SOCIAL SERVICES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS IN THE WELFARE REFORM ERA

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From slavery to the present, African-American congregations have provided for both the spiritual and social welfare of their members and communities. With public policy initiatives such as Charitable Choice[1] and the White House Faith Based Initiative, policymakers are expecting African-American congregations to play an even greater social service role in many urban communities. Some scholars have suggested that African-American congregations respond differently and more comprehensively than non-African-American congregations to the needs of their communities (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Billingsley, 1999)—a response largely due to their distinct evolution within a racially segregated society and a reluctant welfare state (Quadagno, 1994). This comparative study of African-American, interracial, and white congregations explores the extent to which African-American congregations have a unique niche as social service providers. Findings of this study will help us better understand the service delivery role of African-American congregations in the welfare reform era.

Over the last thirty years, scholars have called into question the continued centrality of congregations in the African-American community, given the increasing availability of secular organizations such as the Urban League, the NAACP, and government agencies (Frazier, 1963; Mukenge, 1983; Nelsen, 1988). African Americans who moved to urban areas at the beginning of the 20th century during the Great Migration were among the first to experience the diminished role and capacity of African-American congregations as they entered a new geographic and economic environment (Frazier, 1963; Mukenge, 1983; Nelsen, 1988). Nelsen (1988) concluded that: "With the urbanization of the African-American church caused by the migration of African-Americans to the urban South and North the church could not meet all the functions required in the complex urban environment, and it [the

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[1] The Charitable Choice provision of the 1996 welfare reform legislation is a policy that encourages states and local governments to contract with faith-based and community-based organizations to deliver social welfare and related services while preserving the religious identity of the service providers and upholding the religious freedom of the clients.

church] had no monopoly to do so" (p. 407). Nelsen suggested that new social and economic conditions that resulted from the migration and urbanization of African Americans required new methods and strategies to support and improve conditions for African Americans—strategies and methods that could not be fully achieved through the limited resources of African-American congregations. Mukenge (1983) speculated that African-American congregations would become overwhelmed by needs, much like white congregations had been during the Great Depression, and hence recede into a niche focused on the spiritual needs of their members.

Frazier (1963), Mukenge (1983), and Nelsen (1988) hypothesized that, over time, the function of African-American congregations would become only religious, and thus completely differentiated from its historical overlap with the roles of government and the market in providing services and financial resources for African Americans. Their assertions also implied that African-American congregations provided services less efficiently than their secular counterparts. African-American congregations, therefore, would become more like White congregations that accepted the government as having the primary responsibility for providing social services (Harris, 1987). This being the case, as organizations set within similar environments, African-American congregations would demonstrate institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) rather than a process of differentiation. That is, a particular congregational service profile would become the dominant and legitimate institutional form for all congregations. In addition, this theory of complete differentiation rests on the assumption that religion must be coupled with secular issues to maintain a public role. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) challenged the notion of complete differentiation and isomorphism by offering a principle of partial differentiation. Rather than completely receding into a religious niche, Lincoln and Mamiya argued that African Americans began to have more interactions within the mainstream sectors of society as a result of the Great Migration and the Civil Rights movement. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990, p. 188) frame their hypothesis with the following argument:

> "First, white churches do not have the kind of institutional centrality in their communities that black churches have; second, there are far more competing secular institutions among whites. Probably the only time when white churches and pastors in the United States experienced a similar kind of centrality in their communities occurred in the colonial period when churches were at the center of social life and pastors were considered the major community leaders. Lastly, black churches have a greater range of social problems to contend with. Since close to 35 percent of the black population is mired in an economic underclass…"

African-American congregations have continued to maintain involvement in some social and community areas while leaving other service areas to the government and market sector. In their study of 1,894 urban ministers representing 1,531 African-

American churches, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) found that 71% of the churches provided community services while 29% focused exclusively on religious services.

