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**SOCIAL WORK AND CHURCH COLLABORATION: ASSISTING A
CHURCH'S DEVELOPMENT VIA NEEDS ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES**

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Abstract

Social work collaboration with faith-based establishments, such as churches, has great potential to optimize internal functions and service to the community. This presentation describes both the process of social work and local church congregation collaboration as well as the needs assessment results yielded from this collaboration. This study includes a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. First, researchers analyzed quantitative and qualitative data obtained by a pastoral search committee in 2009. Then they performed a quantitative survey completed in 2011. The quantitative survey was developed in collaboration with the prior surveyors, pastoral leadership, and social work professionals and was used to assist in program development and future direction of the church. With the assistance of the researcher and a structured interview guide, the search committee collected qualitative data in the form of interviews with church members and regular attendees. Results from original data reflect themes that include average/mean priorities on a scale of one to three (one as highest priority) and frequency of specific responses. Results from qualitative data substantiate identified themes. This research serves to provide critical strategic planning content for this church, which is articulated in terms of intra-church content and structure, change potential, and community outreach. It also exemplifies the benefits of social work collaboration in strategic planning efforts, such as with faith-based communities.

Social Work and Church Collaboration:
Assisting a Church's Development Via Needs Assessment Strategies

Introduction

Many of the original foundations of benevolence and charity have their beginnings in religious institutions. "The desire to help others and, therefore the beginning of social welfare appears to have developed as a part of religion" (Langer, 2003, p. 137). Religious values and traditions have greatly affected the development of American social welfare (Cascio, 2003). Religious institutions like the church have "continued to be a prominent context for social work practice..." (Garland, 1992, p. 1). Holt (1922) maintained that the "early church grew out of the necessity of greater efficiency in ministry to the physical needs of" others (p. 43). "The Church continues to be a significant and influential institution -for good or for ill- in this nation's formal social services, and to a greater extent, in the informal social support and services available to persons and their families" (Garland, 1992, p. 4). This creates a place of exploration and connection for those who serve in the helping professions, such as social work and psychology. These collaborations provide both an excellent context for practice and an opportunity to assist faith-based communities, such as churches, to more effectively meet the needs of its people and the community it serves.

Helping Professions and the Church

The Church and helping professions, such as social work and psychology, share a common mission of providing assistance, guidance, and support to those in need, but there are also sources of tension. For example, some within the helping professions do not value religion and do not think churches can contribute significantly to human services. Conversely, some faith traditions doubt the use of secular helping professions if they do not include explicit components

of Christian faith (Plante, 2008). Since the church and the helping professions have many areas of common focus and influence, the development of strategies and approaches to enhance collaboration make for more effective and holistic work.

There are many examples of helping professions supporting the church with their expertise. “Despite the secular evolution of the welfare state, religious congregations have continuously provided social services throughout our history” (Langer, 2003, p. 144). This includes areas of clinical work such as counseling, consulting with cell groups, marriage and pre-marriage sessions, and other related educational experiences (Edwards, 2003), consultation to churches with large congregations, supervision of community ministries, and assistance in implementing social action (Watkins, 1992; Ferguson, 1992; Bailey, 1992; Spessant, 1992). Wolfer and Sherr (2003) categorize congregational outreach into six areas: immediate needs (food, shelter, clothing), educational and health needs (tutoring, after school programs), community development activities (neighbor associations, AA, civic groups), evangelistic outreach, humanitarian efforts to deprived areas or countries, and finally, public advocacy.

Plante (2008) maintains that the church brings valuable input to this collaboration, such as spiritual tools and traditions (e.g., meditation), processes of forgiveness, acceptance of others, and a calling to volunteerism that can augment professional practice. “Overall, the religious and spiritual wisdom tools, at their very best, offer many tools to enhance psychological, physical, interpersonal and community functioning” (Plante, 2008, p. 444). Furthermore, the church provides a relationship with mental health gatekeepers, potential resources for clients, and connection to an established community of support (McMinn, Vogel, & Heyne, 2010).

Social Work, Psychology and Church Collaboration.

We will now look at how two specific helping professions, psychology and social work, have interfaced with the church, the models they have used and some examples of clinical practice and application. We will explore and discuss some of the requirements and competencies that may be needed to successfully and effectively be utilized in this collaboration.

Psychology

The predominant model discussed and possibly utilized in the psychology literature is the notion of church-psychology collaboration. Much of the research appears to be focused on the concept of collaboration “with” the church rather than serving “in” the church (Edwards, 2003; Bland, 2003; Plante, 1999; Edwards, Lim, McMinn & Dominquez, 1999). McMinn, Chaddock, Edwards, Lim, & Campbell (1998) define collaboration as “both parties working together each offering important expertise to solve a problem or help each other” (p. 565). The assumption of this approach is the notion of mutual respect, a value dearly held by the ethics of the profession, and the mission of the church. It is hoped that this collaboration “produces an outcome somewhat different, unique and richer than either of the contributing disciplines left alone” (Bland, 2003, p. 299). However, the collaboration of two established disciplines is often difficult and requires wisdom and patience. “Fruitful collaboration between psychology and the church must overcome several barriers that have been erected due to years of tension between the disciplines” (Bland, 2003, p. 299). Barriers have included a lack of awareness by the professional of important church teachings and issues (Plante, 1999), limited trust of the professionals by the church (Bene, Walsh, McMinn, Dominquiz, & Aikens, 2000), financial practices (Edwards et. al., 1999), and the unidirectional nature of the relationship (McMinn, Chaddock, Edwards, Lim & Campbell, 1998). “Clergy may perceive psychology-church collaboration less favorably than psychology because they have experienced fewer benefits than psychology” (McMinn et. al., 1998, p. 576).

