The Promise and Peril of Charitable Choice: Religion, Poverty Relief, and Welfare Reform in the Rural South*

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ABSTRACT This study analyzes narratives of welfare reform and faith–based poverty relief articulated by religious leaders in rural Mississippi congregations. These congregations are situated in and around Mississippi’s Golden Triangle Region, a locale that includes a diverse group of small and mid–sized towns, as well as remote rural areas. As a state with entrenched social disadvantage, a thriving religious economy, and the nation’s first faith–based welfare reform program, Mississippi is an ideal locale to study this important issue. We begin by discussing the charitable choice provision in welfare reform legislation. This legal provision bars discrimination against religious organizations as social service providers. We then

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briefly outline the poverty relief strategies utilized in a purposive sample of thirty Mississippi religious congregations that vary by denomination, racial composition, and size. Finally, we analyze pastors’ appraisals of charitable choice, paying special attention to the various rationales they enlist to justify their evaluations of this policy initiative. We conclude by discussing our study’s implications for charitable choice implementation in the rural South.

Although political commentators hardly agree on the philosophical merits of recent welfare reform legislation, 1996 welfare reform law dramatically changed the face of public assistance. Consistent with the discretionary latitude ushered in under the block grant system, a provision called charitable choice (Title I, Section 104) forbids states from discriminating against or excluding religious organizations as potential service providers in the competitive outsourcing of public assistance monies (see A Guide to Charitable Choice 1997; Ammerman 2001a; Bartkowski and Regis 2003; Bane, Coffin, and Thiemann 2000; Chaves 1999; Cnaan 1999; Wineburg 2001). Despite dramatic welfare caseload declines in the South and other regions of the United States, debates over the expansion of faith–based initiatives continue to rage (see, e.g., Sherman 2000a and rejoinders in Responsive Community). Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed growing support for charitable choice among policymakers and the forging of service provision partnerships between state governments and local religious organizations (Griener 2000; Sherman 2000a, 2000b).

Along with charitable choice architects Tommy Thompson (U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services) and John Ashcroft (U.S. Attorney General), the Office of Faith–Based and Community Initiatives has played a pivotal role in the Bush administration’s implementation of “compassionate conservatism.” The administration favors the expansion of charitable choice based on arguments of flexibility (more service provider options from which clients can choose), fairness (non–discrimination against religious nonprofits as potential contractees), and efficacy (the positive public role of religion in promoting community development and moral enrichment) (Bush 2001). For their part, American citizens generally agree. The public remains very favorably disposed toward public funding for faith–based organizations, with 75 percent of respondents in nationally representative surveys expressing support for charitable choice. Moreover, a
majority of those favorably disposed toward charitable choice (72 percent) support the initiative because they believe religious services providers are more compassionate and caring than their secular counterparts (see Bartkowski and Regis 2003 for review).

Scholarship on faith–based responses to social disadvantage has shown that religious organizations are often quite effective in providing social services to disadvantaged populations (e.g., Ammerman 1997, 2001a, 2001b; Cnaan 1999; Dudley and Roozen 2001; Harris 1995, 1996; Morrison 1991; Olson et al. 1988; Rawlings and Schrock 1996; Wineburg 2001). At the same time, recent studies highlight the complexity of faith–based initiatives. Faith–based organizations differ dramatically in terms of their formal structure, culture, and service provision efforts; and, when compared with their secular counterparts, religious organizations often face distinctive challenges in financing and staffing faith–based social service and community development initiatives (Bartkowski and Regis 2003; Cnaan 1999; Messer 1998; Smith and Sosin 2001). Consequently, it is imperative for researchers to evaluate different congregational strategies for service provision and to explore religious insiders’ appraisals of faith–based welfare reform. Such are our goals. This study examines the practice of benevolence undertaken in thirty rural and small–town Mississippi religious communities while also exploring congregational leaders’ appraisals of faith–based welfare reform.

In many respects, Mississippi provides an ideal case in which to examine pastoral appraisals of faith–based welfare reform. To begin, Mississippi’s rural character makes it an excellent locale for examining the challenges associated with providing social services to a geographically dispersed population situated across a nonmetropolitan area. Moreover, a plethora of statistical indicators underscore the pervasiveness of poverty in this largely rural state. Economic disadvantage remains a prominent feature of Mississippi’s social landscape. Nearly 20 percent of all Mississippianans and 32 percent of all children in the state live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau 1996; Kids Count Data Book 1998). About 17 percent of Mississippi children live in extreme poverty (i.e., household income under half the poverty level), an indicator that is almost double the national rate (9 percent) (Kids Count Data Book 1998). Prior to welfare reform, Mississippi featured one of the highest rates of public assistance use in the country—twice that of the national average (U.S. Census Bureau 1992; U.S. Census Bureau
These factors are complemented by a thriving local religious economy in which congregations—particularly, Baptist and Methodist churches—dot the landscape (see Bartkowski and Regis 2003). Religious congregations are a key element of the civic infrastructure throughout the state. This is especially true in its remote rural areas where neighbors separated by considerable geographical distance know one another principally through their common membership in a local congregation.

Finally, through its Faith & Families program, Mississippi was the first state to implement faith-based welfare reform—even prior to the passage of federal welfare reform in 1996 (Bartkowski and Regis 2003). Attracting national attention (e.g., Harrison 1995a, 1995b; Sherman 1996; Yardley 1996), Faith & Families of Mississippi created a network through which local religious congregations could adopt needy families with the aim of moving welfare clients from government assistance into the workforce. This program was implemented on November 1, 1994 by the administration of Republican governor Kirk Fordice. For various reasons, the Mississippi program eventually faltered (see Bartkowski and Regis 2003). Some observers suggest that the theological conservatism of “fundamentalist” churches in Mississippi made it difficult for local congregations to cultivate and maintain a relationship of trust with the state government. Others point to the fact that Governor Fordice was the first Republican governor in Mississippi since Reconstruction, thereby suggesting that Democratic party entrenchment caused the program to perish. Finally, some have traced Mississippi Faith & Families’ demise to the fact that it was immediately implemented as a statewide program without a pilot venture. Regardless of its ultimate fate, this trailblazing program generated extensive deliberations about church-state partnerships throughout the state. In this regard, discussions and debates about faith-based welfare reform emerged in Mississippi long before they rose to prominence elsewhere. This program also provided momentum to other states and localities, such Texas and Indianapolis, that eventually adopted similar initiatives. To be sure, our investigation is not an evaluation study of Mississippi Faith & Families. However, the early visibility the program gave to faith-based welfare reform throughout the state, and many congregations’ actual experiences with it, have afforded Mississippi pastors with the opportunity to engage in
sustained reflection about the merits and drawbacks of charitable choice.

