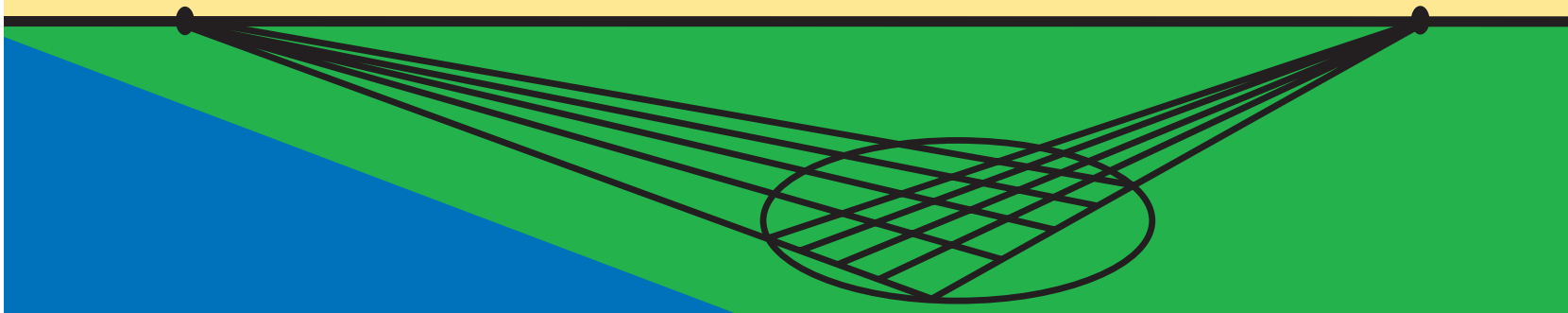
FOCUS on FAITH-BASED PARTNERSHIPS:

Coalitions and Congregations in Social Service Ministry



RESEARCH REPORT:
The Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study (CMACS)

by Paula F. Pipes, M.A., Helen Rose Ebaugh, Ph.D., and Janet S. Chafetz, Ph.D.

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Department of Sociology, University of Houston

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Copies of this report are available online at the Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study website: ***www.uh.edu/cmacs.***

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PREFACE

This report summarizes findings from the Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study (CMACS), a national research project funded by the Lilly Endowment. Faith-based coalitions are autonomous, nonprofit organizations that offer a range of individual and community services. Coalitions have been an important component of community service delivery for decades, yet little is known about these organizations or their relationships with supporting congregations. As varied as the neighborhoods they serve, the one common characteristic coalitions share is that their mission is heavily dependent on congregational affiliates and the contributions, volunteers and leadership they provide. The primary aim of this report is to provide coalition and congregational leaders with information that will help them strengthen and maximize the effectiveness of their partnerships.

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The findings reported here are based on data from the CMACS national survey of faith-based coalitions and interviews with clergy and lay leaders in over fifty congregations that participate in a sub-sample of nine coalitions that were studied in more depth. From these combined sources, we provide a national portrait of faith-based coalitions and examine the structure, expectations and challenges of coalition partnerships from the perspective of both coalition and congregational leaders.

INTRODUCTION

In countless communities across the United States, faith-based coalitions offer a range of programs benefiting the poor, homeless, elderly, youth and immigrants, all motivated by the desire to demonstrate God's love to those in need. While coalitions rely heavily on congregational affiliates, congregations are equally dependent on faith-based coalitions as a means to pursue their social mission. In addition to providing congregations with access to meaningful service opportunities, coalition programs help increase congregants' awareness of social problems and connect them to members of faith traditions other than their own.

In total, the faith-based coalitions that responded to the CMACS survey report that they affiliate with over 80,000 congregations. Extrapolating from this modest indicator, at least one-quarter of all American congregations channel a significant part of their social mission efforts through faith-based coalitions. Simply stated, the partnerships between coalitions and congregations are too important to be allowed to founder.

Our research indicates that organizational partnerships between coalitions and congregations are typically decades old. The natural lifecycle of communities and organizations introduces changes that can make the original vision for the partnership outdated or unclear. ***Therefore, we encourage leaders from both sides of the partnership to use this report as a catalyst to reexamine, celebrate and refine their mission together.***

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Faith-based coalitions are known by many different names (e.g. community ministries, ecumenical coalitions) and their characteristics are as varied as the communities they serve. The CMACS project uses the following four criteria to define faith-based coalitions:

1) the organization identifies itself as faith-based;
2) religious congregations are in some manner affiliated with the organization;
3) it conducts at least one service for individuals or the community; and
4) it is governed by its own board of directors.

Two research methods were used to gain a better understanding of the scope and structure of faith-based service coalitions and to explore the factors that influence their relationships with congregations:

- A national survey that resulted in responses from 656 coalitions. This represents a 41% response rate, which is considered high for a mailed survey.
- Field research that included intensive interviews with leaders of 9 coalitions located in various regions of the United States, as well as clergy, volunteers and lay leaders at over 50 of their affiliated congregations.

Nine coalitions participated in the field research:

Barberton Area Community Ministries (BACM)
Barberton, Ohio

Capitol Hill Group Ministry (CHGM)
Washington, D.C.

Denver Urban Ministries (DenUM)
Denver, Colorado

Interfaith Community Services (ICS)
Escondido, California

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston (IMGH)
Houston, Texas

Nicholas House (NH)
Atlanta, Georgia

People Responding in Social Ministry (PRISM)
Golden Valley, Minnesota

South Louisville Community Ministries (SLCM)
Louisville, Kentucky

The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport (CCGB)
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Overview

- The average coalition was founded thirty years ago and many coalition leaders fear that congregational support is waning, becoming almost perfunctory. Key evidence of this includes: 1) transitions away from congregational-level commitments to coalitions to congregational support that depends on the influence of just a few individuals; and 2) congregational leaders' lack of familiarity with coalition missions and programs.
- Overall, coalition leaders categorize congregational partners as equally divided between those with strong ties to the coalition and those with only a moderate or weak commitment.
- Clergy involvement and recruitment of new volunteers are the two weakest components of congregational support.
- Coalition leaders regard congregations as essential partners that are intrinsic to coalition identity and mission.
- Congregations expect coalitions to provide community services beyond what the congregations could provide on their own and to offer meaningful social mission activities for congregants.
- Participation in a coalition has symbolic value for congregations. It is an expression of the congregation's identity as a compassionate religious community and signifies to the wider community and potential new members that the congregation is one that believes in social action and provides congregants with opportunities to serve.
- While most congregational leaders give coalitions high marks for fulfilling their expectations, many actually have limited knowledge of coalition programs and no strategy for evaluating the coalition or their congregation's participation in it. In only a few cases did we find more than a handful of members actively engaged in the coalition.

Faith-Based Coalitions: Characteristics and Scope

Coalitions are shaped by the needs, resources and culture of their communities and vary significantly in terms of the scope and structure of their operations:

- The average operating income in 2001 was $1.2 million; however, half of the coalitions received less than $240,000 in that year. Government funding plays a principal role in the wide variance in coalition income.
- As operating income increases, coalitions are more likely to offer services that deal with complex issues, such as employment and housing, but less likely to utilize congregational volunteers in leadership roles.

The one common characteristic coalitions share is that their mission is heavily dependent on congregational affiliates and the contributions, volunteers and leadership they provide. Interviews with coalition leaders reveal that relationships with congregations represent more than simply access to resources. For many coalitions, the social mission of congregations remains central to their purpose:

- Over 80% of coalitions indicate that maintaining ties to congregations is important to their overall mission.
- Approximately 70% consider it a key part of their mission to strengthen congregations' involvement in the community, provide congregational members with volunteer opportunities and increase congregants' awareness of social justice issues.

Congregational Involvement

Four factors influence the manner and intensity of a congregation's involvement in a coalition:

MISSION ORIENTATION

Congregations that have strong ties to a coalition are more likely than not to stress an outreach mission focused on social action and community services. Factors that shape a congregation's mission orientation include clergy leadership and social mission priorities associated with individual faith traditions. Evangelical congregations that partner with coalitions typically provide limited support and exhibit weak ties to the organization because coalition policies discourage proselytizing.

RELATIONSHIPS

Coalition leaders often stress the importance of clergy support, but clergy endorsement of a coalition does not necessarily translate into active or lasting participation by the congregation. Extensive ties with lay leaders are necessary to maintain a strong partnership beyond the present generation and can help insure that newly appointed clergy understand and support a congregation's commitment to the coalition.

CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY

The following characteristics, which clergy associate with congregational vitality, all influence the manner and intensity of a congregation's involvement in a coalition: 1) quantitative measures, such as membership numbers, congregational demographics and material resources; 2) an absence of conflict and a strong sense of community and common purpose; 3) spiritual transformation of congregants; and 4) a commitment to social mission.

TRUST

Aspects of trust that can impact a congregation's enthusiasm for the partnership include fiscal responsibility, highly visible and effective programs and shared expectations of the partnership.

Strengthening Coalition Partnerships

Addressing community need is the overarching mission that motivates partnerships between coalitions and congregations. Therefore, leaders must insure that coalition clients receive effective services. It is equally important, however, that coalition partnerships are structured to insure that congregations maintain an active, hands-on involvement in social mission activities. To achieve this, it is important for coalition leaders to: 1) appreciate congregations' primary mission, which is to provide sacred space for worship and the ongoing transmission of religious values, and 2) recognize the impact of internal and external forces on congregations' resources and priorities.

- Communities across the United States are undergoing social, demographic and economic changes, due to immigration, urban expansion and redevelopment. The effect this has on congregational vitality, and therefore coalition participation, was profoundly evident in our field research. While coalition partnerships can be particularly beneficial for under-resourced congregations, dwindling resources obviously constrain their involvement. In communities experiencing new development and gentrification, once-struggling congregations often channel the majority of their energy and resources to member outreach programs.

- The natural lifecycle of religious communities includes births, deaths, newcomers, relocations and leadership changes, transitions that can impact congregations' resources and priorities. Furthermore, these changes mean that long-standing partnerships between coalitions and congregations are either now, or soon will be dependent on newcomers with no knowledge of the original commitment and goals upon which the coalition was formed.