Plante (1999) has formulated several principles of collaboration which he feels need to be considered in fostering a successful interface with the church. They are: 1. a good understanding of the church's religious system, 2. a knowledge of the unique language of that group, 3. the development of a network of key individuals within the system, 4. an expansion of the ways that professionals can effectively serve that specific group, and 5. the provision and application of the highest standards of professionalism and ethics. The ability to develop new ways of working with various religious groups or churches, and the structuring of a mutually beneficial situation can go a long way to fostering collaboration. (Benes, Walsh, McMinn, Dominquiz, & Aikens, 2000; McMinn, Chaddock, Edwards, Lim & Campbell, 1998, Plante, 2005). Tan (2005) who is pastor and psychologist, states that "Psychology also helps us in the church to view human beings from a more comprehensive perspective: physically, emotionally, interpersonally and spiritually"(p .51).

Social Work

Holt (1922) in his classic discussion of social work in the churches reminds us that "religious experience cannot be held in a compartment by itself" (p. 5). The working of the church cannot but spill over into the needs and people around it. "A vigorous Christianity has always projected its great ideas about God, salvation, and human duty into the ordinary relationships of human living"(p. 5). So while being involved in social service may be a natural outflow for the church, we need to remember that the culture and mission are unique. "The church is primarily a fellowship, and it is a corruption of the purpose of the church to look on any local church as an organization whose primary function is the giving of money"(Holt, 1922, p. 45).

While the church has a unique role and mission, it does have a long history of involvement with social welfare concerns. "Almost all modern social services can be traced back to roots in

religious organizations” (Garland, 1992, p. 1). The early Christians were noted for their charity to each other. Monasteries in the Middle Ages provided employment and Phoebe Palmer, a holiness evangelist, founded the Five Points Mission in New York City in 1850. (Garland, 1992) The Methodist Settlement Movement in the mid-19th century “staffed outreach programs to the most marginalized inhabitants of the inner cities” (Kreutziger, 2008, p. 81). Around the turn of the 20th century the Baptist Training School Settlement (Southern Baptists) in Louisville, Kentucky, and the Madonna Center Settlement House (Catholic) in Chicago provided services and aid to the immigrant and poor communities of the respective cities (Scales & Kelly, 2012). Garland (1992) defines church social work as bringing “the social work’s profession’s knowledge, values, and skills to the church as a resource” (p.5).

Garland and Yancey (2012) maintain that congregations have “several characteristics that taken together make congregations a unique setting for social work practice” (p. 313). Some of its elements are unique in that church social work mostly occurs in the context of a primarily voluntary setting, usually has a secondary role or function to the setting, the importance of the laity as well as the clergy to the mission, and the unique culture in which religious groups function. (Garland, 1992) The professional literature for church social work tends to be limited to primarily texts and edited books, with few research-based journal articles. Garland (1992) states that “church social workers have not spilled much ink in the writing of their practice” (p. 10). She attributes this to little recognition of church social work as a unique specialization, and because of the limited time they have to reflect, research or write due to the high demands of their vocation. Psychological literature tends to be primarily research-based journal articles with some edited texts. The focus of psychological literature tends to be on collaboration, while social

work literature focuses on consultation, practicing within the church, the supervision of church-based community ministries and social action.

Consultation is thought to be useful to the churches, “especially those churches with social ministries or those who want to develop such ministries for which the clergy cannot provide the needed leadership” (Watkins, 1992, p. 20). Social workers can provide assistance with organizational development and program evaluation, as well as, administrative oversight. Consultants, as outsiders, can sometime ask the hard questions or pose alternative solutions (Watkins, 1992). However, the social worker serving within a congregation can sometimes be more effective in reaching difficult groups, and have a practice that is “broader than practice in many other settings, including preventive, rehabilitative, and proactive...(Ferguson, 1992, p. 38). Social workers can also serve in developing faith-based community ministries.

Bailey (1992) maintains that community ministries are increasing due to the limiting of federal monies causing a greater burden on local communities, and the inability of individual congregations to meet the growing demands of a community. While this creates the possibility of greater flexibility and awareness in meeting local needs, these ministries have limitations as well. “There are limitations to what community ministry can do. Because of budgetary needs, it is tempting to seek every possible grant, regardless of community need or agency mission” (Bailey, 1992, p. 63). Finally, social action is a way that the social worker can assist and collaborate with the church. “Social change in America has been spurred on by organized religion” (Spessant, 1992, p. 106). The examples of William Wilberforce and Charles Finney in confronting slavery in England in the 19th century, Dorothea Dix in advocating for the care of the mentally ill and the development of rescue missions in the last century, point to a history of engagement and involvement of faith-based communities in fostering social action in America.

This continues to be an ongoing opportunity for social work and the church to work toward common ends and mission.

Competence and Training for Collaboration

The development of effective collaboration with the church may require some additional enhancement of professional competencies. While the importance of good communication is granted, clergy also perceive experiences as being highly helpful when the professional is offering a service that clergy are not prepared to offer (McMinn, Aikens, & Lish, 2003).

