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Faith Based Initiatives and Black Churches: Relationships in a Small City.

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ABSTRACT This exploratory study examined characteristics of black churches in a small southern city that affected the likelihood that such churches would play an active role in faith-based community services. A formal mail survey of church ministers in black Protestant churches in this city was employed. Results were discussed in light of federal policies that promote faith-based initiatives to meet local social service needs. The results indicated that the majority of the black churches in this study were active in addressing local needs through indirect (sermons, lobbying local governments) rather than direct (program development and implementation) means. Among a range of congregation characteristics examined, only length of time that the congregation had been at its present location appeared to affect levels of community participation. General policy implications of these research findings were examined.

In 1996, then President William Clinton, seeking to reform the highly problematic welfare system, signed into law the Personal Responsibility, Work Opportunity, and Medicaid Restructuring Act (PRWOMRA 1996). Though many focused on the elimination of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the creation of Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) provision, it was people's ability to deduct for federal tax purposes their contributions to religious organizations that many religious conservatives supported. Such was the case for nearly five years. However, with the election of George W. Bush as President and his ardent support for religious involvement, particularly faith groups partnering with government, he expanded the charitable choice provision to allow for the government to partner with faith groups for social services. This paper

examines the willingness of black churches in a small city¹ in the South to participate in or make use of this initiative.

We note early that this study drew on a survey of 36 black pastors in a small city. The reasons why we looked at the black pastors and one city was that in the black church, the pastor was the individual responsible for setting the goals of the church, developing the plan of action for the church's resources, persuading members on secular and sacred matters, and implementing community initiatives. According to many, the pastor's views reflect the sentiments of their church (Mays and Nicholson 1933; Johnstone 1997; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Dash and Razor 2001/2002). However, neither their nor their churches' views on faith-based initiative, particularly community engagement, were adequately represented in the literature. This paper was designed to address this void by examining two critical issues that seemed to be absent from this debate: 1) Do black churches in a small city² have an interest in engaging in community service programs, and if so, at what levels do they participate? and 2) What characteristics predispose black churches to participate directly in their communities?

To provide a context for the analysis, the initial sections of this paper reviewed, in general, the debate on charitable choice and the current basis for black church engagement in meeting the needs of their community. In the second part, this research explored the nature of black church community participation in a small southern city and the variables that describe the church environment.

Charitable Choice

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of people—from public officials to academicians—debating the role of religion in politics (Wilson 1999; Bush 2001; DiIulio 1999; Dionne and DiIulio 1999; Cnaan 1999). This discussion, which centered on the applicability of constitutional law as it pertains to the “separation of church and state,” though not new to the body politic, reached its zenith with the Personal Responsibility Work

¹ For anonymity the name of the city is not mentioned specifically, but referred to as “the city,” the “target city,” or “a small city.”

² The term “small city” was defined by 2000 U.S. Census as any city that with a population between 15,000 and 80,000.

Opportunity and Medicaid Restructuring Act, particularly the "Charitable Choice" provision (Pew Forum 2000; Carlson-Thies 2001). This provision noted that faith-based organizations had been key contributors in providing social services to those in need and, because of their successes, were eligible to "partner with government" for the continuation of their secular programs (PRWOMRA 1996; Small 1996). Such was the sentiment of many of the program's proponents (Malone 1994; DiIulio 1998; Chaves 1999; Bush 2001). The opponents of Charitable Choice, likewise, acknowledged both the activism of churches as well as their secular successes; however, they noted that Charitable Choice was wrought with problems from an attempt by government to abdicate its responsibilities to the blurring of the lines between public and private (Goeringer 2000; Pew Forum 2000; Americans United for the Separation of Church and State 2002). Nevertheless, the words of John DiIulio, the White House's former Director of the Faith-Based Initiative, made the point best as to why churches were looked to by the public sector: "Institutions of faith have succeeded in uplifting people out of their distress because of their innate desire to help those in peril, whereas, government, in general, provided 'welfare programs' that responded to the superficial, as opposed to the essential needs of the individual" (DiIulio 1998).