We Recommend...

that coalition and congregational leaders explore ways to revitalize their partnerships. In this process, coalition leaders must consider congregations' individual challenges and mission priorities and identify strategies that increase the value of the partnership to each congregation based on their particular concerns. The steps outlined below present coalition and congregational leaders with suggestions for initiating dialogues both within and between their respective organizations.

1) **Coalitions should define the type of relationship they seek with congregations and identify their goals and responsibilities regarding partnering congregations.** Some questions coalition leaders might consider are: Why are relationships with congregations important to the coalition? What are the coalition's goals in terms of congregations? To what degree is the coalition accountable to partnering congregations and for helping congregations remain active in the community?

2) **Congregations should nurture and shape the coalition partnership to fulfill their mission priorities.** Clergy and lay leaders should review the reasons that their congregation partners with the coalition and identify their congregation's particular gifts and challenges. Some questions congregational leaders might consider are: What scriptures, traditions or rituals exemplify our faith tradition's teachings regarding social mission? How does the coalition partnership help us fulfill our mission priorities? What is our responsibility: To the coalition? To other partnering congregations?

3) **Coalition and congregational leaders must dialogue to understand their overlapping missions and insure that their joint strategies enhance the value and effectiveness of the partnership.** Four partnership dimensions categorize the activities and interactions between coalitions and their partnering congregations: Programs, Volunteering, Resources and Leadership. The Partnership Strategies table (Table 7) on page 23 illustrates ways that these dimensions can be structured to positively impact factors that influence congregational involvement. This table provides coalition and congregational leaders with a framework for joint discussions to assess their goals and develop strategies that will enhance the value of, and congregations' commitment to coalition partnerships.

FAITH-BASED COALITIONS
MISSION STRATEGIES, PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

Faith-based coalitions are shaped by the context in which they operate. Community needs, resources, local culture, social networks and leadership all influence coalitions' mission priorities and strategies. As a result, coalitions vary widely in terms of their scope, operating strategies and the programs they offer. In this section, we summarize the mission strategies, programs and resources of the 656 coalitions that responded to the Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study survey.

Mission Strategies

Coalitions engage in a variety of activities that can be categorized into three different mission strategies: 1) social services; 2) bridge building; and 3) social change. While some coalitions focus on one mission strategy, it is not unusual for a coalition to be involved in all three. As Table 1 demonstrates, however, the programs they offer are not always part of a coalition's core mission. For example, 65 percent of the coalitions conduct activities that encourage ecumenical or interfaith relations, but only 43 percent consider this activity central to their mission.

TABLE 1. Faith-Based Coalitions: Mission Strategies and Activities

Coalition Activities	Percent Of Coalitions At Which Activity Is:	
	Conducted	Central To Mission
Social Services—94% conduct one of the following:		
Direct Services	86.0	72.3
Assist Social Service Organizations	39.3	19.2
Incubate/Spin-Off New Programs	31.1	10.2
Bridge Building—77% conduct one of the following:		
Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations	64.8	42.5
Community Events	56.1	23.9
Social Change—71% conduct one of the following:		
Advocacy	57.8	36.3
Forums/Workshops	35.5	14.9
Community Organizing	31.3	12.8
Community Development	21.3	10.8

Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003, N=656

SOCIAL SERVICES: The majority of coalitions engage in social service activities that assist individuals with material, physical and emotional needs. The coalitions involved in this mission strategy typically provide direct services to clients. Relatively few coalitions (39 percent) assist congregational-based programs and other direct service providers with capacity building needs, such as training or financial support (see Example 1); fewer still (31 percent) incubate nascent programs that will eventually be spun-off as separate non-profit organizations.

Example 1: SOCIAL SERVICES

Through its Project Learn initiative, the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport (CCGB) supports five after-school programs strategically located to serve the city's neighborhoods. CCGB manages two of the after-school programs at Bridgeport housing projects. The other three sites are sponsored by congregations, each of which operates its after-school program utilizing congregational facilities, staff and volunteers. Apart from adhering to CCGB guidelines for program activities, staff prerequisites and adult supervision, the congregations are free to determine policies suitable for their neighborhood. By collaborating with CCGB, the churches receive grants and assistance with monitoring program outcomes from the coalition, as well as volunteers and material resources from the coalition's member congregations.

BRIDGE BUILDING: Coalitions are typically either inter-denominational or interfaith and often sponsor activities to promote relationships across religious boundaries. The emphasis given to this pursuit varies. Some coalitions sponsor events such as community service projects that are natural settings for networking and spanning boundaries; nearly half (43 percent) of the coalitions explicitly identify building bridges across faith traditions as part of their core mission. These coalitions host events with the sole purpose of fostering a deeper level of understanding and respect among diverse sets of religious groups (see Example 2).

Example 2: BRIDGE BUILDING

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston (IMGH) organizes service projects throughout the Houston area for its annual Interfaith Day of Service. This event increases the coalition's visibility and helps expand networks by promoting interfaith collaboration and community participation. IMGH also facilitates interfaith dialogue through programs such as the Youth Leadership Council and periodic Women's Gatherings that encourage participants to explore differences and similarities in their faith traditions.

SOCIAL CHANGE: Some coalitions work for social and economic change on behalf of the community and clients. These activities include community organizing, conducting forums on social problems and testifying before the legislature about social policies that impact clients (see Example 3). Relatively few coalitions pursue a social change mission; for most, these projects are sporadic and peripheral to their primary activities.

Example 3: SOCIAL CHANGE

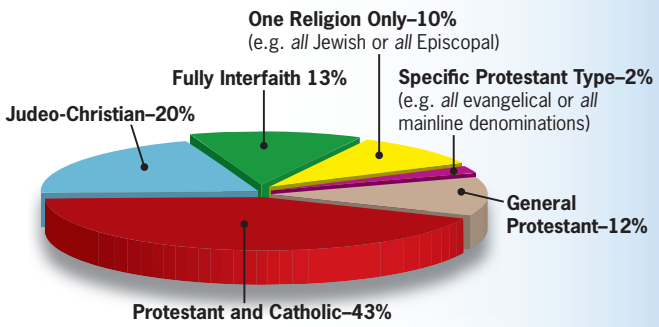
The social change mission of Denver Urban Ministries (DenUM) encompasses two major components: 1) advocacy; and 2) DOVE (DenUM Outreach Volunteer Experience), a service learning program for youth and adults from across the country, as well as local residents. DenUM's advocacy work includes tracking trends and social policies that impact clients, providing testimony on legislative actions and helping DenUM constituents "identify and respond to critical social issues." DOVE service projects are one forum through which DenUM highlights urban social problems. In addition, the coalition hosts a monthly Urban Education Day that includes the Poverty Simulation Game and a Homeless Walking Tour of Denver.

PARTNERSHIP PROFILES

Most faith-based coalitions evolved from clergy clusters, informal collaborations or councils of churches that were initially established to pursue the social and theological missions of congregations. Today, they are autonomous, nonprofit organizations that provide community services. Still, coalitions value congregations as essential partners that provide valuable resources and leadership and, for many coalitions, the social mission of congregations remains central to their purpose. The following provides an overview of the guidelines and characteristics of congregational participation with coalitions in the CMACS sample:

- 68% of coalitions refer to congregations as members or partners.
- 25% of coalitions require congregations to sign a covenant pledging their support.
- Relatively few coalitions include congregations that are predominantly non-white:
  - 67% of coalitions have one or more African American congregations.
  - 38% of coalitions have one or more Hispanic congregations.
  - 22% of coalitions have one or more Asian congregations.
- Only 21% of coalitions have by-laws that exclude non-Christian congregations from affiliating with the organization. Regardless, the majority of coalitions are ecumenical (57%). Most (43%) include both Protestant and Catholic congregations (Figure 1); however, 12% are General Protestant, which includes both Evangelical and mainline Protestant congregations, but not Catholic congregations. Only 13% of coalitions are Fully Interfaith in that they include non Judeo-Christian congregations (e.g. Islamic, Ba'ahi) along with any form of Christian (and possibly Jewish) congregations.

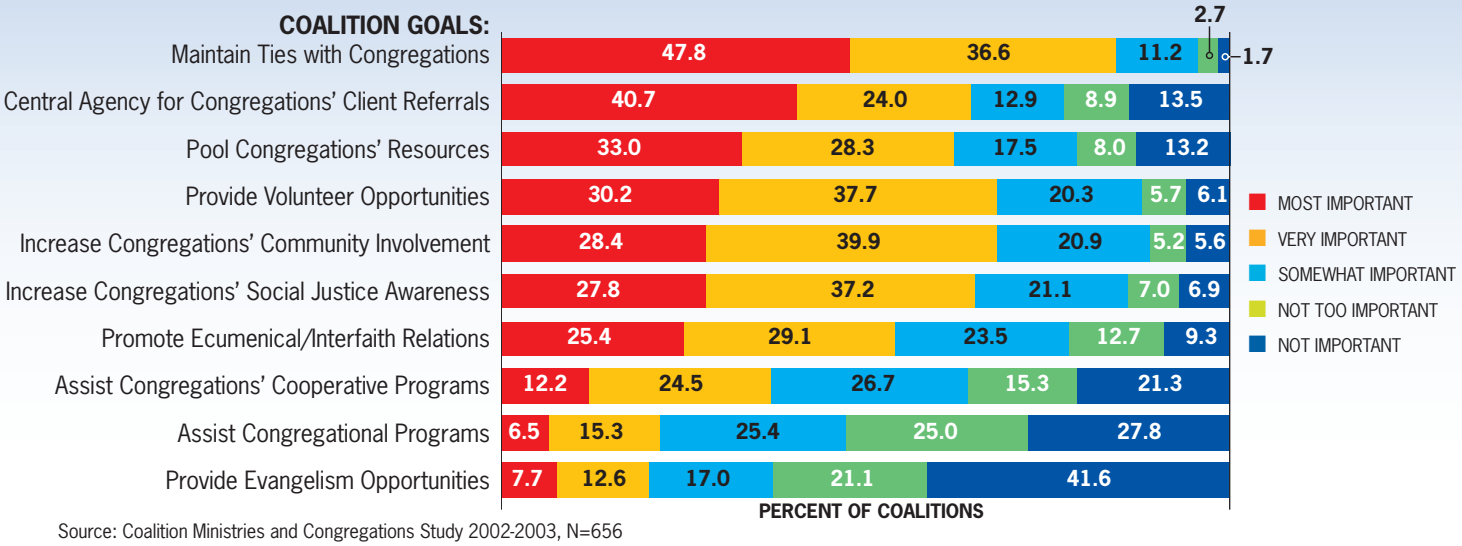
FIGURE 1. Religious Diversity of Affiliated Congregations by Percent of Coalitions



Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003, N=656

FIGURE 2. Importance of Coalition Goals Regarding Affiliated Congregations

Survey Question: Please rate the following goals according to their importance to your organization's mission.



Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003, N=656

Mission and Congregations

Executive directors were given a list of coalition goals related to congregations and asked to rate the importance of each to the coalition's overall mission. Figure 2 presents their responses and demonstrates the significance coalitions attach to their relationships with congregations.

Over 80 percent report that maintaining ties with local congregations is "most" or "very important" to their mission. To a certain degree, this result reflects the value coalitions place on congregational resources such as volunteers and financial contributions. Interviews with coalition leaders reveal, however, that relationships with congregations represent more than simply access to resources. As faith-based organizations with historical links to local congregations, these relationships are intrinsic to coalition identity and mission. The executive director of Interfaith Community Services, for example, explained that she feels accountable to congregations because they founded the organization:

> *We were created by the congregations. We really are their baby. They identified that they had needs within their own structure that they couldn't satisfy so they created us to be an independent arm of them. We're so tethered I can't imagine not being grateful, responsible to them.*

Approximately two-thirds of coalitions consider it part of their mission to strengthen congregations' involvement in the community by providing volunteer opportunities and helping to increase congregants' awareness of social justice issues. The executive director of Barberton Area Community Ministries (BACM) explains that this responsibility is part of BACM's dual mission: "I see our mission as two-fold: to reach out to the needy, but also to educate the community about poverty and how to relate it to their faith life."

Over half of the coalitions consider it their mission to operate as a centralized agency, pooling congregational resources and providing services for individuals whom congregations refer for assistance. In contrast, less than one-quarter of the coalitions consider it important to their mission to assist in the development of congregationally-based programs. From interviews with clergy and lay leaders, we learned that, indeed, most congregations prefer to channel their mission activities through coalitions. However, some expressed concerns about this strategy and indicated that congregations should retain a sense of responsibility for coalition programs so that they are not just "farming out" their social mission. As one pastor noted:

> *A church does not have to literally 'own' a program to feel ownership. [Coalition ministries] offer churches tremendous opportunities for meeting community needs. The difficulty lies in getting congregations to really own the ministry.*

Direct Social Service Programs

In 2000, President George W. Bush established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to expand the role of congregations and other religious organizations as social service providers. Removing barriers that limit faith-based organizations' access to government funding is a major component of this strategy.

Many, including proponents of this initiative, contend that faith-based services are particularly effective because they are guided by religious principles. They argue that faith inspires volunteers and paid staff members to treat clients with dignity and compassion, and that because they build relationships with clients, faith-based providers are more successful than secular agencies at helping clients achieve self-sufficiency.

Most coalitions provide emergency assistance, programs that generally involve limited interaction with clients (Table 2). However, limited interaction does not preclude compassionate service: Close to 90 percent of coalition directors report that "demonstrating God's love" to clients is essential to their social service mission.

"In the faith context, you walk in and we ask what you want to talk about. The first focus is on you as a person. You may have multiple problems, but you're a person and you have assets. The pastoral response is 'Let's figure this out together. I'm committed to doing this with you, we'll figure it out.' That leads to an organizational difference."

(Executive Director
The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport)

In addition to meeting basic needs, a significant number of coalitions provide services, such as counseling, that involve long-term relationships with clients. Providing complex programs differentiates the social service activities of coalitions from those of congregations. Research has demonstrated that congregations that sponsor social services typically limit their programs to food pantries and other types of emergency assistance.[1]

TABLE 2. Percent of Coalitions by Type of Social Service Program Offered†

Program	Percent of Coalitions
BASIC NEEDS—85% of coalitions offer one of the following:	
Food Pantry	65.2
Clothing	60.1
Cash Assistance	55.9
Disaster Response	24.4
Soup Kitchen	22.9
NON-EMERGENCY SERVICES—68% of coalitions offer one of the following:	
Seasonal Programs	54.4
Transportation Services	37.8
Delivered Meals	13.4
Community Garden	9.5
EMPLOYMENT & LIFE SKILLS—62% of coalitions offer one of the following:	
Life Skills	44.7
Employment Skills	35.9
Employment Readiness	31.3
Adult Mentoring	27.0
Job Bank	26.1
Literacy	21.8
HOUSING—56% of coalitions offer one of the following:	
Emergency Shelter	26.8
Transitional Housing	20.5
Home Repair	17.3
Homeless Day Center	11.0
Housing Intervention	9.9
Senior/Disabled Housing	7.1
Interfaith Hospitality Network	6.7
HEALTH SERVICES—61% of coalitions offer one of the following:	
Prescription Assistance	39.5
Health Awareness	26.1
Health Maintenance	20.7
Healthcare Services	15.8
HIV/AIDS	10.1
COUNSELING—57% of coalitions offer one of the following:	
Case Management	43.0
Mental Healthcare Services	29.4
Self-Help/Support Groups	22.2
Domestic Violence	15.8
ELDER CARE—16% of coalitions offer one of the following:	
Elder Recreation	9.7
Nursing Home Visitation	6.3
Elder Day Care	3.5
YOUTH SERVICES—39% of coalitions offer one of the following:	
Youth Mentoring	23.3
Tutoring	22.9
After-School	21.6
Recreation	16.4
Education	15.3
Children's Day Care	12.7
IMMIGRANT SERVICES—15% of coalitions offer one of the following:	
English as a Second Language	10.8
Refugee Settlement	5.8
Legal Assistance	5.4
Citizenship Classes	5.0

Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003

† Percentages in this table are based on the total number of coalitions with direct social services and non-missing data (N=537).

Coalition Funding

The average operating income in 2001 for the faith-based coalitions in this sample was close to $1.2 million (Table 3). Coalition income varies significantly, however, with half of the organizations receiving less than $240,000 in 2001. Median and mean data for coalition funding sources appear in Table 3. The funding sources are ordered in the table from highest to lowest, based on the median amount the source contributed to total income in 2001. Comparing the median to the mean, we can see that government funding plays a principal role in creating the wide variance in coalition income.

TABLE 3. Median and Mean Coalition Funding Data (Fiscal Year 2001)

	Median		Mean	
	Dollar Amount	Percent Of Budget	Dollar Amount	Percent Of Budget
TOTAL INCOME	**$239,000**	**—**	**$1,194,497**	—
FUNDING SOURCE:				
Congregations	$24,000	11.5	$120,270	18.6
Individuals	20,000	10.6	177,569	18.7
Foundations	12,000	4.9	88,186	12.5
Other	8,500	3.9	312,219	13.8
United Way & Fund Raising Events	7,600	3.0	59,977	8.7
Government	3,500	2.1	377,371	16.5
Corporations & Other Organizations	3,000	1.4	41,342	4.8
Judicatories	—	—	17,564	6.3

Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003, N=656

Characteristics of Direct Service Providers by Income Category

Coalition income significantly influences many organizational characteristics. Given this impact and the wide variation in coalition income, the following analysis compares coalitions that offer direct social services across four income categories: 1) Under $100,000; 2) $100,000 to $499,999; 3) $500,000 to $999,999; and 4) $1 million and over.

The amount of income a coalition receives significantly influences the type of services it provides, including whether or not the coalition conducts programs that provide staff and volunteers with opportunities to build supportive, long-term relationships with clients (Table 4). As operating income increases, coalitions are more likely to offer services that deal with complex issues such as employment and housing.

TABLE 4. Percent of Coalitions Involved in Program Areas by Coalition Income Category†

Program Area	Under $100,000	$100,000-$499,999	$500,000-$999,999	$1,000,000 & Over
Basic Needs	81.3	85.5	82.7	91.7
Non-Emergency Services	57.9	70.0	72.0	75.0
Employment and Life Skills	38.3	60.5	77.3	81.3
Housing	34.6	46.3	66.7	78.1
Health Services	40.2	63.2	68.0	71.9
Counseling	33.6	52.6	61.3	83.3
Elder Care	5.6	14.7	17.3	26.0
Youth Services	18.7	36.3	50.7	53.1
Immigrant Services	7.5	10.5	13.3	31.3

Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003

† Percentages in this table are based on the total number of coalitions with direct social services and non-missing data (N=537).

Table 5 lists several indicators of size to demonstrate differences in organizational scope that occur across the four income categories. Coalitions with higher incomes tend to have more supporting congregations and greater numbers of volunteers.

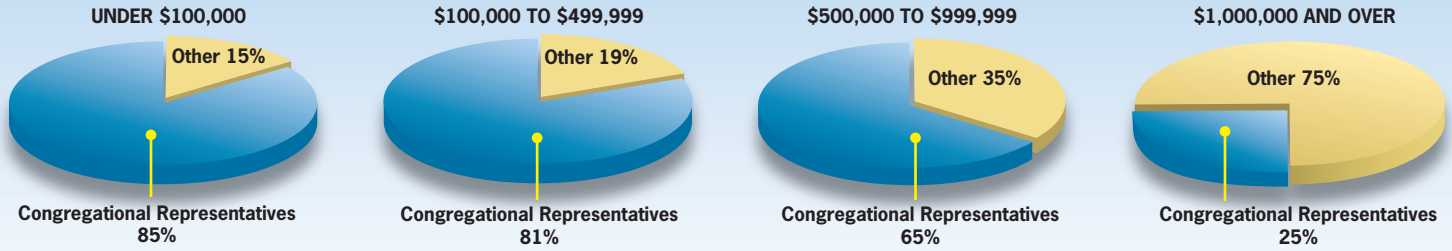
TABLE 5. Median Measures of Size by Coalition Income Category†

Median # of:	Under $100,000	$100,000 - $499,999	$500,000 - $999,999	$1,000,000 and Over
Affiliated Congregations	13	28	37	60
Volunteers in an Average Week	12	25	32	60
Part-Time Paid Staff	1	3	4	5
Full-Time Paid Staff	0	2	10	30
Total Paid Staff	2	6	15	48
Different Types of Services Conducted	5	8	12	16
Individuals Served in 2001	1200	2465	3334	8500

Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003

† Percentages in this table are based on the total number of coalitions with direct social services and non-missing data (N=537).