“Advanced forms of collaboration that transcend referrals back and forth requires particular values and attitudes...(McMinn et. al, 2003, p. 202). Additional theological or religious training may be useful in effectively interfacing with those in religious settings.

McMinn, Aikens, and Lish (2003) proposes the idea that advanced competence must include holistic and integrative care that fosters an awareness of spirituality and shared values with those one is serving. Some emerging areas of training can be on-going theological training at seminaries or religious graduate schools, internship and mentoring via training centers such as the Center for Church-Psychology Collaboration (CCPC: McMinn, Meek, Canning, & Pozzi, 2001), and development of research approaches such as the Multimethod Church Assessment Process (MCAP; Dominquez & McMinn, 2003). CCPC’s mission is to make “sustained and relevant contributions to the research literature in psychology, training doctoral students in effective means of collaboration with religious organizations, and provide service to religious communities throughout the world” (McMinn et. al., 2001, p. 1). Other factors such as the choice of clergy to collaborate with and the type of services provided such as marriage and family issues, may be important to consider in any endeavor with clergy (Lish, Fitzsimmons,

McMinn, & Root, 2003; McMinn, Ammons, McLaughlin, Williamson, Griffin, Fitzsimmons, & Spires, 2005).

The relationship between clergy and the profession, the theological position of the clergy and the perceptions of the clergy of the profession can be important factors in the collaborative process. “Relationships between clergy and psychologists can be enhanced by psychologists volunteering time to present seminar sat the local church, offering no-cost or low-cost consultations to pastors,...and so on” (McMinn, Runner, Fairchild, Lefler, & Suntay, 2005, p. 308). Conservative clergy sometime respond more fully to professionals who are labeled as Biblical Counselor, while “Southern Baptist clergy prefer counselors who use spiritual techniques (such as prayer and scripture in counseling) over counselors who are identified as having excellent interpersonal skills” (McMinn et. al., 2005, p. 307). They seem to be more willing to work with those who more fully “align with the values of the church” (McMinn, 2005, p. 307).

Case Examples

A number of examples of church collaboration exist in both psychology and social work and can be found both in America and other countries. Galloway (2003) highlights three programs developed by Christ Community Heath Service to serve the needs of inner city Memphis, Tennessee. Church Collaboration and Counseling Service was designed to bring counseling into the church, while Memphis Healthy Churches utilize local congregation as vehicles for health care education. Finally, Shelby Alliance of Faith-based Efforts (SAFE) attempts to use churches in preventing sexual assaults. The Lawndale Christian Health Center is an outreach of the Lawndale Community Church located in an underserved community of Chicago. It provides medical, mental health, and other related social work services to people with limited means and

options (Serrano, 2003). Such collaboration is not limited to the United States. Londrina Bible Seminary in Brazil is working with local churches to provide counseling, clinical supervision, consultation, marital enrichment and ongoing training (Edwards, 2003). The Psychology and Christianity Project at the University of Cambridge, England is attempting to develop two initiatives, Church Consultancy and Pastoral Care, to support and strengthen local congregations. Church Consultancy is utilized to assist clergy with communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, and development of goals, while Pastoral Care is designed to enhance pastoral and personal growth via a beta course developed for the “facilitating [of] churches as caring communities” (Savage, 2003, p. 340).

Howell (2005) developed a five-week series of classes designed to educate local congregation about the dynamics and patterns of depression. Holland (2010) notes the work of The Riverside Church in New York City whose Social Service Ministry provides assistance to those in need, a food pantry, barber training program clothing distribution, shelter, and HIV testing and support. Choi (2003) highlights the importance of the Korean American Church as a social service provider. It has acted as a “surrogate family” for Korean immigrants in their financial, cultural and spiritual transition to this country (Choi, 2003, p. 159). Finally Tirrito’s (2003) Faith-Based Community Action Model provides a template to assist churches and other faith-based organizations in the development of community action programs.

Method

Phase I – Qualitative Data

In order to assist a pastoral search committee of a local church in its process, a survey was commissioned by that church to determine the needs, vision and direction of the church. The four members of the search committee were divided into two teams of two to interview church

members and regular attendees. They were tasked with personally interviewing each family of the church using a series of structured questions (see appendix - exhibit 1). Between September 9, 2009 and October 28, 2009 they interviewed 13 of the 18 families of the church. The interviews varied in length from 20 minutes to 2 hours. The average time per interview, according to discussions with the four surveyors was approximately 55 – 60 minutes.

Interviewees were reported to be open and cooperative with the process. The two teams of surveyors were interviewed by this worker (Nicholas Placido) as part the initial assessment process on June 21, 2011 and July 5, 2011 and asked their impressions of the process and their perceptions of the interviewees' responses. Also, the notes kept by the interviewers were given for thematic analysis. A report and summary of the qualitative survey of the September/October 2009 interviews was presented to church board on August 1, 2011

Results and Analysis of Phase I

The following is a report and summary of data obtain by the pastoral search committee of the local church in 2009.

Interviews of Surveyors

The following is a summary of the surveyors' views of the overall responses to each of the six questions asked (see attached). They are not ranked in any order of preference.