Focus, Context, and Method

The focus of our study is twofold. First, with the hope of illuminating the practice of congregational benevolence, we outline the strategies religious communities utilize to provide relief to disadvantaged Mississippians. We focus on faith–based service provision in the Golden Triangle Region (GTR), located in the east central portion of the state. (The social ecology of GTR is described more fully below.) Second, we explore pastors’ appraisals of charitable choice, and unpack the rationales religious leaders articulate to justify their views of this policy initiative. Given the prominent influence of ministers in congregations and local communities, it is important to understand their views of service provision partnerships, and to interrogate the forms of reasoning enlisted to support their appraisals. We use in–depth interviews with local pastors because this open–ended methodology allows informants to speak on their own terms, thereby expressing a wide range of sentiments and rationales concerning this complex social issue.

By way of background, the Golden Triangle Region, located in the east central part of the state, connects three predominantly rural Mississippi counties (Oktibbeha, Lowndes, and Clay), and their respective county seats (Starkville, Columbus, and West Point). Columbus is the largest of these small cities, with a population of approximately 24,000 residents. Starkville has about 18,000 residents, while West Point has a population of just over 10,000 (Mississippi Population Data Sheet 1993). This region, by any measure, is one of the more rural parts of the state. The closest urban center (the state capitol, Jackson) is approximately a two–hour drive from most parts of GTR. The Golden Triangle Region, then, is an appropriate locale in which to study faith–based poverty relief in the rural South.

Moreover, the social landscape of GTR is marked by enough heterogeneity to warrant comparisons among different types of localities (e.g., mid–sized towns, small towns, remote rural areas) within this tri–county area. At one end of the demographic continuum in GTR, Starkville is the home to a large state university (Mississippi State University). This semi–urbanized town therefore has a sizable
professional class, a racially diverse mix of residents (including international students), and well-regarded public schools. At the other end of the spectrum, West Point is a more rural, working class community with an economy predicated on industrial and agricultural production. In a similar fashion, very different cultures characterize the incorporated cities and remote rural areas in the county (the latter of which is linguistically demarcated by colloquialisms such as "out in the country"). In short, GTR offers different community contexts within which to examine benevolence practices and pastors’ appraisals of charitable choice.

Pastors representing 30 different faith communities in and around the Golden Triangle Region area participated in this study. Sampled congregations were selected on the basis of:

- **racial diversity**, including sixteen predominantly white churches, eleven predominantly black churches, a local Muslim mosque, and an itinerant Catholic ministry to Hispanic migrants;

- **denominational diversity**, with purposive sampling designed to account for the predominance of local Baptist [N=9] and Methodist [N=9] churches, as well as the following types of congregations: Catholic [N=3], Church of God in Christ (COGIC) [N=2], Presbyterian (both PCA and PC-USA) [N=4], Church of God [N=1], Latter-Day Saint (Mormon) [N=1], and an Islamic Center [N=1]; and

- **congregational characteristics**, including membership size (ranging widely from 26 to 1,800 total members) and locale (small towns and remote rural areas).

Detailed profiles of religious communities whose leaders participated in this study are featured in the appendix to this article. As illustrated by a review of the profile data presented there, every effort was made to draw interview data from pastors representing a heterogeneous group of congregations. This sampling strategy maximizes the range of standpoints that can be explored through analyses of interview data.

Data were collected from 1998 to 1999, and interview questions covered a range of topics, including descriptions and appraisals of congregational poverty relief efforts; pastoral views of the government,
the poor, and race relations; and perceptions about forging partnerships with the government under the auspices of faith–based welfare reform. (The in-depth interview instrument, along with more contextual and methodological information on this study, is featured in Bartkowski and Regis 2003.) Purposive non–probability samples yield data with a high degree of internal validity, and enable us to examine the meanings, motivations, and social processes associated with faith–based aid provision in ways not permitted by a large, statistically random survey sample. Our analytical orientation toward these qualitative data is consistent with the principles of interpretive social inquiry for policy–based research (Roe 1994). As such, we present our findings in a narrative fashion that preserves the richness of the perspectives articulated by our respondents.

Our analysis of over 700 pages of interview transcripts was guided by the two focal points of this study: (1) identifying the strategies congregations utilize to undertake benevolence work, and (2) exploring pastors’ appraisals of faith–based welfare reform and the justifications that undergird these evaluations. Using an emergent themes technique, we identified four broad aid–provision strategies utilized by congregations, pinpointed the range of pastors’ standpoints on charitable choice, and noted three principal logics that ministers enlisted to justify their appraisals of this policy. In what follows, we explicate each of these themes and draw on quotations to flesh out the perspectives articulated by our respondents.

**Faith–Based Service Provision in the Rural South: Congregational Strategies**

Mississippi congregations in our purposive sample provide diverse forms of relief to the needy, including food provision (offered by 72 percent of all sampled congregations); utility payment assistance (69 percent); rental payment assistance (59 percent); and the provision of counseling services (55 percent) and clothing (52 percent). More noteworthy, however, is the manner in which such relief is provided and the congregational motivations for doing so. Religious leaders are virtually unanimous in defining faith–based aid holistically enough to include both a material component and a non–material dimension. A female pastor at an African American Methodist church in our sample suggested that her church’s work with local elderly was quite successful
Precisely because this program assists older individuals in both financial and spiritual terms. This same church has a jail ministry program that entails not only visitation with the imprisoned, but a personal grooming service for them as well. Despite this general pattern of melding material and non-material forms of aid, many of the congregations in our study intentionally utilize one or more of four different aid-provision strategies.

One aid-provision strategy utilized by local faith communities entails intensive and sustained interpersonal engagement with the poor. Some faith communities located squarely in poverty-stricken areas frequently adopt this aid-provision strategy. Typically, these pastors serve congregations whose own members face intersecting forms of social disadvantage ranging from racism and food insecurity to educational deficiencies and job insecurity. Several well-resourced congregations employ this relief strategy as well. Benevolence work that falls within the rubric of this strategy includes longstanding food assistance, child care, and tutoring programs, as well as long-term adopt-a-family initiatives and regular counseling for substance abuse or marital difficulties. Ministers whose congregations utilize this strategy defend what they perceive as the transformative effects of sustaining face-to-face contact with the disadvantaged. Pastors whose congregations utilize this relief strategy claim that it is amazingly effective.

