

# Opening the Gates



**L.A. CONGREGATIONS CONFRONTING GANG VIOLENCE**

CENTER for RELIGION and CIVIC CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



# Opening the Gates

## L.A. CONGREGATIONS and THE ISSUE of GANG VIOLENCE

by Richard Flory, Donald E. Miller,  
Brie Loskota, and Timothy Sato

Contributors: Hebah Farrag and Nick Street

Center for Religion and Civic Culture  
January 2012

**USC**Dornsife

Dana and David Dornsife  
College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

## contents

Introduction	5
<b>1. Research Process</b>	6
<b>2. Enhancing Faith-Community Efforts on Gang Violence</b>	11
<b>3. Participant Recruitment</b>	12
<b>4. The Institute for Violence Prevention</b>	14
<b>5. Technical Assistance</b>	17
<b>6. Themes Addressed in IVP</b>	21
Going Beyond the Walls	
Bridging Divides and Creating Multicultural Partnerships	
Harnessing the Productive Power of Research	
<b>7. Conclusion</b>	28
Postscript: The Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement	30
Appendix: Program and Community Assessment	31
IVP Organizational Partners	32
Institute for Violence Prevention Staff	33
About the Authors and Contributors	34

The Institute for Violence Prevention at USC was made possible by a grant from the California Endowment.

© USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture, 2012

**“ What could be done to increase the effectiveness and engagement of congregations and other faith-based organizations to stem the flood of gang violence?”**



**Introduction**

Los Angeles has been regarded as the epicenter of the nation's gang epidemic for decades. What began as relatively localized battles over turf and small-scale drug sales in L.A. has morphed into complex networks of gangs with transnational connections to regions where drugs are grown and produced among other multilayered criminal activities. While there has been a slight decline in gang-related deaths in Los Angeles in recent years, neighborhoods in relatively close proximity to the USC campus are still marred by violence.

In 2009 the Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC) at USC partnered with the California Endowment to address this problem by creating the Institute for Violence Prevention (IVP). We began our efforts with the observation that neighborhoods with the highest rates of gang violence also seemed to be populated with numerous religious institutions, which led to the obvious question: What could be done to increase the effectiveness and engagement of congregations and other faith-based organizations to stem the flood of violence in their communities?

After three years of research and programming, we have drawn the following conclusions. First, faith organizations in gang-impacted neighborhoods often function as locations where residents can escape violence, rather than confront it. Second, congregations that seek to intervene in the cycles of violence in their neighborhoods often lack the organizational capacity to do so. Third, many Christian churches in these neighborhoods operate out of a theological framework that does not motivate or equip them to confront the tough social problems that they face on a daily basis. And, fourth, despite these challenges, faith communities have a latent capacity to address community needs if they are equipped with the appropriate training, mentoring, and technical assistance.

In this report we will describe the research and programming that was funded by the California Endowment and also propose some answers to the challenges that confront congregations that wish to engage the problem of violence in their neighborhoods. We do so recognizing that the critics of intervention and prevention programs have charged, perhaps justly, that few of these efforts have actually stemmed the flood of violence, given the deeply rooted social issues that characterize communities with high levels of gang activity. We see little value in cynicism, or in giving up. Rather, we are challenged by the need to help faith-based organizations as they seek to play a productive role in addressing these issues. Hence, this report is not a proposal for religion as a panacea for peace-making in the city of Los Angeles, but an attempt to increase the effectiveness of one element of the larger matrix of policies, institutions and personal efforts that make up the City of Angels.



## The research process

Working within the parameters of the Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development, established in 2007 by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and headed by then “Gang Czar” Jeff Carr—himself a minister with significant community engagement experience from a faith-based perspective—we decided to focus on three Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) zones out of the 12 that had been identified. All three (Baldwin Village, Newton, and Florence-Graham/77th Division) were in relative proximity to the University of Southern California, and each zone had gang-related violent crime rates that were at least 400% higher than other areas in Los Angeles. In 2007, for example, 12 of 13 homicides were gang-related in the Newton GRYD. Newton has 14 active gangs that claim territory, six Latino gangs and eight African American gangs. Baldwin Village has only four active gangs, but 60 percent of residents report that gang activity is “always” or “often” a problem. The Florence-Graham/77th Street Division GRYD has 11 active gangs. In 2007, the Florence-Graham/77th GRYD experienced 354 gang-related crimes. These three areas also had a significant religious presence with hundreds of congregations spread throughout each zone, ranging from a few large churches to numerous smaller congregations.

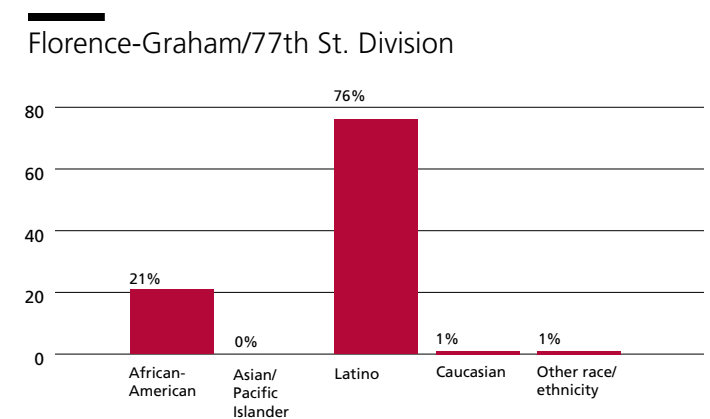
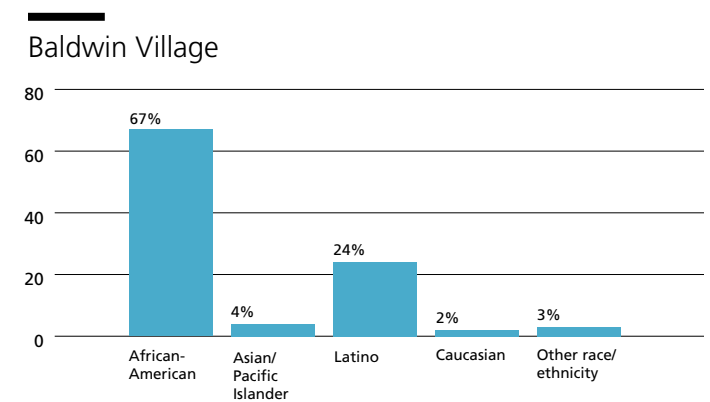
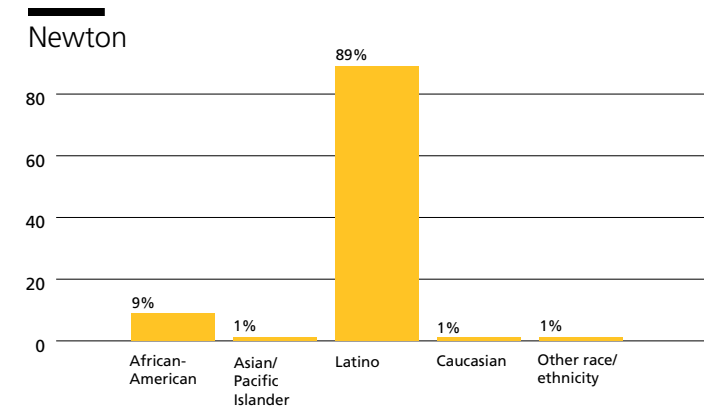
In the early days of establishing the Institute for Violence Prevention we met with staff members that had been hired by the city in each of the three targeted GRYD zones. In addition, we drove and walked through the zones in an attempt to understand their religious ecology, talking with residents as well as clergy. Perhaps we should not have been surprised to discover that many of the churches were closed during the week and opened only for Sunday worship services and, on occasion, for Wednesday night prayer and Bible study. We also noticed that there were historic African American congregations in communities that were largely Latino. And there were Latino congregations that catered to immigrants from particular countries, and even specific regions of a country. These congregations often provide an informal social safety net and system for their congregants but tend to have less engagement with the larger community.

In studying demographic surveys of these three GRYD zones, it became clear that gang activity must be understood in a larger context, not only of low and under-performing schools, historic and current public policies and

practices that create racial discrimination, high unemployment and the persistent lack of capital investment in these communities, but also the significant demographic shifts that have taken place in Los Angeles over the last 30 years. Since 1990, Los Angeles has in general become less Caucasian, less African American and more Latino in its racial and ethnic makeup. In 1990, Latinos made up 38% of the population of Los Angeles County, while the 2010 census data show that Latinos make up almost one-half of the population. These changes were also mirrored in the religious ecology of the three zones we were studying.