Question 1 {"events, function"} – a. Food related activities (potluck, dinner) b. Fellowship events ("being together", visiting, small groups) c. Worship music

Question 2 {"Community Needs"} – a. Inside communication (sharing of information) b. Outside communication (connecting with other churches, involvement in the community) c. Increased youth involvement (growing youth group, connecting with skaters/other youth) d. spiritual growth (stewardship, gifts)

Question 3 { “changes” } – a. Increase member involvement beyond Sunday (enhance lay involvement, weekly meetings/events) b. Increase size of youth group (enhanced activities, draw additional youth) c. Increase partnership with other churches d. increased use of hymns.

Question 4 { “never change” } – a. Fellowship (meals, attention to visitors, “a community”, family atmosphere) b. friendly open place (honest, real, accepting) c. Sunday service (causal, worship music, attention to visitors)

Question 5 { Important “issues and topic” } – a. Spiritual formation (discipleship, missions, spiritual health) b. marriage/woman’s issues (abortion, communications) c. Mentoring (testimonies, hearing people’s stories) d. evangelism

Question 6 { Personal activities } – a. Travel (vacation, sightseeing) b. Outdoor activities (camping, fishing) c. arts and crafts (knitting, cross stitch) c. Fellowship (visiting, coffee, dinner groups) d. reading and games.

Results of analysis of surveyors’ notes

The notes of each surveyor were collected and qualitatively evaluated regarding recurring themes and constructs. The following are the collated thematic responses in the order of their preference and quantity of responses (see attached questions in appendix-exhibit 1).

Question 1- a. Food-related events {29% } b. Special events (VBS, bible studies, special speakers) {29% } c. Worship Team {14% } d. Woman’s Ministry {14% } e. Pastoral visits {14% }

Question 2 – a. Relationship building outside the church (community, needy, mission trips) {33% } b. Relationship building inside the church (group meetings, communications) {25% } c. building improvements {17% } d. – Increased youth involvement/high school ministry (both inside and outside the church) {17% }. e. – Enhanced children services/needs {8% }.

Question 3 – a. Increased lay involvement (Sunday only church) {31%} b. Increased community involvement (benevolent, elderly, youth) {23%} c. Enhanced mentoring/growth experiences (sermons, special events, groups) {23%} d. Enhance church programs (children, Sunday school, youth) {15%} e. Increased connection to missions {8%}

Question 4 – a. Accepting, open, friendly (safe place, greeting visitors) {45%} b. fellowship/relational (“being a community”) {27%} c. Music/worship (causal, informal, Christ-centered) {15%} d. Connection to pastor (accessible) {9%} e. Allow others to use the church {4%}

Question 5 – a. Adolescence issues (sex, abortion, drugs) {37%} b. Spiritual growth/formation {24%} c. Issues for women (communication, personal growth) {13%} d. Marriage {13%} e. Suffering {13%}

Question 6 – a. Relationship building activities (visiting, having coffee) {38%} b. Outdoor activities (gardening, camping, fishing) {24%} c. Games/reading {15%} d. Travel related events (vacations, holidays) {15%} e. Arts and crafts {8%}

Summary of findings of surveyor’s notes

Many of the responses centered on the importance of fellowship and “being a community” of faith. Many of the events viewed as important tended to be relational in nature. The value of being more connected to the community at large is stressed as well. The involvement of the church with other organizations and churches in the area seems to be highly valued. Increased involvement with youth in the community, as well as the enhancement of youth ministries at the church appears to be important. The enhancement of children and youth services and activities might be viewed as a way of enhancing the programmatic offerings of the church and drawing new families into the fellowship. An area of development appears to be the increased

involvement of the laity in the ministries of the church, in order to provide a greater variety of programs and assist already involved individuals in functioning more effectively.

Recommendations – Phase I

A summary of the above results were reviewed and recommendations were presented to the church board on August 1, 2011. Before taking action or developing plans based on this data from a survey given approximately two years ago, it was recommended that a current quantitative survey be completed to validate the findings of 2009. A survey could be developed in conjunction with the prior surveyors, pastoral leadership, and the authors of this article. It was recommended that this survey be completed and implemented in the fall with recommendations to be provided to the church board by the end of the year, to be used for future implementation and planning for the church.

Method-Phase II Quantitative Data

It was agreed that a quantitative survey would be developed from qualitative questions and information obtained from the interviews of 2009. A six-question multiple choice survey was developed with questions derived from the structured questions of the 2009 interviews. Question 6 from the original survey was deleted and question 2 was sub-divided into church needs (Question 2) and community needs (Question 3) at the request of the church board. The choices for each question were derived from the top five answers given in the 2009 survey. (see Appendix – exhibit 2) The survey was forwarded to the pastor, and a representative of the board for review and feedback. The survey was signed off by the pastor of the church on September 4, 2011 and a date was set for the administration of the survey (10/8/11). Announcements were placed in the church bulletin by the pastor and I briefly addressed the congregation on a Sunday (10/1/11) in preparation for the following Sunday's survey. I thanked the congregation for their

assistance in this project and reviewed the nature and possible uses of the survey's information. I reminded them that their involvement was completely voluntary and no personal information would be revealed in future reports or discussions. On October 8, 2011, volunteers and myself administered the survey to congregation as part of an after-service potluck coordinated by members of the church.