Community Organizations and Engagement

It was important to understand institutions of faith within the context of community organization. Community organization can be defined as any type of organization that exists within a neighborhood from civic organizations (e.g., parent/teacher associations, neighbor associations, and neighborhood planning units) to religious/social organizations (e.g., churches and fraternal organizations)(Downs 1981). As such, scholars have examined various types of community organizations in an effort to understand why groups participate in the community (Flora et. al. 1992; Yates 1977; Downs 1981; and Herson and Bolland 1990; Olson et al. 1988; Malone 1994; Gilderbloom 1996; Harris 1999; Cavendish 2000).It was Dahl in his seminal work on pluralism who argued that people, via collective action, formed community organizations to influence decision

makers to advance the group's agenda (1967). These organizations, essentially, had at their core a desire to influence government, either indirectly or directly, by capitalizing on the sociological need of people to benefit from and belong to such groups (Berry 1989; Truman 1951; Salisbury 1969; Lindsey and Beach 2002; Browning and Rodriguez 2000; Calhoun-Brown 2000; Harris 1999, Putnam 2000). Herson and Bolland (1990) acknowledged the aforementioned, but went on to argue that community organizations often respond to community issues themselves, rather than waiting on government to react to their needs. Three very prominent examples of churches that are participating in their communities are the Ten Point Coalition (a coalition of faith groups and private industry) in Boston which developed low to middle income family housing in a response to the number of persons who were renters and the state's housing cost problem which kept many people from being able to buy a home (McRoberts 2001), the Brentwood Baptist Church in Houston that saw the growing number of people infected with the HIV having no place to live and decided to develop a housing community for persons living with HIV (Robinson 1995) and the Victory Temple in Atlanta whom partnered with local correctional facilities in rehabilitating and providing men with necessary skills that allowed them to become productive citizens (Crutchfield 2003). Rather than ignoring the problems plaguing their community or waiting for government to respond to their issues, many churches, like the ones mentioned, because of their understanding of their purpose to serve are answering the call to engage socially, politically, and economically in meeting the needs of their communities.

Within the black community, the Church as an institution has been the primary "force" with which the majority (82 percent) of blacks in America affiliated, to which they contributed most of their resources, both monetary and non-monetary, and looked to for protection (DiIulio 1999; Harris 1999; Sernett 1999; Reed 1994). As a result, black churches, according to DiIulio, had historically served as a "second safety net" to governmental programs, which were too slow or unresponsive to the needs of the black community.

Many scholars have illustrated how and why black churches responded to the needs of the black community. David Hurst (1981) wrote, for example, that slaves coped with their sufferings by forming their own underground churches. It was in these churches,

which E. Franklin Frazier called the "invisible institution," where slaves were able to gather for community support and spiritual renewal. Gary Peck (1982) and Hortense Powdermaker (1969) asserted that black churches nurtured feelings of self worth to blacks, particularly during slavery, by allowing blacks to turn to each other for support and collective action. In addition to the psychological effects, black churches produced numerous sub-institutions (e.g., mutual and benevolent societies, as well as educational facilities) that were effective in meeting the practical needs of the black community. These groups were mostly designed for providing mutual aid to slaves and free blacks facing traumatic situations in their lives (Frazier 1963; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Sernett 1999). For instance, when a Black slave family was split, because of the institution of slavery or death, mutual aid and benevolent societies assisted the remaining family members with necessities such as food and money. Woodson (1972) concluded that each organization that was birthed out of the black church was revolutionary, because it was testament to how blacks pulled their meager resources together to help the community in need. It can be inferred from Woodson and Hurst that many black churches understood the plight of the black masses during this time period and desired to ameliorate these needs by connecting the church "closely with things of this world to make it [society] a decent place to live in" (Woodson 1972:249). Gayraud Wilmore (1972:113) noted: "[W]henver these societies were organized, they began to protest against white prejudice and neglect and with the objective of providing not only for religious needs, but for social service, mutual aid and solidarity among people of African descent." This trend of black churches playing a chief role (e.g., cultural nurturer, social emancipator, political organizer, business innovator, and educator) for the black community can be traced back to the early 1800s and has continued to a lesser extent today (Frazier 1963; Powdermaker 1969; Meier and Rudwick 1976; Wilmore 1972; Harris 1999; Billingsley 1999; Cavendish 2000).

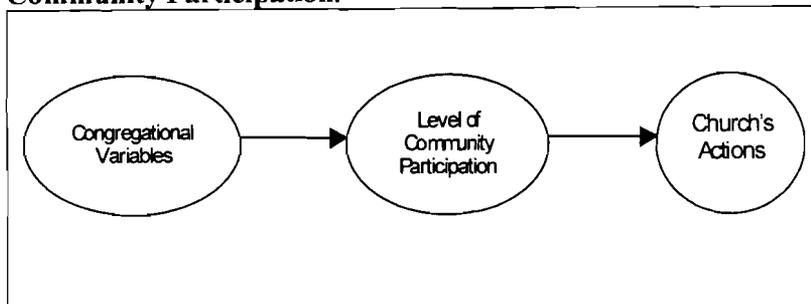
Black churches have been analyzed by scholars using both explicit and implicit conceptual constructs (Hicks 1977; Johnstone 1997; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Hamilton 1972; Myrdal 1944). The explicit approach was based on an examination and evaluation of the observed, or overt, actions of churches, while the implicit approach was based on the exploration of the inner structures of the

church. Wilmore (1972) noted that no longer were scholars interested only in describing the actions of black churches, they were also interested in understanding what caused their actions. Consequently, the latter approach assumed that there were certain organizational traits that influenced churches' actions.