In the three zones, we mapped 329 congregations, not including storefront churches, multiple congregations meeting in the same building, or those meeting in more informal settings. In 2010, the population of the three zones was 108,710, which means that there was at least one congregation for every 330 people. In neighborhoods that had experienced dramatic shifts from historically African American to now being increasingly Latino, this trend created both new tensions and new ministry challenges. Many of the Black churches were comprised of commuters who were driving to the church they attended after

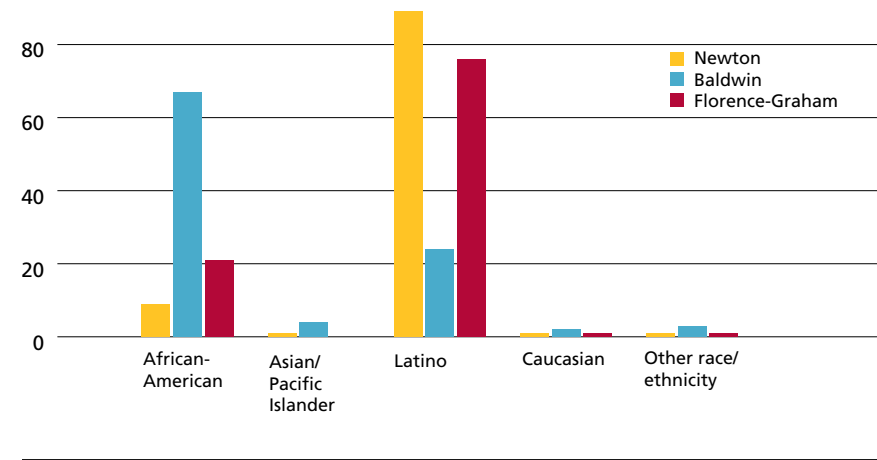
### 2010 population race/ethnicity in the Gang Reduction Youth Development Program (GRYD) zones



Totals do not add up to 100% due to rounding

## Population in GRYD zones

Race/ethnicity, 2008–2010

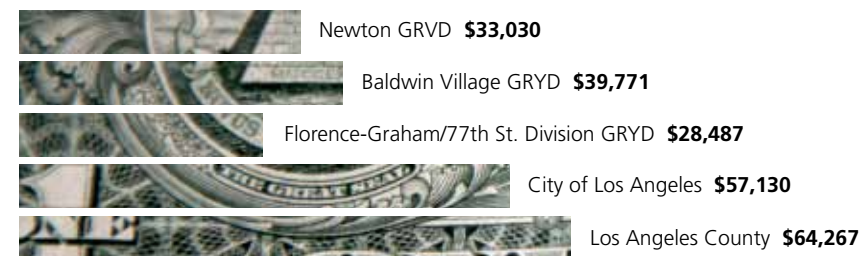


moving to the suburbs or to areas like Palmdale and Riverside. Hence, these congregants were not confronted with daily life in these neighborhoods which lessened the motivation to challenge the violence and social problems in the areas surrounding their churches. Further, many Latino churches in these neighborhoods were Pentecostal imports from Mexico,

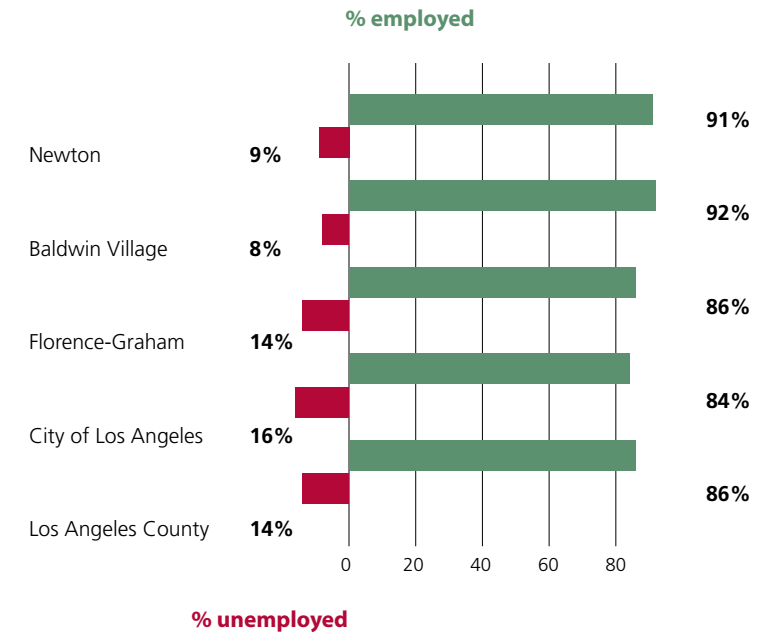
Guatemala or El Salvador and their members were seeking to recreate the extended family communities that they had left behind. Indeed, possibly because of their immigrant status, or their experience of oppression in their countries of origin, or a theology that emphasized personal salvation, many Latinos were reluctant to engage government representatives or political structures.

Within the three GRYD zones, the IVP staff collected data on congregations and contracted with the Advancement Project's Healthy City initiative to create community profiles and asset maps. (Maps are available at <http://crcc.usc.edu/ivp>.) Our relationship with staff at Healthy City proved to be invaluable. They combined our survey of congregations with other community assets and produced three community profiles that mapped active congregations in or near the GRYD areas as well as gang intervention assets already in place in the community.

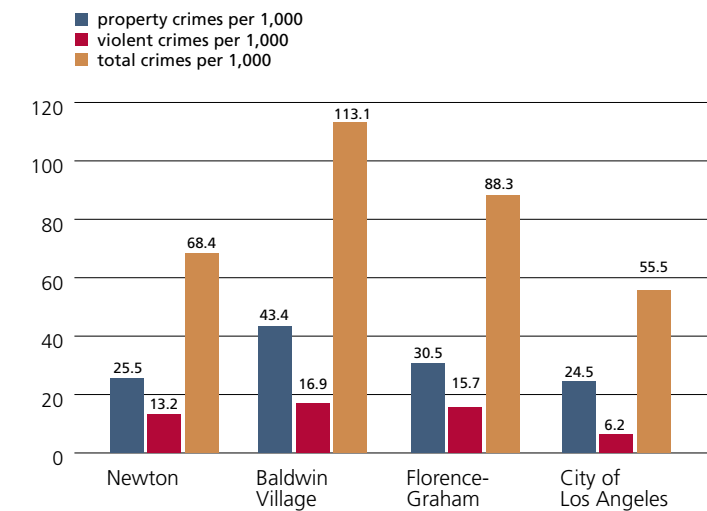
## Average median household income per GRYD zones, in each area, 2010



## Employment/unemployment rate for civilian labor force, 2009



## Crime per 1,000 people in 2008



# Place-based religion

**One side benefit of the relationship with Healthy City staff was that these mapping exercises provided an opportunity for the Center for Religion and Civic Culture to deepen its place-based religion model, which seeks to understand congregations within the context of geographic communities and the ways in which religious organizations function alongside other institutions, such as schools, health care facilities, nonprofit organizations, and other community resources.**

**Historically, religion scholars have been focused on religious beliefs—how they develop, are influenced by, and in turn influence culture, and, how beliefs may influence social action. In contrast, a place-based religion approach seeks to discern how religious organizations operate as community actors within a network of other community resources. This approach promotes a scholarly understanding of how religion and community relate to each other, but it also can aid communities as they seek out religious organizations as partners in improving the lives of its members, and for congregations as they perform important roles within the community: socializing children and imparting values that enable them to be responsible members of the human community; being a prophetic voice for justice; nurturing, consoling, and inspiring people in need; and being an important location for a variety of community-based activities.**



## Enhancing faith-community efforts on gang violence

Equipped with a more in-depth understanding of the social ecology of neighborhoods impacted by gang violence, we determined our objectives:

- 1.** Equip congregations with skills to address gang issues
- 2.** Deepen theological frameworks to support an ongoing commitment to community work
- 3.** Bridge racial/ethnic/theological divides
- 4.** Enhance the organizational structures in which this work can take place.

With these objectives in mind, the Institute for Violence Prevention was initially designed as a fellowship program for congregations and other faith-based organizations. Through a nine-month program at the University of Southern California, including a weeklong intensive followed by monthly evening meetings for community-building, mentoring, and classroom learning, participants explored ways to deepen their commitment to addressing gang

violence in their communities. In addition, opportunities to understand best practices by leaders in the field and to understand current policy work in Southern California were offered in supplemental programs. IVP was formed to allow participants to develop their skills and networks so that they could implement their own initiatives or join with others in partnership to address gang violence in their communities.



## Participant recruitment

In order to recruit a class of fellows for the Institute for Violence Prevention, the Center for Religion and Civic Culture distributed information to its network of congregations and faith leaders. The outreach targeted congregations and faith-based organizations within the three Gang Reduction and Youth Development zones and expanded throughout the region to areas with increasing challenges related to gang activity and youth opportunity. Rev. Mark Whitlock, director of community initiatives and newly appointed executive director of the USC Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement, and Rev. Dr. Cecil Murray, senior fellow and holder of the John R. Tansey Chair in Christian Ethics at the University of Southern California, used their strong relational connections in South Los Angeles to generate interest in the program. In addition, the center hired two community outreach coordinators, Rev. Frank Jackson and Rev. Jim Ortiz, and partnered with Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), to recruit African American and Latino candidates for the program and to inform the design and implementation of the program. Ortiz, Jackson

and CLUE staff attended numerous clergy and denominational meetings and conducted outreach sessions at seminaries, local clergy associations and alliances, and churches within the three Gang Reduction and Youth Development zones and other areas around the city.

The Institute for Violence Prevention originally planned to work only in the three zones, but as the outreach continued, a substantial number of applicants from other areas began to express their interest. Due to the overwhelming response, IVP staff made the decision to include pastors, gang intervention workers, and lay leaders outside of the original three selected zones. Nearly 150 candidates submitted applications for the program. Each applicant described their current gang intervention or prevention programs and their interest in receiving training in civic engagement, public policy, gang intervention and prevention. A committee reviewed each application and selected 65 participants for the first phase of the program. The first cohort of students completed the institute in September 2009.