Results – Phase II

This section provides narratives of tables that provide the priority averages and frequencies for all themes found in this study. The survey for this study is based on six questions that ask about experiences, perceptions, and preferences related to aspects of ministry, church needs, community needs, changes, and preferred spiritual issues/topics. There are 46 participants (N=46). In each question, participants rate their top three choices:

1 = first choice

2 = second choice

3 = third choice

Results are presented as *averages (1 to 3)*. Lower scores reflect higher *priorities*. Frequency (represented as percentages) refers to how often an item shows up anywhere in the participants top three choices. Frequency cut-offs are established as follows:

80-100%: Very high frequency

60-79%: High frequency

40-59%: Moderate frequency

20-39%: Low frequency

1-19%: Very low

For each question, the participant may choose *Other* and provide answers. When participants repeat answers under *Other*, it is noted with numbers in parentheses. Ties are also noted in parentheses.

Question 1 asks about ministries (i.e., activities, events) that are important to congregants (see Table 1). In order of average priority, participants selected Pastoral Ministry, Worship Team, Special Fellowship Events, Women’s Ministry, Food Related Events (2.47), and Other (2.47). Suggestions under Other include small groups, college ministry (2), communion, men’s breakfast, youth group (2), use of building, people my age, and outreach. Pastoral Ministry, Food Related Events, and Worship Team are selected with high frequency. Special Fellowship Events are selected with moderate frequency. Other items are noted with low frequency. Women’s Ministry is noted with very low frequency. Note that Pastoral Ministry was referenced both as the highest priority (1.53) and with most frequency (76%).

Table 1: Ministry Preferences

	Sum	Average	Frequency
Food related events	79	2.47	33 (72%)
Special fellowship events (VBS, Bible study)	51	2.13	24 (52%)
Worship team	53	1.89	28 (61%)
Women’s ministry	13	2.17	6 (13%)
Pastoral ministry	52	1.53	35 (76%)
Other	22	2.47	11 (24%)
Other notes:	Small groups, college ministry (2), communion, men’s breakfast, youth group (2), use of building, people my age, outreach		

Question 2 asks about important needs that congregants see in the church community (see Table 2). In order of average priority, participants selected Increased Youth Programming, Other, Effective Communication Between Ministries, Increased Children Programming, Group Meetings (Fellowship), and Building Improvements. Write-ins under Other include Lack of Volunteers, Prayer Meetings (3), Community Outreach (5), Evangelism, Work Days, Visitors, Church Fellowship, and Enhance Worship Time. Increased Children Programming (VBS, Sunday School), Increased Youth Programming (52%), Group Meetings (Fellowship) (52%), and Effective Communication Between Ministries are selected with moderate frequency. Other items are noted with low frequency. Building Improvements are noted with very low frequency. Note that items under Other are at 30% with an average of 1.86. Prayer Meetings and Community Outreach appear to be important items, though item number three asks more explicitly about community outreach, meaning some congregants tended to equate Community. Prayer meetings were mentioned three times and community outreach was mentioned five times.

Table 2: Church Community Preferences

	Sum	Average	Frequency
Group meetings (fellowship)	49	2.04	24 (52%)
Effective communication between ministries	43	1.87	23 (50%)
Building improvements	18	3.00	6 (13%)
Increased youth programming	43	1.79	24 (52%)
Increased children programming (VBS, Sunday School)	52	1.93	27 (59%)
Other	26	1.86	14 (30%)
Other notes:	Lack of volunteers, prayer meetings (3), community outreach (5), evangelism, work days, visitors, church fellowship, enhance worship time		

Question 3 asks about perceived community needs that go overlooked. Results are as follows (see Table 3). In order of average priority, congregants selected Other, Increased Involvement with Youth in the Community, Greater Involvement with Other Churches, Greater Involvement in Missions, Assisting the Needy, and Increased Involvement with Community Groups/Agencies. Write-ins under Other include Availability of People to Meet Needs, Community Involvement, Fellowship with Community, and Community Outreach. Greater Involvement with Other Churches and Assisting the Needy are selected with high frequency. Increased Involvement with Youth in the Community and Increased Involvement with

Community Groups/Agencies are selected with moderate frequency. Greater Involvement in Missions is noted with low frequency. Other is noted with very low frequency. Note that Greater Involvement with Other Churches and Assisting the Needy are high priority and high frequency selections.

Table 3: Community Needs Preferences

	Sum	Average	Frequency
Increased involvement with community groups/agencies	51	2.32	22 (48%)
Assisting the needy	56	2.00	28 (61%)
Increased involvement with youth in the community	44	1.83	24 (52%)
Greater involvement with other churches	56	1.87	30 (65%)
Greater involvement in missions	19	1.90	10 (22%)
Other	7	1.75	4 (9%)
Other notes:	Availability of people to meet needs, community involvement, fellowship with community, community outreach		

Question 4 asks about Church Change Preferences (see Table 4). In order of average priority, congregants selected Increased Member Involvement, Other, Enhanced Mentoring/Growth Experiences (Retreats, Special Speakers), Enhanced Church Programs (Children, Sunday School, Youth), Increased Community Involvement, and Increased Connection to Missions. Write-ins under Other include Increased Member Interaction, Enhanced Teaching on Communion, Evangelism and Related Subjects, Enhanced Worship Team (More Instruments), Fellowship, Enhanced Teaching, Sunday Morning Children Sunday School, and More Community. Enhanced Mentoring/Growth Experiences (Retreats, Special Speakers) and Increased Member Involvement are selected with high frequency. Increased Community Involvement and Enhanced Church Programs (Children, Sunday School, Youth) are selected with moderate frequency. Increased Connection to Missions and Other are noted with very low frequency. Note that Increased Member Involvement is selected both with high priority (1.62) and high frequency (63%).