A second aid-provision strategy in which many local congregations engage entails intermittent direct relief to the poor. This aid-giving strategy is quite popular among a wide range of congregations and takes many different forms. Intermittent direct relief may entail short-term family support programs in which a congregation purchases toys and clothing for children in a particular household during Christmas. More common by far is one-time relief provided

1Many congregations meld material and non-material forms of relief in quite creative ways. Most religious communities in our sample offer special programs during various holiday seasons (e.g., Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter). While these programs vary in their specifics, they generally complement the provision of material aid (e.g., free dinners at the church) with ritual activities (e.g., special worship services) for those who wish to attend them (see Bartkowski and Regis 2003 for a more sustained analysis of these issues).
to known persons (typically, fellow congregants) suffering a discrete crisis such as a house fire, a physical accident, or the death of a relative who had no savings or burial insurance. Individuals with whom the religious community is unfamiliar are often carefully screened by a range of aid–giving standards (e.g., call–backs on phoned solicitations, visitations to the individual’s home, an escort to the grocery store).

It is difficult to overemphasize the overriding significance of congregational social networks for the disbursement of intermittent aid. Although the vast majority of pastors said that their religious communities would not turn away non–members, tight congregational networks can sometimes promote a help–our–own orientation in which resources are requested by a needy person or family within that group. In some cases, leaders in religious communities may even adopt proactive orientations by, for example, asking friends of disadvantaged congregants about the particular needs of the persons facing a crisis. Intermittent within–congregation support (mutual aid) averts the vexing problem of the solicitor’s deservingness of relief. Prior knowledge of the person in need is viewed as a form of accountability—proof that the relief will be appreciated and used judiciously by the recipient.

A third aid–provision strategy entails congregational collaboration with parachurch or interfaith relief organizations. Such collaboration sometimes entails philanthropic support of a relief agency by local congregations with the contributing churches’ opportunity to refer solicitors to this agency. Such congregations often provide a long list of local interfaith relief agencies which they support through resources (e.g., money, clothes) donated by its members or via volunteer assistance. Pastors sometimes argue that they can often most effectively provide aid to the needy through semi–professional parachurch relief organizations rather than at their own doorstep. Centralized and standardized agencies with record–keeping systems are believed to safeguard individual congregations from fraudulent, door–to–door requests for aid, particularly in large towns where population density makes knowing one’s neighbors difficult. Moreover, small congregations will often provide a referral to a parachurch relief agency rather than exhaust their limited benevolence funds. Other religious leaders utilize this strategy because of the time constraints faced by their members. As this reasoning goes, the church “already supports” the needy through such donations and need not duplicate its efforts too vigorously with offerings of direct relief. When
employed as a key mechanism for relief provision, philanthropic aid-giving can preserve social boundaries separating privileged congregants from the poor.

Several congregations employ a fourth aid-giving strategy by offering their membership the opportunity to participate in distant missions to a chosen location in Mississippi (e.g., the Delta) or other southern states (e.g., Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas). Some distant missions even entail travel to an impoverished country outside the United States (e.g., remote sites in Central and South America). Often, distant mission trips are coordinated through pastors or adults who work with youth in privileged congregations. The relief work performed on these distant missions is designed to effect a small-scale transformation of the disadvantaged community while also promoting spiritual and moral transformation for the relief workers. When youth-oriented missions are underwritten by young congregants’ fund-raising activities, these missions teach youngsters lessons about hard work, thrift, and self-sufficiency. Despite the hard work required on these trips, distant missions simultaneously serve as a getaway. To this end, they often include a day’s worth of recreational activities in which participants consume distinctive aspects of the distant culture not be available to them in small-town Mississippi.

Pastors’ Appraisals of Faith-Based Welfare Reform

With the foregoing overview in mind, we now seek to explore local religious leaders’ orientations toward faith-based welfare reform and discuss several factors affecting pastoral evaluations of this initiative. Our analyses of pastoral discourse highlight three key influences on religious leaders’ orientations toward faith-based welfare reform.

Structural Influences: Congregational and Denominational Dynamics

During interviews about faith-based welfare reform, pastors were asked to discuss and evaluate current and previous congregational relief efforts. These same religious leaders were also asked to describe several salient characteristics (e.g., church structure, decision-making processes) in their congregations. These factors provide crucial lenses through which religious leaders appraise charitable choice. Pastors who
speak positively about their congregation's previous aid–provision efforts frequently are optimistic about charitable choice. Rather straightforwardly, programs that were perceived to work effectively in the past are anticipated by religious leaders to be similarly effective or even more so under charitable choice.

Nancy Evans, a black female pastor at River Road United Methodist church, a rural African American congregation, serves as an excellent illustration of this perspective. When asked if members of her congregation would be willing to participate in aid programs that involve the state, she says that her members are more than willing—they are also able and wish to live up to their distinctive congregational legacy. The "myriad of professional people in my church," she says, provide her with "a wealth of people that I can tap to oversee such programs... People here want their church to be more involved," she contends. "They just don't want the door shut during the week. They want to be more involved. That church—they used to call it the Civil Rights church. That church has always... been about improving."

Quite notably, Pastor Evans' church has also participated successfully in local parachurch relief efforts. Pastors appointed at congregations that have had generally positive experiences with parachurch or interfaith relief agencies often express optimism about providing relief collaboratively with the government under charitable choice. Successful parachurch efforts have convinced pastors and congregants that they can cooperate effectively with persons and organizations situated outside their congregation. Given the dearth of

The names used to refer to religious organizations and individual pastors in this study have been changed to preserve the anonymity of our subjects. Still, to help readers link the pastors quoted in this study with the congregations they serve, the appendix identifies those congregations whose pastors are quoted here. In the appendix, we list pseudonyms for the congregation and pastor listed in the second column from the left. We also have placed an asterisk [•] next to the identification [ID] number of congregations whose pastors we quote in this study. Of course, space constraints allow us to quote only a limited number of pastors directly in this study. In light of this fact, we have sought to provide quotations that best represent the various types of policy evaluations and justifications that were manifested in the full repository of more than 700 pages of interview transcripts. More sustained treatments of these data are provided in Bartkowski and Regis (2003).
full-time black ministers in her small town, however, Pastor Evans warns that charitable choice monies routed only through rural parachurch agencies could unwittingly promote racial stratification. Because black pastors in her rural town are typically bivocational minsters employed outside their church calling, a parachurch—only strategy for implementing charitable choice in this locale and others like it would unfairly favor religious communities—specifically, white congregations—with full-time professional clergy.

