Volunteers in Service to Their Community: Congregational Commitment to Helping the Needy

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INTRODUCTION

Congregations In Human Services: Literature Review.

The human service system changed markedly during the 1980s. Federal cuts in social spending in the early part of the decade shifted much of the responsibility for resolving social problems to states and localities. Available research indicates that volunteers from religious congregations stepped forward in the early and mid-eighties and became involved in different dimensions of service provision.

Doll (1984) and McDonald (1984) have examined the roles churches played in local human service development in Cleveland and Denver. They found that they were more active in crisis intervention and welfare advocacy services. Negstead and Arnholt (1986) noted because of the cooperation between local churchbased day care centers for the elderly and the members of the local community services system, more effective services will emerge from this affiliation. Religious congregations will probably continue to expand their efforts in this service area given the increasing growth in the elderly population.

Salamon and Tietelebaum's (1984) work outlined the broad concerns pertaining to congregational involvement in human services provision. They found, for example, that religious congregations increased their activities in direct services, like feeding the hungry. They also established that religious congregations expanded their efforts at helping community-based service providers—such as delivering meals to the homebound.

And, their research showed that congregations increased their financial support to religiously affiliated funding federations—like Catholic Charities, Lutheran Family Services, or Urban Ministries.

These studies confirm the relationship between the reduction in federal domestic spending and the stepped-up involvement of volunteers and other congregational resources to manage community problems. They also pointed to the need for large scale research on this essential topic. From Belief to Commitment, a 1988 study done by the Gallup organization for Independent Sector, took up where Salamon and others left off. That work detailed the philanthropic efforts of the nation's religious congregations. It was a bench mark. And, it has become the starting point for future studies. The results pointed to far greater than expected (by this author) philanthropic efforts by our nation's religious congregations.

This heightened activity automatically raises the question of what increased congregational involvement means for the field of volunteer administration. While large scale studies are important in showing the broad picture, often times, they do not connect their findings to the local picture (Hershberg, 1989). This leaves practitioners with a great deal of new information and nowhere to go with it. For example, the Independent Sector study estimated that the value of volunteer time donated to religious and other congregational activities in 1986 was 13.1 billion dollars. About 756 million dollars, or 12% of volunteer time, was donated to human service and other welfare pro-

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grams. However, the study did not reveal exactly how or why members of congregations increased their involvement; whether they were involved in direct services or prevention programs; started new services; or have funneled their activities through existing agencies. It is essential to know whether this participation will be ongoing, and the degree to which congregations may have developed innovative and cost-efficient approaches to human service delivery (Wineburg & Wineburg, 1987). Other questions arise as well, including: what kinds of programs were congregational volunteers working; how were the volunteers recruited; were they trained; to whom were they accountable—their congregations or the agencies where they volunteered?

PURPOSE

This article is based on the empirical findings of an exploratory study which examines the religious congregations in Greensboro, North Carolina, in terms of their involvement with the programs of Greensboro Urban Ministry. While it will not be able to answer all of the above questions, it will illustrate how the congregations in one community have pitched in to fill some of the holes caused by federal spending cutbacks.

The author shows the kinds of programs to which volunteers from congregations have committed their time and other resources by presenting some of the findings from a survey of 128 religious congregations in Greensboro conducted during late 1988 and early 1989.

The central purpose of this article is to add to a concept presented in a previous article in this journal (Wineburg & Wineburg, 1987). In that article, the authors discussed the institutional involvement of volunteers to solve community problems. The article suggested that, as human service systems become more locally focused and forced to rely more and more on community resources, local agencies will recruit volunteers by obtaining institutional commitments of service from churches, civic organizations, and businesses. The changes in federal domestic policy have, in other words,

gradually shifted the focus of volunteering from individual commitments to commitments from individuals as representatives of community institutions. This idea has widespread implications for volunteer recruitment training and retention, some of which are addressed in the discussion of this article. The author also plans to point out what the findings mean with regard to the involvement and potential involvement of volunteers drawn from religious congregations.