Table 4: Church Changes Preferences

	Sum	Average	Frequency
Increased member involvement	47	1.62	29 (63%)
Increased community involvement	60	2.22	27 (59%)
Enhanced mentoring/growth experiences (retreats, special speakers)	66	2.00	33 (72%)
Enhanced church programs (children, Sunday school, youth)	39	2.05	19 (41%)
Increased connection to missions	18	2.25	8 (17%)
Other	12	1.71	7 (15%)
Other notes:	Increased member interaction, enhanced teaching on communion, evangelism, and related subjects, enhanced worship team (more instruments), fellowship, enhanced teaching, Sunday morning children Sunday school, more community		

Question 5 asks about No Change Preferences (see Table 5). In order of average priority, congregants selected Accepting/Open/Friendly Place, Fellowship/Relational Structure (Being Part of a Community) (2.00), Other (2.00), Allowing Other Groups/Organizations to Use the Church, Music/Worship Style (Casual, Informal), and Connection to Pastor. Write-ins under

Other include Preaching from the Word and All Important. Accepting/Open/Friendly Place is selected with high frequency. Fellowship/Relational Structure (Being Part of a Community), Music/Worship Style (Casual, Informal) (48%), Allowing Other Groups/Organizations to Use the Church (48%), and Connection to Pastor are selected with moderate frequency. Other is noted with very low frequency. Note that Accepting/Open/Friendly Place is selected with high priority (1.50) and high frequency (78%).

Table 5: No Change Preferences

	Sum	Average	Frequency
Accepting, open, friendly place	54	1.50	36 (78%)
Fellowship/relational structure (being part of a community)	50	2.00	25 (54%)
Music/worship style (casual, informal)	49	2.23	22 (48%)
Connection to pastor (accessible)	52	2.48	21 (46%)
Allowing other groups/organizations to use the church	50	2.08	22 (48%)
Other	4	2.00	2 (4%)
Other notes:	Preaching from the Word, all important		

Question 6 asks about Social/Spiritual Issues Preferences (see Table 6). In order of average priority, congregants selected Spiritual/Growth Formation, Youth Issues, Marriage, Suffering, Issues for Women (Communication, Personal Growth), and Other . Write-ins under Other include Being the Church, Missions-Evangelism, Fatherhood/Husband, Sharing Your Faith, Spiritual Warfare, Spiritual Growth, Holy Spirit, It's All Important, and Practical Teaching. Spiritual Growth/Formation is selected with very high frequency. Marriage (57%), Suffering (57%), and Youth Issues (Sex, Drugs) are selected with moderate frequency. Issues for Women (Communication, Personal Growth) and Other are noted with low frequency. Note that Spiritual Growth/Formation have an average priority of 1.32 and 91% frequency.

Table 6: Social/Spiritual Issues Preferences

	Sum	Average	Frequency
Youth issues (sex, drugs)	45	2.25	20 (43%)
Spiritual growth/formation	54	1.32	42 (91%)
Issues for women (communication, personal growth)	23	2.30	10 (22%)
Marriage	61	2.26	26 (57%)
Suffering	59	2.27	26 (57%)
Other	21	2.33	9 (20%)
Other notes:	Being the church, missions-evangelism, fatherhood/husband, sharing your faith, spiritual warfare, spiritual growth, Holy Spirit, it's all important, practical teaching		

Some additional strengths noted were strong involvement from college age students. Most students (75%) consider themselves regular attendees. Almost half of those who selected member or regular attender status are (transitional) college students. Most congregants viewed the church as accepting, open, and a friendly place. They enjoyed the relational structure (“being a part of a community”) of the church. Also noted was the music/worship style, which was characterized as casual and informal. Recent building improvements, allowing other groups/organizations to use the church and strong involvement with missions were also reported as strengths of this church.

A number of challenges were reported as well. The need for more effective communication between various ministries of the church, increased development of youth programming, further development of children’s programming (VBS, Sunday School), and enhanced member involvement were noted as difficulties by the congregation.

Discussion of Results – Phrase II

Congregants who participated in this study reflect both a genuine appreciation for the strengths of their church along with a strong sense of responsibility in terms of providing critical input about quality improvement. A strong community of believers that cultivates a deepening faith and yields a warm and genuine connection to the broader community appears to be the centerpiece of these findings. Phase II of the results addresses intra-church structure and content, change potential issues, and community outreach.

Congregants provided robust responses in this study about intra-church structure and content (Items 1, 2, and 6). Worship and fellowship are clear priorities. But it also appears that more opportunities for specific age groups, perhaps with small groups, would be appreciated. Again, responses to this question suggest common desires to see more age-specific ministries in

operation. Effective Communication between Ministries is highly valued, reflecting a desire to see connection between ministries. Congregants appear to strongly value a balance between efforts toward enhanced community experience (e.g., collective worship, food-related fellowship events) and increasing opportunities for individualized ministry on specific topics. Congregants cited spiritual growth and formation with the highest of priority and frequency. This suggests a strong sense of personal responsibility for nurturing one's relationship with God. Beyond that, congregants strongly and frequently cite family growth and issues along with grieving and suffering as important topics. Note that specific women's issues were cited with low frequency. Given that the sample equally represents men (n=23) and women (n=23), this could imply that, for most female congregants, this topic is already sufficiently addressed.