This study measured several dimensions of implicit qualities of black churches' and the characteristics of the members: membership size, social status of the membership, educational level of the membership, social proximity of membership to their church, membership trend, and the church's tenure in the community. Documenting these characteristics adds to the store of information on black churches and contributes to understanding why certain black churches are engaged in the community while others are not.

Hypotheses

A contextual model was developed to aid in analysis of contextual conditions affecting the level of black church engagement in addressing community needs (Figure 1). It was the general premise of this study that civic engagement was sensitive to the specific congregational context in which persons attended. Thus, the first hypothesis was that black churches with large memberships were most likely to participate more in community activities (H₁). Black churches that were less community active were hypothesized to have had a membership that decreased during the past five years (H₂). Black churches that had been in their communities for more than ten years were hypothesized to be more likely to engage in community outreach (H₃). It was also expected that black churches with a high percentage of blue-collar congregants would be less likely to participate in community service projects (H₄). Black churches with a low percentage of college-educated adults were anticipated to be less likely to participate in community service projects (H₅). In addition, churches with a high percentage of their membership living within one mile of the church were expected to be less likely to participate in community service projects (H₆).

Figure 1: Understanding Black Churches in Small City Community Participation.

Data Collection and Methods

This case study used a 49-item, all closed-ended, forced-response instrument, developed by Walter Stuhr Jr. (Stuhr 1974) of the Center for the Scientific Study of Religion in Chicago, Illinois and modified by this researcher in 2001, to collect information about black churches and their interest in community participation (Sewell 2001). The city of Albany, Georgia was selected because of a research grant from the local university, its demographic profile, particularly its dependency on a blue-collar economy, its high poverty rate, its low per capita income (\$15,485), and its high concentration of blacks living within the boundaries of the city (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). This setting had 77,853 residents of which nearly half were black, with 43.4 percent of them living at or below the poverty level (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000), and 85.2 percent noting that they were members of a local church. Although many middle-class blacks lived in integrated neighborhoods, the majority lived in predominately segregated public housing communities, which were primarily (25.1 percent) headed by single mothers who tended to be overwhelmingly (70 percent) dependent upon some form of public assistance (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). Considering that although the data did not specifically address this statistic, it is fair to assume that the majority of the city's 6.5 percent unemployed labor force lived in the black community (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). This environment, particularly as it related to the black community, made the city a very reasonable setting to explore whether or not black churches in a small city, which were

directly affected by the conditions, were concerned about the needs of their community, and to what extent they sought to respond to the challenges.

A universe of black Protestant churches was constructed using the university's database of ministers, the local ministerial alliance membership list, the local newspaper's religious section, the most recent edition of the city's telephone directory, and the city's black funeral homes. Although the representative nature of the list was not infallible, it was the best technique to garner a list of black churches. The process produced a list of 68 black churches.

In January of 2001, using Don Dillman's model (Dillman 1978 and Mangione 1995), a survey was mailed to every black pastor in the city with a request that it be returned by January 30, 2001. For the convenience of each pastor, a self-addressed stamped envelope was enclosed with each questionnaire along with a cover letter and letters of endorsement from the state presiding officer representing their respective denominations, as well as the president of the local black ministerial alliance. The endorsement letters were included in an effort to increase response rate. According to Dillman, letters from organizational leaders add credibility and legitimacy to the study, as well as serve as motivation to the respondents to participate (Dillman 1978). Because of a low return rate on January 30, a follow-up letter and questionnaire were mailed, and calls were made to those pastors who had not responded. This second mailing was more successful, generating an overall response of 36 (53 percent of the total targeted population) usable surveys.