METHOD

The survey instrument measured past, present, and future congregational pledges of volunteers, money, goods, use of facilities, and formal collaboration with other congregations. The author describes six programs administered through Greensboro Urban Ministry. The programs began following the federal budget cuts in 1981. It should be emphasized that the survey was sent to the religious leader of each congregation. Panels A and B of Table I (p. 39) measure activities in which congregations actually participated prior to the survey (Panel A), and at the time of the survey (Panel B). Panel C on the table measures the religious leaders' assessment of the likelihood that members of their congregations would partake in the listed activity at some future point, and thus is speculative.

PROGRAMS

Greensboro Urban Ministry is an interfaith agency supported mainly by congregational donations. The Urban Ministry began in 1968, and for a number of years provided only counseling, emergency financial assistance and clothing. When the impact of the recession and budget cuts became evident in the community in 1982 and 1983, the agency expanded its programs greatly.

The six post-budget-cut programs include: a night shelter, food bank, soup kitchen, support program for welfare mothers (Wineburg & Wineburg, 1986), shelter for families, and a housing rehabilitation program that refurbishes homes (condemned residences occupied primarily by the elderly). Each of these

programs started during or after 1983 as a local response to reduced federal service efforts.

SAMPLE

The study includes 128 of Greensboro's larger congregations, including five Roman Catholic, one Jewish, one Bah'a'i denomination, and 23 different Protestant denominations. Most responses came from Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists respectively, as may be expected in southern communities of this size. A slight majority of the responding congregations were suburban parishes. Most congregations began operating in this century and have over 100 families. Thirty-four percent said that their members were mostly professional and business people. Thirteen percent were blue collar, and 53% were an even mix of true professional and blue collar workers. Forty-eight percent of the congregations viewed themselves as political moderates while 45% classified themselves as conservative, and seven percent were liberal. A majority said that they were financially sound.

FINDINGS

Past Activities 1983-1988

Panel A, on Table I, lists the past outreach activities of the reporting congregations for six programs of Greensboro Urban Ministry, the community's safety net agency, or the agency to which people turn when no other services are available. The time frame for past activities is roughly five years.

Food and Shelter. Panel A shows that the soup kitchen was the most popular outreach volunteer activity of the reporting congregations with 57 congregations reporting volunteer participation. In the ordering of human needs, sustenance and shelter are the most important. Congregations pitched in where it counted. Participation in the night shelter program was ranked second among volunteer activities with 38 congregations reporting involvement. One can argue that feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless are moral imperatives which spurred congregations into action. In this case, the community need matched both

the congregational will and capacity to act. This principle should underscore recruiting strategies for convincing religious organizations to commit volunteers on behalf of their groups. A substantial portion of future success in recruiting and maintaining institutional volunteers will hinge on the strength of the match between the community need and the moral forces driving the organization to volunteer in the first place.

Other volunteer activities ranked lower than the soup kitchen and night shelter. While not as strong in garnering volunteer support, the food bank was, as might be expected, the largest recipient of goods. The night shelter and soup kitchen ranked highest in cooperative service efforts, meaning that two or more congregations agreed to work together on a project. The night shelter and the food bank received the most reported financial help.

Closer inspection of Panel A allows one to see a community's congregations pulling together—giving time, money and goods to help those in need. Other programs ranked considerably lower in volunteer commitment. The program that helps out welfare mothers, the housing rehabilitation program which refurbishes houses for the elderly and disabled, and the family shelter, all ranked lower than the soup kitchen and night shelter in volunteer support. While one might expect to find that one motivating factor for involvement in volunteer activities at the soup kitchen and night shelter is the moral imperative noted above, other factors do come into play. The shelter operates nightly. The soup kitchen operates daily. The soup kitchen offers volunteers a variety of short-term helping opportunities including cooking, serving meals, and cleaning up. Helping at the shelter usually takes the form of serving an evening snack and conversing informally with the residents. Each program offers either abundant daytime or nighttime volunteer opportunities, and both offer weekend volunteer opportunities. The soup kitchen serves a noon meal daily, allowing volunteer opportunities for retirees and those who have free time in the day. Consequently, there is ample time for all who want to get involved to

Thus, success in maintaining institutional volunteers seems to require, in addition to moral commitment, a variety of activities to which members of an institution can give their resources. The more available times and the more available activities, underscored by a strong commitment to the issue giving rise for community concern, constitute an equation for garnering strong institutional commitments. There are other ways to gain commitments as well. The two programs just cited, the night shelter and soup kitchen, call for one kind of volunteering, basically unskilled with little training needed to be successful. Two programs that had fewer volunteer commitments from congregations call for different kinds of volunteers.