Change potential items provide great insight both in terms of what to change and not to change (Items 4 and 5). For things to change, *Other* comes in as one of the higher prioritized items, suggesting that the researchers did not anticipate some important items for congregants. This is a positive finding because it identifies areas for deeper exploration. It is clear that some congregants feel strongly about increasing and improving interaction and community, as well as deepening teaching around specific topic areas, such as communion. The results from this item also point to a strong preference for improved mentoring efforts. It is notable that in comparison to the item asking for what to change, there are very few *Other* items cited. This implies that the researchers did comprehensively anticipate areas of importance for not changing. Congregants clearly indicate that the church's accepting and open environment must remain unchanged. It is also clear that congregants highly value numerous aspects of their church, including fellowship opportunities, styles of worship, strong ties to the pastor, and adequate access to outside community groups.

This congregation clearly states community outreach and relationships as a leading indicator for the church's spiritual health (Item 3). Collaborating with other churches for the betterment of the community, especially focusing on the *needy*, is paramount. This strongly implies that congregants view community outreach as both an expression and indication of faith.

Recommendations- Phase II

These recommendations were presented in congregational meeting in January of 2012. Regarding students attending the church it was recommended that the board consider the development of mentoring and ministry opportunities for students within the church. They were advised to continue to support and enhance the Wednesday night college meeting, and place one or two students on the church board to provide feedback and assistance to the church.

Regarding lay involvement, it was recommended that the board simplify leadership of various church ministries and offices (Deacons, Trustees, etc.), and develop a simple model of church governance until the census of church can support the demands of church offices. The development of a mentoring program (yolk fellow) for individuals to explore various tasks with the guidance of current leadership and workers was advised as a way of developing further involvement.

The development of youth programs, as well as children's programs, to attract and keep new members/ attendees was explored. The problem they experience is the difficulty it is to attract new attendees without such programs. It is equally hard to develop such programs with the current level of involvement and size of the congregation. It was recommended the phasing in of one of these programs, via an initial pilot program.

Based on further analysis of the survey completed after the January 2012 meeting, further recommendations were made in the areas of pastoral ministry, children's programming,

community needs and outreach, and maintaining an open and accepting environment.

Congregants view the pastoral ministry as highly important. Congregants want pastors with whom they can relate as well as look to for spiritual teaching and leadership. Additionally, congregants have specific topics and issues they would like to address. Therefore, it is important to develop a strategic plan that yields clearer job descriptions for the part time pastoral staff in terms of focusing on priorities of the congregation.

Improving family attendance appears to be contingent upon a church's ability to provide children's programming. Increased and improved children's activities, that are flexible and can be administered as needed, should improve family attendance. The church needs an established children's program structure, but one that will not drain valuable resources when not needed.

Because cooperating with other churches and assisting the needy are viewed as important by the congregation, the development of a plan to review current community involvements and establish future alliances with other faith based organizations in meeting the needs of the community together would be strongly recommended. This could include co-sponsorship of community events such as food drives, retreats, fund raising, or spiritual development seminars.

Finally, the church highly values that it is a friendly and open community, especially for the students who attend. The development of a follow up plan for visitors to include follow up via post cards, texting, e-mails or other electronic sources is thought to be useful and an effective way of fostering a friendly connection. Future planning for the development of a follow up committee might help develop other alternative means of connecting with their community.

Implications

The church provides a "unique context" for the practice of social work (Garland, 1992, p. 12). It has historically been involved in caring for the poor, underserved and people at risk.

However, “despite their considerable contributions, congregations are not social agencies” (Wolfer & Sherr, 2003, p.45). They each have a unique perspective, focus, and process they bring to the task at hand. It is, therefore, essential for the social worker to be aware of the values and culture of various congregations. Some maintain that to effectively serve churches, “the first step is determining what services are appealing to clergy” (Lish, McMinn, Fitzsimmons & Root, 2003, p. 297). The development of effective community, shared values, and mutual respect are thought by some to aid in the forming of useful alliances with the church (McMinn, Ammons, McLaughlin et. al., 2005; McMinn, Runner, Fairchild, Lefter & Suntay, 2005).

Because of the unique cultural contexts of religious organizations, on-going training of professionals in religious cultural awareness and diversity would be helpful in fostering increased personal and professional awareness (McMinn, Aikens & Lish, 2003; McMinn, Meeks, Canning & Pozzi, 2001). Some have proposed that training for professionals should “include training in religious diversity”(Plante, 2005, p. 78). It is important to view congregations as being unique “communities of believers” rather than business like organizations (Blande, 2005, p. 78). Savage (2003) maintains that “the thrust here is to empower churches as communities” (p. 341).

