the extent we have some reason to believe that faith-based approaches are effective, the next logical question is, why? The easy sound bite here, of course, is: "They work because of the faith." That is, they get people "right with God" and this aids in producing positive social outcomes. This is a very important and often fully accurate statement; indeed, it is frequently the main point made by clients of faith-based programs who have achieved some measure of success (e.g., gotten clean from drugs, stayed out of prison, remained chaste, started working).

Many clients report that they used to "drift," and the faith-based program gave them a moral anchor—some signposts and objective standards of right and wrong to live by. Or they say that they had failed in other programs because they felt unloved and hopeless, but that their participation in the faith-based ministry connected them to a real and loving God, and they began drawing great hope from their newfound spiritual relationship. Or they report that they found power to change through prayer. Or they point to a decisive, supernatural intervention that brought change (such as clients of Victory Fellowship's drug rehabilitation program who, through the power of prayer, came clean from drugs "cold turkey" with no withdrawal symptoms).

All these may be statements that make social science researchers a bit uncomfortable, but these are the very things reported by many successful clients themselves. Clearly, for

many participants in religiously affiliated initiatives, the program worked because it brought them into a faith that decisively changed their lifestyle for the better.

But this answer -- faith-based programs work because of the faith -- while true and important, is also incomplete. This is because some clients of faith-based programs are *already* people of faith. They do not experience a religious conversion through their participation in the program, because they already are religious believers. Thus, they cannot say that conversion led to lifestyle changes that produced new health. According to many of these clients, two other important characteristics of faith-based programs contributed to their success. For some, the FBO trained them in the practical application of their faith, influencing their development of new strategies for overcoming their obstacles. For others, participation in the FBO connected them with a supportive community of faith from which they drew emotional and practical support and which legitimized their striving for a better life.

Client interviews reveal a number of other important key characteristics of the faith-based organizations that helped them to achieve success. *Accessibility* is one--the program was located in their neighborhood and was operated by people who were available "24-7-365." This made their participation easier and they found that they could get help when they needed it -- even if it was "after business hours." *Trust* is another factor mentioned: these clients engaged more thoroughly with the helpers they found at the FBO, because they trusted those helpers more than they did staff at government agencies. *Individuality* is still another--that is, clients testified that the FBO, unlike other agencies, did not treat them like a number. They experienced a "personal touch" at the FBO that they appreciated, and that often motivated them to remain engaged in the program, whereas they had dropped out of other programs run by different agencies that felt less friendly and more bureaucratic. Relatedly, clients said the faith-based programs were *flexible* -- they felt that their individual problems had been examined and that a personalized action plan had been constructed. They succeeded because they were not forced into a one-size-fits-all program.

Outside observers of faith-based programs -- Marvin Olasky, Robert Woodson, Barbara Elliott, Ron Sider, Carl Dudley, and others -- have offered additional insights as to why faith-based programs work. One is that faith-based programs work because they rely on volunteers. Program participants feel more loved, supported, and inspired, because they know those who are helping them are not getting paid to do it. This motivates them to stick with the program, whereas in other situations, they quit. Another is that such programs work because they hold participants accountable for giving back--they make demands on program participants, and these demands enhance the dignity of those being served. This approach causes program clients to look at themselves in a new, more positive way, since others are telling them that they really do have a contribution to make; they really do have gifts to offer.

A third is the "being there" thesis: faith-based organizations succeed because they are present. The physical, constant presence of the FBO and its staff and/or volunteers in the community enables a level of engagement with local kids and families that can

effectively compete with the constant negative presence of the drug dealers and the gangbangers. Being there is an irreducible part of winning the battle for safer streets in urban America. An article in *Newsweek* (June 1, 1999) about Rev. Eugene Rivers, leader of a Christian community development ministry in Boston that targets urban at-risk youth and gang members, related the following story about when Rivers first moved into the neighborhood:

Rivers sought out a local drug dealer and gangbanger named Selvin Brown-"a sassy, smartass, tough-talking, gunslinging mother shut your mouth," he says, not without some appreciation. Brown took the Reverend into crackhouses, introduced him to the neighborhood. And he gave Rivers, a Pentecostal, a lesson in why God was losing to gangs in the battle for the souls of inner-city kids. "Selvin explained to us, 'I'm there when Johnny goes out for a loaf of bread for Mama. I'm there, you're not. I win, you lose. It's all about being there.' "

Finally, other observers and I assert that faith-based programs work because they are holistic they seek to find ways to meet clients' wide-ranging needs, including those that might not initially seem to be relevant to the particular program at hand. For example, an FBO might help a woman in its job-training program to kick out an abusive boyfriend or deal with a crack-addicted sibling who constantly expects the woman to baby-sit for her. Unless these "home front" problems are addressed, the woman may not be able to secure and retain a job. Or, the FBO offers its services to "problem people" connected to the strivers in their program. A participating client may, for example, be on a good path towards better employment and rising wages. But if there is a leeching, unemployed boyfriend in the house who's wasting the income, the woman is unlikely to move out of poverty. Suppose the boyfriend is unemployed because he cannot get into a decent training program-because the eligibility guidelines of many government programs may prohibit his enrollment. FBOs usually lack such stringent eligibility requirements. And if they are able to serve the boyfriend and help him into constructive employment or training, the impact on the woman, who has been striving hard to climb out of poverty, is substantial.

