

# American Religion and Religious Organizations as providers of Social Services

Nineteenth Annual International Law and Religion Symposium  
October 7-10, 2012, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah



Ram A. Cnaan  
University of Pennsylvania

# Opening Remarks

- It is an honor to be here; thanks to the organizers.
- I am not a lawyer! [Constitutional lawyers experience...].
- I am a professor of social work interested in the interface between religion and welfare.
- I focus on the “healing” side of religion as compared with the “killing” side of religion. [Martin Marty]
- 5 minutes to 5 hours.
- Apologies to the interpreters: I will cover a few of the slides and not always linearly..

# My Goals

- I have two key goals in this lecture:
- First to provide some background about religion and welfare in the USA; and I emphasize the “some” part...
- Second to demonstrate that in the USA religious congregations are key community organizations and major participants in the provision of welfare to needy individuals and families.

# *Religion in America I*

- Strong religious beliefs and active religious participation (Contrary to Secularization Theory).
- The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (September , 2012) reports:
- 56% call religion very important in their life and additional 26% call is important; total of 82%.
- Three quarters pray at least weekly (58% daily).
- Seven in ten attend religious services monthly.
- AND: “Those who are heavily involved in activities in their place of worship are among the most likely to volunteer their time to non-church activities” ...
- and to donate money. [See also Putnam & Campbell, 2010].

# *Religion in America II*

- In a national representative survey of 2004 teens (11-18), Cnaan, Gelles, and Sinha found:
- 83.7% reported religion to be important in their lives.
- 66.8% attend a place of worship at least monthly.
- 41.2% are members of a religious-based youth group.
- Findings are supported by three other national studies.
- Strong correlations with reduced risk behavior—Smoking; Alcohol use; Marijuana use; Truancy; Sexual activity; and Sense of depression.

# *Religion in America III*

- Religious diversity = More religions and denominations than anywhere else
- No one group dominating the religious scene: 24% Catholics and 24% Southern Baptists.
- Protestantism that once was the founding and dominating religion in the USA captures today about 51% of the population and is consists of hundreds of different denominations.
- All religious groups are minority and feel “persecuted.” Some more than others...

# *Religion in America IV*

- Society of seekers.
- Pew (2012) data reveals that: “44% of adults have either switched religious affiliation, moved from being unaffiliated with any religion to being affiliated with a particular faith, or dropped any connection to a specific religious tradition altogether.”
- Among people who are married, nearly four-in-ten (37%) are married to a spouse with a different religious affiliation.

# *Religion in America V*

- Surrogate families.
- Sense of community.
- Fellowship.
- Members but not believers (immigrants; non-Orthodox Jews).
- Personal meaningfulness of God and religion: From ethnic celebrations to gay camaraderie.

# *Religion in America VI*

- Disestablishment
- Before 1776-1830
- The duty of clergy
- The case of U.S.A. vs. Europe
- **“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”**
- Separation of church and state (from First Amendment to public discourse).
- Exemption from many laws (employment, civil rights, ADA).
- No registry – no qualifications to become clergy.

# *Religion in America VII*

- Congregational segregation. [9 out of ten are ethnically segregated and the other are culturally segregated]
- The case of Tabernacle Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis
- Investment in congregational property.
- “Broken Window Theory”
- In Philadelphia—9 out of 10 own their properties.

# *Religion in America VIII*

- In the Colonial times, congregations did not provide welfare (The 1601 Elizabethan Poor Laws were the law of the land)
- Only some 50 years after disestablishment (1830-1850) and when the Protestant nature of urban America was threatened – FBOs and congregations started to attend to the social needs of people in a systematic manner.

# *Religion in America IX*

- The culture of doing good.
- All world religions call upon the believers to be charitable, honest with each other, and compassionate.
- Theological tenets are insufficient!
- The safe space of small groups.
- Mutual aid and personal support.
- “The sense of protected and stronger ‘we’ vs. ‘them’”

# Short Explanation of the USA

- The only country that was formed on two pillars: Protestantism and Capitalism.
- Fundamental distrust in government.
- Still an immigrant society.
- Consequently, little family responsibility.
- Economic individualism is one of the strongest values emphasized in society.
- As such: Welfare is not the state or the extended family responsibility.