Many churches, such as the Korean-American Church, have limited professional assistance and overly relies on paraprofessionals to run social services (Choi, 2003). This creates a need and a niche where social workers can often be of aid and guidance in enhancing services and effectiveness. The skills in the area of assessment can be useful in helping congregations to focus and formulate a meaningful direction. “Assessing needs, planning and evaluation are basis principles in effective ministry” (Ferguson, 1992, p. 53). Certain assessment approaches such as the MCAP can provide a focused inquiry based on the needs and desires of a specific

congregation (Dominquez & McMinn, 2003). As Galloway (2003) maintains “ we have much to offer our community churches...” (p.346). Whether we are effective in collaborating with churches will, to a degree, depend on our ability as professionals to be open to innovative ideas and approaches beyond our traditional roles and practices. We need to “re-think the possibilities” in order to not just work *in* churches, but work *with* churches (Benes, Walsh, McMinn, Dominquez, and Aikens, 2003, p. 519). If we are “interested in collaborating with clergy (we) would be wise to consider innovative possibilities for a changing world” (Edwards, Lim, McMinn & Dominquez, 1999, p. 550). We need to be willing to think and practice outside of our traditional professional *box*.

Conclusion

This study has explored and examined both archival and original data collected from this church’s congregation. It includes analysis and recommendations based on average priorities and frequency of responses. Further research should be done on both more deeply and systematically understanding the needs of churches as well as on the role of social work collaboration. This data will provide an opportunity for further research, such as comparing results among independent variables of demographics such as transitional (student) and permanent members. Limitations include a small sample size, which did not lend itself to intensive statistical analysis. Also, social work collaboration with congregations has not been a widely researched area. Therefore there are not many established norms.

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Appendix

Exhibit 1 – Structured questions for home interviews of church members and attendees (phase I)

August 23, 2009

_____ Community Church

Pastoral Search Committee

Re: Questions for home visits

1. Tell us about some events, functions, activities or ministries at the church that have really meant a lot to you? Why?
2. What needs have you seen locally or even at the church that you think are important but that seem to go overlooked or unaddressed? Think about your neighbors and friends, regardless of whether they attend church. The needs are be physical, financial, spiritual – anything.
3. If you could change anything about the church, what would you change? Why?
4. What are some things about the church that you hope never change? Why?
5. What topics (social or spiritual) really hold your attention? Think about what issues you feel you could talk about “forever” or topics you are always eager to learn more about.
6. That activities get you so excited that you either look forward to them long before they happen, are always willing to make time for them or that or that you never tire of doing? Do not limit yourself to church activities. You can include entertainment, recreation, projects, hobbies, social events, or even things as simple as coffee with a friend.

Exhibit 2 – Survey utilized in phase II of study. Congregation Survey

_____ **Community Church**
Congregational survey

Administered by the MSW program of Asbury University

The findings of this survey may bear important information worthy of consideration of educational dissemination or publication. This aids our profession in more effectively serving similar populations or groups.

By completion of this survey I hereby grant the permission to use data collected for educational/publication purposes. I understand that the identity of the church and information obtained from its members will be handled in a private manner. No part of it will be used for anything other than educational/publication purposes. No individuals attending the church will be individually identified. Your involvement is purely on a **voluntary basis**. You, and/or your leadership team may choose at any time to discontinue their participation in this project.

Gender: M____ F____ Please **check!**

Age: Please **check!**

Less than 18____ 18-21____ 22-30____ 31-40____ 41-50____ 51-65____ Greater than 65____

(Please check one of the following) Member____ Regular Attendee ____ Visitor____

Are you a university/seminary student? YES____ NO____) Please **check!**

Please complete the questions below.

Place (1, 2, 3) a number by your top three (3) choices according to your preference (1 – first choice, 2 – second choice, 3 – third choice).

You may write in an additional preference if you wish on item F.

Please place number by it to indicate your level of preference.

Only select three items.

1. What are some of the ministries (i.e.-event, activities) at CMC that have been important to you? ____ A. Food related events (Potlucks, Breakfasts)
____ B. Special fellowship events (VBS, bible study, special speakers)
____ C. Worship Team
____ D. Woman's Ministry
____ E. Pastoral Ministry (Preaching, Teaching)
____ F. Other _____

(write in comment above)

TURN TO NEXT PAGE

2. What important needs have you seen in CMC church community that seem to go overlooked or unaddressed?

- A. Group meetings (greater opportunity for fellowship)
- B. Effective communication between various ministries of the church
- C. Building improvements
- D. Increased youth programming
- E. Increased Children programming (VBS, Sunday School)
- F. Other _____

(write in comment above)

3. What important needs have you seen in the Wilmore community that seem to go overlooked or unaddressed?

- A. Increased involvement with community groups/agencies.
- B. Assisting the needy
- C. Increased involvement with youth in the community
- D. Greater involvement with other churches
- E. Greater involvement in missions
- F. Other _____

(write in comment above)

4. What would you change about CMC, if you were able to?

- A. Increased member involvement
- B. Increased community involvement
- C. Enhanced mentoring/growth experiences (retreats, special speakers)
- D. Enhanced church programs (children, Sunday school, youth)
- E. Increased connection to missions
- F. Other _____

(write in comment above)

5. What are some things about CMC that should **NOT** be changed?

- A. Accepting, open, friendly place
- B. Fellowship/relational structure (“being a part of a community”)
- C. Music/worship style (Casual, informal)
- D. Connection to pastor (accessible)
- E. Allowing other groups/organizations to use the church
- F. Other _____

(write in comment above)

6. What social/spiritual issues/topics do you find to be important?

- A. Youth issues (sex, drugs)
- B. Spiritual growth/formation
- C. Issues for women (communication, personal growth)
- D. Marriage
- E. Suffering
- F. Other _____

(write in comment above)