### **Creative Government-Faith Collaboration**

If all or many of these propositions as to why faith-based programs work are accurate, then the implication is that public officials should avoid implementing policies that rob FBOs of the very elements that lend them success. What should government's relationship to the faith-based social action community be?

Theoretically, a number of options are possible. One is benevolent neglect. Government would simply stay out of the way and let these groups flourish. A slightly modified version of this would be public officials simply using the bully pulpit to commend FBOs, cheer them on, and encourage private support for their efforts. A third version would be the "first do no harm" approach; assisting FBOs by identifying where government is hindering their work (perhaps through intrusive or unnecessary regulatory policy) and

refor ing harmful policies. A more engaged strategy would be the "help indirectly" position-that is, provide public support for FBOs through vouchers, charity tax credits, or tax reforms permitting more Americans to deduct charitable contributions to poverty-fighting FBOs. More aggressively, government could attempt to help FBOs directly, by expanding government funding of faith-based social service programs through grants or contracts.

Federal policy under George W. Bush has exemplified a combination approach. The president is spotlighting and cheering FBOs from the bully pulpit regularly. His White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives has conducted an audit of five major cabinet departments (Education, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, and Justice) to identify policies and rules that discriminate against or otherwise harm faith-based efforts. Initially, House Republicans pressed forward the faith-based initiative's legislative goals in H.R. 7, the Community Solutions Act.

It sought to: (1) expand the charitable choice guidelines to additional federal social welfare programs, thus opening up the possibility of increased government contracting with FBOs; (2) empower Cabinet secretaries to "voucherize" millions of dollars worth of social services; and (3) implement a charitable tax deduction for Americans who do not itemize their deductions. H.R. 7 stalled on Capitol Hill over concerns about charitable choice. Currently, the administration has devised a compromise bill with Senators Santorum and Lieberman, focused primarily on encouraging greater private investment in FBOs. The White House is also now emphasizing national volunteer service, suggesting that this will serve FBOs since at least some new volunteers will contribute their labor to faith-based ministries.

There are positive elements in the administration's new approach. Enabling citizens to gain a tax deduction for charitable contributions should stimulate increased private giving. Incorporating the use of vouchers for social programs will provide clients with more choice. But the White House appears to have capitulated too quickly in advancing its full-orbed agenda for the faith-based initiative. This seems to have come about as a result of too much of reading the inside-the-Beltway tea leaves and not enough attention to what's actually happening out in the streets as concerns government-faith community collaboration. My recent study of charitable choice implementation in 15 states found many evidences that the faith-based initiative is alive and well in communities across the nation, even if it is beleaguered in Washington, D.C.

The study revealed that states and localities are interacting in creative, constructive ways with FBOs. These new partnerships-worked out in the real world, in real communities, among real people-offer at least three lessons for policymakers interested in establishing a climate for a fruitful relationship between the faith community and government.

*First, collaborations should capitalize on the faith community's unique strengths.* The best rule of thumb for fruitful government-faith collaboration is simply this: let the churches do what they do best, and let the government do what it does best. One of the faith community's greatest assets is its people-it can mobilize caring volunteers to be



engaged in supportive relationships with struggling families. Many states and localities have recognized this; that's why there has been such an explosion of faith-based mentoring programs around the country. They exist now in approximately 25 states. Some of these programs involve non-financial collaboration with government (e.g., the Texas Family Pathfinders program (which has engaged hundreds of congregations); others involve dollars (such as several local contracts in various counties in Michigan that are underwriting mentoring initiatives). Through these initiatives, clients are receiving intensive emotional and practical support that caseworkers would never be able to offer, given their huge caseloads. The statistic noted earlier, regarding the National Jobs Partnership's impressive 83 percent job retention rate, has been achieved in large measure because of the program's strong mentoring component.

Another creative example of capitalizing on the faith community's strengths is the ACT Help Desks being used in several California cities. The Help Desks are staffed by trained volunteers drawn from local churches. The Desks are physically located in the lobby of the CalWORKS One Stop Career Centers. Volunteers are available to serve clients coming into the Centers for appointments. They can help manage the children while mom talks to the caseworkers, offer encouragement and comfort, and, if the client gets through the One Stop Center and still has unmet needs, the volunteer can refer her to a wide variety of resources in the private sector.

A third example is the way New York, Wisconsin, and Ohio have contracted with congregations to do outreach and recruitment work. In some cases, local welfare offices know that there are needy families in the community who could benefit tremendously from the various services they are eligible for-but these individuals have not formally applied for such services. Finding those "falling through the cracks" is difficult for government social workers. But congregations located in distressed communities often know who their needy neighbors are, speak their language, hold their trust, and can encourage them to get connected to services. In other cases, congregations are being asked to work with welfare clients sanctioned for noncompliance with mandatory work rules. New York City has engaged 16 FBOs, many of them congregations, in a \$6.4 million dollar demonstration project focused on this. Faith partners are given lists of clients under sanction; FBO staff then contact the individuals, assess why they are not working, refer them to training centers, and otherwise help them to lift the sanctions.