# *Welfare Reform and Charitable Choice I*

- A word about “Welfare Reform” and PRWORA.
- Section 104 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.
- The way government contracted out social services with religious organizations (billions of dollars annually) = Secular model.

# *Welfare Reform and Charitable Choice II*

- Marvin Olasky and the *Tragedy of the American Compassion*.
- Welfare payments corrupt people as they have no moral basis to them.
- In the past the church with its deep religious teaching and close familiarity with the recipient of help assisted the needy while putting a strong expectation for rehabilitation.
- Government handling of welfare is inefficient and create generational dependency.

# *Welfare Reform and Charitable Choice III*

- John Ashcroft (Senator from Missouri) and the conservative right agreed.
- Ashcroft wrote and introduced section 104 of PRWORA that is now known as Charitable Choice (CC).
- CC revolutionized the way government and religious organizations interact.

# *Welfare Reform and Charitable Choice IV*

- First there is encouragement for religious nonprofits and congregations to provide social services.
- That is, all government units are expected to not discriminate and are encouraged to contract out with religious organizations.
- The religious organizations can provide service in a religious environment and at their expense ass religious contents.

# *Welfare Reform and Charitable Choice V*

- Clients can refuse service at a faith-based organization and are entitled to similar care by a secular organization at a reasonable distance.
- Practice show that almost no client refuse faith-based care.
- Practice show almost no attempts to proselytize.
- Practice show that clients prefer faith-based providers although their efficacy is no necessarily better.

# *George W. Bush I*

- Into his second week in office, President Bush announced the establishment of The White House Office of Community and Faith-Based Initiatives.
- Tracking the contracts with faith-based organizations.
- Kept expanding in scope and responsibilities.

# *George W. Bush II*

- Annual reports of this office show that money and number of contracts are growing annually.
- Various legal challenges failed and CC and its application seem sound.
- Not expected to be changed in the near future regardless of who will be the next president.

# *Philadelphia Census of Congregations I*

- A three year census of congregations in Philadelphia.
- Need to define congregations.
- Need to count congregations (Yellow Pages, City property tax files, denominational lists, expert opinion and familiarity, and canvassing the streets) N=2,119.
- Findings here based on a sample of 1,393 (66%).

# *Philadelphia Census of Congregations II*

- 3 instruments
  - General Form: congregational info, its history, membership, financial information, staff, governing structure, and relations with wider community
  - Inventory of Programs: 215 areas of possible social and community involvement
  - Specific Program Form: Most important social programs. Max: 5.