Interestingly, stories of relief program success offered by such pastors are often complemented by discussions about select program failures. Pastor Evans says that her church has indeed suffered some setbacks in service provision and community development. Yet, she traces those setbacks not to a lack of time, skills, or motivation on the part of her congregants. Relief provision in Methodist churches is based largely on fixed apportionments, and this particular church simply did not have enough funds available at key times to perform all desired benevolence work. The church could not afford to support its child-care center because the large sum of start-up money needed to bring it into compliance with legal requirements was unavailable. In addition to reinitiating the daycare center with an infusion of funds, Pastor Evans would like to initiate a program for victims of domestic violence—preferably with a trained counselor. The source of such overriding optimism in this interview and others like it is located largely in congregational dynamics—the slate of extant relief programs, as well as the availability of material resources and volunteer staff.

Pastor Evans' optimism, however, is accompanied by a strong admonition concerning the implementation of charitable choice through local congregations. This warning speaks directly to structural factors characteristic of United Methodism:

I think [government officials] need to be careful not to really allow the ministers to do everything, but allow the people [in the congregation] to get more involved . . . In the United Methodist Church, they have what they call an itinerancy position. The ministers move constantly. If you want any program to be in place, to work, and to have long-term effects, you are going to have to have the people [in the congregation] involved more. The people who are in
the church [need to be involved because] they are going to be there for longer amounts of time.

Such references to member involvement, often advanced by Methodist and Baptist ministers, underscore the importance of congregants in the implementation of charitable choice initiatives. Many of these pastors readily concede that successful aid programs are predominantly dependent on member participation and the long-term commitment of congregants.

In other denominations where local religious leaders enjoy longer pastoral tenures, member involvement is still considered important for successful congregational relief. However, given their lengthier appointments, such pastors exercise more congregational authority than many of their itinerant counterparts in denominations structured differently. Such pastors are in more of a position to oversee the bidding process and, if funds are received, program implementation and evaluation in their congregations. Elder Cornelius Smith, who has served as pastor of a large black congregation (Temple Zion-Church of God in Christ) for eighteen years, is quite favorably disposed toward charitable choice. Much of his favorable disposition toward faith-based welfare reform stems from positive previous experiences. His church, which he says serves about 500 persons per month through its food assistance program, also claims great success in moving public assistance recipients into the workforce.

How are these same structural dynamics related to pastoral pessimism toward charitable choice? Pastors who deem previous experiences with congregational relief as largely unsuccessful often carry this pessimism into their evaluations of charitable choice initiatives. Pastor James Holt is appointed at a modest sized white rural church—Green Prairie United Methodist Church. He says that his church "should be" more involved in relief even as he concludes "but I don't think it will be." Based on his experience, Pastor Holt argues that lofty theological ideals about Christian service to others simply do not motivate many of his members to participate in aid provision programs. He suspects such patterns not to change much with the expansion of charitable choice:

I think in one sense of the word, churches ought to be very involved in this area out of concern for other
people. But at the same time, I’ve had some reservations about whether we will become much more involved than we already are. A lot of time at the grassroots level, people may say, “Yes, we need to be involved.” But as far as really volunteering for work or increasing their giving to do so—that’s where the problems usually begin. Not to mention agreeing on what those needs are that need to be met, and who those people are that need to be helped. So as voluntary as the church is in depending on a consensus rather than a mandate, it is going to be difficult, I think, to get the churches involved in any significantly increased level.

Like accounts featured above, Pastor Holt’s words highlight the importance of three keys for member involvement—time, ability, and willingness—in successful relief programs and effective charitable choice initiatives. According to Pastor Holt, his congregants would lack the last of these elements and, for that reason, would be unlikely to consider participating. Indeed, this congregation has not participated in parachurch relief efforts—even with neighboring Methodist churches—for many of the same reasons. Moreover, given the way in which decisions are made in this particular church—by “consensus rather than [by] a mandate”—disputes often preclude unified action. Here a grassroots congregational structure lends itself to inaction.

Taken as a whole, these accounts reveal that pastors’ appraisals of charitable choice are partly contingent on their prior experiences with relief work. Evaluations of previous relief programs—conducted alone or in tandem with other congregations—often frame pastors’ views of charitable choice. Moreover, each of three key elements—time availability, possession of skills, and willingness to participate—are deemed necessary for successful initiatives. In a broader sense, pastoral appraisals of charitable choice are shaped by structural factors in religious organizations, ranging from denominational rules concerning ministers’ tenure and relief-funding mechanisms, as well as congregational decision-making patterns. Where the last of these issues is concerned, congregant involvement in relief efforts seems to be a necessary ingredient for successful aid programs,
but a thoroughgoing commitment to decision-making by consensus can sometimes produce inaction.

**Standpoints on Stratification: Religious Perceptions of Social Inequality**

Pastors' perceptions about social inequality—particularly, those concerning race relations and poverty—exert a profound influence on their views of charitable choice. References to racial attitudes among our sample of pastors are situated on a complex continuum. Some white pastors argue that racism is still quite prominent in Mississippi, and explain why charitable choice will likely fail for that very reason. As it turns out, impediments toward charitable choice participation at Pastor Holt’s United Methodist congregation are not solely reducible to the structural dynamics described above. Pastor Holt is one of the few pastors in our study who stated forthrightly that members in his rural, all-white congregation would likely view government standards mandating a color-blind allocation of aid as coercive. When asked if attitudes about race would affect the routing of welfare services through local congregations, Pastor Holt answers not so much based on his own views but rather in light of the attitudes he believes are pervasive in his church:

Yes, definitely. Well, it would affect it even in the beginning—if [charitable choice] was accepted to be [worthy of member participation]—for them to get involved. That is one way it would be affected. I don’t feel my church would accept [block grant money] because of their attitude. They would simply turn it down. I feel there might be some churches, though, that might accept it. But their attitudes about the way they handled it and who they helped individually would shape [pause]. In other words, they might consider some persons unworthy of help and kind of refuse help. Or [they might] formulate their guidelines so that these people would be excluded. And their attitudes toward race might be one of those guidelines.

In this way, Pastor Holt suggests that his own congregation has a
racially insular past that would shape their orientation toward charitable choice: “I have not seen them work across racial lines to help locally.”