Housing Rehabilitation. The housing rehabilitation program is a weekend program that requires at least a basic understanding of household repairs. The same level of moral concern for the housing repair issue as the food and shelter issue may have been prevalent. The skills needed to accomplish the tasks and the weekend limit for the volunteering may have constrained efforts to broaden the program. In other words, people may care deeply about an issue but they won't get involved if they feel they cannot make a difference. Good organizing, thorough training, and well-planned publicity can change that.

Support for Welfare Mothers. The welfare support program (Wineburg & Wineburg 1986, 1987) calls for a longterm commitment by congregations to get involved in the many aspects of helping poor women and their families. They are recruited in a much more aggressive fashion than a mere summons for help at the shelter or soup kitchen appearing in Urban Ministry's news letter. Staff go to congregations to promote the virtues of the program, usually after several preliminary rounds of discussions with a lead clergy person. Once a congregation has signed on, members participate in extensive training about poverty and about the sensitivity people need in order to work effectively with the group of women this program serves. This training focus differs from the very limited training the volunteers receive before working at the soup kitchen or night shelter. In essence, the welfare support program is a prevention program requiring more effort to recruit, educate, and consequently retain volunteers.

Cooperative Service Efforts

Another finding in this study is that congregations work formally with other congregations in virtually all the outreach programs. In the feeding and shelter programs, volunteers from different congregations may team up and split a week of service. For Project Independence, the welfare support program, congregations are often matched to sponsor a family together. Other congregations work independently. The key point for those interested in recruiting volunteers is that there is some indication that congregations would be willing to formally work with others in the future, underpinning a recruiting strategy.

Current Activities

Panel B displays current congregational outreach activities. It can be seen that all the programs currently receive less volunteer assistance than in the past, with the exception of the welfare support program just noted above. It should be pointed out that Panel A charts a fiveyear period, while Panel B captures activities at the time of the survey. It would be expected that over time there would be more congregational activity in most categories than at this particular moment in time. Both the welfare support program and the housing rehabilitation program show an increased number of congregations giving money than in the past.

This increase in money and the clear pattern of volunteer stability for the welfare assistance program may be due to the education and training efforts by program staff. The publicity that housing problems among the poor and elderly have received during the recent past has also stimulated interest in helping this group. While there are fewer congregational commitments of money and goods

TABLE I

Panel A. Past Congregational Outreach Activities For Greensboro Urban Ministry (1983-1988). Congregations gave volunteers, money, goods, use of facilities, and cooperative efforts. N = 128 (in number of congregations)*

	Volunteers	Money	Goods	Facilities	Cooperation
SERVICE					
Night shelter	38	41	39	01	15
Food bank	28	43	56	02	10
Soup kitchen	57	36	39	02	13
Welfare assistance	17	17	10	05	09
House rehabilitation	16	16	11	02	11
Family shelter	17	21	17	01	03

Panel B. Current Congregational Outreach Activities For Greensboro Urban Ministry—(Time of Survey 1988-1989). N = 128*

	Volunteers	Money	Goods	Facilities	Cooperation
SERVICE					
Night shelter	22	37	28	00	08
Food bank	24	37	51	01	08
Soup kitchen	43	36	33	01	06
Welfare assistance	17	20	08	01	04
House rehabilitation	15	17	08	01	08
Family shelter	14	20	15	00	02

Panel C. Future Intentions For Congregational Outreach Activities For Greensboro Urban Ministry. N = 128*