The program included a diverse range of participants, including African Americans and Latinos, men and women, those

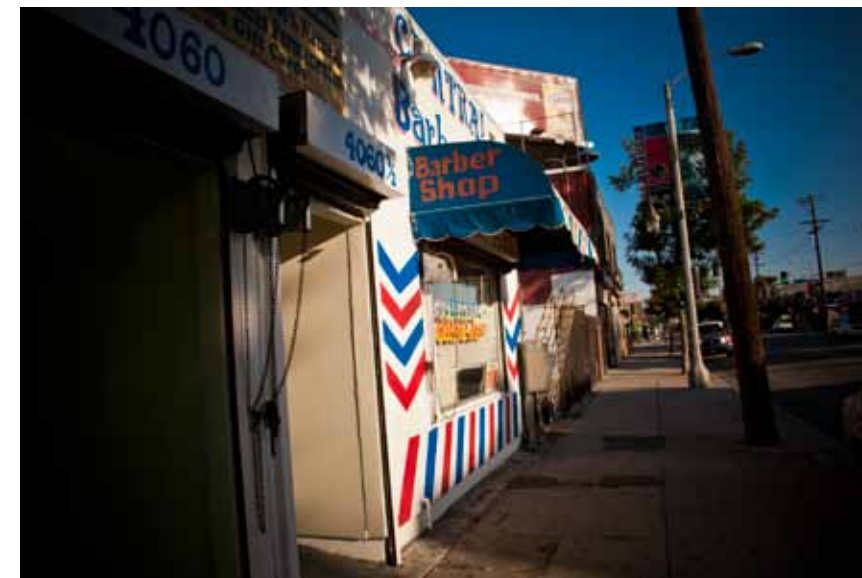
with advanced degrees and those without. Of the 65 participants, 21 were Latinos. In fact, several participants required Spanish translation during classroom sessions. In all, 42 different congregations and nonprofit organizations were represented. Several organizations sent multiple participants in order to increase the impact of the program on their organizational culture. Many participants were bi-vocational, serving as pastors or nonprofit leaders in addition to their regular employment.

A unique aspect of the IVP program was its ability to recruit from the heart of the community. This was not a class of privileged personalities hoping to assist “those in need.” The fellows were selected directly from communities affected by violence, whether

within the GRYD zones, adjacent to them, or in other areas. Many of those attending the class had either been former gang members, or have been directly impacted by gang violence. One participant gave an example of why he decided to join IVP: “Just before we came out of church we heard all these Uzi shots. One guy had gotten shot, wrecked the car, was bleeding, running down the street...And to see this just let us know that the area had become unstable for some reason. It turned out it was gangs, one against another.”

In 2010, a select group of the original 65 participants was invited to participate in an “advanced” session. The original program design envisioned admitting a completely new cohort of fellows

in the second year. However, after completing the first year of the institute, staff identified additional training needs and decided to create a session that would further solidify skills and strengthen the capacity of the participants to become more closely involved in civic engagement efforts. The second year of IVP included a practicum phase with placement in a community organization. Twenty-seven fellows completed the advanced session.







## The IVP Program

Early in the Institute for Violence Prevention, Rev. Jeff Carr spoke to the assembled IVP cohort and appealed to them to provide volunteers and food for one of the city's premier anti-violence initiatives. Summer Night Lights (SNL) takes the simple notion of keeping local park gyms open after dark, and adds free food and youth programs. According to the program website, SNL served 710,000 participants at 24 parks in 2010. Moreover, SNL served 30,000 meals and created 1,000 new jobs in 2010. As they listened to Carr, many IVP fellows decided to become involved in a program that was in need of volunteers, funding, and resources. Later, on a site visit at a local SNL program, IVP fellows saw firsthand how community assets, like a local gym, can have a dramatic impact on youth.

IVP trainers sought to create similar breakthrough moments in the classroom, on site visits, and in practicum sessions. Rather than dry lectures or abstract concepts, the sessions encouraged fellows to ask questions, engage the presenters, and debrief the presentations in post-lecture small groups. The sessions brought public officials, scholars, gang interventionists, civic engagement specialists, community practitioners, and law enforcement agencies to spark new ideas. Equally important, the fellows were exposed to civic leaders and experts and were given the opportunity to enter into

new partnerships and coalitions. IVP was further supported by a partnership with CLUE, which harnessed their expertise in mentoring pastors and linking them with ongoing work bridging the divides between Latino and African American faith leaders.

The community profiles developed in partnership with Health City were distributed to IVP fellows and were also made available on the Center for Religion and Civic Culture's website, <http://crcc.usc.edu/ivp>. CRCC also arranged for Healthy City to provide hands on training for IVP participants. This training gave participants an opportunity to work directly with the Healthy City datasets and mapping capabilities and to develop skills to enhance their own community work. The community profiles included population characteristics (age, ethnicity, school population characteristics, median income, employment status, health conditions), public safety information, and community assets, such as congregations, parks, nonprofit organizations, and city resources. These profiles were then used in the classroom training of IVP participants as they developed gang-related programs and ministries, created public policies in various practicum exercises, and learned how to use data to develop strategic plans for their organizations.

For many leaders engaged in community violence interventions, the struggle of program imple-

mentation and responding to daily emergencies limits their ability to incorporate new models into their programs. Thus, the Institute for Violence Prevention developed classroom sessions to expose fellows to new modes of thought as well as to help them think about ways to create space to adopt new practices into their daily activities. In addition to the classroom sessions, IVP fellows also participated in site visits to area programs with effective service delivery models, such as SNL, Watts-Willowbrook Boys and Girls Club, and the Los Angeles Dream Center.

In order to create a positive learning environment, the training sessions began with a shared meal and an icebreaker activity. Formal and informal opportunities for peer bonding were a necessity in a setting with geographic, denominational, gender, and ethnic diversity. Small group activities also created opportunities to identify fellows with similar goals and values and expand opportunities for collaboration.

The Institute for Violence Prevention included presentations from national and local experts on topics such as:

- > Violence Prevention through Civic Engagement (Alexia Salvatierra, Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice)
- > National Models of Gang Intervention and Prevention (Ray Hammond, Boston Ten Point Coalition)
- > Successful Models of Police Partnerships (LAPD Deputy Chief Craig Hunter, Lt. Ben Hittlesdorf)
- > Best Practice Sessions (Including Jeff Carr, City of Los Angeles, Gang Reduction and Youth Development; James Harris, Community Coalition of South Los Angeles; Bill Martinez, Violence Prevention Coalition; Brian Centers, Better LA; Alex Sanchez, Homies Unidos, et al.)
- > Mental Health and Violence Prevention (Sharon Rabb, Center for the Empowerment of Families)
- > Communications and Media Relations (Edina Lekovic, Muslim Public Affairs Council; Kerman Maddox, Dakota Communications)
- > Policy Analysis (Mary Lee, PolicyLink; Rick Jacobs, the Courage Campaign)

From March to June 2010, the fellows in the advanced session participated in a public policy practicum that included placements with three organizations with expertise in civic engagement, community organizing, and public policy work: Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice, Regional Congregations and Neighborhood Organizations, and Faith Communities for Families and Children. The practicum included classroom training on the steps to civic engagement, fundraising, and community organizing, and each fellow chose one of the three organizations to work alongside during the phase. Fellows attended public actions on violence, a Black/Brown unity service, and participated in training sessions. Many who participated in the IVP program were profoundly affected by the new relationships they formed and the networks they were connected to, especially those that emphasized multicultural alliance building.

The practicum module also exposed IVP fellows to the issue of incarcerated youth. Fellows were deeply moved by their experience visiting a youth detention facility with Javier Stauring, a lay chaplain for the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese and policy director of Faith Communities for Families and Children (FCFC), which works to address the issue of juvenile incarceration and improving outcomes for those who enter the juvenile justice system. Working with FCFC

exposed fellows to interfaith and multicultural coalition building, systemic reform through legislation, restorative justice as a better alternative to a punitive model of justice, direct ministry to incarcerated youth, and development of a faith based educational campaign on juvenile justice. In addition, fellows participated in the Juvenile Justice Week of Faith, an interfaith effort to raise awareness to the needs of children and families impacted by violent crime and society's systemic response to crime.

The other two practicum settings were equally instructive. Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) is a faith-rooted organization that links clergy with low-income wage earners in order to seek economic justice. CLUE worked with fellows on an effort to create partnerships between black and Latino faith leaders

around issues of violence and economic issues that affect both communities. Fellows participated in meetings with Los Angeles City Council members and participated in a Black/Brown Summit in South Los Angeles.

Regional Congregations and Neighborhood Organizations (RCNO) seeks to establish opportunities for communities to address statewide issues related to high levels of incarceration and recidivism rates that impact many GRYD zone communities in Los Angeles. RCNO provided training on community organizing, including how to build alliances and relationships to impact policy and attended a Select Committee on Prisoner Reentry meeting to discuss how reentry issues adversely affect low-income and minority communities.