*Second, policymakers should pursue "triple win" partnerships in which clients, churches, and local government benefit.* One example here would be Illinois' Front Door initiative. This program serves two types of clients: individuals who become employed while they are waiting for their TANF (welfare) applications to be processed or people who need assistance with employment-related expenses in order to retain their jobs and avoid going back on welfare. The state Department of Human Services sends grant money to local faith partners according to a formula based on TANF applications in that church's neighborhood. Clients are referred from local DHS offices to the churches to get specific needs met-money for uniforms, for transportation, etc. The church contact meets with the client and processes the assistance for this need, and can offer the person additional aid available from the church's own benevolence programs.

The program is a win for clients because they get their pressing needs met quickly and because their contact with the church can connect them to additional resources the congregation may have to offer. It is also a win for the churches. Many want to do benevolence outreach, but are unaware of who is in need. Thus, the DHS' referral of specific clients is helpful. Other congregations are already operating benevolence programs, and the Front Door grants add to what they can make available to supplicants. The eight percent administrative overhead fee faith partners retain under the Front Door program is also helpful in keeping their good work going.

Finally, the program is a win for the local DHS office in at least two ways. Church volunteers conduct work with clients that otherwise overworked DHS social workers would have to do (thus leaving them free to concentrate energies on "harder" cases). Government also is interested in helping people to avoid re-entry onto the welfare rolls, and the program advances this objective too. Finally, program administrator Derrius Colvin reports that the Front Door initiative has created a closer working relationship between the local office and faith-based organizations and has built trust between the two parties. The partnership has given birth to additional collaboration, including new programs for senior citizens and a mentorship initiative.

*Finally, to foster fruitful government-faith community collaboration, government can pursue contracting arrangements that make possible the involvement of small and mid-sized grassroots FEGs that often are highly effective, on a modest scale, among particularly hard-to-serve clients.* Government can take several steps in this regard. First, indirect financial contracting via strategic intermediary organizations is a promising practice. Strategic intermediaries are organizations with credibility both in the eyes of the faith community (because they are known and their mission resonates with grassroots groups) and with the government (because they have the administrative capacity to account for and manage large contracts). Governments can contract with intermediaries and intermediaries can then write subcontracts with smaller FBOs—often offering technical support in addition to the funds. Second, in the absence of intermediaries, government can offer contracts in smaller denominations, suiting the administrative capacity of grassroots FBOs. Third, public officials can work hard to inform FBOs of contracting opportunities and offer training workshops teaching FBOs about proposal writing and grant management. Indiana has done these things well through Indiana Faithworks, a technical assistance agency housed within the Family and Social Services Department. Faithworks operates a toll-free information number, hosts an up-to-date web site with comprehensive information about contracting opportunities, and offers regional fund-raising seminars. Through its efforts, FBOs have garnered over \$3.5 million in state contracts. Ninety-five percent of the bidders for those contracts were FBOs that had never before received government funding.

### **The Future of FBOs**

Apart from the political battles on Capitol Hill, the faith-based initiative is advancing throughout the country. The findings from the IS-state charitable choice tracking study

reveal that most states examined truly are doing social welfare business in a new way. Often, government entities have contracted with new partners, FBOs that had not worked with them previously in formal contractual relationships. More often than not (66 percent of the time), government agencies are writing small and mid-sized contracts (under \$100,000) -- a scale that permits the involvement of smaller, grassroots FBOs. Far more often than just two years ago, governments are turning to FBOs as partners in efforts to fight poverty. My earlier study tracking study had identified 84 examples of financial collaboration in nine states in 2000; the current survey uncovered 726 contracts in the IS states. Contracts are also being written for a wider diversity of social services, offered to a broader range of clients (children, youth, welfare recipients, the working poor, the low-income elderly, refugees/immigrants).

Compared with the total amount of federal dollars available for contracting under the four programs regulated by charitable choice, the \$123 million of FBO collaborations uncovered in the IS-state study is modest. But is it an exponential increase over what was happening just two to three years ago. And it-combined with many other signs (special state or local "faith-based initiatives," new outreach endeavors, state-sponsored training conferences and regional seminars, appointments of faith liaisons)-is indicative of an attitude of eagerness by state and local officials to engage the faith community in a more extensive, creative, and systematic way than ever before.

In dialogue with local FBO leaders, these officials are leading the way in discovering-through creative experimentation that focuses on the practical result of serving low-income families better how to partner constructively with faith-based charities. If Washington's decisions about how best to reinvigorate faith in communities are based more on this policymaking "from the ground up," and less on ideological debate, FBOs, low-income citizens, and American taxpayers will be the winners.

*SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS*

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