Although this paper sought to understand the churches' level of community participation, its results were based on responses provided by the churches' pastor. The literature affirmed that a black pastor's perceptions were very reflective of his/her congregation's views, and that it was his/her vision, for the most part, that set the direction, or "mission" for the church and the black community (Hamilton 1972). W. E. B. Du Bois, writing about black pastors in Philadelphia, advanced that "Taken on the average the Negro ministers of the city are good representatives of the masses of the Negroes. They are largely chosen by the masses...and must in every way be men whom the rank and file of the race like and understand" (Nelsen, Yokley and Nelsen 1971:72). Mays and Nicholson (1969) suggested that the black pastor is one of

the freest, as well as most influential men on the American platform today. "This is due to various causes, but chief among them is the factor of the long-time prestige of the black minister" (Mays and Nicholson 1969:10). Mays and Nicholson's (1969:227) concluding statement summed up the point: "What the [black] church does and will do...will depend in a large measure upon the leadership as expressed in the [black] pulpit." In comparative studies, this method has been used by other scholars to investigate black faith groups (Mays and Nicholson 1969; Johnstone 1997; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; ITC 2000; Dash and Razor 2001/2002).

The data was analyzed using Pearson's chi-square.

$$X^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

This method was selected as opposed to other more correlative procedures because of the small number of cases that we received for this study. If we had attempted to run a more comprehensive analysis on these few cases, then we would have run the risk of our findings being useless and inconclusive.

Variables

Dependent Variable

The church's level of community participation. In determining the primary indicator of the church's level of community participation the question was: "In thinking about your responses to local community problems, in which of the following actions did you engage during the last year (2000-2001)?" Responses to this question enabled the researcher to examine and categorize the types of community engagement (e.g., indirect or direct) in which the churches had been involved.

Indirect participation by churches was defined as passive actions expressing interest and/or concern, such as speaking publicly about community issues, informal visits with civic or community leaders, etc. Direct participation was defined as assertive, faith-based community participation in programs and activities developed and implemented by churches to address community problems. Examples of such activities might include forming a community

development corporation or implementing programs in job training, housing development, or education. It was important that the church leaders who were sampled understood that the indirect and direct actions to be reported were to be community oriented, as opposed to being activities conducted for the sole benefit of members of their respective churches.

In addition, I analyzed the church's level of community participation by examining its pastor's perceptions of seven types of community projects: educational/community program, community development initiative, job training, housing development, educational enhancement, and church-based non-profit (Malone 1994). The aforementioned questions sought to measure the church's concern and interest in various types of community service initiatives. Logically, if a congregation was not concerned about or interested in community projects it would be unlikely to participate in faith-based community initiatives (Flora et al 1992).

Measurement Variables

Membership size. The size of the church's membership was an important variable in assessing that church's capacity for participation and outreach activities. It was assumed an increased membership led to increased revenue for the church. Large churches were seen as important community organizations. Churches were then divided into five categories: 1=1000-more, 2= 500-999, 3=300-499, 4=150-299, 5=less than 150.

Social status of the congregation. The social status of the congregation was another factor examined to see if, as Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) found, churches that had a high percentage of blue collar workers tended to be less inclined to be engaged in community outreach because they had fewer resources than churches with a lower percentage of blue collar workers. For the purpose of this paper, the percentage of adult members in the congregation who were blue-collar workers was used to measure social status. Four categories were defined: 1=75 percent or more, 2=50 percent-74 percent, 3=25 percent-49 percent, and 4=less than 25 percent of the congregation was blue-collar.

Educational level of the congregation. The questionnaire solicited information on the percentage of adult members in the congregation who had two years or more of college education.

Scholars have argued that the educational level of congregations influences the congregation's perspective regarding the world around them (Johnstone 1997). The responses were divided into four categories: 1=75 percent or more, 2=50 percent-74 percent, 3=25 percent-49 percent, and 4=less than 25 percent with two or more years of college education.

Proximity of the congregation to church. The theory of social proximity posits that persons tend to be involved in projects and in organizations that affect the space in which they live and operate. We asked: "About what percentage of the membership of the congregation live within one mile of the church building?" The level of measurements was: 1=75 percent or more, 2=50 percent-74 percent, 3=25 percent-49 percent, and 4=less than 25 percent.

Membership trends. An earlier study reported that rural congregations with a strong commitment to social justice and with direct participation in community outreach ministries are more likely to be growing than other congregations (Razor 2002). As a result, the respondents were asked to describe the church's membership trend during the past five years. The response options were: 1=increasing, 2=remained the same, and 3=decreasing. The respondents who contended that their memberships had been increasing were asked to indicate the top two reasons for this trend. The choices were: 1=newcomers to the neighborhood, 2=gain in population in the neighborhood, 3=change in religious makeup of the community, 4=good church programs, 5=vigorous evangelistic and recruitment efforts, 6=approval of pastor's theological and social view, and 7=other. It was assumed that the top two reasons for churches having an increased membership were: "good church programs" and "approval of pastor's theological and social views." The rationale behind these assumptions was that people were drawn to churches that have programs that meet their religious and secular needs.