Later, when research team interviewers asked participants

what they benefitted most from in the program, more often than not it was the expansion of their networks and the exposure to program models they gained through their participation in the program. In response to a question about how one would apply lessons from IVP, Bryan Jones of the HOOP Foundation said: "Well, definitely the networks of the other programs. I'll be able to collaborate with other agencies in making a bigger network of violence prevention as opposed to one agency just trying to do it in my area, as well as the fundamental techniques that are working. For instance, the last program we had with the Boston 10 [Point Coalition] principles, that was very helpful in understanding pilot programs that have worked or could be used to build upon."



## Technical assistance

Through the process of interacting with pastors and ministry leaders around the issue of gang violence, we realized that technical assistance relating to organizational capacity issues was an important aspect of increasing the effectiveness of faith-based organizations, whether on gang violence or any other issue area. While some individuals and organizations simply required inspiration, others were experiencing practical organizational challenges that discouraged them from engaging in the issue of community violence.

For example, many small and midsize congregations do not have full time clergy and staff. Thus, their capacity to take on social programs is limited. Furthermore, these organizations are often out of compliance with state and federal nonprofit regulations and municipal codes. And very few of them have a strategic plan for developing their programs or even know the basics of how to create such a plan. Indeed, some congregations we surveyed were reluctant to share organizational information for fear of revealing their issues to public scrutiny.

Moreover, while organizational inertia is common to all organizations, it is particularly true for religious organizations. One reason for this is that theology and congregational authority are bound together. Leaders have enormous power, usually supported by religious teachings that members

should respect and follow the directives of their leaders. Making significant changes in the organization, even in the face of major shifts, such as new demographic realities, commuter churches, and other factors, becomes more difficult because of the presence of the pastor in all aspects of congregational life and programming.

Congregations often have big dreams, but as discussed above, they lack the organizational capacity and structure to actualize these dreams. Many times the programs and projects envisioned by congregations are too large for one small congregation with a part time pastor and no staff support. While this can result in program paralysis because of the daunting requirements to get the effort going, it can also function to motivate churches to partner with other organizations in the community. However, an intermediary such as IVP may be necessary to inspire small congregations to pursue partnerships, as well as receive help in getting their organizational structures in order.

In response to these needs, Mark Whitlock, Frank Jackson, and Cecil Murray, provided practical information on a variety of topics to strengthen congregations and nonprofit organizations, such as outreach in transitional communities, legal aspects of establishing a 501(c) (3) organization, and tax workshops for religious and nonprofit organizations. The work-

### Identifying Areas for Technical Assistance

Through the community profile process, the Center for Religion and Civic Culture expanded its own understanding of faith-based organizations and identified future training and technical assistance needs. For example, many leaders in communities have a strong desire to address regional policy issues, but at the beginning of the IVP program many of these community groups lacked information on the resources that are already present in their communities that could be part of the ecology of change.



shops, which we designed to run as a parallel track with the other IVP training, proved to be highly successful, both in providing tangible skills and for identifying areas for further technical assistance.

We provided each participant in the institute with the opportunity to receive a technical assistance assessment in the area of corporate governance. The assessment included a review of the organization's corporate minute book, including but not limited to its articles of incorporation, bylaws, Secretary of State and Internal Revenue Service compliance status, and procedures and policies. Based on the results of the assessment, IVP staff established an action list to address non-compliant items and, in most instances, designated a staff member to follow-up with completion. In instances where legal representation was required, the Institute for Violence Prevention received assistance through a pro-bono referral arrangement with O'Melveny & Myers LLP's corporate transactions practice group. Through this arrangement, OMM entered into pro-bono engagement agreements with two organizations led by alumni of the Institute for Violence Prevention.

The IVP staff provided the following technical assistance support:

- > **Information on the formation of an organization** (drafting of articles, bylaws, review and comments to IRS regarding nonprofit status, tax exemption application) and reviewed and commented on a business plans for several organizations, including the HOOPS Foundation (*Rev. Bryan Jones, executive director*), Joy Youth Foundation, (*Dr. Gloria Mitchell, president*), and Prevention Alternatives for Neighborhood Empowerment Inc., (*Darrell Glover, president*).
- > **Reviews of state and federal compliance** and reports delineating the necessary steps required for reinstatement as entities in good standing with the California Secretary of State to three organizations.
- > **Conducting a retreat** for several organizations affiliated with inner city youth mentoring programs affiliated with Falcon Youth and Family Services (*Rev. Keith Johnson, president*). This training extended the impact of the Institute for Violence Prevention beyond the 65 participants. In addition, Mark Whitlock provided introductions to funders, which resulted in an infusion of new grants.
- > **Planning support** related to the formation of new community development entities for two organizations: Church of God Prophecy (*Rev. Peter Ortiz, pastor*) and Victory Outreach Church—El Sereno (*Rev. Rey Rodriguez, pastor*).

Funding is another major issue that limited the effectiveness of the congregations and organizations. Pastor T. Marvene Wright put it this way: "We've got the ideas. We've got the motivation. We've got the people who are interested, but our limitation is resources." Not only are congregations limited in how they can fund community oriented programs, they are often limited in supporting the basic costs of running a church. For example, a recent survey conducted with a similar cohort of African American pastors in southern California found that pastors have limited support from their churches, and have little or no paid staff support. (Visit <http://crcc.usc.edu/ptm> to view the summary report.) A survey of IVP fellows prior to the practicum phase of the program found that 95 percent reported that their organizations lacked funding, and that 77 percent had never written a grant proposal. Moreover, prior to IVP, 81 percent of participants did not feel competent when it came to applying for grant-based funding. Thus, without external support of some sort, it is difficult to imagine how these congregations can develop significant and effective community programming. IVP provided training in fundraising during workshops designed to build organizational capacity.

<i>Pastor's Source of Financial Support</i>	<i>Percent</i>
100% of Support from Church	18
Partial Support from Church	16
No Financial Support from Church	67

Rev. Whitlock conducted a grant-writing seminar that, combined with instruction throughout the IVP program, produced encouraging results. After the conclusion of the program, half of the IVP participants indicated that they were "equipped and knowledgeable" about applying for federal or private funding, representing a significant step toward surmounting the funding barrier. Clearly, though, this area is one that will

require ongoing training and development.

Even after completing the institute, fellows have continued to seek ongoing technical assistance from staff, which is one reason we established the Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement; CMCCE is briefly described in the Postscript to this report. "IVP established an ongoing partnership with various churches and nonprofits," said Rev. Mark Whitlock. "Their desire for support hasn't gone away."



---

## Keith Johnson grew up just a couple of miles from the park that serves as the training center for the Southern California Falcons Youth Football and Cheer Program, which he founded in 2005.

“Back in the day you could still play in the streets,” says Johnson, who is in his mid 40s. “And there was a certain level of respect for the church. Now kids are tagging churches. Times have definitely changed.”

Johnson cites both social stresses accompanying demographic shifts in South Central Los Angeles—“The neighborhood used to be predominantly African-American,” he says, “now it’s mostly Latino”—and the failure of many black churches to respond to those changes as key contributors to the uptick in violence.

“The worst you would expect used to be black-on-black fisticuffs,” Johnson says. “Now warring black and Latino gangs are settling scores with drive-by shootings.”

Johnson says that many black churches have been slow to adapt to the evolution of their communities and the changing needs of the young people they serve. In a part of Los Angeles where a third of the households are living at or below the poverty line, those unmet needs quickly compound problems—truancy, drug use, family instability and economic stagna-

tion—that make gang membership seem like one of the few choices offering upward mobility.

Focusing on the key age-bracket when children are being shaped by their interaction with peers—from ages 6 through 14—Johnson decided to create an organization that would replicate the functions of the institutions that had molded him when he was a young person.

“Falcons Youth uses football and cheer as magnets to bring kids in,” Johnson says. “But it’s really a social recovery program for at-risk youth.”

Johnson hopes the mentoring and social skills that boys and girls acquire through Falcons Youth will not only diminish the appeal of gangs and drugs but also prepare them to make positive contributions to their communities—an aspiration embodied in the organization’s motto: “New school kids, old school values.”

As the football and cheer programs have thrived, Falcons Youth has expanded to include a mobile homework station for training participants as well as several other intervention initiatives to address needs ranging from character development to physical fitness. The ongoing community enhancement strategies at Falcons Youth reflect many of the networking skills that Johnson says he acquired through the Institute for Violence Prevention. And the flourishing of the organization is also deeply rooted in both the nostalgia and the optimism of its founder.

“Children need to play again,” Johnson says.



## Themes addressed in the IVP Program

### *Going Beyond the Walls*

Many participants in the program commented on the role of the church in the community. While some churches are inspired to work on issues such as gang violence due to their faith commitments, many others are not engaged in confronting the issue or other social problems within their community. Some church doors are closed to outsiders and members do not seek to extend services beyond their gates. The IVP program served to re-inspire faith leaders to use their leadership role and pulpit to effect change in their communities. This comment from Pastor Luis Orellana of Faro de Luz was typical: “For many years I have been a church pastor, but what happened is there are a lot of people not reached from the pulpit. So I decided to do more outreach for youth and teenagers.”