	Volunteers	Money	Goods	Facilities	Cooperation
SERVICE	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,				
Night shelter	31	35	31	00	16
Food bank	26	37	50	00	14
Soup kitchen	47	35	33	00	14
Welfare assistance	19	23	16	01	10
House rehabilitation	19	18	11	02	11
Family shelter	01	21	18	00	08

^{*128} congregations responded, but each could give multiple responses, so the categories may add up to more than 128.

in most other categories, they do not seem to be extraordinary. This may suggest that, over time, congregations will filter in and out of various volunteer activities. Program administrators make adjustments according to their program need, and congregations respond within their capacity to do so. The important point that surfaces in Panel B is that congregations continue to support programs with money and goods, even though their volunteer efforts wane. Panel C shows that congregations are willing to step up their volunteering if needs arise. And in the cases of housing assistance, welfare support, and family shelter, there are strong intentions for future support.

A point of interest is the reduction in the use of congregational facilities by Urban Ministry. This is probably due to the fact that in the early days of the development of the post-budget-cut programs, congregations offered space until permanent space for various programs could be found. Once space was found, congregational facilities were no long needed.

Panel C lists future commitments of the responding congregations to Greensboro Urban Ministry's programs. In just about every category there is increased commitment over current activities. This increase in some categories is still below the level of past involvement shown in Panel A. However, the increase over current involvement expressed in Panel B is an indication that a solid number of responding congregations will continue their support in all program areas. Most of the programs started during difficult economic times. It is safe to assume that congregations, given current and future commitments, would more than likely respond to needs at the same or greater levels illustrated in Panel A.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that religious congregations in Greensboro reached out and used their collective energy to help the homeless, the hungry, welfare mothers, and other less fortunate people when the recession and budget cuts of the early 1980s put pressure on Greensboro and other communities to manage many so-

cial welfare concerns independently. The survey responses suggest, moreover, that a substantial number of congregations plan to continue supporting most of Greensboro Urban Ministry's programs with volunteers, money and goods, such as food and clothing. It must be emphasized that the data presented in the table referred to the number of congregations responding to various activities. Literally hundreds of people, as representatives of their religious congregation, have volunteered thousands of hours to help the less fortunate members of their community. These findings offer challenges to volunteer administrators to make sure that these invaluable community resources continue helping in the most effective ways possible.

When the budget cuts and recession of the early eighties created a need for new services, the religious community already had a structure through which it could channel its efforts because Greensboro Urban Ministry had been operating since 1988. This is an important point regarding the institutional involvement of volunteers. It seems that many congregations in Greensboro were able to work together to make Urban Ministry grow and flourish. Congregational volunteers moved into an existing structure, Urban Ministry, allowing congregations to contribute what they could with guidance from an experienced agency staff and in a community effort. This happened without the struggles that often accompany the creation of new organizations. At the start of the service changes in the early eighties, the energy and spirit of cooperation were focused on meeting the service needs, instead of community energies going to building a new institution.

Considerable energy is usually involved in creating a new organization or new services. People often jockey for leadership or get bogged down in other entanglements to the point where no momentum is left to design and deliver the services themselves. Because this did not happen in Greensboro, the community was able to move directly into service provision. Planners would be wise to steer institutional volunteers to existing organizations or risk losing them be-

cause of the potential for chaos associated with starting new voluntary organizations.

The findings indicate that religious congregations often volunteer and contribute to projects jointly. It seems in this era of community-oriented services, volunteer administrators would be very successful building on this finding and recruiting congregations in pairs or groups to work on community concerns collectively. One possible strategy for successful recruitment and retention would be to target congregations which would work well together on certain projects. A way to promote such efforts would be for the agency to convince the local newspaper to write a human interest feature on dual congregational volunteer ventures. Such efforts ground community institutions in helping the less fortunate. There is tremendous potential for institutional volunteering to become contagious if strategists plan appropriately. The findings also indicate that succesful recruitment and retention rest on insuring that there are a variety of both times and opportunities for which volunteers can make commitments.