Church's years in present location. The respondents were asked how long had their churches been at the present location. Thus, the time spans in the present locations were categorized into five areas: 1=more than 50 years, 2=25-50 years, 3=10-24 years, 4=5-9 years, and 5=less than 5 years. Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) noted that churches that had the longest tenure in a community tended to be more stable and community oriented.

Table 1—Churches' Years in Their Present Location.

Years in Present Location	Responses	Percentage
less than 5 years	4	11.1 %
5-9 years	2	5.6 %
10-24 years	5	13.9 %
25-50 years	11	30.6 %
more than 50 years	13	36.1 %

Table 2—Congregational Membership, in Months.

Membership Range (months)	Percentage
less than 150	36.0 %
150-299	39.0 %
300-499	14.0 %
500-999	8.0 %
more than 1000	3.0 %
Total	100 %

Summary of Frequencies Results

The respondents represented a total of five affiliations out of the nine preselected black associations. It should be noted that intensive efforts were made to include the Methodist denominations (e.g., African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, and the United Methodist), which represented approximately 7 percent of the black church associations in this target city; however, these efforts resulted in no responses. The majority of churches in the study were in the General Missionary Baptist Convention (52.8 percent), followed by Pentecostals (22.2 percent), non-denominational (11.1 percent), Church of God in Christ (8.3 percent), and New Era State Convention (5.6 percent).

Of the 36 pastors that responded, 13 (36.1 percent) had been in their present locations for more than 50 years, 11 (30.6 percent) for 25-50 years, five (13.9 percent) for 10-24 years, two (5.6 percent) for 5-9 years, and four (11.1 percent) churches had been in their present locations for less than 5 years. The median range was between 25-50 years (see Table 1). The plurality (38.9 percent) of these churches had memberships that range from 150-299. Thirty-six percent of the churches had memberships of less than 150 congregants, 14 percent had memberships between 300-499, 8 percent between 500-999, and only one, 3 percent, had a membership of 1000 or more (see Table 2).

The majority (55.6 percent) of the respondents noted that their churches had experienced an increase in membership trends, whereas 36 percent noted that their membership had remained the same, and 5.6 percent responded that it had decreased. Of the churches that experienced an increase in membership, the increase was attributed to the approval of their pastor's theological and social views (30.6 percent) and viable church programs (25 percent). It was also revealed that 83 percent of the churches had congregations where the educational level was less than two years of college education; 75 percent had congregations with more than 25 percent of the members in blue collar occupations, and 61 percent noted that less than 25 percent of their membership lived less than one mile from the church.

Although this research had limited objectives, and did not address all of the possible variables that could be related to or impact the church's level of community participation, it was important to examine the demographic characteristics of the respondents, given that they were the primary respondents of the study. The plurality of the respondents (44.4 percent) was between 46-65 years of age; 33.3 percent, 11.1 percent, and 5.6 percent were 36-45 years of age, 24-35 years of age, and 66 years or more, respectively. None of the respondents said he or she was less than 23 years old.

The majority (50.1 percent) had "low" (e.g., some high school) to "low moderate" (e.g., some college) levels of education. There were only seven respondents (19.4 percent) who had graduated from college, and nine (25 percent) who either had completed a master's or doctoral degree. Further, 61 percent of the respondents had pastored at their present locations for more than 6 years, 27.8

percent had served between 1 and 5 years, and 5.6 percent had served one year or less.

Lastly, nearly all of the respondents (83.3 percent) lived two or more miles from their churches, 2.8 percent lived between one and two miles, and 8.3 percent lived between a one-half and one mile from the church. No respondent reported living less than one-half mile from the church.

The last set of questions that was asked of the respondents centered on identifying the problems in their community and their view of the city in general. Although these questions were not directly related to the research issues, one could assume from the responses whether or not the respondents felt there was a need for community participation. Hence, the respondents were provided with a list of community problems (from the preponderance of youth gangs to dilapidated communities) and asked to respond, as to whether the issue was a 1=serious problem, 2=somewhat of a problem, 3=not a problem, or 4=do not know. Based on the number of respondents that noted a particular issue as a serious problem, I then developed a ranking of the issues. Table 3 revealed the results of the respondents' perception of the most important issues facing the black community in the city, from which it was inferred that a plurality (55.6 percent) of the respondents saw disinvestments in the black community as the most serious problem, followed by joblessness (38.9 percent), inadequate job-training programs (36.9 percent), ineffective political representation (36.1 percent), burglary, vandalism, and assault (36.1 percent), and deteriorating housing (36.1 percent). This information was important because it cast light on whether or not black churches were aware of the problems facing their community, as well as indicated where these churches should focus their community participation.