For many congregations, their theology is a significant barrier to community engagement. Some congregations simply spiritualize issues and believe the answers can only be found in praying, Bible reading and relying on “God’s will.” For other congregations, the internally focused and purely spiritual nature of their religious belief limits their activity. Still others remain focused on material gain, spreading the “prosperity gospel” that inspires many to view economic gain as a sign of God’s blessing. To these people, Rev.

Cecil Murray offers this advice: “I would admonish those who preach prosperity to remember that the one who founded the Christian church had just one pair of sandals for his feet.”

Other leaders must be shown that congregations have an important role to play in the public sphere, whether within their immediate neighborhoods or in the larger community. Understandably, congregations prioritize spirituality, but this can constrain them from addressing social problems. They may fear the possibility of gang members disrupting the status quo of the church or may be unsure of adapting church programs to meet the needs of a new group of members. Marco Antonio Martinez of Milo Terrace Baptist Church said, “I see some churches around the area that are dying out, sometimes [because] the pastor has lost his vision to go out there and make an impact.”

IVP introduced congregational leaders to theological models that expanded their more narrow understandings of how churches should function within communities, without giving up their spiritual commitments. A continuing emphasis in the program was reflected by the approach of Rev. Cecil “Chip” Murray and Rev. Mark Whitlock. Murray and Whitlock drew upon their experience of First African Methodist Episcopal Church (FAME), one of the most successful and visible congrega-



# Keith Johnson

## Not long ago, Lydia Hollie's nephew, a young veteran of the war in Iraq, was stopped by the police in central Long Beach.

"Are you on probation or parole?" one of the officers asked Leon Hollie, who's now a senior at Clark Atlanta University.

After Leon related the story of the officer's grim assumption to his aunt, he told her, "Now I know what it feels like to be an Iraqi."

Understanding how unexamined social narratives can cause conflict—along with how community activism can help to get people on the same page—is one of the underlying imperatives for Lydia's work as co-chair of the Long Beach Weed and Seed Strategy Steering Committee. An even deeper motivator is her intimate acquaintance with the wages of urban decay in her native Long Beach.

"A lot of the social ills we're dealing with now didn't exist for me when I was growing up here," Hollie says. "The ghetto came to me."

The twin plagues of violence and desperation have claimed the lives of many young people known to Hollie, who's also a teacher in the Lynwood Unified School District north of Long Beach. Even closer to home, Hollie's younger brother was caught in his community's downward spiral. Robert Hollie is currently serving 25 years to life in a federal penitentiary.

"Despite my family's poor relations with law enforcement," Lydia says, "I'm committed to working with them for the greater good. I credit my father"—a career military man—"for instilling in me the importance of keeping things in a broader perspective."

That broad-minded commitment to bringing stakeholders together to reverse destructive trends in her community led to service on the Long Beach Human Rights Commission and, subsequently, to a four-year stint as chairperson of the city's Youth and Gang Violence Prevention Task Force. Her current leadership position with Long Beach Weed and Seed entails overseeing a comprehensive spectrum of programs—from gang intelligence and community policing to drug-use intervention and green-space development—intended to retool the social machinery of the city from top to bottom.

"Every society is perfectly engineered to get the results it is getting," Hollie says. "So with the resources we have, how do we get deeper into root causes to bring about the kind of change we desire?"

Her experience with the Institute for Violence Prevention was particularly helpful in helping her "pull back the layers" of the issues that will likely someday come into play for her brother.

"Does a perpetrator have a responsibility to the community?" she was compelled to ask. "How do they repay that debt? How do we help them reconnect?"

Weed and Seed's reentry employment plan for ex-offenders embodies Hollie's belief that building social capital is a matter of both good policy and intimately focused advocacy.

tions in Los Angeles during the period of Pastor Murray's tenure. After the 1992 civil unrest, the church created FAME Renaissance, which Mark Whitlock directed, and in subsequent years was the vehicle for \$400 million of investment channeled into low-income neighborhoods in South LA. Similarly, Rev. Alexia Salvatierra, former executive director of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), presented their model of "faith-rooted" community organizing where people are brought together to create change, but are guided and shaped at every step by their faith commitment and a confidence in God's intervention in human history.

These models and others presented during IVP helped inspire Rev. Alan Wright and his wife Rev. T. Marvene Wright of Word Center Church of Los Angeles. Like

many faith leaders, they hoped to influence young men and women in their neighborhood. They also recognized that their desire to help the community required a concrete expression, so they decided to join the Institute for Violence Prevention. Early in the program, after a field trip to the Los Angeles Summer Night Lights program, the Wrights began to realize that their church was an important community asset that could help in the battle against community violence.

For the Wrights, the simple action of letting young men play basketball on the church playground changed their perspective on community outreach and engagement for the Word Center Church of Los Angeles. Previously, they had looked at the young men clamoring to play and thought that it would take time and be a "bother." Despite their apprehensions, they let the youth in and were immediately impressed by the respect that the youth showed. Soon, Marvene expanded a simple basketball game into "BBB," basketball, Bible, and a bag of snacks. "If I hadn't been part of the [IVP] program, I wouldn't be thinking of it," she said.

## *Bridging Divides and Creating Multicultural Partnerships*

An additional community issue that limits the role of congregations is the tension in the community around the issue of ethnic and cultural differences, especially between Latinos and African Americans. The churches mirror these tensions. Despite the demographic shift that has taken place, there are few multi-ethnic congregations within these neighborhoods. While this is not necessarily a surprising result—multi-ethnic congregations are inherently fragile organizations—faith leaders in these communities need to understand the potential that their respective congregations represent if they can figure out ways to work together, if not worship together.

By design, the Institute for Violence Prevention included African American and Latino participants. The program also emphasized developing coalitions that bridge denominational and racial divides. The classroom settings encouraged cross-fertilization through group interaction where relationships could deepen.

According to a survey we administered at the beginning of the program, participants demonstrated a strong understanding of the importance of coalition-building but needed more information regarding how to build strong

# Lydia Hollie



---

## **“I was a good kid who did something very bad,” says Cornell Ward.**

Though Ward was raised during hard times in South Central by a single mother whose restless ways meant Ward had to attend seven different elementary schools, the gifted athlete flourished at Los Angeles High School and was named College Football All-American at Compton Community College during his freshman year.

But when his GPA slipped and he had to return to his neighborhood, Ward let the set-back continue to determine his trajectory.

“I got into dealing drugs,” says Ward, who became a top lieutenant for Rick Ross, a drug lord who was known as the “King of Crack” during the worst days of the urban cocaine epidemic. “From the time I was 19 until I was 22,” Ward says, “I was in the streets selling this poison.”

Crack addiction claimed the lives of people all around Ward, including three members of his family. Just as he was beginning to heed the pleadings of friends and former coaches to get out of the drug scene, he was beaten and arrested by police officers who had a stake in his business. “They were caught up in the mess just like me,” Ward says.

Ward was granted immunity from prosecution in

exchange for his testimony against the crooked cops, and he spent the next couple of decades regaining the ground he had lost and building a career as an activist-athlete. He’s now the head coach of the football team at Compton College.

How has the Institute for Violence Prevention figured into his efforts to give back? “I’ve always been involved in community work,” Ward says with an ironic smile. “Only now it’s about giving life, not taking it.”

As the executive director of the Unity One Foundation, Ward oversees character development and leadership training curriculums as well as programs to reduce recidivism among former prison inmates who are reentering their communities.

He has also developed a broad network of relationships to reduce inter-gang violence.

“There are 12 geographical war zones that we work in,” Ward says. “In those zones we have relationships with different gangs along with support from gang intervention groups like clergy, civic organizations and law enforcement. The point is to put the fires out before they spread.”

Ward, who has mentored hundreds of student athletes, sees his own story as the clearest evidence that even the most hardcore life in the drug-and-gang scene can be transformed.

“Drug dealers are great at math,” he says with the same sly smile. “And they have to have some pretty sharp people skills.”

coalitions. A number of participants said that they were participating in multi-cultural coalitions, but only a limited number could provide examples. After the program, participants said they had gained a more nuanced understanding of the role and place of multi-cultural partnerships, increased their involvement in multi-cultural coalitions and campaigns, and had a deeper understanding of how to make such efforts successful.

During the course of the Institute for Violence Prevention, the Wrights demonstrated a new openness to engage their neighbors and use the resources of the church to assist neighborhood youth. The Wrights continued to express openness to new levels of partnership and coalition building throughout their IVP experience.

At the end of the program, Alan discussed his newfound partnership with the Latino church across the street. Through the program, they discovered the importance of building multicultural alliances and coalitions with neighborhood churches. They looked across the street and realized that the Latino congregation was a potential partner. They opened their doors to Pastor Estrada for special events, such as a *quinceñera* (15th year birthday party), and shared toys from a Christmas toy drive with the congregation.

Alan even said that when he commented that he wanted to learn Spanish in order to create connections with the Latino congregations, a parishioner purchased Rosetta Stone software for him to learn the language. “The open gate policy...is just a starting point in my thinking. Now I can go out and be an open gate. I can open myself up as a gate and whatever resources I have or whatever I can give, whatever good things I have, I can give them away to other people,” said Alan. The Wrights experienced a change in their view of “church” from an experience on Sundays to a community-wide resource.

