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OUTPACING POVERTY: WACO CONGREGATIONS AND THEIR POVERTY ALLEVIATION EFFORTS

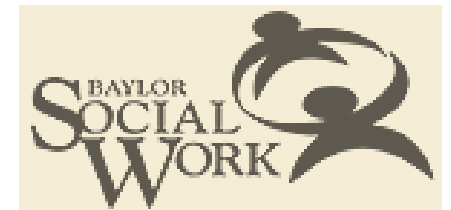
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Outpacing Poverty: Waco Congregations and Their Poverty Alleviation Efforts

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Learning Objectives

1. Clarify how clergy in this study perceive and describe their role in alleviating and reducing poverty in Waco, Texas.
2. Articulate findings in the research and the implications for social workers who network or collaborate with congregations.
3. Increase cultural competence when working with congregations.

Baylor University School of Social Work Waco, Texas





Social Workers & Congregations

- Social workers have paid little attention to the work of congregations (Cnaan, Wineburg & Boddie, 1999)
- Congregations believe addressing poverty is a part of their mission
 - Social services (Chaves & Tsitsos, 2001; Owens & Smith, 2005).



Previously Identified Congregational Roles

- Bane (1999)
 - Building community
 - Providing safety net services
 - Shaping the moral dialogue
- Ellor, Netting, and Thibault (1999)
 - Working to improve the human condition
- Slessarev-Jamir (2004) & Brown (2008)
 - Social Justice

Differing Faith Backgrounds

Judaism

- Torah
- Tzedakah & Hessed
- Justice and charity for the needy (Cnaan, Wineburg & Boddie, 1999)

Islam

- Qur'an
- Zakat & Sadaqah (charity & almsgiving)
- Specific guidance on addressing the poor (Bonner, 2005)

Christianity

- Bible
- Life and example of Jesus Christ
- Answering the need of another (Cnaan, Wineburg & Boddie, 1999)



Racial and Ethnic Differences

- Bell and Bell (1999) write “black people in America have, out of necessity, developed alternative methods of help-seeking, with the black church often being viewed as the primary helping institution by black people in the United States” (pp. 144-145).
- White congregations more likely to provide short term solutions (Brown, 2008).



Racial and Ethnic Differences

- Asian and Latino populations are less likely to provide any type of social service (Brown, 2008).
- If a service is provided, Latinos are more likely to provide food programs (Brown, 2008).



Research Question

- What is the role of congregations in poverty reduction in Waco, Texas?



Methodology

- Purposive Sample
- 1 congregation in each of the 5 Council Districts in Waco
- 8 congregations
 - Baptist Church affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas
 - African Methodist Episcopal Church
 - Islamic Center
 - Conservative Jewish Synagogue
 - Lutheran Church
 - Contemplative Southern Baptist congregation
 - Catholic Church
 - Greek Orthodox Church

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Primarily, how does your congregation meet human need?
2. How does your congregation identify community needs?

3. What type(s) of ministry(es) is your congregation involved with that are related to poverty in Waco?
4. What type(s) of ministry(es) is your congregation involved with that are related to poverty nationally or internationally?



Semi-Structured Interview Guide

5. What is your congregation's role in reducing poverty in Waco?

6. What connections do you see between poverty alleviation and your congregation's mission, if any?



Methodology

- Collected data
 - Consent form
 - Audio taped interviews
 - Transcribed
 - Coded
- First and second level analysis
- Peer debriefing (Professor in the School of Social Work)

Terms

- **Clergy**
 - Inclusive term for all religious leaders and lay people interviewed
- **Community development**
 - “The processes of community social and economic development that focus on empowering citizens to work in united ways to change their lives and environment in relation to living standards, economic conditions and social, employment and opportunity structures.” (Weil, p.9)
- **Poverty Alleviation v. Poverty Reduction**
 - Allowed clergy to define



Findings

3 Major Findings from the Clergy's
Perspective

Finding #1

- “The Poor will be with you always”
 - Uncertain of the reality of reducing poverty

“...we don't have any false ideas about alleviating hunger or something because Christ said [to the woman anointing his feet] ‘Don't bother her, she's doing this for my burial’ but the poor you'll always have with you, but me you will not always have with you... So when it gets so political that they [the poor] go out and ask for money from the government for the alleviation of hunger in the world, well give me a break, we're not going to do that. The Lord has poor people for a reason. It sounds selfish, but we practice on them.”



Finding #1

And again, I don't think you're going to alleviate poverty because scripture says the 'poor you will have with you always' but that doesn't then mean that 'Oh we'll always have poor so just let them be poor.' You know the Lord is very diligent in His pursuit of the poor and speaking to us about the poor."

Finding #2

- Not congregation's primary role
 - *We are **not** social services*
 - *Fear of enabling people*

“Now I get these \$50 food cards from H-E-B. And they have a deal where you can put a sticker on the back and they can't spend it on you know beer and cigarettes and stuff like that. So, now that's what they do, they don't get cash from me.”

“I think in answering that question, we all need to be careful because it's tempting to say, 'Of course it is, yes!' And if we answer it that way, too quickly, too often we can become another social service organization.”

Finding #3

- Part of our role is meeting needs
 - Financial
 - Relational
 - Physical/Material
 - Spiritual

“The Church’s mission is integral in the sense that we want to uplift the human person to become the best person he or she can be. You must touch the mind, you must touch the heart, you must essentially touch the body, otherwise it is not holistic.”

Finding #3

- Congregations unaware they are participating in activities that can be considered community development
- Activities like:
 - Community gardens
 - School partnerships
 - Neighborhood Associations
 - Repairing physical spaces in community



Interpretation & Implications

For Clergy & Social Workers

Interpretations & Implications

- Competency in addressing poverty from a faith perspective
- Awareness of activities congregations can engage in that help address poverty
- Effective collaboration with congregations and the social service field
- Include congregations in conversations about poverty

Implications

- Create new frameworks for understanding congregational contexts in addressing poverty
- Clarified understanding of clergy's primary role
- Acknowledging congregation's impact



Recommendations

3 Recommendations to Clergy, Congregants
and Social Workers

Recommendation #1

- Understand congregation's myth
 - "The church's story"
- Congregants & Clergy
 - Contextualize their congregation's myth
 - Verbalize their mission and purpose for existence in the community
- Social Worker
 - Help congregants discover their myth



Recommendation #2

- Education and training
- Congregants and clergy
 - Engage in continuing education
- Social Worker
 - Utilize current articles, case studies and research
 - Advocate for trainings and CEUs that focus on addressing poverty

Recommendation #3

- Staffing
 - Include a congregational or church social worker to congregation's staff
- Congregants and Clergy
 - Advocate for a social worker on staff
- Social Worker
 - Educate congregations on the value of a social worker on staff
 - Pair social work degree with degrees in divinity, religion or theological studies



Conclusion



Thank You!

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