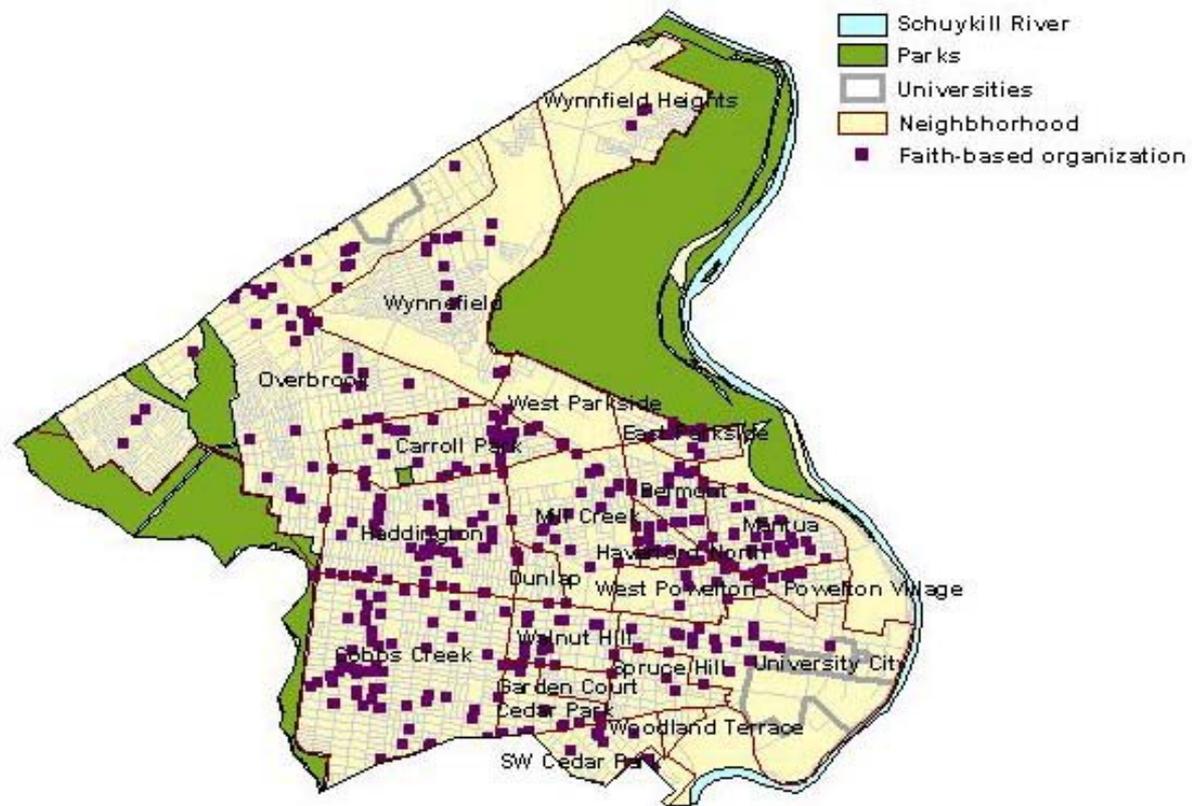
# *Congregations in Community I*

- Most accessible organization in the community and the one closest to people = The answer to New Federalism.
- Large number of congregations in the city:  
John Orr (1998) found in four Los Angeles neighborhoods: “an average of 35 religious congregations and 12.5 religiously-affiliated nonprofit corporations per square mile, far more than the number of gasoline stations, liquor stores, and supermarkets combined”

# *Congregations in Community II*

- In our study of West Philadelphia, we found 433 places of worship in a territory of 6-13 square miles. That is an average of 33.3 congregations per square mile.
- The longest distance possible between two congregations is 0.8 mile (divided by a park).

# West Philadelphia FBOs



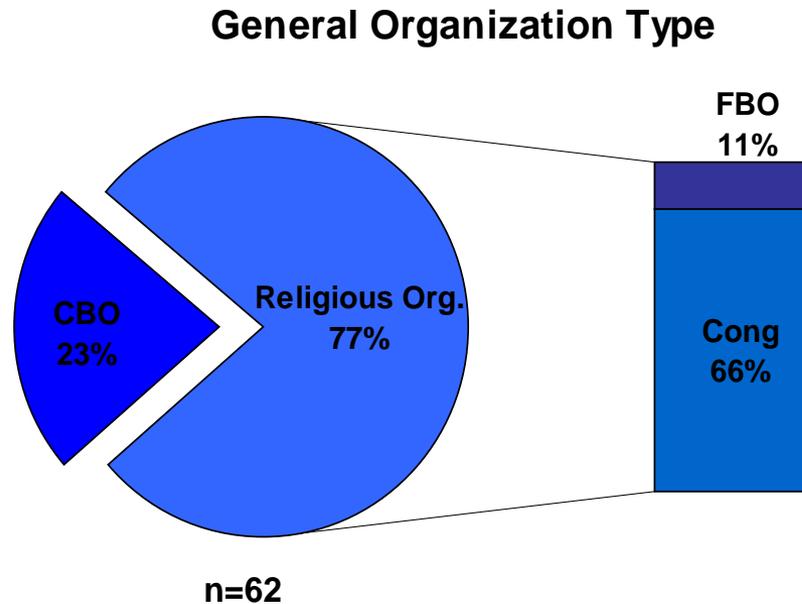
# *Congregations in Community III*

Findings from Nisha Botchey's Dissertation on North Philadelphia

- **The following graph is based on:**
- **7 Contiguous Census Tracts in Lower North Philadelphia**
  - **1.13 Square Miles, 400 City Blocks**
  - **Temple University**