## ***Harnessing the Productive Power of Research***

The university setting for the Institute for Violence Prevention proved to be an important component of the program’s success. Interdenominational gatherings are rare and such gatherings with both African American and Latino pastors are rarer still. USC provided a neutral space for pastors to engage across these lines to address important issues.

In the course of the our data collection, however, it became apparent that a lack of clarity existed among the participants in the program about the role of research, the university, and academics in their communities. Presenters emphasized that additional training in research methodologies could significantly advance their abilities to create and operate effective programs in their areas of concern. Often those being studied, interviewed, or observed by social scientists feel abused, disempowered, and silenced by the work of the researcher. This phenomenon is most pronounced when the subject of the research is disenfranchised in other ways, including a lower socioeconomic status, underprivileged post in society, marginalized ethnic or racial categorization, and when the research is seen as yet another instance of moneyed interests taking advantage of their communities.

# Cornell Ward



## Peter Ortiz knows a thing or two about negotiating cultural boundaries.

His grandfather, raised a Roman Catholic, crossed into the United States from Tijuana in the early 1950s and joined the Church of God of Prophecy. Ortiz's father, now a retired bishop in the denomination, took his family with him into the apple orchards near Fresno to raise money for his church. Now Ortiz, who has just turned 40, is trying to persuade the insular San Diego flock that he pastors to engage with the world beyond the walls of their church. "Hispanics are pretty culturally driven," he says. "A lot of them don't understand the culture outside their communities, and they don't want to. But the newer generation of pastors is a little more radical. We're starting to get people to think outside of the box."

Language is one of the biggest obstacles to greater openness, and Ortiz, like many younger Hispanic religious leaders, is encouraging parishioners to be bilingual. An even tougher challenge is changing attitudes toward young people who run afoul of the law.

"We have a couple of younger men who are in prison," Ortiz says. "In the past, we would always ignore it in the church. Someone would be locked away and we would just forget about them. Some people in the group had been victims of crime, and it was hard for them to have sympathy. They just didn't want to forgive."

Ortiz's approach to dealing with these and similar issues changed dramatically after his participation in the Institute for Violence Prevention, which he says turned his thinking "upside down."

**"The first day I came home, I was crying," he says. "I was intimidated by all the ideas. But I realized we had to reprogram what we're doing. We can't be ignorant of the things that are happening to our kids. We need to be working for them—they have to be impacted by this ministry."**

For Ortiz and his congregation, the process of reprogramming began with initiatives to meet needs as basic as table fellowship and clean clothes. When he spoke to a principal at one of the nearby elementary schools about problems that most urgently needed to be addressed in the community, he was surprised to learn that one of the principal's chief concerns was that some kids were coming to school in dirty pants and shirts. The school had purchased a washer and dryer and offered vouchers to parents who were willing to use them—which provided the model for what Ortiz calls his church's "laundry service ministry."

Another new program that Ortiz implemented to help his congregation expand their circle of concern was a free Sunday breakfast open to everyone in the neighborhood.

"That immediately brought more people into the community," Ortiz said. "All types—black, white, Korean. And my people realized they had to speak English in order for the barriers to drop."

Now in the offing are plans for free car washes, a clothing drive, a family health consultancy and a food-pantry in partnership with a nearby Seventh Day Adventist church. And Ortiz credits his IVP experience for the knowledge and inspiration that helped him initiate all of these boundary-crossings.

"I'm just so proud of what we're doing," he says. "IVP really showed me that every single church has a purpose."

We sometimes encountered this sense of suspicion and anger during the course of our initial data collection with program participants. Those we interviewed often questioned our research motivations, the purpose of the interviews, the reasons this data was being collected, and to what use it was going to be put. One IVP fellow questioned how participating in such data collection exercises would effect any change in his community. "Researchers always come into our communities asking questions, but they just take what they need and never give anything back. They publish what they find but we don't see any change where we live." This sense that disadvantaged communities were being further marginalized by the academy was highlighted in this aspect of our work. However, this finding highlights the need for more work to be done in this area, not only to demystify the academy but to make research more

accessible to these communities, and to create dialogues between researchers and communities.

Exit surveys administered at the close of Phase I of the IVP program revealed that a large majority of respondents wanted access to information that, with some training, could be reached through research tools, including internet searches, the use of Healthy City's free mapping and database tool, or a simple web-based literature review. Respondents were looking for information such as the demographic characteristics of their target community, existing programs in their community, dropout rates in their community, homicide rates, income levels, locations of sex offenders in their neighborhood, healthcare resources, and the like. Such information, along with the desire to learn how to perform community assessments, were by far the most needed items listed in the exit survey at the end of the IVP program.

While the IVP program attempted to chip away at this problem by providing training facilitated by Healthy City, which introduced their databases and research platform while exploring the role of community research in their programming and program development, much more is needed to open up the potential that research can provide these programs. As previously stated, in order to address this gap the Center for Religion and Civic Cul-

ture contracted with Healthy City ([www.healthycity.org](http://www.healthycity.org)) to develop community profiles in the three GRYD zones. Healthy City mapped active congregations, social services, and existing gang intervention assets, creating a resource directory to be used by program partners and participants to promote access, build networks, and identify potential stakeholders and partners. In addition, the resource directory allows partners to assess key gaps in services throughout the area. (View maps at <http://crcc.usc.edu/ivp>.)

Beyond providing the community profiles we believed that it was essential to train IVP participants in how they could use the online Healthy City resource so that these congregations and faith-based organizations could develop their own source of knowledge about their communities. Healthy City's community research labs, offered free of charge to community groups, are an easy way to tackle this problem, but more coaching is needed to effectively resolve this gap. This was an important step in providing these leaders with access to information, giving them the tools for how to obtain data about their communities. Making knowledge accessible to those who could most effectively use such information to address root problems is an important goal worth tackling.

## Conclusion

# Peter Ortiz





While it might be tempting to focus exclusively on the assets of religion in addressing community violence issues, and there are many, we believe that a practical approach of providing training and resources, can match good intentions with positive results. There are theological reasons that churches are not engaging the gang problem in their community; there are organizational reasons related to capacity that block them from this engagement; and many congregations lack fundamental knowledge about their community and its resources that would be helpful in developing funding and program strategies. In even the most crime-stricken neighborhoods, only a few people are actually engaging in violent activities. Consequently, quite a few churches are sheltered locations where people go to escape the problems in their community.

As Karl Marx rightly noted, religion can be an opiate to blunt the pain of everyday existence. However, religion also has the potential to inspire people to transform the conditions that give rise to this pain.

Gang violence can be addressed at several different levels. Homeboy Industries, led by Father Greg Boyle, is a wonderful example of a program that is helping young adults transition out of gangs. His motto that “nothing stops a bullet like a job” is absolutely true. However, there are

other sources of community and gang violence besides joblessness. For many youth, gangs function as a surrogate family. A gang is the place where they seek identity and community. Many young people who join gangs have never been deeply loved; they have not been socialized into the values that promote healthy communities; and they have few skills that would enable them to be productive members of society as adults. As a result, it is understandable that they seek identification with a gang and engage in acts of violence that further erode the structures of a healthy community.

We are under no illusion that religion can solve the problem of violence in Los Angeles. However, it can play an important role in partnering with other community resources. Specifically, it can help strengthen family structures; it can provide mentors to youth that lack positive parental role models in their lives; it can create alternative activities to gang-banging, such as after school programs and sports programs; its members can befriend youth who are in the juvenile justice system and help insure that they receive a fair hearing and trial; and it can advocate politically for programs and policies that will challenge the complex factors that make their communities seedbeds of violence. IVP fellows were exposed to model programs that address each of these potential roles that religion can play in

their community, although scant attention was paid to the complex problem of building healthy family structures—which, in itself, warrants a separate program.

Congregations and faith-based organizations are poised to do amazing things in their communities, and there are examples of successes particularly among larger congregations and faith-based organizations. However, for many congregations, especially smaller ones, there are many theological and organizational barriers that are problematic. Our experience with the Institute for Violence Prevention shows that many congregations and faith-based organizations have a desire to help, but often that desire is not matched with the necessary knowledge and organizational capacity. After their IVP experience however, many fel-

lows were inspired to expand the scope of their ministries to include people from other ethnic groups, or to develop new recreational and mentoring activities to prevent youth from becoming involved in gangs.

We have discovered that desire alone or good intention is not enough. Stable institutions must be established before any programmatic interventions can be made. Further, developing stable institutions requires ongoing attention, first for basic organizational issues, then technical assistance, and finally strengthening organizations to the point where they can work with others to begin to address policy issues. We believe that ongoing investment into building stable organizations, solid programming, and eventual policy engagement must be a priority

if the potential of congregations is to be realized in communities. Without this investment, some outlier successes could result, but real change in local neighborhoods will not occur.

The Institute for Violence Prevention demonstrated that bridging across cultures on issues of importance is an effective way of addressing community concerns and there is an openness and interest in participating in such multi-cultural initiatives. Hands-on training through organizations with proven effectiveness, when combined with classroom experience, is an effective method of engaging communities on issues of importance. The program proved to be successful in helping participants gain crucial skills, such as program development, campaigning, and identifying and targeting policy areas and concerns, while also inspiring leaders to action and generating networks across cultural boundaries amongst equally motivated and like-minded faith leaders.