Like many religious leaders in our study (black and white), Pastor Holt says that current efforts at faith–based relief are “most definitely” affected by attitudes about race. Interestingly, however, a few white pastors argue that racism is no longer a prominent feature of Mississippi social life or, at least, maintain that racial prejudice does not mark congregational aid distribution. Such arguments could indirectly preclude these pastors from supporting charitable choice outright for reasons which, *prima facie*, seem unrelated to race. Pastor Robert Davidson at Main Street Southern Baptist Church is highly ambivalent about charitable choice being routed through local congregations—apparently, for reasons other than race. Citing several instances of faith–based program fraud, he says that “sometimes the unscrupulous have a unique way of getting into those things.” Pastor Davidson firmly believes that racism has not recently affected aid provision in Mississippi churches and would not do so under charitable choice. When asked if race would affect the disbursement of funds to religious communities or, ultimately, to the needy, he responds point blank:

No, because any group involved in [providing] aid today, to anyone, has long since dealt with that one . . . I’m a Southerner. [I] grew up in the South, [and] have lived in a lot of other places, but [pause]. Southerners have always seen themselves as having to help, say, the black community. You know, the old plantation owner, he did it. The farmers did it. It’s always been there. And so, race has—in my own lifetime—has never been a problem in relationships. Even when you had the active Ku Klux Klan and the marchers and everything, there’s always been a desire to help. And I don’t think that’s ever been on a racial basis.

One of the most striking features of Pastor Davidson’s discourse is the way in which it portrays race relations and social inequality as permeated by benevolence. In this narrative, whites are the benevolent agents of aid–giving and “old [Southern] plantation owners”
—popularly viewed as a source of black oppression and exploitation—are persons who diligently demonstrate heartfelt compassion for the less fortunate.

The vast majority of black pastors in our study are favorably disposed toward charitable choice. Black religious leaders and a white Catholic priest with a ministry to impoverished Hispanic migrants argue that racism is persistent in Mississippi. However, these religious leaders remain optimistic that certain safeguards could ensure that charitable choice initiatives address the needs of the poor. Elder Smith from Temple Zion-COGIC believes that race remains salient for Mississippi blacks and argues that charitable choice funds should be distributed with an eye toward the needs of the disadvantaged and congregations close to them:

A while back a large white church in Mississippi came to me . . . [A pastor from that church inquired:] “Can we funnel our assistance programs through you?” I saw this as a great opportunity to get more money to more people. I said, “Certainly. What are you talking about putting through?” This was a large church. This church probably does three million [dollars] a year or more, so [it is] a large white church. And so I said, “What are you talking about money-wise?” And the pastor said to me, “We will give you $4,000 a year.” I was insulted. I stood up and walked out, and he said, “What is the problem?” I said, “I am insulted” . . . At this time our gross income was roughly two-hundred thousand [dollars] a year or a little better. I said, “We spend anywhere from $14,000 to $20,000 in helping people already. You mean to tell me you are going to offer me $4,000 a year to run all of your people through us? Your problem is you simply want to rid your lobby of a certain kind of people and put them in my lobby. You are not serious about the problem. So, when you want to spend some real money, we will talk.” So I think the problem we are going to have is that if the government I going to do this, there has to be some real strict guidelines on how the money is appropriated at a state level so that
it won’t get into the wrong hands and the wrong churches [but] will get to where the people really need it.

Similarly, Father Dejean—an itinerant Catholic priest who ministers to Hispanic migrant workers in the local area—argues that there are currently many racial and class–based biases targeted at the poor. Yet, like Elder Smith, he also expresses a generally positive affect toward charitable choice. He begins by describing racism as “prejudice plus power,” but proceeds to argue that genuine religious conviction can provide solutions to such social problems:

We hear people . . . say, “Why can’t [the poor] be better off? Why can’t they manage their money better? Why can’t they get out of poverty? Why do we have to provide subsidies? Why do we have to help them?” You know, the prejudice and the racism is so ingrained. I define it as ‘racism is prejudice plus power’ . . . It’s only when they have begun to share in their common humanity that the power stops, and the higher and lower people begin to be equal . . . [which is] the message of the gospel.

Father Dejean is enthusiastic about the potential faith–based programs to motivate people to embody scriptural teachings more fully. This is especially the case for residents of rural communities. He asserts that individuals in rural locales “have a greater sense of community than [their counterparts] have in larger churches in urban areas.” In his view, charitable choice could be used to organize “some government–sponsored programs for gardening [such as food cooperatives]. You don’t have to carry the food for miles and miles. It’s right here. Subsidize coops and gardens for good and reduce for the little people all these costs.” He also speaks of expanding congregations’ current aid programs for single mothers with children, as well as skills–based classes in bilingual education, self–esteem, cooking, sewing, parenting, and money management.

In sum, is it noteworthy that black pastors we interviewed are much more favorably disposed toward charitable choice initiatives whereby public monies could be routed through local religious
congregations. Although these pastors argue that racism remains a salient part of the African American experience in Mississippi, many of them strongly believe that charitable choice—if implemented so that funds are delivered judiciously to those who need them most—could help to fight poverty on the local level. With few exceptions, then, pastors we interviewed argue that racial attitudes currently affect congregational relief provision in local religious communities and will continue to do so under charitable choice. Among black pastors, such admissions rarely translate into negative affect toward the expansion of faith-based initiatives with public funds.

**Debating Devolution: Views of the State, Poverty Policy, and Social Justice**

A final lens through which charitable choice was evaluated entails religious leaders’ assumptions about the government and its responsibility toward the poor. Many of the pastors in this study who are negatively disposed or ambivalent toward charitable choice cite the perceived fraud and waste associated with government assistance programs as a cause for concern with faith-based welfare reform. Pastor Davidson, the white minister at Main Street Southern Baptist, is ambivalent about charitable choice partly because of what he perceives as the negative outcome of the War on Poverty: “We’ve basically raised up a culture that says, ‘We really do deserve the money and you don’t deserve anything from us.’” He adds: “Since the 1960s, it has been a problem because we’ve developed a culture to allow people who really don’t want any accountability required [of them].” He links this anti-accountability orientation to the problems his church has had in the Faith & Families of Mississippi program. Like a handful of other large white churches in our study, he says that the families his church selected from a list of Faith & Families profiles do not show up at the church when assigned to do so: “I think a lot of times, if a person realizes maybe if they are going to get involved in having a church and a mentorship, they are probably going to have to change some things in their lives. And they are going to have to face some responsibilities they don’t want to face.”