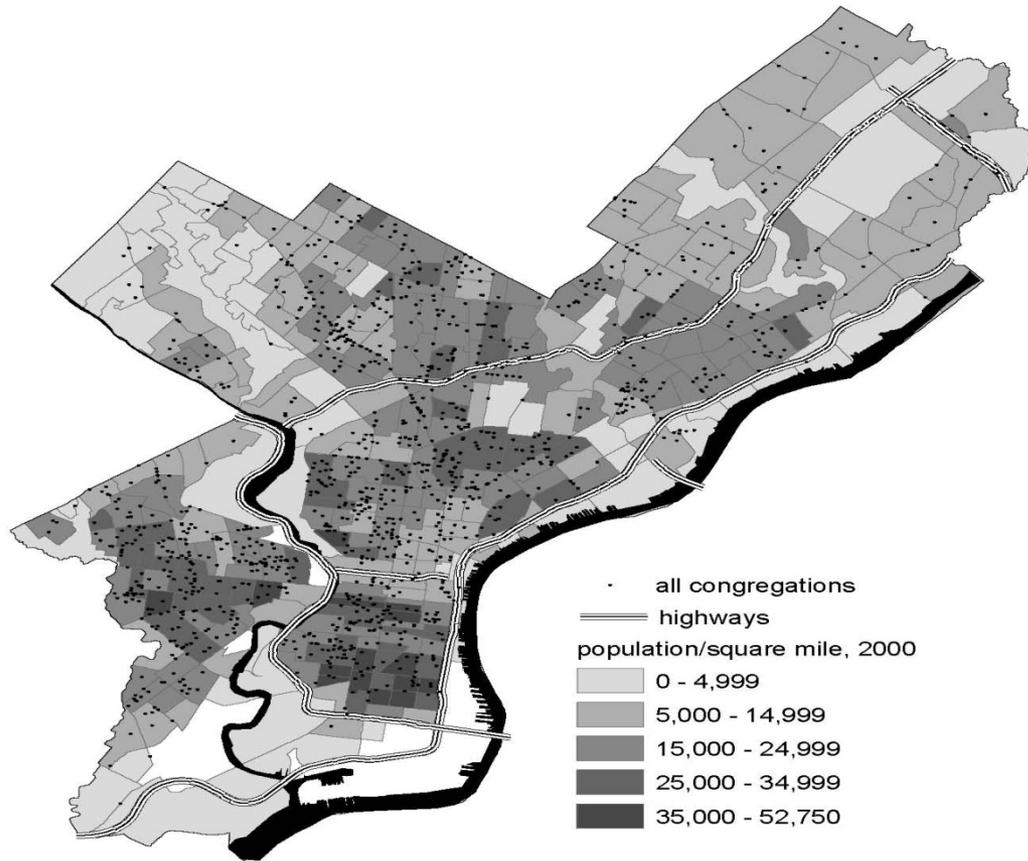
# *Congregations in Community IV*