### The Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement

Through our leadership development work with programs such as the Institute for Violence Prevention, the Center for Religion and Civic Culture has identified the need for a systematic training and capacity building initiative for the faith community. In 2011, CRCC launched the Cecil L. Murray Center for Community Engagement.

The Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement, sponsored by the University of Southern California, draws on the social, spiritual, and leadership capital of churches and the broader faith community to promote economic development and civic engagement in low-income neighborhoods. Specifically, the Center honors Rev. Cecil L. "Chip" Murray's three-decade-long legacy of working for the betterment of Los Angeles by addressing the following areas:

- > Job training and economic development for low-income and minority populations in California, with a focus on Los Angeles, including communities adjacent to the USC campus.
- > Leadership development, capacity building, civic engagement, financial literacy, and entrepreneurial training, mentoring, and incubation of individuals, businesses and non-profit agencies, especially those located in low-income and minority neighborhoods.
- > Maintaining a regularly updated database of best practice models and profiles of small business and non-profit agencies that are successfully confronting the challenges faced by residents in low-income and minority communities.
- > Establishing a forum where ideas can be discussed and debated regarding the programs and policies that are fundamental to creating healthy communities, especially related to their social, economic and cultural strengths.

The Murray Center operates in these four areas and serves as a bridge between the academy and the broader community. It functions under the organizational umbrella of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at USC.

Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement  
University of Southern California  
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0520  
213-743-2141  
cmcce@usc.edu  
<http://crcc.usc.edu/MurrayCenter>

## Appendix

### Program and Community Assessment

Throughout the IVP program, we utilized a variety of research methodologies to document and evaluate program success and effectiveness in meeting the stated goals of the program. We collected data from participants and provided it to the program team in order to inform the program, collected data from congregations in the three target GRYD zones to inform the project direction, and partnered with outside organizations to assist in creating community assessments and to provide training in research techniques and methodologies for program participants.

### Landscape Analysis

The research team created a database of all known religious congregations in each of the three GRYD zones. The list of congregations was compiled through different public sources such as the online yellow pages, Google searches, and denominational websites. Once the database of congregations was compiled, each congregation was located on an

online map. If a congregation had its own website, that was included as a part of the map. This exercise netted a total of 329 religious congregations across the three GRYD zones.

To view the congregation maps, visit the following links: Baldwin Village: <http://goo.gl/NRAO4>; Florence/Graham/77th: <http://goo.gl/ttSZZ>; Newton: <http://goo.gl/NozHz>.

### Surveys

Several surveys were developed and administered by the research team, in two different areas of inquiry, each with different goals. At the community level, we utilized the mapping database of congregations to survey congregations in the GRYD zones to determine the different resources available in these communities related to the aims and goals of the IVP program. The research team also developed and administered surveys to program participants, in order to help inform program development and to gauge success in attaining the goals of the program.

### Interviews

In-depth interviews with participants in the IVP program were also conducted, focusing on participants who either lived or worked in or adjacent to the three target GRYD zones. Twelve program participants were contacted to be a part of the in depth interview process. All 12 were contacted at

three points in time throughout the program in order to gauge progress toward the goals of the IVP program. Twelve were interviewed at the start of the program in May 2009, seven were interviewed at the conclusion of their summer activities using a photo elicitation methodology, and five were interviewed in January 2010.

### Photo Elicitation

Selected IVP participants were each provided a camera and asked to document, through photographs, their work for the summer practicum required in the IVP program. In this methodology, photographs served as a way for IVP participants to visually communicate elements of their work that they viewed as representative of their efforts. At the end of their summer activities each of the participants was asked to use their photographs to tell the story of their summer project. This process brought to life not only the impact the IVP program was having on the way participants were thinking about their communities, but also the challenges they faced, successes they strived for, lessons they were learning and creativity they employed as religious leaders in South L.A. working to combat violence. (Examples of these narratives can be found in this report as well as online at <http://crcc.usc.edu/ivp>.)

## IVP Organizational Partners

### **Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice**

Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) is a faith-rooted organization that links clergy with low-income wage earners in order to seek economic justice. The organization's first victory was the successful L.A. Living Wage campaign in 1997. CLUE worked with Institute for Violence Prevention fellows on an effort to create partnerships between black and Latino faith community leaders around issues of community violence and economic issues that affect both communities. Fellows participated in meetings with Los Angeles City Council members and participated in a Black/Brown Summit in South Los Angeles. More information on CLUE is available at [www.cluela.org](http://www.cluela.org).

### **Healthy City**

For additional data content and training in community data collection, we contracted with the Advancement Project's Healthy City data and public policy resource organization. Healthy City was asked to use data we had collected throughout the project period, along with data they maintain in their extensive database to

provide two products that would be of use for program participants:

- > Community profiles for each of the three GRYD zones (Newton, Baldwin Village/Southwest, and Florence-Graham/77th)
- > Asset mapping and a resource directory

Building on our findings from project surveys and other fact-finding, Healthy City identified community assets in the three GRYD zones. The asset mapping and resource directory includes the mapping of active congregations in or near/ serving the GRYD areas as well as other services offered in the surrounding area related to gang intervention and youth development already in place in the community. The asset mapping also serves as a resource directory to be utilized by program partners and participants to promote service access, as well as network building, identification of potential stakeholders/partners, and leveraging among organizations in the participating community. It allows project partners to assess key gaps in services throughout the project area.

The second aspect of the Healthy City relationship was to provide hands on training for IVP participants, to introduce them to the Healthy City website and resources. This training gave

participants an opportunity to work directly with the Healthy City datasets and mapping capabilities, in order to develop a skill that would enhance the work they are doing in their communities. It also began to address the importance of research as it relates to community programs and how to devise a research plan using Healthy City tools. Visit [www.healthycity.org](http://www.healthycity.org).

### **Faith Communities for Families and Children**

Faith Communities for Families and Children (FCFC) works to address the issue of juvenile incarceration and improving outcomes for those who enter the juvenile justice system. The practicum module exposed IVP fellows to the issue of incarcerated youth, which integrates the components of direct service, public education, and advocacy for systemic change. Working with Javier Stauring, a lay chaplain for the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese and policy director of FCFC, exposed fellows to interfaith and multicultural coalition building, systemic reform through legislation, restorative justice, direct ministry to incarcerated youth, and development of a faith based educational campaign on juvenile justice. In addition, fellows participated in Juvenile Justice Week of Faith, an interfaith effort

to raise awareness to the needs of children and families impacted by violent crime and society's systemic response to crime. incarceration and improving outcomes for those who enter the juvenile justice system.

### **Regional Council of Neighborhood Organizations**

Regional Council of Neighborhood Organizations (RCNO) seeks to establish opportunities for communities to address statewide issues related to high levels of incarceration and recidivism rates that impact many GRYD zone communities in Los Angeles. RCNO provided training for IVP on community organizing, including how to build alliances and relationships to impact policy. During the practicum phase, IVP fellows participated with RCNO activities, including a Select Committee on Prisoner Reentry meeting to discuss how reentry issues adversely affect low-income and minority communities in California. More information about RCNO is available at [www.rcno.org](http://www.rcno.org).

### **INSTITUTE FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION STAFF**

Cecil L. Murray  
*Co-Principal Investigator,  
Tansey Chair in Christian Ethics*

Donald E. Miller  
*Co-Principal Investigator,  
Executive Director, USC Center for  
Religion and Civic Culture*

Brie Loskota  
*Managing Director, CRCC*

Mark Whitlock  
*Executive Director, USC Cecil  
Murray Center for Community  
Engagement*

Sumaya Abubaker  
*Project Manager, CRCC*

### **INSTITUTE FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION CONSULTANTS**

Frank Jackson  
*Community Outreach Coordinator*

Diana Mendoza  
*Community Organizer*

Jim Ortiz  
*Community Outreach Coordinator*

Alexia Salvatierra  
*Community Organizer*

## About the Authors

---

### **Richard Flory**

Richard Flory is director of research in the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture and associate research professor of sociology at the University of Southern California. His Ph.D. is in sociology from the University of Chicago, and his primary research and teaching interests are in the intersection of religion, culture, and urban life. He is the author or co-author of several books, articles and reports, including *Growing up in America: The Power of Race in the Lives of Teens* (Stanford University Press, 2010), *Finding Faith: The Spiritual Quest of the Post-Boomer Generation* (Rutgers University Press, 2008) and *GenX Religion* (Routledge, 2000).

### **Donald Miller**

Donald E. Miller is Firestone Professor of Religion at the University of Southern California and executive director of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture. He received the Ph.D. degree in Religion (Social Ethics) from USC in 1975. He is the author, co-author or editor of nine books, including *Finding Faith: The Spiritual Quest of the Post-Boomer Generation*, with Richard Flory, (Rutgers University Press, 2008) and *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (University of California Press, 2007)

### **Brie Loskota**

Brie Loskota is the managing director of the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture. In this capacity, she oversees the strategic planning and daily operations of an interdisciplinary research center that conducts 25 research and community-based projects each year. She has contributed to raising and managing CRCC's annual budget of \$5 million. She is a frequent speaker and writer on topics such as interfaith engagement, faith-based human services, and religious identity. She received her M.A. degree from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles and completed her B.A. in history and religion from the University of Southern California.