They were asked to compare their communities to that of white communities. The choices were: 1=above average, 2=below average and 3=the same. Two respondents (5.6 percent) commented that their communities were "above average" and nine (25 percent) responded that their communities were "below average." The majority of the respondents (69.4 percent) ranked their communities as "about average."

The respondents were then asked to rank the city for various periods (i.e., 30 years ago, now, and five years from now)?

Table 3: Most Salient Issues Facing the City.

Community Problems	Response*	Percentage**
Disinvestments in Black Community	20	55.6 %
Joblessness	14	38.9 %
Deteriorating Housing	13	36.1 %
Ineffective Political Representation	13	36.1 %
Burglary, Vandalism, and Assault	13	36.1 %
Inadequate Job Training Programs	12	33.3 %
Dilapidated Community	10	27.8 %
Inadequate Public Education	8	22.2 %
Youth Gangs	7	19.4 %
Vacant and neglected Land	7	19.4 %

*The number of pastors who responded that this was a most serious issue.

**Pastors were allowed to choose more than one issue so the percentages will not equal 100 %.

Table 4: Pastors' Response to Ranking the City for Various Periods.

Rating	Today	30 years ago	5 years from now
Best	10 (27.9 %)	4 (11.2 %)	18 (50 %)
Moderate	17 (47.2 %)	9 (25 %)	10 (27.8 %)
Worst	8 (22.3 %)	18 (50 %)	6 (16.7 %)
Total	35 (97.2 %)	31 (86.1 %)	34 (94.4 %)

* *some respondents (n=36) chose not to answer one or more of the questions.*

(see Table 4) After collapsing the ten categories into three general categories: 1=worst (1-4), 2=moderate (5-6), and 3=best (7-10), the majority (50 percent) ranked the city as the worst 30 years ago, while 9 (25 percent) felt that it was a moderate place to live, and only four (11 percent) responded that it was a good place in which to live. The average sentiment about the city 30 years ago was that it was not (3.4) a desirable place to live. Likewise, eight (22.3 percent) responded that the city was a worse place to live now, 17 (47.2 percent) felt that the city was a moderate place to live, and 10

(27.8 percent) felt that the city was the best possible city in which to live. The mean evaluation of the city today was moderate at 5.6. When asked to project five years into the future about the city, the respondents noted, on average, that it would be a good city in which to live (7.8). Half of the respondents (50 percent) projected that the city would be a great city in five years, 10 (27.8 percent) responded that it would be a moderate city, and 6 (16.7 percent) of the respondents felt that the city would not be a desirable place to live.

Much of the commentary regarding black churches and their role in society falls into two perspectives: an inward view of society, in which the church rejects contemporary community issues for more religious experiences, and a "this-world" perspective that sees the work of the church as being solely involved in secular and sacred affairs (Sewell 2001). Thus, the respondents' perceptions of what they felt was the role of the church—"other-world" or "this-world"—was ranked as important for possibly understanding why black churches in this small city did not participate directly in community development initiatives. Scholars have long debated this issue with little resolution. The majority of these scholars have concluded that most black churches and their pastors were "other-worldly" in their view of the role of the church. Thus, the respondents were given 10 statements that measured, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, their perceptions of the church as an institution (See Table 5).

The pastor's perception of what he/she felt was the church's role was examined for its influence on community development. Basically, the doctrine of the church was significant, because it reflects the views of the pastor and the directions of the church. An analysis of the responses to these ten questions reflected a basic belief by many of the respondents that the role of black churches, particularly in the targeted small city, was to be active in both the secular and sacred spheres of the community.

This survey also garnered information on the level of interest black churches in this small city, based on their pastor's perception, had in community development. Most black churches (88.9 percent) were interested in community development. The data revealed that 15 (41.7 percent) were very interested, 17 (47.2 percent) were somewhat interested, three (8.3 percent) not interested, and one (2.8 percent) had no opinion.

Table 5: Pastors' Perceptions of the Churches' Responsibilities.

Responses	Agree	Disagree
One's relationship to God is immediate and direct. (other-world)	30.6 %	50 %
The Christian faith provides clear-cut answers to contemporary ethical questions. (this-world)	83.3 %	5.6 %
The working of God can be seen in the human struggle for freedom and dignity. (this-world)	66.7 %	19.5 %
Christians should not enter into the give and take of political compromise. (other-world)	55.6 %	11.1 %
Black churches have a responsibility to develop inner city communities through the use of public and private funds, and can be an excellent tool for churches to redevelop their communities. (this-world)	75 %	2.8 %
In civic and political matters, minister should:		
Act on behalf of the congregation (this-world)	81.6 %	11.1 %
Prepare and encourage members of the congregation to act individually (other-world)	55.6 %	19.5 %
Encourage the congregation to act cooperatively (this-world)	72.3 %	5.6 %
Act along with the congregation (this-world)	58.4 %	16.7 %
Act only as a private citizen (other-world)	11.2 %	63.9 %

Do black churches in this small city participate in their community? This research found that 36 (86.1 percent) of respondents who responded to this study had a concern for community participation. However, it was determined, by asking what type of community action these churches had engaged in within the last year, that much of their participation was indirect action.