FIGURE 3. Median Percent of Board Members who Represent Affiliated Congregations by Coalition Income Category†



Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003

† Percentages in this table are based on the total number of coalitions with direct social services and non-missing data (N=537).

Newly formed coalitions typically allow each supporting congregation to appoint two voting representatives to the governing board. As the number of affiliated congregations increases, the size of the board becomes unwieldy for effective decision-making. Larger budgets, expanded operations and greater organizational complexity also require that the coalition acquire specific leadership skills. As a result, growing coalitions eventually change their by-laws to: 1) reduce the number of board positions; and 2) decrease the number of board positions that must be filled by congregational representatives (Figure 3).

Similarly, the percent of coalitions that utilize volunteers in managerial and professional roles decreases sharply as income increases (Table 6). Importantly, the number of coalitions that provide opportunities for volunteers to serve and interact with clients in meaningful ways does not decline as dramatically. In the field research, we found that increased resources and complex client programs can actually enhance the variety and substance of volunteer roles, especially if coalition leaders are intentional about targeting strategies that promote hands-on involvement.

TABLE 6. Percent of Coalitions that Utilize Volunteers in Staff Positions by Coalition Income†

Position	Under $100,000	$100,000-$499,999	$500,000-$999,999	$1,000,000 & Over
Manager	46.7	15.6	20.3	18.5
Professional	55.1	37.6	37.8	26.1
Intensive Client Interaction (e.g. Case Management)	59.8	46.8	60.8	51.1
Limited Client Interaction (e.g. Food Pantry)	62.6	57.5	54.1	45.7
Administrative and Other	71.0	62.4	62.2	47.8

Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003, N=656

† Percentages in this table are based on the total number of coalitions with direct social services and non-missing data (N=537).

CONGREGATIONS AND SOCIAL MISSIONS

In communities across the United States, coalitions have become a chief conduit through which congregations and their members seek to fulfill their social mission. To fully understand their perspective on these partnerships, it is important to appreciate congregations' religious goals and mission priorities. First and foremost, churches, temples and mosques are religious communities with theological mandates. Their primary mission is to provide sacred space for worship and the ongoing transmission of religious values. As one lay leader of a Houston synagogue stressed, social action is just one facet of a congregation's mission:

> *Social action is not the primary function of a congregation. It is ancillary; it is in keeping with the mission of the congregation, but the congregation is a place of worship and study.*

Congregational Vitality

Stability and congregational health are necessary for congregations to fulfill their spiritual mission; therefore, clergy are first concerned with insuring a congregation's sustainable vitality. We asked clergy about the characteristics they believe demonstrate that a congregation is alive and vibrant. Their responses can be summarized into the following four categories: quantitative, community life, spiritual transformation, and social mission.

> *"[In vital congregations] people are willing to reach out beyond themselves and to be cognizant that the church does not just exist for the people who are members, but the church exists for community much larger than itself…There is a keen, strong sense that God has called us to utilize our gifts, our talents so we can be good stewards of our time, talents and treasure."*
>
> *(Pastor)*

QUANTITATIVE: Although clergy emphasized that vitality is not strictly a matter of numbers, many identified quantitative factors such as membership growth, baptisms, strong attendance rates, and solid financial support as important indicators of a thriving congregation. Attracting and integrating new members into the life of the congregation provides organizational depth and stability. Young families bring new energy and insure long-term viability, while senior congregants embody the community's history and often have the time to volunteer and the financial resources necessary to sustain important programs.

COMMUNITY LIFE: A significant number of clergy stated that vital congregations have a strong sense of community and "commonness of purpose." Members recognize and are grounded in a common identity and seek to respond as a community to their congregation's unique calling. Corporate worship in a vital congregation is exciting, lively and exudes a "sweet spirit [and] the presence of God;" there is an absence of conflict and members are warm and welcoming to visitors, as well as to one another.

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION: Clergy also look for signs that individuals are growing spiritually. In our interviews, Christian clergy and lay leaders spoke of "making disciples," and many congregations' mission statements refer to spiritual disciplines such as worship, prayer and religious study. One pastor reported that he looks for evidence of spiritual transformation through congregants' "experiential stories":

> *I listen for people to talk about where they were [spiritually] and where they are now. What's changed in their life?*

SOCIAL MISSION: Most clergy remarked that just as a vital congregation cares for its members, it also exhibits compassionate concern for the wider community. Social mission may not be a congregation's major priority, but, as one pastor expressed, "The truly vital congregation is going to be called to social ministry of some kind."

Expectations of Coalition Partnerships

We asked clergy and lay leaders about their expectations of partnerships with local coalitions. Most respondents gave coalitions high marks for fulfilling their expectations, which are summarized below. It should be noted, however, that many congregational leaders had limited knowledge of coalition programs and no intentional strategy for evaluating the coalition or their congregation's participation in it. Furthermore, in only a few cases did we find more than a handful of members actively engaged in the coalition. This suggests that only a limited number of congregants typically experience any direct benefits or impact from the partnership.

"Our job is to make disciples. Sometimes it's easier just to give money than to invest of yourself. [Through its volunteer opportunities] PRISM offers a place where we can really grow. It can turn head knowledge into heart knowledge. When you go to PRISM, you usually meet the people you are serving—that's different from just dropping off some canned goods. That's a good thing too, and they need them, but it's not the same as meeting and talking with people and learning their stories."

(Lay Leader)

EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT PROGRAMS: Providing effective community services is one of the most frequently cited expectations congregational leaders have of coalitions. Congregations want their mission dollars to be wisely spent and the organizations they support to achieve results beyond what they could accomplish alone. Many partnerships are structured with the understanding that the coalition pools congregational resources and provides shelter, food and financial assistance to individuals whom the congregations refer. In these cases, congregations expect the coalition to screen for charity abuse, but they also assume that the coalition has expertise and community contacts that insure clients will receive more comprehensive services than they would from the congregation. In our interviews, congregational leaders placed a great deal of importance on the need to screen clients. Coalition leaders may want to carefully consider how they communicate with congregations about the problem of charity abuse to avoid fostering stereotypical notions of the "undeserving poor" that overlook the root causes and consequences of poverty.

MISSION FULFILLMENT: Coalitions are often the primary, or only, avenue that congregations have for engaging in social mission. Most clergy and lay leaders expect coalitions to provide members with opportunities to fulfill their mitzvah obligation or "put their faith into action." As one lay leader explained, the benefit of participating in a coalition is that it reduces impediments to volunteering: "Those opportunities are already set in motion. It's not hard to plug in, join in and go to work." Some congregational leaders are particularly concerned that coalitions provide meaningful volunteer experiences to enhance congregants' spiritual development.

INCREASED AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY NEEDS: Many congregants live in a social world untouched by the social problems coalition clients routinely encounter. Clergy expect that through these partnerships congregants will gain first-hand experience with the human side of poverty and witness the blight and social disorder of resource-drained neighborhoods. They hope that through these encounters congregants will grow spiritually and develop a stronger sense of their obligation to serve and to promote social justice. This potential benefit of participating in a coalition was often raised by leaders in suburban congregations. The pastor of one exurban church observed: "The whole idea of suburbs is to keep the world out of your face." Volunteering in coalition programs forces his congregants to learn about urban poverty and "rub shoulders that they might not otherwise."

SYMBOLIC: Participation in a coalition is an expression of the congregation's identity as a compassionate and active religious community. It signifies to the wider community and potential new members that the congregation is one that believes in social action and provides congregants with opportunities to serve. Partnership activities also connect congregants to their common religious identity and values. Collecting food and other goods for a coalition provides small and aging congregations with tangible evidence that they can still make a difference in the world. Smaller and minority congregations may participate in a coalition in hopes of gaining greater visibility and a larger voice in the community. Interfaith coalitions allow minority faith traditions to demonstrate important facets of their religion. For example, a Bahá'í community participates in Interfaith Community Services partly because it helps them to build bridges and demonstrate their commitment to the wider community:

> *It is easy to just take care of your own [congregation]. Our job is to demonstrate in word and deeds that we care about the [wider] community. [The coalition] makes it easier for us to do that.*

Social Mission Contributions

The financial support that congregations provide to coalitions varies tremendously. Most coalitions, even those that require congregations to sign a covenant of support, have at least some affiliated congregations that contribute little or nothing. It is also not unusual for a coalition to have a few congregations that provide a level of financial support that far outweighs that of all other congregations. The congregations that participated in this research gave a median annual contribution of $1,058 to coalitions; half of the congregations in this study gave 4.5 percent or less of their social mission budget to their coalition partner.

In most communities, a variety of organizations compete for congregations' volunteers and charitable donations. We found that congregations vary in the degree to which they formalize their mission goals or evaluate their social action strategies. Many congregations simply support the same organizations from year to year until new leaders and priorities emerge that override previous decisions. A few congregations, typically those with professional, well-educated members, have increased their scrutiny of mission giving and their social mission boards have implemented strategies to insure that the congregation's contributions align with its mission priorities. These strategies include:

"The way [mission budgeting] has been done [in the past], the incumbent has the advantage. [An organization is a line item because] somebody went through an exercise to justify it. Once an organization gets on the list, it's pretty much there until somebody removes it. I don't think a group like ours can understand 40 [organizations] and what they're doing and how they're doing it…And how important is $2,000 to most of these organizations? I would rather reduce [the number of organizations in the mission budget]. We are also assigning advocates to each one of these organizations and with that in place we can see if we are being effective."

(Chairperson–Social Mission Board)

- Supporting organizations that address specific population groups or issues that are of particular concern to the congregation.
- Apportioning the budget to insure that mission giving proportionately addresses local, domestic and global issues, according to the congregation's mission priorities.
- Assigning liaisons who are responsible for maintaining current information on the mission, services, operating budgets and funding sources of organizations the congregation supports.
- Reducing the number of organizations the congregation supports so the congregation can give larger contributions to a smaller number and therefore have greater impact.

CONGREGATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Faith-based coalitions and congregations partner to provide local services, but congregations' commitment to the partnerships and level of participation varies. The objective for coalitions is to achieve *congregational-level* commitments that are embodied by *individual* members' actions.

In part, coalition scope and service strategies influence the level of support a coalition receives from congregations, and some coalitions are more successful than others at actively engaging congregants. Characteristics of congregations also play an important role in determining their commitment. Some of these factors relate to well-known patterns such as differences between the mission priorities of conservative, evangelical congregations and those of liberal faith traditions. It is also true, as Woolever and Bruce point out, that every congregation is a "collection of one-of-a-kind individuals who make up a distinct group portrait."[2] Each congregation has a unique understanding of its purpose, and specific assets and limitations that shape its passion and capacity for active involvement in a coalition. Therefore, each coalition, regardless of its policies and programs, receives varying levels of support from its member congregations.

Across the research sites, we found that executive directors use fairly consistent measures to gauge relationships with partnering congregations. Financial and volunteer assistance, relative to a congregation's resources, are the basic indicators most directors use to determine congregational commitment. Beyond this fundamental support, directors consider a host of clues that signal the breadth and depth of the commitment, and most consider clergy support essential for insuring that congregants remain actively engaged.

"A very strongly related congregation provides support from the pulpit. The best of the best have a pulpit connection where the clergy speaks about our work from the pulpit and endorses it; provides financial support from the congregation's budget; provides active representatives who attend the general membership meeting; announces lots of opportunities for hands-on ministry to the congregation at large and secures their participation; and includes our organization in rituals and recitals so the connection is prayerful as well."

(Coalition Executive Director)

In our interviews, coalition directors' appreciation for congregations was mingled with concerns about these ties and about keeping congregants actively involved. Many sense that congregational support is waning, "almost perfunctory," in the words of one community leader. Congregational leaders note that many congregants volunteer in the community as individuals and that the congregation's social mission activities are fragmented. Similarly, one coalition executive director has noticed a shift away from congregational-level commitments:

> *Forty years ago, the culture was such that if you were a [coalition] member, you needed to have a delegate and there was a procedural approach to almost everything. You could count on people's organizational commitment. [Now,] people expect organizations like ours to customize what we do around the individual or a smaller and smaller group.*

Given the unique properties of coalition partnerships, it is difficult to disentangle the precise factors that determine congregational commitment. We can, however, identify patterns of congregational involvement in coalitions and isolate several factors that influence the strength of their commitment.

Measuring Congregational Involvement

To gain a national perspective of coalition directors' assessment of congregational support, survey respondents were asked to rate congregations' involvement in seven areas, using a five-point scale ranging from excellent to poor (Figure 4). It is important to remember that the results reflect respondents' overall opinions of congregational support. In other words, the survey asked each executive director to consider *all* congregational affiliates, taken as a whole, and rate their participation.

Survey ratings flag two areas of concern that were also cited as growing problems in our interviews with coalition directors: 1) engaging the clergy; and 2) recruiting new volunteers. Nearly 30% of survey respondents reported that clergy involvement is only poor or below average, and close to one-quarter gave the same low rating for recruiting new volunteers.

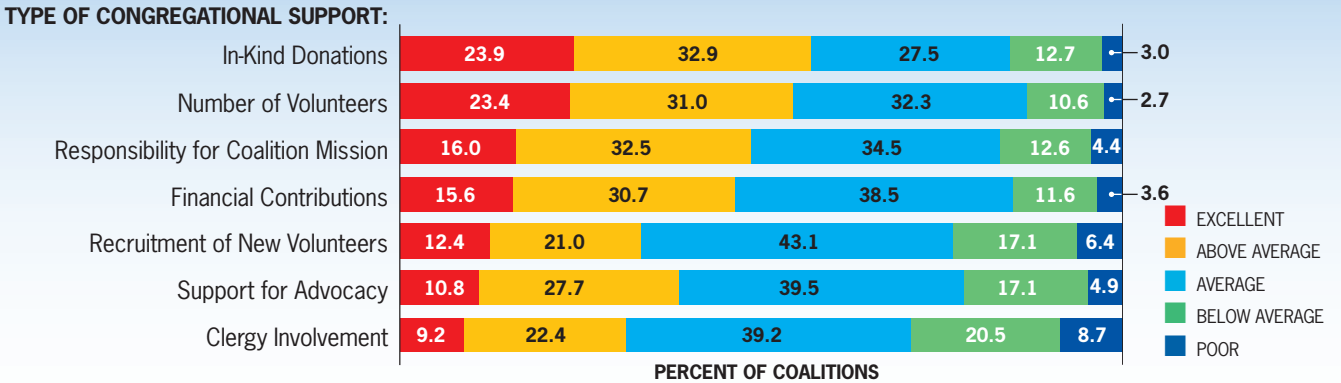
Most believe clergy endorsement is the key to strong congregational support and put considerable effort into maintaining relationships with clergy members. This goal is frustrated by such realities as difficult-to-reach clergy with overwhelming workloads and clergy turnover, which necessitates constant attention to cultivating new relationships. In most cases, congregations' original commitments were established by clergy who no longer live in the area and whose successors have less interest in the partnership.

Volunteers have been the life-blood of coalitions since their founding. Their energy and skills drove the coalitions through their infancy and today provide the labor-power and vision to maintain programs and respond to emerging needs. But will there be a volunteer workforce in the future? Many coalitions rely on senior citizens to open their doors and serve clients each day. The aging of this volunteer base presents a looming crisis when coupled with the busy lifestyles of dual-income households, which most believe is the reason for reduced numbers of new recruits. One coalition lost five volunteers in five days to problems such as cancer and other illness, spousal health problems, and snowbird relocations. The executive director at another coalition noted:

> *Already some of our volunteers are too infirm to be effective...I don't know what's going to happen in ten years...Getting the next generation involved is a real challenge.*

FIGURE 4. Coalition Ratings for Overall Congregational Support

Survey Question: Thinking about the past year, how would you rate congregations' support of your organization in the following specific areas?



Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003, N=656

Congregational support is relatively robust in terms of contributions and volunteer numbers. About 50 percent of the coalitions rate the amount of in-kind and financial donations and the number of volunteers from congregations as either excellent or above average. Similarly, nearly half of the executive directors believe that, overall, their partnering congregations exhibit a sense of responsibility for the coalition and its mission. Conversely, this means that about half of the coalitions rate congregations' support as average to poor. The same split between strong and weak support is evident within individual coalitions as well: nearly all of the coalition directors who participated in the field research categorize their partnering congregations as equally divided between those with strong ties to the coalition and those with only a moderate or weak commitment.

Advocacy campaigns can present challenges to coalitions because of the need to maintain strong relationships amid religious and ideological diversity, an issue that critics, and even some proponents, consider a limitation to the overall effectiveness of ecumenical and interfaith coalitions.[3] The story of one coalition provides an instructive example of this dilemma. In previous decades, tensions occurred at the coalition between a former director, who favored a social change mission strategy, and leaders from partnering congregations who were uncomfortable with "stirring up the ghettos." They preferred that the coalition confine its work to meeting material needs. Today, the current board president acknowledges that the coalition still struggles with negotiating a balance between the organization's three mission strategies of building bridges, providing social services and advocating for social change:

> *We're trying to figure out our role. Advocacy was more a part of [the coalition's] history. Unfortunately, when you advocate there are two sides to it and it narrowed who would be involved. We're trying to identify those things we can advocate for without alienating someone.*

Factors that Influence Congregational Involvement

Characteristics such as faith tradition and community context influence the importance that individual congregations attach to their relationship with coalitions and the ways in which they participate. While every community and partnership is unique, four factors play a role in shaping congregations' level of commitment and involvement: mission orientation, relationships, vitality and trust.

MISSION ORIENTATION

Not surprisingly, congregations that have strong ties to a coalition are more likely than not to stress an outreach mission focused on social action and community services. A passion for community involvement paves the way for developing a strong relationship with the coalition. Congregations differ, however, in the type and intensity of their outreach commitment.

Clergy possess a highly visible, moral authority and can significantly shape a congregation's mission orientation, even that of a congregation that is clearly lay-led. In our research, we often heard stories of lay leaders who became more involved in a coalition after gaining a deeper understanding of their faith tradition's teachings regarding social mission. A United Church of Christ congregation that was not particularly active in social mission called a new pastor with a strong commitment to social justice. The pastor weaves mission "into every sermon, every class," and according to a lay leader in the congregation, social justice and service are now core values of the church.

Generally, a congregation's faith tradition gives some

> *"We don't just happen to do good stuff, we do it because if you dig into Luke's gospel you find that it is what you are supposed to do. We see our job as orienting [members] towards outreach, but also getting them back to why. Our gut feeling is the more we have drawn people into Bible study and a little more in-depth examination of this, the more committed they seem to be to [outreach]."*
> *(Pastor)*

indication of its social outreach priorities. For example, Reformed Judaism articulates a strong social action commitment in terms of *tikkun olam*, the Jewish obligation to repair the world. As one Rabbi explained:

> *When we do God's work, we become better people and honor our part of our covenant with God. When we help these broken vessels, we're really God's partner in finishing the work of Creation.*

Christianity's mission in the world includes both evangelism and social ministry. While these two mission strategies are not opposing or mutually exclusive mandates, Christian traditions typically stress one over the other. In our interviews, mainline Protestant pastors often referred to evangelism and social ministry as "two sides of the same coin;" they and their congregants were adamant that material needs should be met "without any strings attached." This same philosophy typically guides coalition policies, with fewer than 20 percent of coalitions actually encouraging religious discussions with the clients they serve; the majority allow these interactions, but only if initiated by the client.