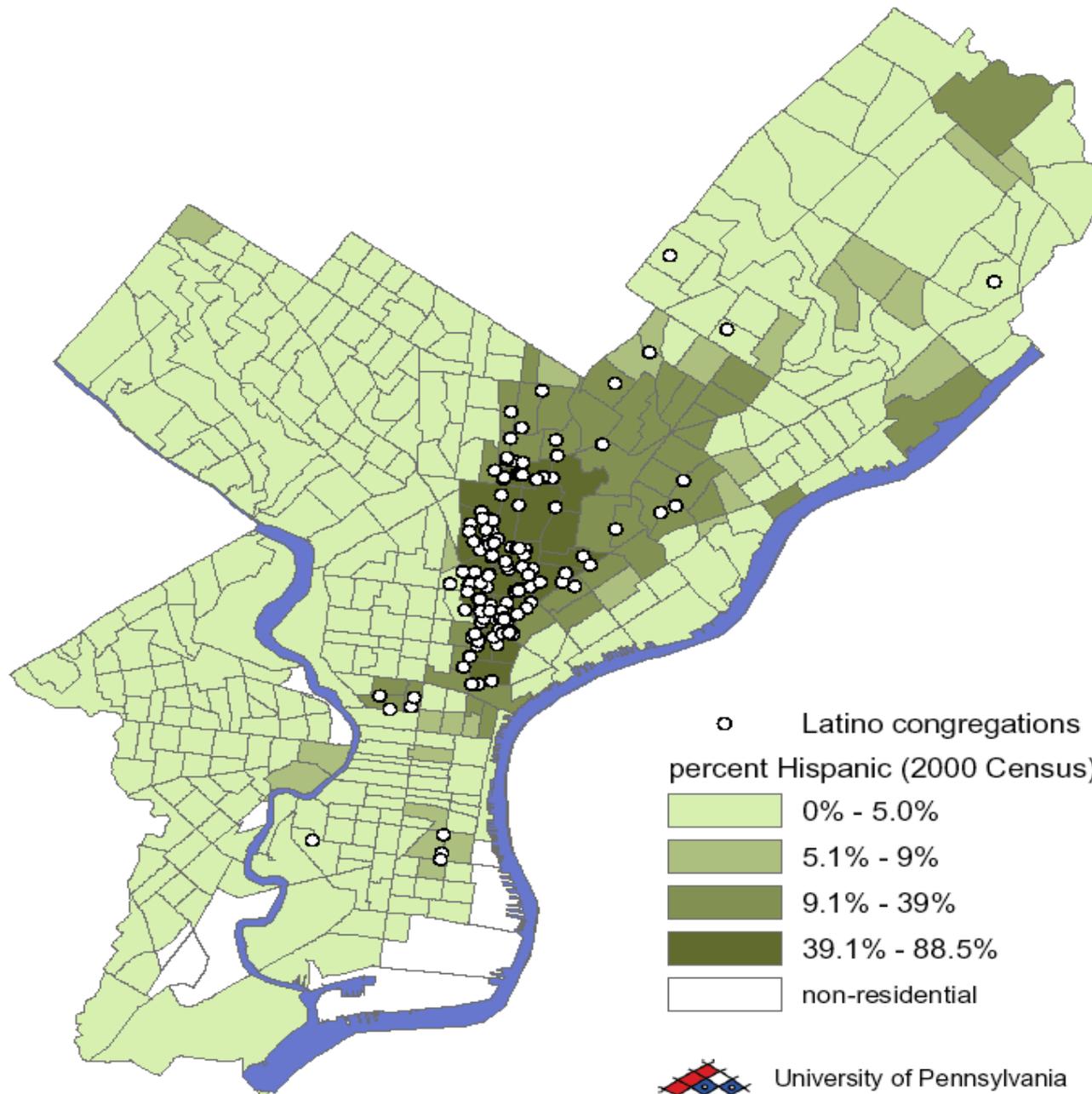
Findings from Nisha Botchey's Dissertation on North Philadelphia