Table 6: Pastors' Actions Taken Regarding Community Development (N=31).

Actions	Response	Percentage
Spoke about a specific community issue from the pulpit	16	44.4 %
Encouraged members of the congregation to take action through study groups or individual conversation	8	22.2 %
Wrote letters to public officials.	1	2.8 %
Informal visits with public officials and other community leaders	2	5.6 %
Sought to form a community development corporation	1	2.8 %
Helped to organize the community toward revitalization efforts	3	8.3 %

**Respondents were asked to choose as many as applied.*

Specifically, 27 respondents (75 percent) reported that their participation had simply extended from speaking about community issues from the pulpit to writing letters to public officials, while only four (11.1 percent) respondents had been direct participants in developing community service programs (see Table 6). Consistent with this finding, 19 respondents (52.8 percent) said they had only preached about community development over the last six months, 10 (27.8 percent) had conducted small group community meetings, two (5.6 percent) reported to have had films or guest speakers to mobilize community development program efforts, and five (13.9 percent) responded that they had done nothing on the subject of community development (see Table 7).

Drawing on the theory that institutions were conduits for their members' will and notions that membership directs the type of action/program in which an institution engages, respondents were given six questions that addressed specific elements of community service (e.g., deteriorating communities, community development, job-training, housing development, and faith-based community development corporations) and asked to rate the level of support each

Table 7: Pastors' Community Development Actions – Past Six Months.

Efforts	Responses	Percentage
Sermons	19	52.8 %
Small group meetings	10	27.8 %
Films or guest speakers	2	5.6 %
Not at all	5	13.9 %
Total	36	100 %

had from the church. On average, over half of the respondents (63 percent), in each of the programs, supported the idea that such programs "would help" the community. Specifically, it was noted that 83.3 percent supported a program for improving deteriorating communities; 63.9 percent for community development; 77.8 percent for job training; 72.2 percent for housing, and 63 percent for educational enhancement. Only 55.6 percent noted that a church-based Community Development Corporation "would be of help" in the community. Most of the churches believe that community service programs "would help" their communities.

Cross tabulations were run on each of the questions with that of congregation demographic variables in an effort to see if any relationship existed. The results indicated that there was no relationship between congregational demographics and type of community service programs. However, there was a trend regarding the data: 1) churches with fewer than 299 members seemed more interested in community service programs; 2) churches with a congregation comprised of 25-49 percent college trained members were more community service minded; and 3) churches that had less than 25 percent of the congregation living one mile from the church tended to be more interested in community service programs

This inconsistency, church support for direct community action and indirect engagement by the church, begged the question: Why were so many churches concerned about community challenges yet showed such low levels of direct (or indirect) community participation?

Bivariate Analysis

The focus of this study was to determine if a church's membership characteristics were related to the church's community participation. The working assumptions were that the demographic composition of a particular congregation would impact the community participation of a church. Unfortunately, this sample was not extensive enough to reach any definitive conclusion about how the characteristics of black churches in a small city related to their participation. This study's findings, however, were interesting and suggestive of possible trends. After collapsing question 26 (note: "In thinking about your responses to local community problems, in which of the following actions did you engage during the last year?"), which was the dependent variable, into two categories (e.g., indirect and direct), it was revealed that of the seven hypotheses only one reported any significance: number of years the congregation has been in its present location ($\chi^2=11.923$, $p<.018$) (see Table 8).

The results are reported in Table 8. Among those 30 respondents who noted that they participated in their community, 10 (33 percent) had been in their present location for more than 50 years. All 10 of them were engaged in indirect community activities. Noting the challenge of using chi-square with so few cases, the research collapsed the five categories of the independent variable into two (e.g., 1=less than 25 years and 2=more than 25 years at its present location) and then analyzed it against the dependent variable. This showed no relationship between the variables (see Table 9). Likewise, the data indicated that the hypothesis was invalid. Churches that had been at their present location for more than 25 years were less involved in direct community participation than those in place less than 25 years.