Conservative Protestants, in particular, consider evangelism essential to their ministry and are less likely than mainline Protestants and Catholics to collaborate with organizations such as coalitions.[4] In our research, we found that evangelical congregations that partner with coalitions typically provide limited support and exhibit weak ties to the organization. The emphasis conservative congregations place on evangelism is the primary factor. Many of the partnering evangelical congregations that participated in the CMACS research are somewhat atypical in the emphasis they give to social ministry. Still, these evangelical congregations hold firm to a belief in the healing power of personal salvation, as demonstrated by one pastor's comments:

> *Just throwing money at the problem doesn't change them. There is the charity piece and the justice piece, but there is also the hole in your soul piece, too. If we don't fix that problem, then I don't see a real solution.*

As a group, African American congregations are generally theologically conservative and embrace an evangelical mission. However, the African American struggle for civil rights and self-determination has led them to equally interpret the Christian mission as one of social justice. Still they are less likely than white congregations to partner with coalitions.[5] The African American congregations we studied all have weak ties to their local coalition and sponsor congregational programs of their own such as a community center with after-school programs and cultural activities, a $1.1 million day care center licensed to serve 198 children and a halfway house for women recently released from prison.

RELATIONSHIPS

In his analysis of nonprofit and corporate partnerships, James Austin states that "personal relationships are the glue that binds organizations together."[6] The same holds true for partnerships between coalitions and congregations. Diffuse networks that include lay leaders, as well as clergy, are the best strategy for insuring long-term, active partnerships.

Coalition leaders often stress the importance of clergy support, but clergy endorsement of a coalition does not necessarily translate into active or lasting participation by the congregation. As one pastor put it,

> *Pastors come and go in terms of their interest, time and physical presence—if [the pastor] is the connection, it all dies.*

Many weakly connected congregations are barely sustaining legacy partnerships based on the interests and commitments of *past* clergy. Extensive ties with lay leaders are necessary to maintain a strong partnership beyond the present generation and can help insure that newly appointed clergy understand and support a congregation's commitment to the coalition. A synagogue that has maintained a vibrant, twenty-five year connection to Interfaith Community Services exemplifies the effectiveness of diffuse ties with lay leaders. The current rabbi described her first introduction to the coalition upon moving to the area: "You can't be in this congregation and not hear about [the coalition]. It's part of the package of [the temple]. It's bundled together."

VITALITY

As previously noted, several components define a congregation's vitality: quantitative measures such as membership numbers, demographics and material resources; an absence of conflict and a strong sense of community and common purpose; spiritual transformation of congregants; and a commitment to social mission. These factors all influence the manner and intensity of a congregation's commitment to a coalition.

Possessing inadequate resources is perhaps one of the most obvious barriers to social action. Congregations that are struggling to survive have limited funds and few volunteers available to share and may therefore maintain very weak ties with the coalition. Conversely, elderly congregations, or those that are small or have restricted budgets, may especially appreciate and need the opportunities for social mission that coalitions provide. Such congregations may be strongly committed to the coalition's mission but restricted

in how or to what degree they can participate. For example, the frail elders of one congregation are no longer able to volunteer, but they maintain a strong connection to the local coalition by conducting special drives for in-kind donations as part of their fellowship activities.

One pastor observed that social mission is always "one of the big losers" when there is conflict because it drains a congregation's energy away from ministry. A congregation's social mission can become fragmented due to internal conflicts, poor communication or strong individual passions that result in duplicated and divergent projects. As the lay leader of a struggling congregation commented:

> *If you have a few things you all feel very strongly about, you can do it well. But we're a small congregation and you get an even smaller base if we all go off in different directions.*

Context significantly influences a congregation's resources and vitality, and therefore, its mission priorities. For example, many coalition leaders report that suburban congregations provide weak support and charge that some are indifferent to inner city problems. Typically located in neighborhoods of younger households, suburban congregants are often more attracted by youth programs than inner city mission opportunities; social and geographic distance further limits their hands-on involvement. Thriving suburban congregations that have a strong commitment to social mission may provide significant levels of financial support, but they are not as likely to be active participants in the coalition.

Communities across the United States are undergoing social, demographic and economic changes, due to immigration, urban expansion and redevelopment. The effect this has on congregational vitality, and therefore coalition participation, was profoundly evident in our field research. In aging neighborhoods with changing populations we visited under-resourced congregations with limited funds and few, frail or needy members, factors that obviously constrained participation in the local coalition. In communities affected by new development and gentrification, we found once-struggling congregations optimistically conducting capital campaigns and member outreach programs, with less of their energy and resources committed to social mission.

TRUST

Integrity and fiscal responsibility are obviously important to maintaining healthy partnerships. In our field research, we observed other aspects of trust that can impact congregations' enthusiasm for the partnership.

- A strong reputation as an effective community organization increases trust and the symbolic value of participation in the coalition.
- Visible and well communicated programs insure congregations know how their resources are being used. Achieving this is especially difficult for coalitions that provide behind-the-scene client services such as case management or meals-on-wheels. Pursuing multiple mission strategies, such as conducting social services and bridge-building programs, can also make it difficult to communicate a coalition's vision and identity, thereby reducing congregations' loyalty to the organization.
- In more than one community, we found congregations with misconceptions about coalition policies and programs. Similarly, we found cases in which coalitions have lost touch with congregations' expectations of the partnership. For example, in one community, a coalition board member articulated concerns about local congregations beginning to sponsor programs of their own:

  > *[The coalition] started out as a community of congregations with churches that were struggling for members and resources pulling together. [The congregations] are now communicating less and coordinating less and I think many congregations are beginning to develop their own programs.*

Several of the coalition's partnering congregations do operate at least some on-site programs, but they expect the coalition to help coordinate these efforts. As one lay leader expressed:

> *It would be a real service for those of us who are trying to feed the homeless if [the coalition] would help to coordinate the churches' efforts. I thought one church a Sunday was running a meal. It surprises me to find out they aren't. We look to [the coalition] for coordination of this sort of thing.*

STRENGTHENING COALITION PARTNERSHIPS

Faith-based coalitions and congregations share a rich history. Founding stories of coalitions often chronicle accounts of congregations joining forces in response to poverty or a local disaster. Some began as clergy networks that were formed to foster supportive, ecumenical relationships or to span racial boundaries. Others were denominational ministries that provided congregations with community service opportunities. In short, coalitions evolved from programs originally sponsored by religious leaders to fulfill congregational missions.

On average, coalitions are now over thirty years old and their organizational structures and activities have changed. Once operated under the auspices of congregations and other religious organizations, they are now autonomous nonprofits. Typically, they rely on multiple funding sources and paid staff to provide professional social services.

Congregations have changed as well during this time. The natural life cycle of religious communities includes births, deaths, newcomers, relocations, and leadership changes, transitions that can all impact congregations' resources and priorities. During the past few decades, forces such as baby boomer individualism and dramatic shifts in neighborhood demographics, denominational growth and decline patterns and family lifestyles have influenced the context in which congregations seek to understand and execute their mission.

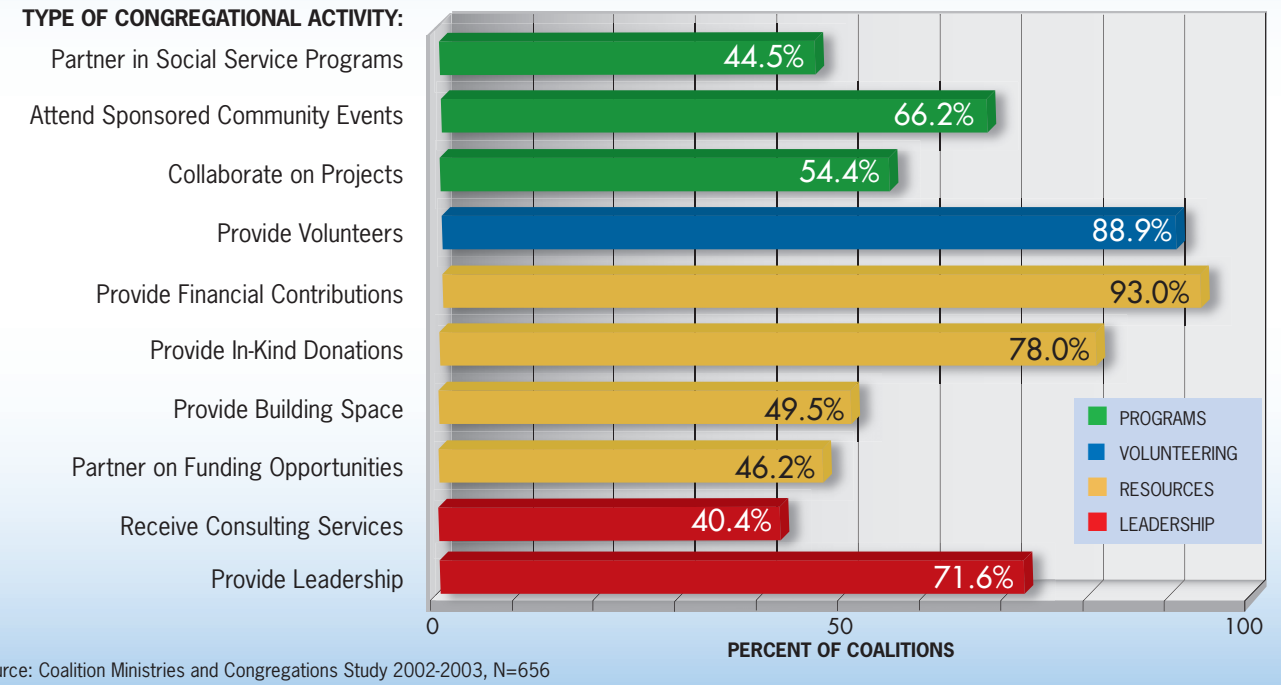
Our research findings suggest that leaders need to explore ways to revitalize the relationship between coalitions and congregations. Long-standing partnerships between coalitions and congregations are either now, or soon will be dependent on newcomers with no knowledge of the original commitment and goals upon which the coalition was formed, and coalition programs and strategies may have stagnated despite dramatic changes affecting the community and local congregations. Comments from clergy, such as the following, demonstrate that congregations value these partnerships, but that there is also a need for both sides to re-examine the dynamics of the relationship:

> *Our [mission board's] current long-range plan is to develop the partnerships we're involved in. We feel like [the coalition] is one of our partners, but we don't know that we've made that clear to the congregation, or as clear to [the coalition]–the partnership, both the giving and the receiving...We haven't formalized it and figured out how to make the most of it. We're kind of at a right time for trying to figure out what it would look like to be a partner with [the coalition]. How do we get the whole congregation aware and active in what's going on?*

Addressing community need is the overarching mission that motivates these partnerships and coalition leaders must first insure that program clients receive effective services. But it is perhaps equally important to their mission, and to congregations' social and spiritual missions, that congregations remain active partners. According to the National Congregations Study, 84 percent of congregations that engage in social services perform these activities through their partnerships with other organizations and congregations.[7] How can these partnerships be structured so that congregations and their members function as vital participants and continue to play a hands-on role in helping coalitions "repair the world"? In this final section, we examine ways in which congregations are affiliated with coalitions. We also present a framework that coalition and congregational leaders can use to develop strategies that enhance the value of, and congregations' commitment to, coalition partnerships.