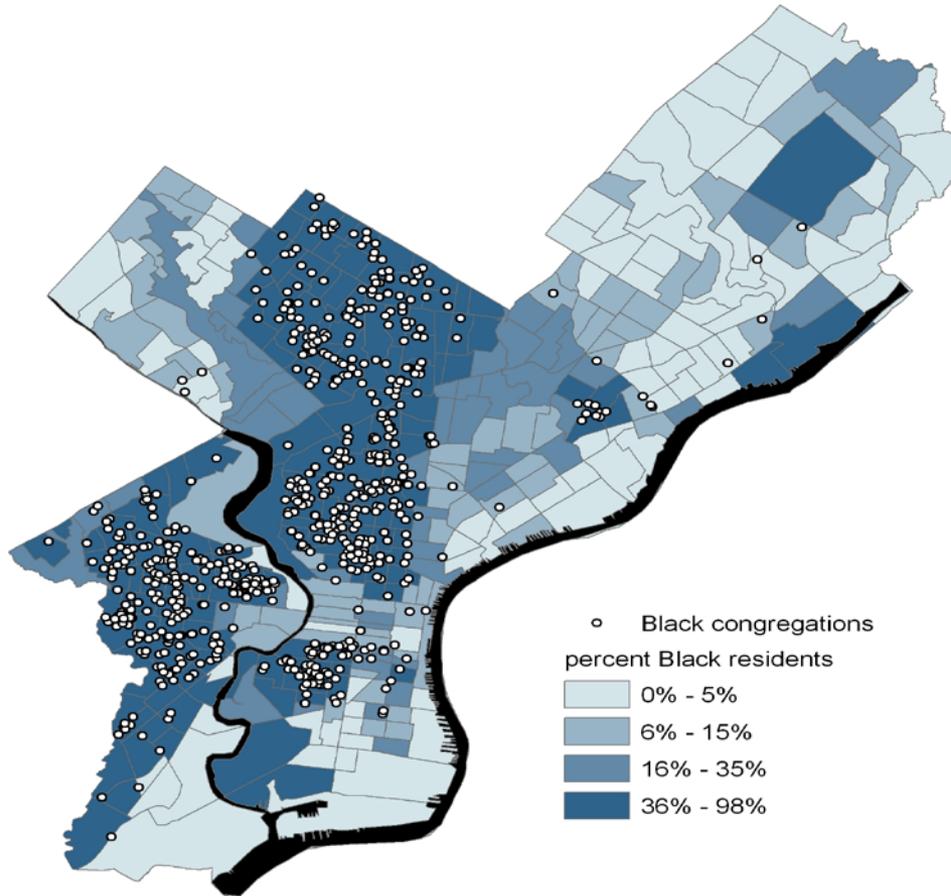


# *Congregations in Community V*

- Map of congregations in Philadelphia by population density.
- Map of Black congregations by percent of Black residents.
- Map of Latino congregations by percent of Latino residents.







# *Congregations in Community V*

Findings from GIS Correlations (p. < .01)

<b>Social problem</b>	<b>Correlation</b>
Domestic abuse in 2000	0.59
Aggravated assaults in 2000	0.62
Serious crimes (no rape/murder) in 2000	0.47
Serious property crimes in 2000	0.39
Median household income in 2000	-0.31
Percentage of population in poverty in 2000	0.40
Median housing values in 2000	-0.20

# *Organizational Characteristics I*

- Mean of active members per congregation = 322 (Including children).
- But---50% of congregations have 90 adults members or less.
- low of 6- high of 13,000 members.
- on average 247 people attend at least one worship service per week per congregation.
- Store-front churches
- Mega-churches

# *Organizational Characteristics II*

- Suggests that 47% of Philadelphia's population belongs to a congregation.
- Over 200 different denominations.
- On average 44.5 % of the cong's members lived within 10 blocks of the congregation site, 37.5% within city limits but over 10 blocks, 18 % outside city limits.
- On average, a congregation in Philadelphia has been at its present location for 50 years.

# *Organizational Characteristics III*

- About 90% of the congregations reported that 75% or more of their members belong to one racial or ethnic group.
- Majority Black (54%) and White (26.2%). Also Hispanic (6%) and Asian (4%).
- Approximately half the clergy (49.3%) graduated from a theological seminary; 24.4% do not have a full-time clergy.

# *Organizational Characteristics IV*

- 35% cong.'s income >\$50K.
- 24% between \$50K and \$100K
- 20% between \$100K and \$200k.
- One third (38%) reported financial difficulties; 52% getting by; and only 10% reported no financial problems.
- 49.5% od budget comes from offerings and 30.5% from pledges. Almost none from public sources.

# *Organizational Characteristics V*

- 15% were established in the past ten years.
- Of the new congregations most were:
- Planted or distinct ethnic group.
- Small and planning to grow and relocate.
- Theologically more conservative.
- Following a trend of new search for religious strictness.

# *Organizational Characteristics VI*

- Women in congregations:
- 65.25% of congregational members are women (worldwide; mostly among Blacks).
- Of the 4,124 reported committees 53.8% were headed by women.
- 13.6% of the congregations had no women leader—mostly among fundamentalists.
- In 11.9% of the congregations a woman is the clergy (higher by 2% than the national data).