### **Timothy Sato**

Timothy Sato serves as communications director and senior editor for the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture. He has conducted research and co-written reports on community organizing with Donald Miller. His work has appeared in *GenX Religion*, (Flory and Miller, Routledge, 2000) and *Books and Culture*. He has 20 years of experience in the non-profit sector, including positions at a community-based social service agency and a national organization providing grants and training for community and economic development. He is a graduate of Occidental College.

## **CONTRIBUTORS**

### **Hebah Farrag**

Hebah Farrag is project manager for CRCC's Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative and other research and training initiatives. She is a graduate of the American University in Cairo (AUC) and received an M.A. in Middle East Studies. She also holds a BA in political science and international relations from USC and a graduate diploma in Forced Migration and Refugee Studies from the AUC. Hebah is interested in issues concerning religion, the politics of identity, nationalism, and migration.

### **Nick Street**

Nick Street is the journalist in residence at the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture. He studied religious ethics at Oberlin College and the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. After a decade working as an editor in the world of scholarly publishing, he returned to graduate school at USC Annenberg, where he received an M.A. in print journalism. His writing on religion, science, sexuality, media and culture has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *LA Weekly*, the *Jewish Journal*, *Search*, *Religion Dispatches*, *Patheos* and the *Revealer*. In addition to his role at CRCC, he is the

managing editor of *TransMissions*, the web site of the Knight Chair in Media and Religion at USC. He is also a resident priest at that Hazy Moon Zen Center in Los Angeles.

## **RESEARCH TEAM**

Richard Flory  
*Director of Research*

Hebah Farrag  
*Project Manager*

---

*Design*  
Denton Design Associates

*Photography*  
Betsy Winchell

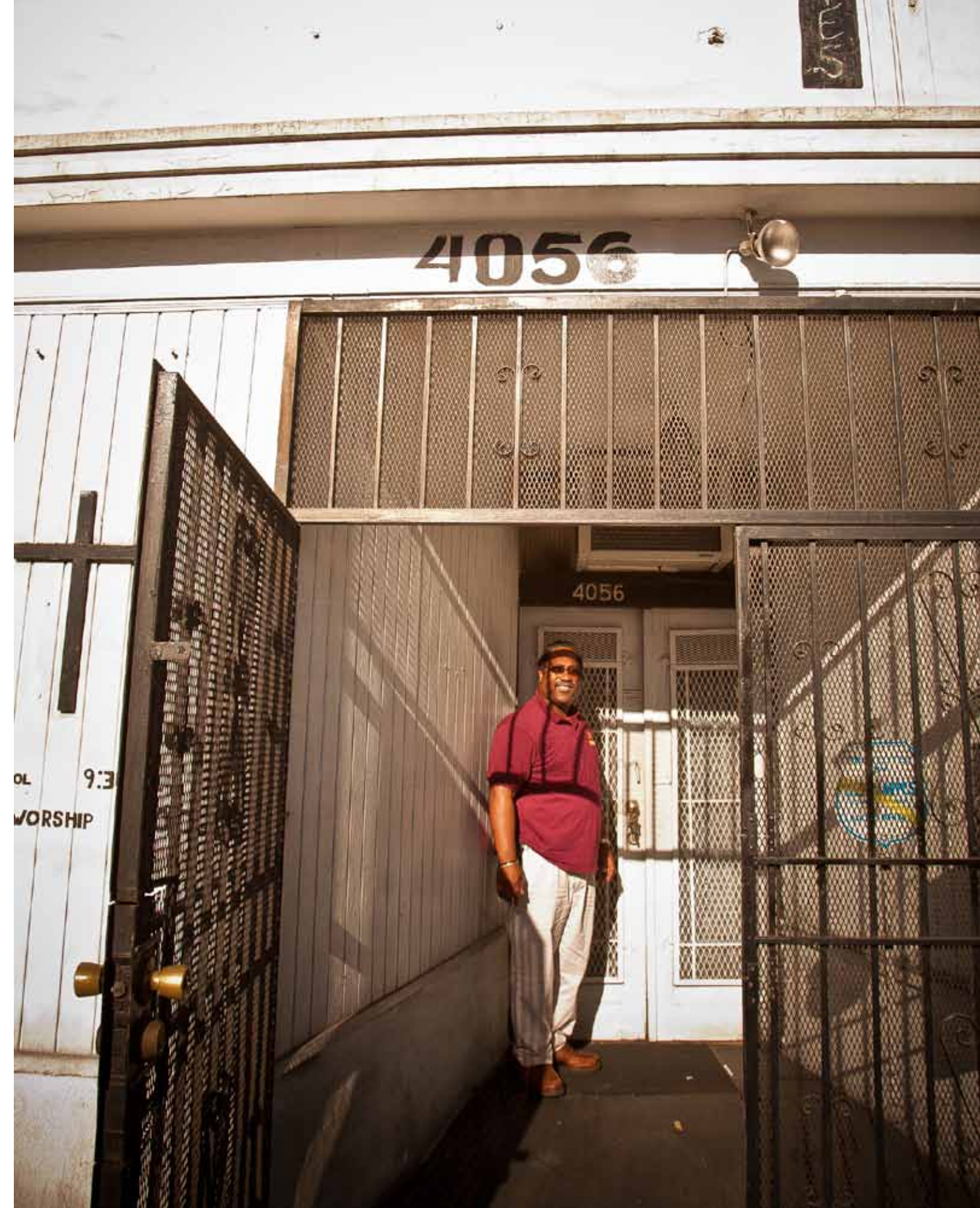
## About the Center for Religion and Civic Culture

The Center for Religion and Civic Culture at USC was founded in 1996 to create, translate, and disseminate scholarship on the civic role of religion in a globalizing world. CRCC engages scholars and builds communities in Los Angeles and around the globe. Its innovative partnerships link academics and the faith community to empower emerging leaders through programs like the Passing the Mantle Clergy and Lay Leadership Institute, for African American church leaders, and the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute. Since its inception, the Center has managed over \$25 million in grant-funded research from corporations, foundations, and government agencies. In 2002, CRCC was recognized as a Pew

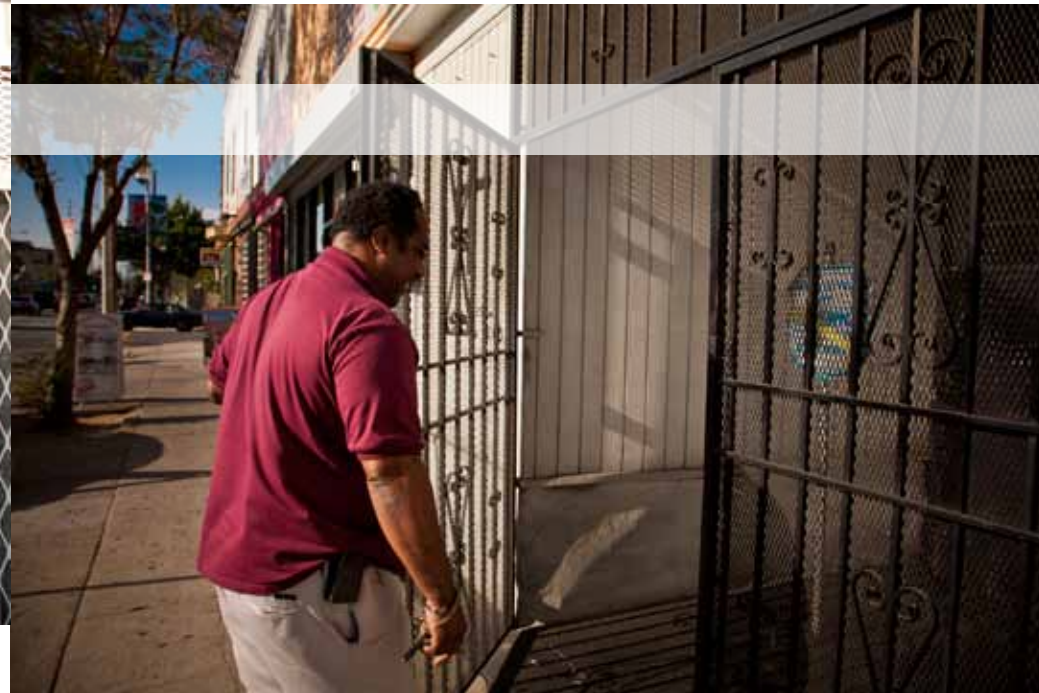
Center of Excellence, one of ten university-based research centers. Currently, the Center houses more than 20 research initiatives on topics such as Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, the transmission of religious values across generations, faith-based non-governmental organizations, and the connection between spirituality and social transformation. CRCC is also involved in the creation of scholarly resources, including the International Mission Photography Archive, the largest online repository of missionary photographs that document social change in non-Western cultures. The Center for Religion and Civic Culture is a research unit of the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts & Sciences.



Center for Religion and Civic Culture  
USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences  
825 Bloom Walk, ACB 439  
Los Angeles, California 90089-1483  
(213) 740-8562  
fax (213) 740-5810  
e-mail: [crcc@usc.edu](mailto:crcc@usc.edu)  
[www.usc.edu/crcc](http://www.usc.edu/crcc)



# Opening the Gates



L.A. CONGREGATIONS CONFRONTING GANG VIOLENCE