Pastor Davidson concedes that longstanding public assistance programs had altruism and “want[ing] to help” as the initial “basis of the program.” Yet, he argues that this system has, since that time,
become profoundly corrupt: “The welfare system basically operates in America today not for the poor person, but for the administrators.” He asserts that such corruption is currently not incidental, but intrinsic to federal government programs: “What is it they say? That something like twenty—something percent of all federal welfare money is gulped up in fraud. In dishonesty.” Consequently, Main Street’s pastor reviles big government and strongly supports political devolution: “Most of those people [in the federal government] got those jobs through political appointments. They were put there to do just what they’re doing—that’s to lie, cheat, and steal . . . I don’t have a lot of appreciation for [federal government workers].”

Not all pastors who are ambivalent toward charitable choice—and, for that matter, not all white religious leaders—are so strongly supportive of political devolution or overtly critical of government poverty programs. Bishop William Taylor, a local religious leader of a predominantly white Latter-Day Saints congregation (the Magnolia Ward), assessed public assistance programs like AFDC as “largely an excellent idea that has been, I guess, sloppily implemented.” For both ethical and economic reasons, Bishop Taylor personally remains fully in favor of providing a “safety net” for the poor. However, he highlights the impersonal character of welfare programs by enlisting the provision of medical care as a metaphor: the reason that I say [welfare] has been sloppily implemented is that it’s become a program that’s very difficult to control and to make sure that the aid is going always to help people who need it ... And so, because of that sort of slack oversight, there’s grown up to be a fairly significant abuse of the system. The difficulty with reforming it, then, is that you really don’t want to wipe out the people that it’s intended to help. And, of course, everybody says, “We’ll just cut off the fat.” But everybody has a different definition of fat, so that’s a difficult thing. A comparison, I guess, that comes to my mind is that you would never ask a physician to prescribe addictive medication for somebody over the phone. And yet our welfare system is set up so that payments flow, in many cases, anonymously and continuously without—I mean, they fill
things out and they have caseworkers, but there's not the person-to-person contact with people who are really involved in the [welfare recipients'] lives that you really need to administer the thing well.

Bishop Taylor's ambivalence about charitable choice, then, combines hope and trepidation. Consistent with the views expressed above, he believes that congregations—as formidable community-based organizations—could provide services more effectively. Yet, he is quick to concede the difficulty associated with predicting the long-term viability of such collaborations.

Black pastors are equally critical, and often times more so, regarding public assistance programs that predated welfare reform. However, such criticisms of government programs are often coupled with defenses of particular aspects of public assistance. Interestingly, these negative assessments of public assistance programs did not erode these pastors' favorable disposition toward charitable choice. Why?

To begin, popular images of "welfare fraud" and the stereotypical "welfare recipient" are quite often criticized by black pastors. Many of these same religious leaders argue that "welfare fraud" is all too often narrowly understood. Indeed, several of these pastors allege instances in which welfare fraud—when understood in a broader and more practical sense—has been perpetrated by privileged whites who apparently extract benefits indirectly from welfare recipients. Among the most common examples cited are white landlords who artificially inflate rental prices in public housing for local blacks, and small-scale merchants who effectively keep retail prices high in order to absorb the monies of welfare recipients in nearby neighborhoods.

From this vantage point, both blacks and whites as well as both rich and poor have been beneficiaries of public assistance programs in rural Mississippi. One black pastor who says he has personally seen such incidents comments on the centrality of public assistance monies to local economies and the financial fallout from welfare reform: "White people will be crying [about welfare reform]. It will be the mom and pop grocery stores who have been taking the food stamps and taking the welfare checks the first of every month [that will be adversely affected by welfare reform]. They will be going broke."

In addition, several of these black pastors cite welfare dependency as a major concern in previous public assistance programs
but simultaneously suggest that "dependency" is a fact of life for devout Christians. One of these pastors argues outright that long-term reliance on public assistance is the wrong kind of dependency, whereas dependency on God is justifiable and necessary. Such notions lend themselves to support for charitable choice, if this initiative is viewed as a program that promotes a socially productive dependency on God or one’s co-religionists—rather than an unproductive dependency on the state.

Finally, in offering a counterpoint to those who argue that "big government" is the source of all social ills, some Black pastors defended continued government involvement in antipoverty work. Like all pastors in our study, Elder Smith has some misgivings about charitable choice. However, his generally favorable disposition toward it stems in part from his experience as a black Southerner who came of age during the Jim Crow era. Given his own life experiences, Elder Smith saw the positive involvement of the federal government in facilitating the demise of blatant Jim-Crow segregation in the South:

Whenever I hear people in Congress and the senators say things like, “We have to make government smaller and giver power back to state governments” [pause]. To a Southern black person [pause]. Whenever I hear them say those kinds of terms, I know that means that [political power and resource control] is going to be put in the hands of the good old boys. It is going to be handled the way it was handled all the time. And the people who need [help] most won’t get it. And so for that reason, I opt to say, “Let’s keep the government [as is].” I too would like to see a small government. But I would like to see a more fair system to where the government could be smaller because we have rectified the problem [of] each state being able to discriminate when they want to.

In sum, pastoral views of charitable choice are inflected by religious leaders’ beliefs about the government, public assistance, and social justice—the last of which is commonly informed by their own experiences with discrimination. Several of the pastors who express opposition or lukewarm ambivalence toward charitable choice find
crucial flaws in previous public assistance programs, and some of these religious leaders express anxiety about collaborating with the government for this very reason. Pastors who are quite favorably disposed toward charitable choice often concede that previous public assistance programs were marked by significant shortcomings. However, these pastors—many of them black religious leaders—also contend that a thoroughgoing reversal of public policy will not necessarily redress poverty-related problems. It is in this spirit that many African American pastors express support for charitable choice, a program that would entail collaborative antipoverty work on the part of the state and local religious communities. Religious leaders who support charitable choice do indeed believe that potential problems could surface with such an initiative. But they also contend that religious communities could initiate or expand antipoverty efforts with the infusion of resources that might be forthcoming under such a program.