In more recent studies, scholars have compared the level of social service of African-American congregations with other congregations (Chaves & Higgins, 1992; Cavendish, 2000; Cnaan & Boddie, 2001; Tsitsos, 2003). These studies concluded that African-American congregations were not more involved in all types of social and community services, and highlighted the value of considering specific social services provided by African-American congregations as compared to other congregations. Using a sample of larger congregations, Chaves and Higgins (1992) found that African-American congregations were more likely than white congregations to offer support services to help the underprivileged in the local community. Using a nationally representative sample of Roman Catholic congregations, Cavendish (2000) reported similar findings. Based on an analysis of 1,044 Philadelphia congregations, Cnaan and Boddie (2001) found a different pattern. For instance, African-American congregations were more likely to provide summer day camp, clothing closets, programs for gang members, prison ministry, health education, mentoring, computer training for youth, street outreach to the homeless, neighborhood cleanup, and drug and alcohol prevention than non-black congregations (i.e. white, Latino, Asian congregations). Further, Tsitsos (2003) found that African-American congregations were more likely than white congregations to provide a limited range of services: education, job-related, substance abuse, and mentoring. These comparative studies primarily focused on the percent of congregations providing particular types of social services and used the number of social services as the measure of social service involvement (Chaves & Higgins, 1992; Cavendish, 2000; Cnaan & Boddie, 2001; Tsitsos, 2003). This measure of social service involvement is limited. It does not consider other ways in which congregations may demonstrate their level of social service involvement, namely the level of informal services or the percentage of financial resources allocated.

Methods

This study uses a multi-dimensional measure of social service involvement, which is expected to present a different picture of the level of social service involvement of African-American congregations compared to white and interracial congregations. Given that limited resources have been suggested as one reason African-American congregations have a diminished role as a community social service provider, this study also examined the provision of informal services and the allocation of financial resources for social service provision. By presenting the profile of formal services as well as identifying the informal services and financial investment, these findings shed light on how public and private sector partners can support the social service investment of African-American congregations.

The data used for this analysis were drawn from two waves of a cross-sectional survey of congregations from seven cities—Chicago, Indianapolis, New York, Mobile, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Houston (Cnaan, Boddie, Handy, Yancey, & Schneider, 2002). The original sample of 111 congregations housed in historic properties was randomly selected in Chicago (16), Indianapolis (25), New York (15), Mobile (15), Philadelphia (24), and San Francisco (16). To offset the bias toward selecting congregations founded before 1940, congregations established after 1940 were targeted in Chicago (5), Houston (24), Indianapolis (29), Mobile (25), Philadelphia (39), and San Francisco (11).

The unit of analysis for this study was 228 congregations with 75% or more African-American members (n=70, 31%) or 75% or more white members (n=122, 54%). Congregations without a predominant racial or ethnic group were classified as interracial (n=36, 16%). Due to the low number of cases, 16 congregations that were predominately Latino and Asian were excluded from this study. Thus, this study's sample of 228 congregations reflects the diversity of the estimated 350,000 U.S. congregations from seven cities, each region of the U.S, different religious traditions, various congregational sizes, different political orientations, theological orientations and socioeconomic status.

Trained interviewers conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with clergy, administrators, and program leaders. A three-part survey instrument was administered to more than one person in each congregation. Congregation leaders were asked questions about the congregation's history and membership profile; the congregation's governance and resources; the nature and scope of social and community services; and up to five specific services and their resources as well as staffing patterns. The social services were identified from a list of 190 services. This recognition method was preferred over asking respondents to recall the services provided in the last 12 months.

Using a social service inventory of 190 services, respondents were asked if within the last 12 months the congregation had provided a specific service upon request or when needed, run a formal program on their own property, run a program administered by the congregation elsewhere, or referred congregants to a program run by someone else. Respondents were also asked what percentage of the church's annual budget was designated for outreach, social action, social ministry, and social programs. Bases on these items, the congregations' level of social services activity was measured by (a) the total number and percentage of congregations providing formal services, (b) the total number and percentage of congregations providing informal services, and (c) the percentage of the annual budget allocated to provide social services. The percentage of the annual budget allocated was used rather than the absolute number allocated (in dollars) so that the size of financial contribution was independent of the size of the membership and the resource base of the

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congregation. Calculating various descriptive statistics using the items described above provided indicators for the three measures of the congregations' social service activity.

Results

When examining the formal social service provision of the African-American, interracial, and white congregations, approximately 40-50% of all three congregations provided music performance, hospital visitation, recreation for teens, choral groups, summer programs for teens, holiday celebrations, services for the sick and homebound, and visitation buddy programs. A similar pattern emerged for informal social services. Approximately 70% of all three congregations provided bereavement counseling, couple counseling, and family counseling when a request is brought to the clergy or another congregation leader. However, a distinct profile for formal services emerged for African-American congregations as compared to interracial and white congregations. Of the social and community-oriented services identified in Table 1, African-American congregations were more likely to provide all of these services than interracial congregations and white congregations.