The findings also demonstrate that congregational volunteers will make long-term commitments if recruited and trained properly, as was the case in the welfare support program. Volunteers were recruited person-to-person—a method that works! That program also demonstrates that volunteers from congregations will work long term in advocacy and other support roles when they have constant monitoring and back-up from the recruiting agency. Before approaching congregations for volunteer support, volunteer administrators would be on strong ground if their training and support plans were drawn up and ready for implementation so that volunteers would not fear being left dangling in a service area where they have little familiarity.

The study revealed another factor that might be considered in planning for the institutional involvement of volunteers from religious congregations. In programs that require skilled volunteers like the housing rehabilitation program, planning publicity in the form of public

interest stories will help raise the community consciousness about a specific need or concern and spur skilled volunteers to donate their efforts when direct appeals to congregations are made. While Greensboro Urban Ministry may not have used that strategy directly, there has been enough widespread media attention focused on housing concerns facing the less fortunate members of the community to keep the issue visible. Planners desiring institutional commitments of volunteers must make sure that the concern for which they are recruiting volunteers is a visible community issue. Administrators can and should shape the community's views of various social concerns.

The findings also show that moral concerns compel volunteers from congregations into service. Recruiters can insure success by doing their research to determine the moral concerns motivating a particular congregation and matching the congregation to a particular community or agency need. One congregation may be driven into service by health concerns, others by environmental concerns, and still others by the problems of the elderly. Surveying a particular organization may help a volunteer recruiter properly frame a concern in just the right moral language to attract a congregation or a group of congregations into service.

CONCLUSION

In Greensboro the responding study congregations indicated a willingness to volunteer for, give money to, and work with others on various projects in the future. The potential is there for volunteer administrators to guide their voluntary efforts and make the best use of these powerful community resources in Greensboro as well as other communities.

Much more research needs to be done on both the role of religious congregations in local human services and the implications of the increased institutional involvement on the role of volunteers. One thing is certain: religious congregations are vital resources to communities nationwide. Appropriate planning for the involvement of their volunteers will help make communities stronger. Hopefully, the information from this study will help in that planning.

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APPENDIX SURVEY

CONGREGATIONAL BACKGROUND

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IN THE NEXT SECTION

Please indicate whether your congregation has **officially** contributed, is currently contributing, or has plans to contribute in the future volunteers, money, or goods to various community programs. Please indicate whether volunteers work once a month or more, and whether your congregation formally works with another congregation on any project.

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SAL	VATION ARMY X = YES BLANK = NO NS = NOT SURE	IN THE PAS Have Members Volunteered For	T Have You Contributed Money To	Have You Contributed Goods To	Have You Contributed Facilities To	Have You Worked With Others On (formally)
29a) 30a) 31a) 32a) 33a) 34a) 35a)	LODGE SOUP KITCHEN THRIFT STORE YOUTH PROGRAMS OTHER OTHER OTHER					

30b) 31b) 32b) 33b) 34b)	YOUTH PROGRAMS OTHER OTHER	CURRENTL Do Members Volunteer For	Y Do You Contribute Money To	Do You Contribute Goods To	Do You Contribute Facilities To	Do You Work With Others On (formally)
ŕ	OTHER	IN THE FUT Will Members Volunteer For	URE Will You Contribute Money To	Will You Contribute Goods To	Will You Contribute Facilities To	Will You Work With Others On (formally)
30c) 31c) 32c) 33c) 34c)	LODGE SOUP KITCHEN THRIFT STORE YOUTH PROGRAMS OTHER OTHER OTHER					
36a) 37a)		IN THE PAS Have Members Volunteered For	Have You Contributed Money To	Have You Contributed Goods To	Have You Contributed Facilities To	Have You Worked With Others On (formally)
38a) 39a) 40a)	OTHEROTHER	CURRENTL	DO	DO You	DO You	Do You
36b) 37b) 38b) 39b) 40b)	REFUGEE PROGRAM YOUTH PROGRAMS OTHER OTHER OTHER	Members Volunteer For	You Contribute Money To	Contribute Goods To	Contribute Facilities To	Work With Others On (formally)
36c) 37c) 38c) 39c) 40c)	REFUGEE PROGRAM YOUTH PROGRAMS OTHER OTHER OTHER	IN THE FUT Will Members Volunteer For	WIE Will You Contribute Money To	Will You Contribute Goods To	Will You Contribute Facilities To	Will You Work With Others On (formally)