Conclusion

This research study has examined rural Mississippi pastors’ appraisals of charitable choice—that is, the incorporation of religious communities into America’s welfare reform initiatives. The charitable choice provision in 1996 welfare reform law identifies religious congregations as a service provider outlet in states that forge partnerships with local nonprofits. We demonstrated that pastors typically define faith-based service provision in holistic terms that aims to address both material and non-material needs. Beyond this particular point of consensus, however, local congregations engaged in social ministry often enlist different service provision strategies. We discussed the contours of four strategies used by local religious communities: (1) intensive and sustained interpersonal engagement with the poor; (2) intermittent direct relief to the needy; (3) collaboration with parachurch relief agencies (e.g., via congregational volunteer assistance, philanthropic support, or referrals); and (4) short-term missions trips, often involving church youth, to the poor in distant locales.

Next, we found that religious leaders evince wide-ranging evaluations of charitable choice. Consistent with previous survey research on this topic (Chaves 1999), black pastors in our purposive sample were generally more favorably disposed toward forging
charitable choice partnerships with the state. However, regardless of their general orientation toward charitable choice, virtually all pastors expressed mixed reviews of this initiative. We identified three key influences on pastoral evaluations of charitable choice: (1) structural dynamics in religious congregations, such that a wealth of organizational resources (e.g., available staff, finances, and extant programs) lend themselves to favorable appraisals of charitable choice; (2) perceptions of social inequality, such that those who have seen religious convictions offset racial and class-based antagonism were generally optimistic about charitable choice; and (3) beliefs about the government and social justice, such that pastors who recognize the merits of public assistance in the face of social injustice evaluated charitable choice in more positive terms.

In general, favorable evaluations of charitable choice were articulated with greater frequency and more force by religious leaders committed to poverty relief through face-to-face benevolence work with the poor. Pastors whose congregations are more removed from direct forms of poverty relief (e.g., solely through philanthropic support of other organizations) generally expressed less support for charitable choice. Of course, given the fact that our study draws on a nonprobability sample of pastors in rural Mississippi, this general finding should be interpreted with some caution. Further research with a broader sample of religious organizations is needed to explore how congregations' poverty relief strategies (intensive benevolence, intermittent relief, parachurch initiatives, and distant missions) frame religious leaders' appraisals of charitable choice initiatives and faith-based organizations' participation in partnerships with the state. Still, it bears mentioning that the goal of our study was not to identify the types of religious leaders who support or oppose charitable choice in a lockstep fashion. Rather, we were principally concerned with unpacking the complicated logics that underlay pastoral appraisals of this policy.

Important policy implications emerge from our investigation. Policymakers should be aware that congregations which vary dramatically in denomination, size, and preferred aid-provision strategies can participate effectively in charitable choice if a critical mass of members from these faith communities have the available time, skills, and willingness to do so. It seems that service provision could be undertaken effectively by regionally dominant faith traditions (i.e., Baptist,
Methodist), as well as by underrepresented or up-and-coming denominations in the rural South (e.g., Church of God in Christ, Roman Catholic, Muslim). Consequently, the evaluation of bids for government contracts by potential faith-based providers should not be guided by the assumption that the congregation with the most members or the denomination with the most churches will function as the most effective social service provider. Given population dispersion in nonmetropolitan areas, we can envision this assumption being made by policymakers concerning rural areas. This assumption may be valid in some cases, but should be balanced by efforts designed to protect religious diversity in securing bids for charitable choice funds. Indeed, this balanced approach might improve the quality of relief that many local congregations provide.

A great deal of sociological research suggests that congregations and denominations that function as an organizational monopoly in a local “religious market” actually operate less effectively—much like business monopolies—because of reduced competition for adherents from rival faith traditions (Stark and Finke 2000). To be sure, sociological uses of a “religious marketplace” metaphor are limited inasmuch as congregations are not-for-profit entities and competitive bidding for state contracts might exacerbate denominational factionalism sometimes evidence within the rural South (Bartkowski and Regis 2003). However, including a diverse range of faith communities in bidding for charitable choice funds might prevent dominant faith traditions (such as Baptists in the rural South) from further consolidating their advantage over other religious communities and may ensure that the antipoverty commitment of many different local religious communities remains robust. Because religious pluralism tends to promote greater involvement in and commitment to local faith communities writ large, policymakers should seek to ensure congregational and denominational diversity in competitive bidding for charitable choice funds. Ultimately, the dispersion of resources across various congregations and denominations might also ensure that the racial and economic homogeneity that is characteristic of many faith communities—particularly those in rural areas—would not undermine service provision to diverse groups of disadvantaged people. These issues and others like them are worthy of sustained attention from scholars of religion, social policy, and southern culture in America’s post-welfare era.
Our study of faith-based poverty relief strategies in rural Mississippi and local pastors’ appraisals of charitable choice reveals that religious communities can be a valuable ally in our society’s effort to redress economic disadvantage. We surmise that congregational participation in charitable choice might be influenced by structural factors at work in congregations and denominations, and by religious leaders’ views of social inequality, the state, and social justice. In the end, a combination of these factors will likely influence the reception of charitable choice initiatives among congregants who are the backbone of local religious communities throughout the rural South. Many Americans would readily agree that poverty—particularly that found in rural areas—is a serious problem in a society marked by such an abundance of resources. Yet, solving this problem with the support of local congregations in South’s rural areas will require a keen awareness of the distinctive aspects of Southern culture and religious life in such locales.