# *Congregations and Service Delivery I*

- 93% reported at least one community service program. The average number of programs per congregation was 2.45.
- Those not involved: small; new immigrants, & declining. Yet, apologizing = a societal norm.
- Most connected: 85.6% have joint worship or prayer services with other religious groups;
- For social services provision with other religious group —62.5%;
- 56.2% collaborated with secular organizations.

# *Congregations and Service Delivery II*

<b>Beneficiaries</b>	<b>Percent of programs</b>
Children	44.1%
Youth	38.2%
People with low incomes/poor families	34.7%
Adults	34.1%
Elderly	23.9%
People with addictions	21.8%
People with disabilities	13.8%
Community residents at large	43.1%

# *Congregations and Service Delivery III*

- The most frequently provided services by congregations are: Clothing closets; Recreational programs for children; Summer day camps; and Food pantries.
- On average, each congregation-sponsored program serves 41 members of the congregation as well as 80 non-member community residents.
- On average, each program is served by 12 congregational people (members or staff) and 5 non-members.

# *Congregations and Service Delivery IV (Space)*

- 89.3% or reported 4,287 social programs are held on congregational property. (Most at no extra cost or nominal cost).
- Congregations routinely provide space, often free of charge to: AA (11.2%) and other 12 step programs (5%); Scouts (all ages and both males and females) (16%); and day care centers (17%).
- Additionally: Food-pantry/distribution (37%); After-school programs for children (23%); Pooling stations (14%); homeless shelters (6.2%); immunization stations (1%).
- Estimated value of space alone -- \$48M.

# *Congregations and Service Delivery V (informal)*

- Definition: Ad-hoc, information, and referrals (no formal program yet service was provided)..
- Informally, more than 30% of clergy have discretionary funds to assist homeless and poor people. Also: sponsorship for students in need (10.6%).
- More than half of the clergy refer members to health, vocational, legal, or financial services.
- Areas of informal counseling: financial counseling (30.6%), legal assistance (22.1%), consumer counseling (19.3%), and job counseling and placement (11.9%).
- Areas of help to the sick: hospital visitation (34.7%), transportation for seniors (29.3%), visitation/buddy systems (25.4%), and sick/homebound visitation (21.8%).

# *Congregations and Service Delivery VI*

- Least involvement in social change – delegated to alliances and/or denominations.
- Calculation of replacement value.
- \$250 million replacement cost while the city of Philadelphia's budget for social programs is \$550 million/yr.

# *Congregations and Service Delivery VII*

- What explains higher participation in helping others (three measures)?
- Above all the societal norms (from theological seminary to needy people's expectation through social services rules).
- Size (money and members)
- Clergy education
- What does not explain?
- Religion, denomination, other-worldly perspective, location.....

# *Congregations as Source of Support*

- More than 9 in ten support the work of others by space, volunteers, and/or money.
- Amachi.
- R.E.S.T. Philly.
- NPHIN (North Philadelphia Hospitality Interfaith Network).

# *What does it mean? I*

- The culture of helping the needy.
- Religion as a positive and negative power in society.
- Harnessing the good in all religions.
- Increasing dialogues between social services and social sciences and the religious community.

# *What does it mean? II*

- Educating clergy to cooperate and be open to other faith traditions. The challenge of sharing faith rather than fighting over souls.
- Retreats for inter-faith clergy.
- Joint congregational projects. Adopting one cause together (the power of accomplishing tasks in groups).

# *What does it mean? III*

- Public media campaigns. Showing the good in all religions.
- The role of government – in the USA and beyond.
- Is it possible???? YES!!!!!!
- In many serious ways it is the only solution to a very fragmented, atomistic, and threatening world.

# *Questions?*

☐ Time for questions and discussion.

☐ Contact information:

Ram A. Cnaan

School of Social Policy & Practice

University of Pennsylvania

3701 Locust Walk

Philadelphia, PA 19104

Tel: 215.898.5523

E-mail: [cnaan@sp2.upenn.edu](mailto:cnaan@sp2.upenn.edu)