



North American Association of Christians in Social Work
A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work

PO Box 121
Botsford, CT 06404
www.nacsw.org
888.426.4712

OUTPACING POVERTY: WACO CONGREGATIONS AND THEIR POVERTY ALLEVIATION EFFORTS

By: Alexis Christensen, Johnny Jones, and Gaynor Yancey

**Presented at:
NACSW Convention 2012
October, 2012
St. Louis, MO**

Outpacing Poverty: Waco Congregations and Their Poverty Alleviation Efforts

Alexis Christensen, MSW
NACSW Convention 2012
St. Louis, MO

Johnny Jones, Ph.D.
Gaynor Yancey, DSW





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



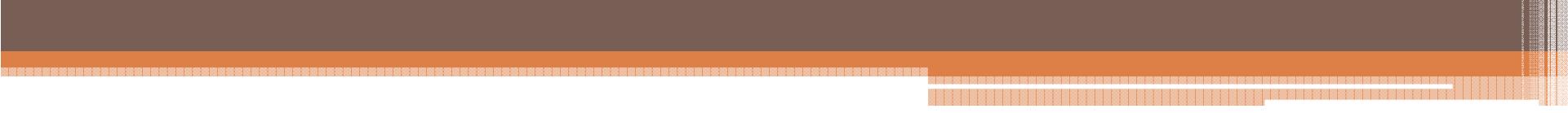
Semi-Structured Interview Guide

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 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!

Alexis Christensen, MSW
Community Organizer
Waco Community Development
alexis@wacocdc.org
254-235-7358

References

- Anastas, J. W. (2004). Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: Issues and Possible Answers. *Research on Social Work Practice, 14*(1), 57–65. doi:10.1177/1049731503257870
- Atherton, C. R., & Gemmel, R. J. (1993). Measuring attitudes toward poverty: A new scale. *Social Work Research & Abstracts, 29*(4), 28. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Bane, M. J. (1999). Poverty, welfare, and the role of churches. *America, 181*(8), 8-11.
- Barna Group. (2007). Americans are misinformed about poverty, but widely involved in helping the poor. Retrieved from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/13-culture/101-americans-are-misinformed-about-poverty-but-widely-involved-in-helping-the-poor?q=americans+misinformed+poverty>
- Barna Group. (2011). Do churches contribute to their communities? Retrieved from <http://www.barna.org/congregations-articles/502-do-churches-contribute-to-their-communities#.TzvbGX4hPF8.email>
- Barusch, A., Gringeri, C., & George, M. (2011). Rigor in qualitative social work research: A review of strategies used in published articles. *Social Work Research, 35*(1), 11–19. doi:10.1093/swr/35.1.11
- Bell, T. R., Sr., & Bell, J. L. (1999). Help-seeking in the Black Church: An important connection for social work to make. *Journal of North American Association of Christians in Social Work, 14*4-154.
- Bonner, M. (2005). Poverty and economics in the Qur'an. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 35*(3), 391–406.
- Brown, R. K. (2008). Racial/ethnic differences in religious congregation-based social service delivery effort. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 35*(4), 95-113.
- Campbell Johnson, B., & Dreitcer, A. (2001). Myth in congregational spirituality, *Beyond the ordinary: Spirituality for church leaders* (p. 49-63). Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Chaves, M., & Tsitsos, W. (2001). Congregations and social services: What they do, how they do it, and with whom. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 30*(4), 660–683. doi:10.1177/0899764001304003
- Cnaan, R. (2011). If you don't count it, it doesn't count: A pilot study of valuing urban congregations. Manuscript in preparation.
- Cnaan, R., & Boddie, S. (2001). Philadelphia census of congregations and their involvement in social service delivery. *Social Service Review, 75*(4), 559-580.

References

- Cnaan, R., Wineburg, R. J., & Boddie, S. C. (1999). *The newer deal: Social work and religion in partnership*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cohen, D., & Jaeger, A. R. (1998). *Sacred places at risk*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Partners for Sacred Places.
- Corbett, S., Fikkert, B., & Perkins, J. (2009). *When helping hurts: Alleviating poverty without hurting the poor and yourself*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publications.
- Dudley, C. S. (2001, November 14). Choices for churches. [Review of the books *Doing justice: Congregations and community organizing*, by D.A. Jacobsen and *Transforming charity: Toward a results-oriented social sector* by R. Streeter]. *Christian Century*, 32-34.
- Ellor, J. W., Netting, F. E., & Thibault, J. M. (1999). *Religious congregations and human services. Religious and spiritual aspects of human service practice* (pp. 144-159). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Floersch, J. (2005). Qualitative methods for studying poverty. [Review of book Regulating the Poor, by F. F Piven & R. Cloward]. *Qualitative Social Work*, 4(1), 112-113. doi: 10.1177/1473325005050209
- Garland, D. R., Myers, D. M., & Wolfer, T. A. (2008). Social work with religious volunteers: Activating and sustaining community involvement. *Social Work*, 53(3), 255-265.
- Hoepfl, M. C. (1997). Choosing qualitative research: A primer for technology education researchers. *Journal of Technology Education*, 9(1). Retrieved from <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JTE/v9n1/hoepfl.html#patton>
- Hotchkiss, D. (2007). Taking action for the poor. *Clergy Journal*, 83(6), 21-22. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Jansen, J. (2011). *The civic and community engagement of religiously active Americans*. Retrieved from The Pew Research Center website: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Social-side-of-religious.aspx>
- Koku, P. S., & Acquaye, H. E. (2011). Who is responsible for rehabilitating the poor? The case for church-based financial services for the poor. *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, 15(4), 346 – 356. doi: 10.1057/fsm.2010.28
- National Association of Social Workers (2008). *6.01 Social welfare of code of the ethics*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp/>
- Owens, M. L., & Smith, R. D. (2005). Congregations in low-income neighborhoods and the implications for social welfare policy research. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 34(3), 316-339. doi: 10.1177/0899764005275207

References

- Padgett, D. (2008). Qualitative methods in social work research. SAGE.
- Palys, Ted (2008). Purposive sampling. In Lisa M. Given (Ed.) (2008). *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, Vol.2, pp.697-698. Retrieved from <http://www.sfu.ca/~palys/Purposive%20sampling.pdf>
- Patton, M.Q. (1990). Designing qualitative studies. *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (pp.145-199). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2011). Internet surveys. Retrieved from <http://peoplepress.org/methodology/collecting-survey-data/internet-surveys/>
- Rubin, H.J., & Rubin, I.S. (1995). Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (2010). Essential research methods for social work. Belmont: Brooks/Cole.
- Rusaw, R., & Swanson, E. (2004). *Externally focused church*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing.
- Siegle, Del. (n.d.). Purposive sampling. In M.Q. Patton (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. Retrieved from <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/research/Samples/purposivesampling.htm>
- Slessarev-Jamir, H. (2004). Exploring the attraction of local congregations to community organizing. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 33(4), 585–605. doi:10.1177/0899764004269147
- U. S. Census Bureau. (2010). Selected economic characteristics: 2010 American Community Survey1 Year Estimates. Retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_1YR_DP03&prodType=table
- Westerfelt, A., & Dietz, T.J. (2010). *Planning and conducting agency-based research*. (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- What Orthodox Christians Believe*: A Conciliar Press Compendium. (1988). Chesterton, Indiana: Conciliar Press.
- Yardley, J. (2001). Waco pins its hopes for image on Bush Ranch. The New York Times. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/16/national/16WACO.html>