FIGURE 5. Partnership Dimensions

Survey Question: In what ways do congregations support or affiliate with your organization?



Source: Coalition Ministries and Congregations Study 2002-2003, N=656

Partnership Dimensions

Across the United States, coalitions have developed a considerable array of strategies for partnering with congregations. In the CMACS survey, we asked coalition directors to indicate all of the ways that congregations affiliate with their organizations. The activities they report are each components of one of the following four dimensions: programs, volunteering, resources and leadership. These dimensions define the parameters of the partnerships between coalitions and congregations.

Figure 5 presents the activities that comprise these dimensions and the percentage of coalitions that have one or more congregations that participate in each. Most coalitions have congregations that participate by contributing resources. For example, approximately 90% of coalitions have congregations that provide volunteers. A smaller, but noteworthy percent of coalitions assist congregationally-based programs with resources and consulting services. In the following discussion, we share examples of the four partnership dimensions including several that involve coalition support of congregationally-based programs.

Partnership Strategies

The activities and policies related to the four partnership dimensions form the structure of the relationships between coalitions and congregations. These strategies should be designed to intersect favorably with partners' priorities, resources and challenges. Particular attention should be given to insuring that partnership activities positively impact the factors (discussed in Part 3) that influence congregations' involvement in a coalition: the congregation's mission orientation, internal and external relationships, congregational vitality, and trust.

The Partnership Strategies table (Table 7) illustrates ways in which the partnership dimensions interact with these four factors and provides a framework for assessing current and potential strategies based on the degree to which they effectively address congregations' individual goals and characteristics. The following discussion provides a brief explanation of each dimension and its importance. Also included are examples of each dimension, taken from our field research, that demonstrate ways in which partnership strategies can affect congregational involvement.

TABLE 7. Partnership Strategies

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CONGREGATIONAL INVOLVEMENT	PARTNERSHIP DIMENSIONS			
	PROGRAMS	VOLUNTEERING	RESOURCES	LEADERSHIP
MISSION ORIENTATION	Programs align with and foster congregation's sense of social mission	Offer options that align with congregation's mission orientation	Congregation: Identify and align contributions with the congregation's mission; Coalition: Learn about and support congregational programs	Congregation: Maintain vibrant link between social mission and faith tradition's teachings; Coalition: Inform congregations about social issues; Respect congregations' mission priorities
RELATIONSHIPS	Conduct bridge building events such as community forums, fund raising events, congregational tours, ecumenical and interfaith worship services	Sponsor congregational group projects, community projects	Maintain relationships between lay leaders responsible for social mission and coalition leaders; Rotate congregational liaisons to broaden relationships	Promote relationships and cooperation between congregations; Build clergy networks; Visible presence in congregations; Cultivate new leaders; Maintain congregational representation on coalition board
VITALITY	Programs utilize and nurture congregational vitality	Provide a range of volunteer opportunities that matches congregational capacity, nurtures congregational community life and encourages spiritual transformation	Identify giving opportunities that utilize and nurture congregational capacity and vitality	Coalitions and congregations: Promote and organize congregant participation in coalition programs
TRUST	Visible, effective programs are well-respected within the community; Communicate client outcomes (not just numbers); Host assemblies for congregational representatives	Encourage volunteer feedback; Provide training and acknowledge volunteers' contributions	Coalition: Demonstrate and insure fiscal responsibility; Congregation: Maintain current information on coalition finances and programs	Visible presence in the community; Provide program tours; Communicate and demonstrate ability to implement a clear vision

PROGRAMS

Programs are the primary vehicle used to achieve the partners' community service goals and the activities involved should reflect and advance their objectives. In addition to social service programs, coalitions sponsor advocacy campaigns, bridge building events and forums for increasing congregants' awareness of social issues. Programs that consolidate congregational resources to provide centralized services are inherent in the coalition ministry model. However, some congregational leaders believe it is important to sponsor at least some congregationally-based services and projects in addition to partnering with the coalition. The following examples demonstrate ways that two congregations have found to pursue social mission in a manner that is consistent with their priorities and still partner with coalitions to help provide comprehensive social services.

Nicholas House: An African American congregation in Atlanta, Georgia, offers an array of services through its Community Center. The congregation also partners with Nicholas House, a transitional shelter for families that provides case management and other services to help clients achieve independence. Each year the congregation provides scholarships to children living at Nicholas House to attend the Community Center's summer camp. The coalition and its sheltered families benefit from this program and the alliance fits well with the congregation's *mission orientation*, which is to directly serve the community rather than "pass on [the] responsibility to others."

Interfaith Community Services (ICS): ICS provides a continuum of care that helps to prevent and resolve homelessness. The coalition has modified its procedures for a partnering congregation that believes it is important for the church to assist individuals in crisis. As a deacon explained, "To have a church and not have it as a refuge or a place where somebody thinks they will be helped just would not be right." But congregational leaders also recognize that ICS offers a range of programs that can help clients achieve independence. At the congregation's request, ICS trained church volunteers to interview individuals requesting emergency assistance. The volunteers provide immediate help with food and financial aid and then refer clients to ICS for additional services. The church authorizes a dollar amount that it will reimburse the coalition for services it provides each client; the coalition provides the church with updates on clients' progress. This arrangement aligns with the congregation's *mission orientation* and clients still benefit from the coalition's continuum of care; the coalition receives additional funds for client services, as well as the church's annual contribution.

VOLUNTEERING

In addition to providing crucial labor-power, volunteers are important links to their congregation and potential advocates for promoting the partnership. An important coalition strategy for increasing volunteer participation is to offer a variety of opportunities that accommodate a wide range of ages and lifestyles. Coalition leaders should also consider the social and spiritual mission priorities of their partnering congregations. Clergy and lay leaders are often eager to provide members with service projects they can do together as a community-building activity for the congregation. Many congregational leaders look for volunteer activities that promote spiritual growth, push individuals beyond their comfort zone and challenge assumptions about those they serve. It is equally important that congregational leaders assume responsibility for promoting and coordinating volunteer activities.

Capitol Hill Group Ministry (CHGM): CHGM partners with Washington, D.C.'s local chapter of Interfaith Hospitality Network to provide case management for homeless families. In addition, the coalition coordinates rotational shelter sites among its member congregations. While hosting families for one month, congregational volunteers prepare meals, help with laundry and serve as chaperones. Congregants can volunteer for something as involved as spending the night or as quick and easy as dropping off an evening meal or doing a load of laundry. Those unable to volunteer can help cover costs through special donations. Hosting a shelter family nurtures congregational *vitality* by engaging members in a common purpose and fosters *relationships* among the volunteers. Congregations like the rotational shelter project because it takes "everyone pulling together:"

> *It gives [church members] a common thing—on Sunday mornings we know there's something we're all participating in and you can say 'how'd it go for you?'—you have one more thing in common. It just gives you this feeling that we're all in this together. (Lay Leader)*

Through this collaboration, coalition staff provide clients with counseling and training that can help them achieve self-sufficiency. At the same time, the rotational shelter program exposes volunteers to the realities of poverty, which can impact their *mission orientation* and commitment to social justice:

> *I was surprised to learn how complicated people's lives are. It's one thing after another—transportation problems, kids and school issues. They spend a half of their day just traveling across the city to get to this service and then another. I'm amazed anyone ever gets out of the situation. (Lay Leader)*

RESOURCES

Financial contributions from congregations are important, unrestricted funds that coalitions need to cover administrative costs and to maintain services for clients, especially those who are ineligible for grant monies. Most coalition leaders prefer that their organization be a line item in congregations' operating budgets. However, campaigns such as food drives and special offerings are also appreciated and help to keep coalition needs before the congregation. Furthermore, these drives can become symbolic, corporate events for congregations that nurture vitality by affirming their common purpose. One pastor noted that her congregation has a strong mission orientation but members' volunteer activities often relate to individual passions. Once a month, this congregation holds a food drive for the coalition that helps express the religious community's common identity:

> *It never ceases to amaze me how many remember to bring in bags of food even though [our members] are so irregular at attendance. That is a wonderful thing to see. At a real practical level, when it's time to sign up for volunteering [at the coalition] either for the feeding program or the immigration program or helping with taxes, it is very good for the congregation to hear that from up front. It is one way we can be visible and be stronger than we are alone.*

Resources can flow both ways. In addition to receiving in-kind donations and financial support from congregations, coalitions can bolster congregationally-based programs by issuing small grants or serving as a fiscal agent.

The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport (CCGB): CCGB serves as the fiscal agent through which FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) grant money is passed to approximately 30 emergency feeding programs dispersed throughout the city. Through this program, CCGB helps congregations maintain a network of neighborhood food pantries, as well as several long-standing Community Supper programs for the poor, homeless and elderly. CCGB hosts monthly meetings for the congregational leaders responsible for these food programs where they share efficiency tips and learn about community resources. CCGB also supports these efforts through hunger awareness programs and food drives, as well as allocating donor contributions across participating food programs. The Hunger Outreach program helps congregational volunteers maintain a direct, hands-on role in their neighborhoods and develop stronger *relationships* in the community and with CCGB staff.

LEADERSHIP

Coalition and congregational leaders are the backbone of the partnership and largely determine the strength and structure of the commitment. Lay leaders and clergy provide coalitions with needed expertise by serving on boards and committees; these connections can play an important role in helping coalitions stay grounded in their religious identity. These liaisons can also insure that congregants are informed about coalition strategies and needs.