Conclusion

Although the integration of religion and politics has often been controversial the issue has recently received the attention and interest of many social scholars (Dionne and DiIulio 1999; Wilson 1999) due to the debate regarding faith-based initiatives. This study examined the characteristics of pastors of black churches toward community participation in a small southern city, which indirectly provided some insight for the thesis that "charitable choice" might be a useful

Table 8: Relationship of Demographics to Community Participation.

Variable	P
Membership Size	.393
Social Status of Congregation	.102
Educational Level	.145
Proximity of Congregation to the Church	.626
Membership Trend	.603
Number of years the Church had been in the community	.018

**Chi-square test significant at .05 levels.

Table 9: Community Engagement and the Number of Years at Its Present Location.

Community Engagement	Less than 25 years	More than 25 years
Indirect	8 (26.7 %)	18 (60 %)
Direct	3 (10 %)	1 (3.37 %)
Total	11(36.7 %)	19 (63 %)

($\chi^2=2.921, p<.087$)

policy initiative. It needs to be restated that the findings should not be generalized outside of the present context. However, given the lack of current social research on levels of community participation within black churches in the South, the data from such an exploratory study can serve as a foundation for future studies and theorizing.

Based on the research reported upon here, black churches located in this small city were faced with serious challenges (e.g., disinvestment in black communities, joblessness, deteriorating housing, and crime) and, because of those issues, their communities were only moderately acceptable places to live. Moreover, nearly all of the respondents (88.9 percent) in this study indicated that their churches were concerned about their communities, and of those who noted that they were community concerned, 86.1 percent reported that they were either interested in responding to, or had begun to respond to, the needs of their communities. This stood in sharp

contrast to a 2000 study of black rural churches in the southeast conducted by the Interdenominational Theological Center which noted that southern rural black congregations tend to give less attention to social and political issues or serving as change agents within the larger society (Razor 2002). Nevertheless, sentiments expressed by my respondents were in line with the historic role and the “this-world” orientation of black churches in general. My results lend support to the current debate about Charitable Choice, and were consistent with the results reported by Mark Chaves, based on a study of 1,236 religious congregations in 1998, that race and religious traditions were key identifiers of congregations that would pursue public funding for social service activities (Chaves 1999). Specifically, black congregations that understood the role of the church to be one of activism were “very substantially” more likely to benefit from the Faith Based initiative (Dionne and DiJulio 1999).

The initial findings revealed that the number of years that the congregation had been at its present location was a predictor for level of community participation on the part of black churches. Because congregations do not operate within a cocoon, the issues that plague their communities directly affect them. Most of the members that attended these congregations lived in the shadows of these churches. Both of these points explained why black churches in this small city were inextricably linked to their communities and this link was only strengthened as the number of years the church had been in the community increased. In this light, the results reported here led the researcher to argue that if “choice” was to be beneficial, the number of years a congregation had been in its present location had to be taken into consideration.

A closer examination of the type of actions that black churches had engaged in was most interesting because it stood in sharp contrast to the type of action that was advanced by Charitable Choice. However, this study revealed that the actions of most congregations were not in line with tenets of the program. The majority of their work was indirect (i.e., pastors talked about developing a church-initiated community response, or met with public officials regarding the problems). Perhaps just by talking about community-related issues and encouraging persons to get involved in civic activities they were living up to their professed responsibilities of

being community-minded. However, many have found such activities inadequate and inconsistent with traditions of black churches in general. Granted, the black community today has more advocates and opportunities for advancement than perhaps any other period in history, and maybe this might explain why these churches have no direct engagement in their community. On the other hand, with a growing homeless and jobless population, the increasing number of persons dying from chronic/infectious diseases and substance abuse, the ever expanding percentage of single-parent households and school drop-out rate, to name a few ills in small cities, black churches are the single best agent to answer a clarion call of service.

Assuming that the information reported upon here is indicative of what can be found in other small city black churches that are directly engaged in their communities, one may conclude that congregations that are most likely to take advantage of the faith-based initiative will have been in their present location for more than twenty-five years. This research strongly suggests that this study be replicated in other small cities in order to determine the consistency of these findings. More analysis needs to be conducted regarding the type of black churches in small cities, which are likely to engage in social services, and what trait in black churches is likely to affect their participation in their community. For instance, numerous societal trends, including an increase in black congregational-giving to their churches, the number of Episcopal structured denominations, a growing sense of holistic ministries, and background characteristic and perceptual view of the pastor could affect the conditions for church-community participation. Such pastoral and congregational assessments would enrich the data on black churches' interested in community participation and development and help to ground the current faith-based policy debate, resulting in best practices and approaches for small city black churches that seek to embark on community initiatives.

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