	ER COMMUNITY GRAMS X=YES	IN THE PAS Have Members	T Have You	Have You Contributed	Have You Contributed	Have You Worked
	BLANK = NO NS = NOT SURE	Volunteered	Contributed	Goods	Facilities	With Others
44-1		For	Money To	То	То	On (formally)
41a) 42a)	PROJECT UPLIFT					
42a)						
44a)	YOUTH FOR CHRIST					
45a)	TEEN CHALLENGE					
46a)	BIRTH RIGHT					
47a)	GUILFORD NATIVE					
48a)	S.E. COUNCIL ON CRIME					
49a)						
	FOR OLDER ADULTS					
- ,	OTHER					
•	OTHER					
	OTHER					
54a)						
•	OTHER					
oou,						
		CURRENTL				
		Do Members	Do You	Do You Contribute	D0 You Contribute	Do You Work
		Volunteer For	Contribute	Goods To	Facilities To	With Others On (formally)
41b)	HABITAT FOR HUMANITY	ror	Money To	10	10	On (lonnally)
42b)	PROJECT UPLIFT					
43b)	HOSPICE					
44b)	YOUTH FOR CHRIST					
45b)	TEEN CHALLENGE					
46b)	BIRTH RIGHT					
47b)	GUILFORD NATIVE					
48b)	S.E. COUNCIL ON CRIME					
49b)	UNITED SERVICES					
EQL)	FOR OLDER ADULTS					
	OTHER					
	OTHER	*******				
53b)	OTHER					
	OTHER					
55b)	OTHER					
		IN THE FUT	URE Will	Will You	Will You	Will You
		Members	You	Contribute	Contribute	Work
		Volunteer For	Contribute Money To	Goods To	Facilities To	With Others On (formally)
41c)	HABITAT FOR HUMANITY		,			,
42c)	PROJECT UPLIFT					
43c)	HOSPICE					
44c)	YOUTH FOR CHRIST					
45c)	TEEN CHALLENGE					
46c)	BIRTH RIGHT					
47c)	GUILFORD NATIVE					
48c)	S.E. COUNCIL ON CRIME					
49c)	UNITED SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS					
EO _O)	OTHER					
	OTHER					
•	OTHER					
53c)						
54c)	OTHER					
	OTHER					
			_		_	_

Please indicate with an X if your congregation offers any of the following services: • We are also trying to determine whether the service is an established or informal program. Established means formal hours, guidelines, etc. Informal means doing as need arises. Whether it is for members of your congregation only or offered to the larger community as well, and whether you charge a fee. · We are also interested in knowing whether the program began after 1980. **PROGRAM** 56) EMERGENCY FOOD 57) CLOTHING 58) CONGREGATE MEALS SOUP KITCHEN 60) EMERGENCY SHELTER 61) CASH MOBILE MEALS 62) 63) INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING 64) FAMILY COUNSELING TELEPHONE REASSURANCE APPOINTMENT TRANSPORT HOUSEWORK FOR DISABLED HOUSEWORK FOR ELDERLY 69) HOME HEALTH CARE 70) FOOD PREPARATION 71) LEGAL ASSISTANCE **ASSIST IN FINDING SERVICES** 73) CHILD CARE 74) AFTER SCHOOL CARE ADULT DAY CARE 75) 76) TUTORING **EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE** PREGNANCY COUNSELING 79) FOSTER CARE **ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS** 81) ALA TEEN NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS 83) OVER EATERS ANONYMOUS 84) GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS PARENTS ANONYMOUS 86) MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES 87) OTHER_ 88) OTHER 89) OTHER 90) OTHER OTHER. 92) OTHER DOES YOUR CONGREGATION WORK WITH THE NEIGHBORHOOD IN WHICH IT IS LOCATED? NO _____ IF "YES" PLEASE EXPLAIN ON BACK.

___ NO ____ IF "YES" PLEASE EXPLAIN ON BACK.

DO YOU EVALUATE ANY PROGRAMS? YES _