Executive directors are the public face of the coalition. By attending congregational events, giving presentations and maintaining a presence in the wider community, directors help maintain congregational trust and enthusiasm for the coalition's mission. Coalition staff members have the knowledge and professional background to train volunteers for social mission, galvanize congregations' involvement in local issues and educate the community about social problems. The following examples demonstrate the impact that both congregational and coalition leaders can have on participation in a coalition.

South Louisville Community Ministries (SLCM): In an older neighborhood undergoing dramatic demographic change, one small congregation's generous support of SLCM stands out amidst the large number of struggling and dying churches. Lay leaders from the congregation, such as SLCM's board president, point to a clergy-led Bible study as the catalyst for the church's renewed commitment to social *mission* and to the 30-year-old coalition:

> *I think [the Bible study] is where we found out what it means to be a disciple. Of those of us that are active [in the coalition], I would give that Bible study the credit…The energy that class brought us—my walk has grown so much since that study. It helped me see I had gifts I needed to share. (Lay Leader)*

The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport (CCGB): The pastor and several lay leaders in one congregational affiliate have had an impact on their church's support for CCGB. The pastor serves on the coalition board and, as the chairperson explains, the Mission Board has implemented procedures to insure that the congregation is intentional about its social mission partnerships, including its *relationship* with the coalition:

> *[The mission board] meets with [the coalition] on an annual basis and understands what happens to their funding and their initiatives. [CCGB] is a needs-based organization and not a government bureaucracy. It responds to real grassroots needs in the community and they are passionate about it because they see [the need] day in and day out. The lack of funding from the community and the government is a tremendously challenging situation and it just gets more and more difficult. We hear firsthand from them. We probe them and ask questions about what they are doing and their initiatives, and have a direct pipeline in terms of [the pastor] and other members of the congregation [who volunteer and serve on CCGB's board of directors]. It leaves you with the feeling that you wish you could do even more and we have raised our contributions and have tried to leverage our members' contributions with directed pledge-matching funds. (Chairperson–Mission Board)*

Interfaith Community Services (ICS): The ICS leadership hosts monthly meetings at which congregational representatives learn about social problems and policy issues, meet other coalition affiliates, hear client testimonies and take guided tours. In addition to encouraging congregants' commitment to social *mission*, these events help to build *relationships* among congregational and coalition leaders and foster *trust* in the coalition, which is evident through congregants' in-depth knowledge of the coalition and their pride in the organization:

> *I just want to repeat again that they are an organization that is doing a great job for the clientele. I have the utmost respect for [the leadership] and I'm tickled to death to see they are doing as well as they are...[The director] showed me all around the office space. If you go there, you're welcomed with open arms and they show you what they have to offer. They put themselves out to tell you what their organization does. It's nice to know because a lot of these organizations that we give money to we don't know for sure what they do with it. (Lay Leader)*

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no panacea that can insure stronger, more effective partnerships as every coalition and congregation is unique. The preceding examples are intended to encourage leaders to assess their existing mission strategies and develop programs and policies that fit their *particular* needs. But first, leaders on both sides of the partnership must be clear about their own goals.

1) Coalitions can begin this process by identifying the type of relationship they seek with congregations. What does it mean that the coalition is a "faith-based" organization? Why are relationships with congregations important to the coalition? What are the coalition's goals in terms of congregations? To what degree is the coalition accountable to partnering congregations and for helping congregations to remain active in the community? How can the coalition engage youth in volunteering and social mission? What role should the coalition play in promoting interfaith relationships? In promoting social justice and advocacy?

2) Congregations are also responsible for nurturing and shaping their community service partnerships. Clergy and lay leaders might review reasons why their congregation partners with the coalition and probe the congregation's mission priorities, gifts and challenges. The coalition's history is often an important part of the congregation's own story. What does the congregation know about its history with the coalition? In what types of volunteer roles are congregants interested or able to participate? How can the congregation help promote and organize these activities? Are there specific coalition activities that can help the congregation achieve its primary mission of remaining a vital faith community?

3) Ultimately, coalition and congregational leaders must dialogue to understand their overlapping missions and develop strategies that enhance the value and effectiveness of the partnership. In this process, coalitions should consider congregations *individually*. Coalition ministries rely on the collective resources and talents of local congregations. Still, the relationship with every congregation is unique because each has a distinct passion and capacity for social action. Coalitions can enhance the value of their partnerships by adopting a flexible approach towards each congregation that is responsive to its particular set of expectations, concerns and resources. The Partnership Strategies table focuses this analysis enabling leaders to identify partnership activities that can have a meaningful impact on factors that influence congregational commitment.

CONCLUSION

Religion has historically provided much of the inspiration, structure and leadership needed to respond to human need. Faith-based coalitions, which have mushroomed in the past several decades, exemplify this creative facet of religion. Convened by religious leaders, the inter-congregational coalition model was largely fueled by the ecumenical spirit of the twentieth century.

After a founding period of intense involvement from clergy and laity, coalitions have become independent nonprofit organizations and congregations have evolved into affiliates, rather than sponsors. The risk is great that coalition programs will come to represent outsourced solutions to congregations' social mission. As one new pastor observed when he learned that his congregation participates in a coalition, "That's both good to hear and not good to hear. It was good to know we were doing something, but it's not good if it's just a way to get rid of people."

At the same time, there is much cause to celebrate coalition partnerships. In addition to providing community services, many coalitions provide volunteer opportunities that actively engage congregants, inspire congregations' social mission and contribute to congregational vitality.

Based on the stories they tell, many coalitions survived difficult organizational growing pains before becoming stable, well-resourced, community service providers. These challenges were often resolved by the faithful leadership of congregational representatives. Coalition partnerships now face mid-life challenges in which the initial enthusiasm surrounding the mission may wane. Coalition and congregational leaders need to revisit and perhaps re-vision the mission that unites them. One pastor eloquently stressed the need for congregations and coalitions to dialogue about their shared mission:

> *What are common foundations in scripture that connect us? How can we appeal to one another, lift one another up? How does it help us to see ourselves as being involved in common goals? We need to really dig at it through anecdotes, experience the story of one another. Where goals overlap is the why of doing it.*

It is our hope that this report can help guide such conversations and enable leaders to develop strategies that will maximize the strength and effectiveness of these relationships.

REFERENCE NOTES

[1] The National Congregations Study found that less than 10% of congregations in the United States engage in programs that involve anything more than fleeting contact with those they serve. See Mark Chaves (2004). *Congregations in America.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[2] See Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce (2002). *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations: Who's Going Where and Why.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

[3] See A. David Bos (2005). *Bound Together: A Theology for Ecumenical Community Ministry.* Cleveland: The Pilgram Press

[4] See Nancy Ammerman (2005). *Pillars of Faith*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[5] Ibid., Only 54% of African American congregations have one or more partners for the purpose of community service. This compares to 89% for white Mainline Protestant, 66% for Catholic and 60% for Conservative Protestant congregations. (Table 14. p.166).

[6] Austin, James (2000). "Strategic Collaboration between Nonprofits and Businesses." Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 29:69-97.

[7] See Mark Chaves (2004). *Congregations in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

APPENDIX

The CMACS project uses the following four characteristics to define the faith-based coalitions that are included in this research: 1) the organization identifies as faith-based; 2) religious congregations are in some manner affiliated with the organization; 3) it delivers at least one social service (based on an extensive list of service types); and 4) it is governed by its own board of directors. Virtually all have obtained 501 (c) 3 status from the Internal Revenue Service.

The CMACS project utilized two research methods to gain a better understanding of the scope and structure of faith-based service coalitions and to explore the factors that influence the level of support they receive from congregations: a mailed survey of faith-based coalitions and interviews at nine field research sites.

MAILED SURVEY

It is important to note that the population we are studying is unknown, and therefore, impossible to randomly sample. Our initial mailing list was obtained from the Interfaith Community Ministry Network, an organization founded in 1988 with a database that included 1,383 organizations. To insure that all 50 states and the 100 largest U.S. cities were represented, we added the names of 32 coalitions that were identified through the Internet and brief interviews with representatives from other community ministries and councils of churches. We next compared the original ICMN database with the list of over 200 "United States Regional and Local Ecumenical Bodies" found in Chapter 7 of the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches (Lindner 2002). A comparison of our list with the yearbook list determined that the two shared 85 organizations in common; the remaining 115 organizations in the yearbook were added to our sample.

We used two additional methods to address biases that we recognized in the original sample. First, we asked respondents to the initial wave of 1,186 mailed questionnaires to identify organizations similar to their own, especially those that were predominantly evangelical, African American or located in rural areas. After duplicates were deleted, this snowball sample included 297 organizations. Second, we purchased a list from InfoUSA of organizations that were: 1) located in two underrepresented regions on our list, the west and northeast, and 2) coded with the Standard Industrial Classification Code for "Social Service and Welfare Organizations." We screened this list for organizational names containing keywords similar to those in the original sample, including "ecumenical," "interfaith" and "ministry." We deleted 64 duplicates from the previous two lists resulting in a third mailing list with 555 organizations.

Combining all waves, 2038 questionnaires were mailed, of which 829 were returned, for a total response rate of 41 percent, which is high for a mailed survey. From the 829 completed questionnaires, we dropped 173 (21 percent) that failed to meet one or more of our four criteria for a final sample of 656.

FIELD RESEARCH

Nine coalitions were selected from among survey respondents to participate in the second phase of the project. These sites were selected to provide variation across several key characteristics: regional location, size of operating budget, number of congregational affiliates, religious diversity and amount of government funding. At each coalition site, field researchers conducted interviews with coalition leaders and volunteers, and selected a sample of approximately 6 to 8 congregations affiliated with the coalition and 2 non-participating congregations. Congregational affiliates were selected to provide equal representation of strongly and weakly committed congregations, as identified by coalition directors, and variation across several key characteristics, including religion/denomination, ethnicity, size of the membership and location relative to the coalition. Interviews were conducted at each congregation with the senior clergy, lay leaders, and staff members responsible for social mission, and coalition volunteers.

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