References


### Appendix: Summary Profile of Religious Communities in Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congregational ID$^a$</th>
<th>Congregation</th>
<th>Membership Characteristics$^c$</th>
<th>Locale$^d$</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Types of Aid Provided$^e$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>White (99.5%) 1800 total members 1200 active members Household Income: $50K+</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$1.3 million</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>White (100%) 550 total members 280 active members Household Income: $30-50K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$220,000</td>
<td>not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>United Methodist (2 churches served by pastor, described separately here)</td>
<td>Church 1: White (100%) 140 total members 65 active members Household Income: $30-50K Church 2: White (100%) 110 total members 30 active members Household Income: $20-30K</td>
<td>Church 1: Semi-rural Church 2: Semi-rural</td>
<td>Church 1: $60,000 Church 2: $42,000</td>
<td>Church 1: 1, 3, 7, 12 Church 2: 7, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4$^*$</td>
<td>United Methodist Green Prairie Methodist Pastor Holt</td>
<td>White (100%) 96 total members 60 active members Household Income: $10-20K</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>not specified</td>
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## Appendix. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congregational ID(^a)</th>
<th>Denomination (with pseudonym, if pastor quoted)</th>
<th>Membership Characteristics(^c)</th>
<th>Locale(^d)</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Types of Aid Provided(^e)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5*                      | Southern Baptist (SBC)  
*Main Street Baptist Pastor Davidson* | White (99.9%)  
2300 total members  
1600 active members  
Household Income: $30-50K | Urban | $1.4 million | 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13 |
| 6                       | Southern Baptist (SBC) | White (100%)  
950 total members  
375 active members  
Household Income: $30-50K | Urban | $630,000 | 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 13 |
| 7                       | Southern Baptist (SBC) | White (100%)  
372 total members  
200 active members  
Household Income: $20-30K | Rural | $141,000 | 2, 3, 7, 11, 12, 13 |
| 8                       | Southern Baptist (SBC) | White (100%)  
150 total members  
90 active members  
Household Income: $20-30K | Semi-rural | not specified | 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 13 |
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<tr>
<th>Congregational ID$</th>
<th>Denomination (with pseudonym, if pastor quoted)</th>
<th>Membership Characteristics$</th>
<th>Locale$</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Types of Aid Provided$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Catholic (Parish)</td>
<td>White (84%); Black (10%); Hispanic (4%); Asian (2%); 1158 total members; 740 active members; Household Income: $30-50K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$480,000</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Catholic (Parish)</td>
<td>White (85%); Hispanic (6%); Black (3%); Asian (3%); 1600 total members; 1000 active members; Household Income: not specified; upper-middle class</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$250,000</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 8, 12, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11$</td>
<td>Latter-Day Saints Magnolia Ward Bishop Taylor</td>
<td>White (94%); Black (3%); Asian (3%); 300 total members; 120 active members; Household Income: $20-50K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 (as needed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational ID&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Denomination (with pseudonym, if pastor quoted)</td>
<td>Membership Characteristics&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Locale&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>Types of Aid Provided&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Presbyterian (PC-USA)</td>
<td>White (99%) 265 total members 150 active members Household Income: $30-50K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$188,000</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 13, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Presbyterian (PCA)</td>
<td>White (100%) 350 total members 200 active members Household Income: $30-50K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$270,000</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 9, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Presbyterian (PC-USA)</td>
<td>White (99%) 170 total members 112 active members Household Income: $30-50K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
<td>2, 3, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Presbyterian (PC-USA)</td>
<td>White (95%); Black (5%) 26 total members 50 active members Household Income: ranges from under $10K to over $50K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 13, 14</td>
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### Congregational Characteristics

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<th>Locale&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Types of Aid Provided&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>Black (99%) 409 total members 225 active members Household Income: $30-$50K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$165,000</td>
<td>2,3,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>Black (100%) 106 total members 50 active members Household Income: $20-$30K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,7,14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>Black (98%) 205 total members 150 active members Household Income: $30-$50K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$110,000</td>
<td>1,2,3,7,9,10,11,12,13,14,15</td>
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<tr>
<td>19*</td>
<td>United Methodist <em>River Road Methodist Pastor Evans</em></td>
<td>Black (100%) 206 total members 150 active members Household Income: $20-$30K</td>
<td>Semi-rural</td>
<td>$58,000</td>
<td>3,4,7,9,11,12,13,14</td>
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<th>Budget</th>
<th>Types of Aid Provided</th>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Missionary Baptist (National Baptist Convention)</td>
<td>Black (90%); White (5%); 525 total members 350 active members Household Income: not specified; (middle/upper-middle class)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>1,2,3,5,8</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Baptist (National Baptist Convention)</td>
<td>Black (95%); White (5%); 500 total members 375 active members Household Income: $30-50K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$120,000</td>
<td>2,3,5,12, 13,14,15</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Missionary Baptist (National Baptist Convention)</td>
<td>Black (100%) 300 total members 200 active members Household Income: under $10K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Baptist (National Baptist Convention)</td>
<td>Black (100%) 200 total members 125 active members Household Income: $20-30K</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
<td>1,2,3,7</td>
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<th>Congregational ID&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<th>Locale&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Types of Aid Provided&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Baptist (National Baptist Convention)</td>
<td>Black (100%)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>7,13,14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50 total members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35 active members</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Household Income: $10-20K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25*</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ (COGIC)</td>
<td>Black (99%)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
<td>1,5,7,8,13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temple Zion - COGIC</td>
<td>400 total members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elder Smith</td>
<td>350 active members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Household Income: $30-50K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ - COGIC</td>
<td>Black (100%)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5,12,13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>200 total members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100 active members</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Household Income: $10-20K</td>
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<th>Locale&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Types of Aid Provided&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Muslim (North America Islamic Association)</td>
<td>International (71%); Asian (15%); Black (10%); White (2%); 200 total members; 150 active members; Household Income: $10-30K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>$5,000-$10,000</td>
<td>16 (&quot;For needy according to their need; social support&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28*</td>
<td>Catholic *Itinerant Hispanic Ministry Father DeJean</td>
<td>Hispanic (98%); 300 total members; 150 active members; Household Income: $10-20K</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>2, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> ID: Identification number for each congregation.

<sup>c</sup> Characteristics: Includes membership demographics and income data.

<sup>d</sup> Locale: Urban or Rural designation.

<sup>e</sup> Aid Provided: Types of aid provided, including specific programs or services.

<sup>*</sup> Denotation: Indicates data from a specific category or group within the larger dataset.
This table was prepared from organizational survey data collected from religious leaders in our non-probability sample. Completed surveys were not secured for two of the thirty congregations in our sample.

Congregations marked by an asterisk (*) are those whose pastors were quoted in this article. The pseudonym of the pastor and congregation for these cases appears in the next column to the left. Also, the assigned congregational ID does not reflect an implied ordering of these cases.

Household income represents the typical annual earnings of families within the congregation, as estimated by the pastor, where $K=1,000$ dollars (thus, $10K=$10,000, $20K=$20,000, and so on).

The term "urban" takes on a particular meaning in the rural South. Urban designates a church located in a county seat.

The numerical references listed under "Types of Aid Provided" conform to the following key:

1 - HELP PAYING RENT
2 - HELP PAYING UTILITIES
3 - GROCERIES
4 - CASH
5 - TEMPORARY SHELTER
6 - LOW-COST HOUSING
7 - CLOTHING
8 - MEDICAL SERVICES
9 - CHILD CARE
10 - HOT MEALS  11 - CARE FOR THE ELDERLY
12 - TRANSPORTATION
13 - COUNSELING
14 - TUTORING
15 - AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS
16 - OTHER (Specify)