When social service activity is measured as financial investment, the results are mixed. The mean scores for the percentage of the overall budget allocated for social services for the three groups of congregations were African-American (M = 25.8, SD = 21.7), interracial (M = 24.3, SD = 19.2) and white (M = 19.9, SD = 16.7). Differences in mean scores were not statistically significant (F = 2.25, p = .11). However, it is important to note that overall African-American congregations had lower annual budgets (36.2% under $100,000) and more members with lower incomes (35.1% with incomes less than $25,000 per year) as compared to interracial congregations (34.3% with budgets under $100,000 and 38.1% members with incomes $25,001-$50,000 per year) and white congregations (21.4% with budgets under $100,000 and 30.5% members with incomes $25,001-$50,000 per year).

Discussion

Although this study is not based on a representative sample, it builds upon the findings of past research to document differences and similarities in the social service patterns of African-American congregations compared with interracial and white congregations.

These findings provide evidence to support Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) partial differentiation hypothesis by documenting a unique profile for the social service provision of African-American congregations. While these results do not support the opinion that African-American congregations are more involved in all services or only services for underprivileged populations, they suggest that African-American

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Table 1. Social Services: Comparing African-American, Interracial, and White Congregations

Services Sponsored by Congregations	African-American Congregations N=70	Interracial Congregations N= 36	White Congregations N=122	Total N= 228
Food pantries	35 (50.0%)	13 (36.1%)	36 (29.5%)	84 (36.8%)
Clothing closet	32 (45.7%)	12 (33.3%)	19 (15.6%)	63 (27.6%)
Summer day camp	29 (41.4%)	13 (36.1%)	31 (25.4%)	73 (32.0%)
Voter registration	29 (41.4%)	9 (25.0%)	18 (14.8%)	56 (24.6%)
Tutoring	28 (40.0%)	9 (25.0%)	21 (17.2%)	58 (25.4%)
Sports activities	26 (37.1%)	11 (30.6%)	28 (23.0%)	65 (28.5%)
Cooperation with police	23 (32.9%)	9 (25.0%)	14 (11.5%)	46 (20.2%)
Neighborhood Association	22 (31.4%)	8 (22.2%)	26 (21.3%)	56 (24.6%)
Space for police/ community meetings	22 (31.4%)	4 (11.1%)	15 (12.3%)	41 (18.0%)
Street outreach to homeless	21 (30.0%)	7 (19.4%)	24 (19.7%)	52 (22.8%)
Single parents	20 (28.6%)	6 (16.7%)	16 (13.1%)	42 (18.4%)
Health education	19 (27.1%)	5 (13.9%)	15 (12.3%)	39 (17.1%)
Drug & alcohol prevention	19 (27.1%)	8 (22.2%)	14 (11.5%)	41 (18.0%)

congregations are engaged in a broad range of services, often at much higher levels than interracial and white congregations. Further, the levels of social service provision by African-American congregations are also higher than those reported in previous studies (with the exception of food programs) (Tsitsos, 2003). This broader range of services may be explained by the fact that African-American congregations are responding to the needs of the underprivileged, the working poor, and the middle class represented within their congregations and local communities.

African-American congregations give a significant portion of their annual budget to provide social services while balancing their need to maintain the congregation's facility and membership concerns. Relative to their resource base and financial capacity, African-American congregations appear to dig deep into their reservoir of resources to serve those in need. With such a picture, it may not be possible for African-American congregations to increase their social service provision without threatening their own survival. The expansion of social services by African-American congregations should be accompanied by the assessment and development of their institutional assets. The present forms of fundraising and the limited grant making to congregations may not achieve the institutional capacity needed to support expanded social services.

The differences in this study's findings and previous studies may be accounted for by the difference in data collection method, measurement of social service activity, and number of African-American congregations in the sample. Unlike previous studies that used a recall method to identify only formal services, this study used a recognition method to identify formal and informal services. It was expected that the recognition method would ensure consistency and reliability of the measures across all of the congregations studied. Future study is needed using a more representative sample to test this hypothesis. In addition, the demand for services relative to the supply of services should be further explored as well as the capacity of these congregations to respond to the demand for services in their communities.

In conclusion, this study moves the present discussion of African-American congregations forward by using a comprehensive face-to face interview that includes additional measures of social service activity. This study also included a larger and more diverse sample of black churches. It also examined the extent to which African-American congregations have maintained their unique difference from white and interracial congregations as a more public religion that is less differentiated from the market and government spheres.

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